THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF CHINA

General editors

DENIS TWITCHETT and JOHN K. FAIRBANK

Volume 3

Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part 1

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Volume 3
Sui and T'ang China, 589–906, Part I

edited by
DENIS TWITCHETT

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

In the English-speaking world, the Cambridge Histories have since the beginning of the century set the pattern for multi-volume works of history, with chapters written by experts on a particular topic, and unified by the guiding hand of volume editors of senior standing. *The Cambridge modern history*, planned by Lord Acton, appeared in sixteen volumes between 1902 and 1912. It was followed by *The Cambridge ancient history*, *The Cambridge medieval history*, *The Cambridge history of English literature*, and Cambridge Histories of India, of Poland, and of the British Empire. The original *Modern history* has now been replaced by *The new Cambridge modern history* in twelve volumes, and *The Cambridge economic history of Europe* is now being completed. Other Cambridge Histories recently undertaken include a history of Islam, of Arabic literature, of the Bible treated as a central document of and influence on Western civilization, and of Iran and China.

In the case of China, Western historians face a special problem. The history of Chinese civilization is more extensive and complex than that of any single Western nation, and only slightly less ramified than the history of European civilization as a whole. The Chinese historical record is immensely detailed and extensive, and Chinese historical scholarship has been highly developed and sophisticated for many centuries. Yet until recent decades the study of China in the West, despite the important pioneer work of European sinologists, had hardly progressed beyond the translation of some few classical historical texts, and the outline history of the major dynasties and their institutions.

Recently Western scholars have drawn more fully upon the rich traditions of historical scholarship in China and also in Japan, and greatly advanced both our detailed knowledge of past events and institutions, and also our critical understanding of traditional historiography. In addition, the present generation of Western historians of China can also draw upon the new outlooks and techniques of modern Western historical scholarship, and upon recent developments in the social sciences, while continuing to build upon the solid foundations of rapidly progressing

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European, Japanese and Chinese sinological studies. Recent historical events, too, have given prominence to new problems, while throwing into question many older conceptions. Under these multiple impacts the Western revolution in Chinese studies is steadily gathering momentum.

When *The Cambridge history of China* was first planned in 1966, the aim was to provide a substantial account of the history of China as a bench mark for the Western history-reading public: an account of the current state of knowledge in six volumes. Since then the out-pouring of current research, the application of new methods, and the extension of scholarship into new fields, have further stimulated Chinese historical studies. This growth is indicated by the fact that the History has now become a planned fourteen volumes, which exclude the earliest pre-dynastic period, and must still leave aside such topics as the history of art and of literature, many aspects of economics and technology, and all the riches of local history.

The striking advances in our knowledge of China's past over the last decade will continue and accelerate. Western historians of this great and complex subject are justified in their efforts by the needs of their own peoples for greater and deeper understanding of China. Chinese history belongs to the world, not only as a right and necessity, but also as a subject of compelling interest.

JOHN K. FAIRBANK
DENIS TWITCHETT

June 1976

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PREFACE TO VOLUME 3

The Chinese is transliterated according to the Wade–Giles system, which for all its imperfections is employed almost universally in the serious literature on China written in English. For Japanese, the Hepburn system of romanization is followed.

Chinese personal names follow their native form, that is with the surname preceding the given name.

Place names present a complex problem, as many of them underwent changes during the course of the period covered by this volume, some of them several times. In general we have used the names in use in the period until 741 and employed as the head-entries in the monographs on geography in the two Dynastic Histories of the T'ang, even when (as for example from 742 to 758) this is strictly speaking an anachronism. In some cases there is possible confusion between modern provincial names, used as a regional description, and the names of T'ang provinces. The convention is adopted of hyphenating the syllables of T'ang place names, and not hyphenating modern names. For example Hopei represents the modern province, Ho-pei the T'ang province. For modern place names some non-standard spellings which have become customary, for example Nanking for Nanching, Sian for Hsian, are retained.

For dates the Chinese and Western years do not exactly coincide. The Western year which nearly coincides with the Chinese year is used as the equivalent of the Chinese year. For example 716 is used as equivalent to the fourth year *K'ai-yüan*, which in fact ran from 29 January 716 until 15 February 717 (it included an intercalary month). Dates, where given, are expressed in Chinese lunar months and days, since this makes reference to the Chinese sources simpler than if they were expressed in the Western calendar. Western equivalents may easily be found for the T'ang period in Hiraoka Takeo, *Tōdai no koyomi* (Kyoto, 1954).

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We would also like to acknowledge the generous support given by the American Council of Learned Societies to the Conference on T'ang Studies held at Cambridge in 1969. That conference, in which all but one of the contributors to this volume took part, gave a new impetus to the study of the period, and proved invaluable in formulating the basic outline of Sui and T'ang history, and in establishing the major problems to which this volume and its successor attempt to provide answers.

My co-chairman at that conference, and the co-editor of the symposium volume, *Perspectives on the T'ang*, in which the papers were published, was the late Arthur F. Wright, who died while this volume was being prepared for press. I and my fellow contributors, several of whom have been his pupils, and all of whom were his personal friends, would wish to record our tribute to the great contribution he made to the study of medieval Chinese history, and our sadness that he did not live to see the completion and publication of this volume, in the progress of which he had been so deeply involved.

DCT

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ABBREVIATIONS

AM	*Asia Major* (new series)
BEFEO	*Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CTS	*Chiu T'ang shu*
CTW	*Ch'üan T'ang-wen*
CYYY	*Kuo-li chung-yang yen-chiu-yüan Li-shih yü-yen yen-chiu-so chi-k'an* (Academia Sinica)
HJAS	*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*
HTS	*Hsin T'ang shu*
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JAS	*Journal of Asian Studies*
LSYC	*Li-shih yen-chiu*
MSOS	*Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin*
SGZS	*Shigaku zasshi*
SPPY	Ssu-pu pei-yao edn
SPTK	Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an edn
SS	*Sui shu*
TCTC	*Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*
TD	*Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* edn of the Buddhist Tripitaka
TFYK	*Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei*
THGH	*Tōhō gakuhō*; refers to the journal of this name published in Kyoto unless specified *THGH* (Tokyo).
THY	*T'ang hui-yao*
TLT	*T'ang liu-tien*
TP	*T'oung pao*
TSCC	Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng edn
TT	*T'ung tien*
TTCLC	*T'ang ta chao-ling chi*
TYGH	*Tōyō gakuhō*
WHTK	*Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao*
WYYH	*Wen-yüan ying-hua*

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EDITIONS EMPLOYED FOR MAIN PRIMARY SOURCES

The Standard Dynastic Histories are cited in the punctuated critical texts published by the Chung-hua shu-chü, Peking. This edition is also available in a reprint published in Taipei. Works from this series to which reference is made are:

Ch'en shu, 2 vols., 1972
Chiu T'ang shu (abbreviated as *CTS*), 16 vols., 1975
Chou shu, 3 vols., 1971
Hsin T'ang shu (abbreviated as *HTS*), 20 vols., 1975
Hsin Wu tai shih, 3 vols., 1974
Nan shih, 6 vols., 1975
Pei Ch'i shu, 2 vols., 1972
Pei shih, 10 vols., 1974
Sui shu (abbreviated as *SS*), 6 vols., 1973
Wei shu, 8 vols., 1974

Collected works of individual authors, unless otherwise specified, are cited from the editions reprinted in the *Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an.*

Buddhist works, unless otherwise specified, are cited from the *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* edition of the Buddhist canon.

The editions of other frequently cited primary sources are as follows:

Ch'üan T'ang-wen, imperial edn, 1814; reprinted in facsimile, Hua-wen shu-chü, Taipei, 1961; Hua-wen shu-chü, Taipei, 1961. (Abbreviated as *CTW*)

Tzu-chih t'ung-chien, Ku-chi ch'u-pan-she edn, Peking, 1956. (Abbreviated as *TCTC*)

Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei, edn of Li Ssu-ching, 1642; reprinted in facsimile Chung-hua shu-chü, Peking, 1960; Ching-hua shu-chü, Taipei, 1965. (Abbreviated as *TFYK*)

T'ang hui-yao, Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen tsüng-shu edn, Shanghai, 1935; reprinted Chung-hua shu-chü, Peking, 1957. (Abbreviated as *THY*)

T'ang liu-tien, edn of Konoe Iehiro, 1724; reprinted in facsimile Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, Taipei, 1962. (Abbreviated as *TLT*)

T'ung tien, Shih T'ung edn, Shanghai, 1936. (Abbreviated as *TT*)

T'ang ta chao-ling chi, Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan edn, Shanghai, 1959. (Abbreviated as *TTCLC*)

Wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao, Shih-t'ung edn, Shanghai, 1936. (Abbreviated as *WHTK*)

Wen-yüan ying-hua, edn of 1567 with prefaces by T'u Tse-min and Hu Wei-hsin; reprinted in facsimile, Chung-hua shu-chü, Peking, 1966. (Abbreviated as *WYYH*)

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Table 1. *The Sui emperors and their reign periods*

Emperor	Reigned	Reign titles	
Wen-ti	581–604	K'ai-huang	581–600
		Jen-shou	601–4
Yang-ti	604–17	Ta-yeh	605–17
Kung-ti	617–18	I-ning	617–18

For full details see A. C. Moule, *The rulers of China 221 BC – 1949 AD* (London, 1957), p. 34.

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Table 2. *Outline genealogy of the T'ang imperial family*

Kao-tsu 566–635
reigned 618–26
22 sons

1st Li Chien-ch'eng
HA 619–26

2nd T'ai-tsung 599–649
reigned 626–49
14 sons

1st Li Ch'eng-ch'ien
HA 635–43

9th Kao-tsung 628–83
HA 643, reigned 649–83
— Empress Wu Tse-t'ien
reigned 690–705
8 sons

1st Li Chung
HA 652–6

5th Li Hung
HA 656–75

6th Li Hsien
HA 675–80

7th Chung-tsung 656–710
HA 680, reigned 684
Imperial heir 698
restored 705–10
4 sons

8th Jui-tsung 662–716
reigned 684–90
under empress Wu
restored 710–12
6 sons

3rd Li Ch'ung-chün
HA 706–7

4th Li Ch'ung-mao
reigned as Wen-wang
under empress Wei 710

3rd Hsüan-tsung 685–762
HA 710, reigned 712–56
30 sons

2nd Li Ying
HA 715–37

3rd Su-tsung 711–62
HA 738, reigned 756–62
14 sons

1st Tai-tsung 727–79
HA 758, reigned 762–79
20 sons

1st Te-tsung 742–805
HA 764, reigned 779–805
11 sons

1st Shun-tsung 761–806
HA 779, reigned 805
23 sons

1st Hsien-tsung 778–820
HA 805, reigned 805–20
20 sons

1st Li Ning
HA 809–11

3rd Mu-tsung 795–824
HA 812, reigned 820–4
5 sons

13th Hsiuan-tsung 810–59
reigned 846–59
12 sons

1st Ching-tsung 809–27
HA 822, reigned 824–7
5 sons

2nd Wen-tsung 809–40
reigned 827–40
2 sons

5th Wu-tsung 814–46
reigned 840–6
5 sons

5th Li Ch'eng-mei
HA 839–40

1st Li Yung
HA 832–6

1st I-tsung 833–73
reigned 859–73
8 sons

5th Hsi-tsung 862–88
reigned 873–88
2 sons

7th Chao-tsung 867–904
reigned 888–904
10 sons

1st Li Yü
HA 897–904

9th Ai-ti 892–908
reigned 904–7

HA: heir apparent

This chart shows the line of succession; also those heirs apparent who did not succeed to the throne.

Other royal princes were given the *title* of heir apparent as a posthumous honour, but did not actually serve as heir apparent.

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Table 3. *The T'ang emperors and their reign periods*

Emperor	Reigned	Reign titles	
Kao-tsu	618–26*	Wu-te	618–26
T'ai-tsung	626–49	Chen-kuan	627–49
Kao-tsung	649–83	Yung-hui	650–5
		Hsien-ch'ing	656–60
		Lung-shuo	661–3
		Lin-te	664–5
		Ch'ien-feng	666–7
		Tsung-chang	668–9
		Hsien-heng	670–3
		Shang-yüan	674–5
		I-feng	676–9
		T'iao-lu	679
		Yung-lung	680–1
		K'ai-yao	681–2
		Yung-ch'un	682–3
		Hung-tao	683
Chung-tsung (court under control of empress Wu)	684†	Ssu-sheng	684
Jui-tsung (court under control of empress Wu)	684–90†	Wen-ming	684
		Kuang-chai	684
		Ch'ui-kung	685–8
		Yung-ch'ang	689
		Tsai-ch'u	689–90
Empress Wu Tse-t'ien Chou 'dynasty'	690–705	T'ien-shou	690–2
		Ju-i	692
		Ch'ang-shou	692–4
		Yen-tsai	694
		Cheng-sheng	694–5
		T'ien-ts'e wan-sui	695
		Wan-sui teng-feng	696
		Wan-sui t'ung-t'ien	696–7
		Shen-kung	697
		Sheng-li	697–700
		Chiu-shih	700–1
		Ta-tsu	701
		Ch'ang-an	701–4
Chung-tsung restored	705–10	Shen-lung	705–7
		Ching-lung	707–10
Shao-ti (court under control of empress Wei)	710†	T'ang-lung	710
Jui-tsung restored	710–12*	Ching-yün	710–12
		T'ai-chi	712
		Yen-ho	712
Hsüan-tsung	712–56*	Hsien-t'ien	712–13
		K'ai-yüan	713–41
		T'ien-pao	742–56

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Table 3 (*cont.*).

Emperor	Reigned	Reign titles	
Su-tsung	756–62	Chih-te	756–8
		Ch'ien-yüan	758–60
		Shang-yüan	760–1
		Yüan	761–2
Tai-tsung	762–79	Pao-ying	762–3
		Kuang-te	763–4
		Yung-t'ai	765–6
		Ta-li	766–79
Te-tsung	779–805	Ta-li	779
		Chien-chung	780–3
		Hsing-yüan	783–4
		Chen-yüan	785–805
Shun-tsung	805*	Chen-yüan	805
		Yung-chen	805
Hsien-tsung	805–20	Yung-chen	805
		Yüan-ho	806–20
Mu-tsung	820–4	Ch'ang-ch'ing	821–4
Ching-tsung	824–7	Pao-li	825–7
Wen-tsung	827–40	T'ai-ho	827–36
		K'ai-ch'eng	836–40
Wu-tsung	840–6	Hui-ch'ang	841–6
Hsiuan-tsung‡	846–59	Ta-chung	847–59
I-tsung	859–73	Hsien-t'ung	860–73
Hsi-tsung	873–88	Ch'ien-fu	874–80
		Kuang-ming	880–1
		Chung-ho	881–5
		Kuang-ch'i	885–8
		Wen-te	888
Chao-tsung	888–904	Wen-te	888
		Lung-chi	889
		Ta-shun	890–2
		Ching-fu	892–3
		Ch'ien-ning	894–8
		Kuang-hua	898–901
		T'ien-fu	901–4
		T'ien-yu	904
Ai-ti	904–7	T'ien-yu	904–7

* abdicated ‡ correctly transliterated Hsüan-tsung. We have used this irregular form to avoid confusion with Hsüan-tsung (reign 712–56)

† deposed

For full details see A. C. Moule, *The rulers of China 221 BC – 1949 AD* (London, 1957), pp. 54–62. For detailed calendar see Hiraoka Takeo, *Tōdai no koyomi* (Kyoto, 1954).

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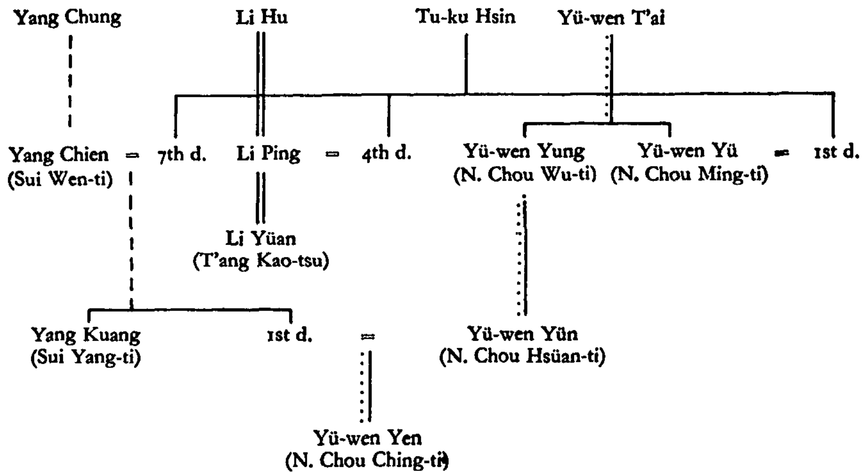
Table 4. *Marriage connections of the T'ang royal house*



—— Tu-ku clan ══ Li clan (T'ang royal house)
---- Yang clan (Sui royal house) ⁚⁚⁚ Yü-wen clan (Northern Chou royal house)

Yang Chung, Li Hu and Yü-wen T'ai, the founders of the Sui, T'ang and Northern Chou royal houses, all served as high-ranking generals during the Western Wei, together with Tu-ku Hsin, to whose daughters all three married their sons.

Table 5. *T'ang weights and measures*

(*a*) Length		
	10 *tsun*	= 1 *ch'ih* (slightly less than 1 English foot)
	5 *ch'ih*	= 1 *pu* (double pace)
	10 *ch'ih*	= 1 *chang*
	1800 *ch'ih*	= 1 *li* (approx. ⅓ English mile)
(*b*) Area		
	1 *mou*	= a strip 1 *pu* wide by 240 *pu* long (approx. 0·14 acre)
	100 *mou*	= 1 *ch'ing* (approx. 14 acres)
(*c*) Capacity		
	3 *sheng*	= 1 *ta-sheng* (the standard pint)
	10 *ta-sheng*	= 1 *tou*
	10 *tou*	= 1 *hu*
	1 *hu*	= 1 *shih* (approx. 1⅝ bushels)
(*d*) Weight		
	3 *liang*	= 1 *ta-liang* (the standard ounce)
	16 *ta-liang*	= 1 *chin* (approx. 1⅓ English lb)
(*e*) Cloth		
	1 *p'i* of silk	= a length 1·8 *ch'ih* in width, 40 *ch'ih* long
	1 *tuan* of hemp	= a length 1·8 *ch'ih* in width, 50 *ch'ih* long

Further details are given in S. Balazs, 'Beiträge zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte der T'ang-Zeit', *MSOS*, 36 (1933) 49 ff.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This volume is the first of two devoted to the Sui and T'ang dynasties (581–907). It is designed to provide the reader with a narrative account of this complex period, during which China underwent far-reaching changes in political institutions, in her relations with the neighbouring countries, in social organization, in the economy and in every sphere of intellectual, religious and artistic life. The broader issues in institutions, social and economic change and in intellectual developments are dealt with in detail in Volume 4 which also contains a bibliography for both volumes.

A glance at this bibliography will show that a wealth of modern scholarship has been devoted to the T'ang. Chinese scholars have been attracted to the period as one of the high points of Chinese political power and influence, and as one of extraordinary achievements in every field of culture and the arts. Japanese scholars have been drawn to the Sui and T'ang not simply because of the intrinsic interest of the period, but also because it was during these dynasties that Japan was most deeply influenced by Chinese institutions. Consequently Japanese scholars have had a deep and instinctive understanding of Sui and T'ang China which provided so much of the fabric of their own state structure, laws and institutions, art, literature and even of their written language. Western scholars too have long been fascinated by the period – the first full scale political history of the T'ang in a European language was completed by Father Antoine Gaubil SJ in 1753[1] – and in recent decades have begun to make their own distinctive contribution to the understanding of T'ang China.

However, although the Sui and T'ang periods have been subjected to more rigorous scrutiny by modern historians than any other period of Chinese history prior to the nineteenth century, political history in the

[1] Le P. Antoine Gaubil, SJ, *Abrégé de l'histoire chinoise de la grande dynastie des T'ang* in *Mémoires concernant les Chinois*, tome 15 (1791) pp. 399–516 and tome 16 (1814) pp. 1–365. In spite of its dates of publication, this monumental work was completed in Peking in the mid-eighteenth century, and sent back to Paris by Gaubil in 1753. Tome 16 of the *Mémoires concernant les Chinois* also includes articles by Gaubil on the Muslims under the T'ang (pp. 373–5); on the T'ang population (pp. 375–8); on the Nestorian stele at Sian (pp. 378–83) and on the countries of the western regions in T'ang times (pp. 383–95).

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broadest sense has been neglected and taken for granted. Surprisingly, much of the ground covered in this volume has not previously been examined in detail, even by modern Chinese historians. Only the Sui, the first years of the T'ang, the reign of the empress Wu, the latter years of Hsüan-tsung and the first decades of the ninth century have been subjected to reasonably close analysis. For the rest, the best summary often remains the amazingly lucid, critical and judicious account written by Ssu-ma Kuang and his collaborators in the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* completed in 1085.[2] As work on this volume has progressed, so our admiration for this prince among historians has grown. The original aim of *The Cambridge history of China* was to produce a summary of the current state of knowledge, but in the event all the chapters in these volumes represent much new research into previously neglected topics. Some of the results are therefore tentative. But the placing of the results of many isolated studies of specialized topics into the context provided by a detailed chronological account has thrown into relief many unsuspected relationships between developments in very different fields, and we feel confident that this volume will provide the reader with a historical context which will add new significance to the more specialized studies in volume 4.

By way of introduction I shall now outline some of the main themes which run through the period and have attracted previous scholars' attention, and also draw attention to the complex underlying problems raised by the nature of our primary source material, which to a surprising extent prescribes the limits of what the modern historian can accomplish. The uneven coverage of the different periods in this volume reflects very closely the uneven documentation at our disposal.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY

The single most important long term development during these centuries was the final re-establishment of Chinese national unity. In the preceding period the unified empire set up by the Ch'in and the Han had been shattered. The progressive breakdown of central authority in the latter half of the second century was accompanied by the growth of many local power structures. The Yellow Turbans and other popular rebellions of the 180s and the decades of civil conflict and near anarchy which followed them finally destroyed both the effective power and the authority of the Han government. Military force became the sole source of authority, and

[2] On Ssu-ma Kuang see Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'Chinese historical criticism: Liu Chih-chi and Ssu-ma Kuang', in W. G. Beasley and Edwin G. Pulleyblank, eds. *Historians of China and Japan* (London, 1961), pp. 135–66. See also Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The Tzyhjyh Tongjiann Kaoyih and the sources for the period 730–763', *BSOAS*, 13.2 (1950) 448–73.

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the emperor became a puppet controlled by the generals. The maintenance of some degree of local stability and law and order lay in the hands of powerful local magnates with personal control over extensive lands and numerous client families of cultivators and military retainers. When the last powerless Han emperor finally abdicated in favour of one of his great generals in AD 220 China was split into three regional states, in none of which did the central government have the unquestioned authority the Han had enjoyed in its prime. Although the whole country was briefly reunited under the Chin in 280, the new regime had little effective power and soon fell victim to serious internal disorders. Almost immediately afterwards, at the beginning of the fourth century, the north was overrun by waves of non-Chinese nomadic peoples, and the Chin survived only as a regional regime in the south. The invaders, the Tibetan Ch'iang and Ti in the north-west, and the Hsiung-nu and various Turkish, proto-Mongol and Tungusic peoples in the north, overran what had been the most advanced, richest and most populous areas of China, establishing a bewildering succession of petty shortlived dynasties. Northern China suffered more than a century of constant warfare, anarchy, disruption and physical devastation before the establishment of a stable unified northern regime by the Toba Turks (the Northern Wei dynasty) in 440.

Although they attempted for decades to preserve their cultural identity, the Toba, like their predecessors, found themselves forced to adopt Chinese institutions and to collaborate with the Chinese elite. Their traditionalist tribal aristocracy, feeling itself about to be absorbed by its Chinese subjects, reacted violently and the ensuing tensions brought about the division of the Northern Wei empire into two states, the Western Wei (which became the Northern Chou in 557) in which the non-Chinese elements remained strongest, and the Eastern Wei (which became the Northern Ch'i in 550) in the north-east. Finally in 577 the Northern Chou conquered the Northern Ch'i, reunifying northern China and reasserting the political and military dominance of the north-west.

These centuries of political and social dominance by non-Chinese peoples left deep marks on the society and institutions of northern China. The nobility of the various foreign ruling houses constantly intermarried with the Chinese elite. This was particularly the case in the north-west, where two aristocractic groups emerged to form an elite very different from the traditional Chinese ruling class. These groups, the Tai-pei aristocracy of central and northern Shansi, and the far more powerful Kuan-lung aristocracy with its power bases in south-west Shansi, Shensi and Kansu, were not only of mixed blood. They had a life style strongly influenced by nomadic customs; even well into the T'ang period many

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of them still spoke Turkish as well as Chinese; they were essentially a military group rather than a civilian elite, living a hard, active outdoor life; and, as among the nomads, their womenfolk were far more independent and powerful than in traditional Chinese society.

In the north-eastern plain the great aristocratic clans of Shan-tung (the area east of the T'ai-hang ranges, that is modern Hopei, Honan and Shantung) had gone to great lengths to preserve their social and cultural identity as the true heirs of the culture of the Han period. They scrupulously avoided intermarriage with the alien nobility, and had to an extent remained aloof from court politics, remaining powerful in their regional bases.

The Sui first came to power as the successor of the Northern Chou. Like the ruling house of the Northern Chou, the family of its founder Yang Chien (the future Wen-ti) was from the north-western Kuan-lung aristocracy. Its members had served in succession the Northern Wei and Western Wei and had then been one of a small group of powerful families who had been involved in the founding of the Northern Chou. This group also included the Tu-ku (the family of Yang Chien's wife) and the Li, the future royal house of the T'ang, and all were connected with one another and with the Northern Chou imperial house by complex marriage ties.[3] Although the Sui, seen in the light of subsequent events, marks a major break in the continuity of Chinese history, its succession and the foundation of its empire was at the time simply a court coup which placed on the throne one noble north-western family in place of another. The succession of the T'ang, in its turn, simply transferred the throne to yet another of this close-knit group of families, and throughout the seventh and early eighth centuries the Sui royal family of Yang, the Tu-ku, and members of the Northern Chou royal family of Yü-wen remained ubiquitous and extremely influential.

The Sui court did not merely perpetuate the political dominance of this small group of great north-western aristocratic clans; it also continued to organize its empire by means of tried institutions that had been employed under the northern dynasties for the past century. In this respect, too, the T'ang continued along almost identical lines. There was thus a powerful continuity, both in terms of the dominant social group, and of political institutions, running from the Northern Wei through into the early T'ang.

Sui Wen-ti spent the first years of his reign in consolidating in the north the regime that he had taken over from the Northern Chou. Within a few

[3] See table 4, p. xx above. See also Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Chi T'ang-tai chih Li, Wu, Wei, Yang hun-yin chi-t'uan', *LSYC*, 1 (1954) 33–51.

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years the Sui had produced a new legal code, reformed and rationalized the chaotic system of local government, combined metropolitan offices and local posts into a unified bureaucracy under strong central control, revived the financial structure of the state, and strengthened the defences against the Turks along the northern frontier. Like the Northern Wei and other northern dynasties, the Sui claimed to be the legitimate rulers of all China. Wen-ti now set about making this reality.

The conquest of the south posed quite new problems. Southern China, at first under the Chin and later under a series of shortlived dynasties, the Sung (420–79), Southern Ch'i (479–502), Liang (502–57) and Ch'en (557–89), had gone its own way for two centuries. Ruling from their splendid and luxurious capital Chien-k'ang (modern Nanking) all of these dynasties were dominated by a small group of powerful aristocratic families and by their generals. They were politically unstable, their regimes a constant succession of court intrigue, coups and usurpation. They had from time to time attempted to reconquer the north, but with disastrous results. The centre of the southern dynasties was in the lower Yangtze region, but during these centuries their main achievement was the beginning of Chinese colonization in the area south of the Yangtze, and the pacification and assimilation of its aboriginal population.

Although the political regimes were weaker than those in the north, the south was in some ways more advanced than northern China. Its great families, mostly émigrés who had fled from the disorders in the north, felt themselves to have a quite separate identity from the northerners, whom they despised as crude, boorish and semi-barbarian. They considered themselves to be the pure heirs of Han culture, and developed a distinctive highly refined literary style, their own schools of philosophy and of Buddhism, and their own sophisticated social mores.[4] But the differences were more fundamental than those of life-styles and rival pretensions to be the bearers of a superior culture.

The dislocations of the third and fourth centuries had had deep and lasting social and economic consequences in the north. Great numbers of people had fled, especially from the north-west, to seek refuge and a new life in the comparatively peaceful regions of Szechwan and the Huai and Yangtze valleys. Millions more had perished in the constant warfare of the fourth century. Large areas of the north were devastated and depopulated, and had fallen out of cultivation, so that the northern regimes were constantly attempting to encourage their population to keep land

[4] On the cultural differences between the southern and northern elites, see Moriya Mitsuo, 'Nanjin to Hokujin', *Tōa Ronsō*, 6 (1948) 36–60, republished in his *Chūgoku kodai kazoku to kokka* (Kyoto, 1968), pp. 416–60.

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in profitable use. Slavery had re-emerged on a large scale under the Toba, again causing social dislocation. Much of the north had reverted to self-sufficient farming, and society tended to cluster in small local units dominated by one or more large clans. Trade and commerce had languished and the use of money fell away. The northern regimes designed their institutions for this type of situation; they collected revenue in kind, and most of the minor functions of government were performed as labour services.

The south, once the land had been cleared, was far more fertile and productive than the north, and the transplanting method of rice cultivation widely in use in southern agriculture enabled it to produce considerable surpluses. Trade continued to flourish, as did the use of money. The southern regimes taxed commerce, and money played a comparatively important role in their financial systems.

The actual conquest of the south by the Sui was comparatively easy. At this time there were two southern regimes. The Later Liang, in modern Hupei province, had been a client state of the Northern Chou and was easily overwhelmed in 587. The rest of the south and south-east was the territory of the Ch'en, based on Chien-k'ang. This too was conquered in 589 after a short campaign, and the reunification of the empire was complete. The actual conquest was achieved with the minimum of bloodshed and destruction. It was consolidated by liberal and imaginative policies which achieved the allegiance of the southern ruling class, and their incorporation into the Sui bureaucracy, while the ordinary people were not saddled with excessive burdens, or brought fully under the northern land and tax systems. By the early seventh century the south had become an important source of wealth and of reserves. Under the second Sui emperor, Yang-ti, a canal network was constructed linking the Yangtze valley with the Huang-ho and with the area near modern Peking, which allowed the Sui to use supplies from the south to provision its great capital Ta-hsing ch'eng (modern Sian), and to send strategic supplies to the northern frontier. This gave a physical form to the union of north and south.

The reunification of China proved a solid and lasting achievement, but the Sui itself soon fell from power. The internal stresses caused by the establishment of its strong centralized state, the cost and loss of life involved in its grandiose schemes of public works, the rebuilding of the Great Wall, and the construction of canals, caused widespread suffering and discontent. Yang-ti made matters worse by his ambitions to extend Chinese power into the old Han territories of the north-west and into northern Korea, now the territory of a powerful and well-organized

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native kingdom, Koguryŏ. A series of costly and abortive expeditions against Koguryŏ produced widespread disorders, which destroyed Sui power. Nevertheless, after the Sui fell, although there were many contenders for power there was never any real threat that China would again be split into a number of regional states. The question after the final Sui collapse in 617 was which of the rebel forces would replace it as master of the whole empire.

Events under the victors, the T'ang, confirmed this. When, after more than a century of internal stability the rebellion of An Lu-shan in 755 nearly brought the dynasty to its knees, the strong highly centralized regime founded in the seventh century proved unable to survive, except by compromising with the powerful forces of local autonomy released by the rebellion. Some of the richest and most vital areas of China became virtually independent of central control. But they made no attempt to assert their independence by setting up regional states, and were content to remain within the framework of a united Chinese polity.

Eventually in the late ninth century massive discontent led to the disastrous Huang Ch'ao rebellion, and the consequent fragmentation of the country among ten or so regional regimes. These were the successors of the provincial divisions of late T'ang times, and became independent as much because of the total breakdown of central power as by any conscious will of their own. Most of them were perfectly viable states, and the final reunification of the last of them under Sung did not come about for seventy years. Yet it was taken for granted that the empire would eventually be reunited. In the same way, some parts of north China fell into the hands of neighbouring alien regimes in the early tenth century, and were to remain under foreign domination for more than four centuries. Yet they would always be considered *terra irredenta*, that would be recovered.

Political division, in short, now came to be thought of as a temporary disturbance of the natural order of things, that would in due time be brought to an end by the rise of a new centralized regime. After An Lu-shan's rebellion, when men were very conscious of the collapse of central authority, the historical analogy which sprang to mind was not the recent period of division, but the later stages of the Chou period when the ruler's authority was diminished and challenged by the power of the feudal lords. The situation was seen in terms of *feng-chien* – that is decentralization and the devolution of authority to local governors – rather than in the context of a simple partition of the empire.

The Sui and T'ang thus finally established the idea of the integrity of China as the territory of a single unified empire. They also, as we shall see

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below, established an outer zone of territory in which Chinese military and political influence would remain paramount, and perhaps more importantly a quite separate zone of independent states dominated by Chinese culture, Chinese systems of thought, literature, art, law and political institutions, and using the Chinese written language.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The second major long-term change which came about during the Sui and T'ang was the complete transformation of the patterns of political life. The period from the late sixth to the eleventh century saw a complete transformation of Chinese society and of life at every level, which is comparable only with the earlier period of fundamental change from 500 BC to the early Han. Even historians writing in the ninth century realized that there had been a complete change in the composition of the governing class, and in the eleventh century Shen Kua, seeking a parallel to the social order of the pre-Sui period, was forced to look to the alien society of India, so different was it from the China of his own time.

In terms of modern historiography the broad problem was first set out by Naitō Torajirō on the eve of the First World War, when the Ch'ing dynasty had fallen and China's traditional order was finally crumbling. To Naitō the T'ang and early Sung represented the end of China's 'medieval' period, and the beginning of 'modern' China – modern in the sense that the patterns of government, of administration and of social organization which had then begun to take their final form were essentially those that had survived until his own days.[5]

Very broadly, he characterized the changes as follows. During the long period of division following the collapse of the Han, China had been dominated by aristocratic groups whose social position and political dominance at both local and national levels was unassailable. They not only monopolized high office, but also enforced a system of selection for officials which placed great stress on descent and social standing, and thus entrenched their influence deeply at every level of government. They remained a closed group, practising endogamy and marrying outside their own group only to obtain political advantage. Some sections of this

[5] On Naitō's theories see H. Miyakawa, 'An outline of the Naitō hypothesis and its effects on Japanese studies of China', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 14.4 (1955) 533–52; Chou I-liang, 'Jih-pen Naitō Konan hsien-sheng tsai Chung-kuo shih-hsüeh shang chih kung-hsien', *Shih-hsüeh nien-pao*, 2.1 (1934) 155–72; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Chinese history and world history*, inaugural lecture (Cambridge, 1955). Naitō's theory was first published in his *Shina Ron*, (Tokyo, 1914). It was more fully developed in his 'Gaikatsu-teki Tō Sō jidai kan', *Rekishi to chiri*, 9.5 (1922) 1–12, and in the posthumously published notes of his lectures given at Kyoto University 1920–5, *Chūgoku kinsei shi* (Tokyo 1947).

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aristocracy had intermarried with the non-Chinese conquerors of northern China, and from this group emerged the ruling houses of the northern dynasties of the sixth century, of the Sui and of the T'ang. Until this period the ruling dynastic house had been little more than the particular aristocratic clan which happened to occupy the throne for the time being. The other great aristocratic clans, which remained immensely wealthy and powerful, treated the imperial family merely as *primus inter pares*. The emperor was on close terms with his highest officials, who came from the same social background and much important business was decided at informal meetings with them. The ruler was thus forced to rule through his fellow aristocrats, and in their mutual interest.

Under the Sui, and more particularly under the T'ang, with the whole empire reunified a change came over this situation. The aristocracy gradually declined in power, and its place in government was taken by professional bureaucrats recruited by examination on the basis of their personal talent and education, who became the agents of the ruling dynasty rather than the representatives of their own social group. This widened the social base of the ruling group and made office accessible to men from lesser families. The old aristocracy gradually disappeared.

With this change in the personnel of government the position of the emperor was also transformed. He was no longer merely first among an aristocratic elite some of whom, as in T'ang times, might even look down upon the royal family as social upstarts. With no aristocracy to challenge them, and with a bureaucracy whose members were dependent upon the dynasty for their office, power and influence, the royal clans were set apart from ordinary society in quite a new way, while the emperor began the gradual accretion of despotic powers which were to reach their apogee under the Ming. The result was a growing gulf both between the emperor and society, and between the emperor and the officials through whom he ruled.

Naitō's theory was stated in very general terms. He was not originally an academic historian, but a journalist and publicist who had been involved in the study of China since the 1890s. He was writing, moreover, when the application of modern western historical science to China's past had barely begun. His views have been much modified and refined by later scholars. We now know far more than was known in his time both about the composition of T'ang society, and about the precise nature of political and institutional change. We know that the 'aristocracy' was a far more complex social stratum than Naitō imagined, and that the changes he outlined took effect only very gradually, with their final results becoming apparent only during the eleventh century. But the

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general outline which Naitō perceived – largely by intuitive understanding – has stood up remarkably well to the progress of modern research.

His theory was essentially a political analysis, although he placed political change in a broad context of social, economic and cultural developments. His successors, particularly Miyazaki Ichisada who succeeded to his chair at Kyoto University, tended not so much to concentrate on political developments, but to pursue research into the broad underlying issues of economic and social history.[6] They also were at pains to fit China's history into a general pattern of development embracing world history. The same was true of the early generation of Marxists, an important group which took the view that although the late T'ang period was a major turning point in Chinese history, it was rather the transition between a stage of slave society and one of feudalism. To these issues I shall return later.

The next major contribution to the interpretation of the political and institutional history of the period was the work of the great Chinese historian Ch'en Yin-k'o.[7] In two major books, published in wartime Chungking, and in a long series of articles published in the 1940s and 1950s, Professor Ch'en put forward a view of T'ang politics and institutions far more carefully researched, more closely argued and considerably more persuasive than anything published before. His major contribution to our understanding of the period was his analysis of the various rival groupings and interests which provided the dynamics of T'ang court politics. He saw the T'ang as a period of transition during which the ruling house, itself a member of the close-knit north-western aristocracy, presided over a court which was at first dominated by men from the same social group, then polarized around rival regional groupings within the aristocracy, and later divided by a constant tension between the old aristocracy and a new class of professional bureaucrats recruited through the examination system. The examination system was in his view a means of providing the dynasty with a bureaucratic elite dependent upon the dynasty for its position and authority rather than upon their noble lineage and hereditary privilege. Both Professor Ch'en and some of his followers attribute a large part of the rise of the examination-recruited bureaucracy to deliberate policy on the part of the empress Wu, whom he saw as an

[6] For example, see Miyazaki Ichisada, *Tōyōteki kinsei* (Kyoto, 1950).

[7] The theories of Ch'en Yin-k'o were first published in two books that appeared in Chungking in 1944, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao* and *Sui T'ang chih-tu yüan-yüan lüeh-lun kao.* These have been through several later edns and are available in two recent collections of Professor Ch'en's writings. The extremely well-edited *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun chi* (Taipei, 1971) includes only his writings published prior to 1949. A more complete, but less thoroughly edited collection is *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun-wen chi* (2 vols., Hong Kong, 1974; supplementary volume, *pu-pien*, Hong Kong, 1977).

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'outsider' intent upon breaking the monopoly of political power held by the north-western aristocrats. Some very unconvincing attempts have been made to identify these 'new bureaucrats' as members of a newly emergent class of merchants and landlords.

His views have been challenged in detail: the role of the empress Wu in the emergence of the examination stream within the bureaucracy was certainly exaggerated, and perhaps misconceived; the new bureaucrats were mostly recruited from the lower levels of an aristocracy far more complex in its composition than he imagined; the factional rivalries at court were only occasionally polarized around tensions between aristocratic groups and examination graduates and factions were for the most part ephemeral groupings caused by a specific issue rather than the permanent alignments he envisaged; and the aristocrats maintained a greater degree of dominance for longer than he believed to be the case.[8] Nevertheless, his analysis has proved an immensely fruitful starting point for later research. In a much refined form it underlies the most important single work on T'ang political history, Edwin G. Pulleyblank's study of the last years of Hsüan-tsung's reign,[9] and every chapter in this volume is deeply indebted to his work, even when his precise views on specific issues are challenged.

Ch'en Yin-k'o was not only concerned with the struggles between rival aristocratic groups and court factions. He put forward equally original and perceptive views on the development of institutions.[10] Here he identified another form of deep-rooted tension in T'ang government, the tension arising between the institutions inherited by the Sui and the T'ang from the northern dynasties going back to the Northern Wei, which had as we have seen been devised for a relatively primitive and simple society, and the demands arising from their application to the far more complex situation of the newly reunified empire. He showed how in every field of government the T'ang was a period of dynamic change, in which these inherited institutions were modified or replaced by more advanced systems more appropriate to the new circumstances.

During the past forty years a large amount of literature devoted to such institutional changes has appeared, and it is now clear that, as in so many other respects, the Sui and T'ang straddle two very different periods and that very radical changes occurred in the eighth century, which are often obscured by the continuity of nomenclature and by the survival in

[8] For a survey of some of this literature see Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class: new evidence from Tun-huang', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 83–5.

[9] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955).

[10] Ch'en Yin-k'o, *Sui T'ang chih-tu yüan-yüan lüeh-lun kao.*

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name of institutions which had ceased to function and had become sinecures. Much research still needs to be done on individual institutions before we can confidently arrive at a general synthesis, but the main lines that emerge are as follows.

As has been suggested above, the Sui and early T'ang were not periods of radical institutional change or innovation. Their real achievement was the adaptation of existing methods of administration to meet the needs of a greatly expanded empire, and to a changed and changing social order. It was a period of rationalization, simplification and streamlining of procedures; of elimination of surplus posts, for example in local government; and of irrelevant laws. The Sui Code of 583 was a third of the size of that in force in the Northern Chou, and a fifth of that promulgated by the southern Liang in 503. It was also a period of codification and formalization of practice, when confidence in the permanence of strong central government inclined statesmen to think in terms of uniform institutions applicable to the whole empire, and of everlasting norms of social behaviour, rather than to deal empirically with specific issues as they arose.

It has been conventional to consider the reign of T'ai-tsung (626–49) as the period in which the 'ideal institutions' of the T'ang were formed, and as a reign famed for its good and orderly government. Certainly T'ang writers of the late eighth and ninth centuries looked back upon it as a golden age. But in reality during T'ai-tsung's reign no new institutions emerged, nor was there any major change of government policy. The basic structure of government, the details of administration, and the all-important question of the limits of government intervention had been established under the Sui, reintroduced with comparatively minor modifications under T'ai-tsung's father, Kao-tsu, and embodied in the complex of codified laws promulgated in 624.

T'ai-tsung's real achievement was much more the further consolidation of dynastic power, and his own very personal 'style' in government which enabled him to establish a firm ascendancy over the various powerful aristocratic groups among his high-ranking officials. His earliest historians acclaimed him not only for his unquestioned achievement in consolidating T'ang power both at home and abroad, but even more as a forceful and decisive, yet fundamentally wise and benevolent sovereign always willing to heed the counsel of his gifted group of close advisers. He was praised, in fact, as an emperor whose exercise of power conformed to the ethical-moral and anti-institutional ideals of conventional Confucianism, which were shared by the members of the bureaucracy and the traditional historians alike. His government, too, gave ample opportunities for consultation, in daily meetings with his large group of chief ministers, to

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the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, and did much to secure their firm allegiance to the dynasty, and also to strengthen their *esprit de corps*.[11]

The early T'ang government was simple and economical. As late as 657 there were only 13,465 ranking officials to control a population perhaps in excess of 50,000,000. The military establishment was kept at a minimum by the militia, whose troops were self-sufficient farmers performing only an annual tour of duty. As many of the routine tasks of government as possible were entrusted to selected taxpayers, who performed them as a form of labour service. The control of the central administration over local government, whose officials were now incorporated in a single bureaucratic service, was firmly established, and prefectural and county posts were no longer dominated, as in the period of division, by prominent local clans. But while central control down to the county level was firmly maintained, it was accepted that central policies and central intervention were practicable only in very limited areas of activity: in the maintenance of law and order, the administration of justice, tax collection and the allied problems of population registration and land allocation; and the mobilization of labour for military service and for corvée. Local implementation of government policy, since local officials had no forces at their disposal to coerce the local population, depended very much on compromises between the county officials and the large sub-bureaucracy of clerks and village headmen who were both minor employees of the state, and also representatives of the local society. The aim was accommodation between the policies decreed in the capital and what was feasible and acceptable locally. Too ruthless interventionist policies were just impossible, and officials who imposed the law with undue rigour were more likely to be censured or punished than commended.

Accommodation was thus the keynote throughout the administrative system. In central government, the emperor was just as constrained by the entrenched interests of the powerful aristocratic group which still provided almost the entire upper echelon of the administration, as were his local officials by the circumstances in which they operated.

This equilibrium did not last very long. The military ambitions of T'ai-tsung began T'ang expansion into central Asia, and renewed attempts to reconquer the Han colonies in Manchuria and Korea. His successor Kao-tsung continued with these conquests, and by the 670s T'ang protectorates had been established up to the borders of Persia, the Chinese had occupied the Tarim and Zungharia, and destroyed Koguryŏ in Korea, although attempts to incorporate it into the empire failed. A large

[11] This aspect of his administration is exemplified in H. J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, 1974).

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and expensive defence establishment was imperative because of these conquests, and the necessity of permanent border garrisons to protect the empire against the traditional enemies – the Turks in the north, and also against the newly risen and aggressive expansionist kingdom of Tibet. At home, the bureaucracy steadily increased in size and complexity. Expenditure increased rapidly and constantly threatened to outstrip revenue. The tax system came under pressure and new levies had to be introduced.

The political equilibrium at court was also shattered. T'ai-tsung's very personal style of administration, and the sense of common purpose that he achieved with his bureaucracy, did not long survive him. His successor, Kao-tsung, was a sick man who came increasingly under the dominance of his ruthless consort, the empress Wu, who after his death controlled the court, eventually, from 691–705 establishing herself as the sovereign-empress (the only woman ruler in all of Chinese history) of a new dynasty. Her regime was perhaps less disruptive of institutions than traditional historians claimed. But her period of dominance caused very great changes in politics. She practised a tyrannical and repressive style of government, using secret agents and constant purges. She attempted to eliminate the power of the imperial clan, many of whom were killed, and she deliberately attempted to curb the power of the north-western aristocratic clans who were the dynasty's principal supporters. By her capricious and ruthless methods of government she destroyed the confidence of the official class, and gave undue powers to a succession of worthless favourites. Yet two very important developments took place. First, officials from the great clans of the eastern plain, who had played little part in court life in earlier reigns, began to be appointed to high office, and the factional rivalries between different regional groups of aristocrats ceased to be a major factor in politics. Second, and more significantly in the long term, a bureaucratic elite who had entered service through the examinations began to be appointed to the highest court offices.[12]

The examination system was not her creation. It had begun under the Sui, and had been in use since the early years of the T'ang on a small scale. The empress herself recruited comparatively few men through the examinations. The new situation arose partly because there was now at last a body of officials recruited by examination who had reached the advanced age and seniority required for high office. Moreover, she herself seems to have deliberately chosen examination graduates for the court's 'pure

[12] For a rather superficial account of her reign, see C. P. Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu* (London, 1956; 2nd edn 1968). See also Toyama Gunji, *Sokuten Bukō* (Tokyo, 1966); R. W. L. Guisso, 'The Life and Times of the empress Wu Tse-t'ien of the T'ang dynasty', unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford, 1975.

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offices' (the sensitive advisory and deliberative posts), some filled by very junior men. The examination graduates began to be employed as an elite stream within the bureaucracy, who could expect accelerated promotion and would spend most of their careers in central government. Most of them came from aristocratic backgrounds, some from the great families of the 'national aristocracy' that had always dominated the court, others from the equally old-established lesser 'provincial aristocracy' of locally prominent clans (*wang-tsu*). The resulting tensions within the bureaucracy were not so much the result of differences of class background, as Ch'en Yin-k'o suggested, but of differences of rival functional groups within the official structure.

When the empress Wu fell in 705 and the T'ang was restored, signs of strain were apparent everywhere in the administration. But nothing was done immediately, for her successor Chung-tsung proved an ineffectual ruler, dominated by his empress who with her relatives embarked upon an orgy of corruption, swelling the bureaucracy by the open sale of office and of noble titles.

Under Hsüan-tsung (713–55) the dynasty was once again under firm leadership, and reached a peak of prosperity and cultural brilliance which marks his reign as one of the high points of Chinese history. But during his reign the reforms necessitated by the crisis of the preceding decades set in motion a whole complex of far-reaching changes which were to alter radically the course of Chinese history.[13]

In the central administration the careful balance of powers and division of function between the three central ministries, the Chancellery, Secretariat and Department of State Affairs, that had survived since Sui times was destroyed. The large group of chief ministers who had served as a rather informal advisory council to the emperor in previous reigns was reduced to four or even less, holding broad powers both in policy-making and as chief executives. The Chancellery and Secretariat were merged to form a single organization formulating policy and drafting legislation on their behalf. The Department of State Affairs became simply the executive arm of government, and its head no longer ranked as chief minister or participated in consultations on policy. The way was open for powerful chief ministers to exercise almost dictatorial powers.[14]

The emperor ceased to discuss policy regularly with a large group of ministers, and began to rely increasingly upon groups of young and low-ranking secretaries drawn from the academies of scholars such as the

[13] Pulleyblank, *Background*.

[14] See Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang-tai san-sheng-chih chih fa-chan yen-chiu', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 3.1 (1960) 19–120; Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang-shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Hong Kong, 1969), pp. 1–101; Chou Tao-chi, *Han T'ang tsai-hsiang chih-tu* (Taipei, 1964).

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Chi-hsien yüan and Han-lin yüan to help him draft documents and to plan policy. He also began to use members of the eunuch staff of the palace as personal agents, to circumvent the normal procedures of government. These developments began to undermine the power and the influence of the regular bureaucratic establishment, to break down the orderly routine of government business, and to create a gulf between the emperor and his officials, a gap that widened as Hsüan-tsung withdrew increasingly from public life and turned his attention to religion and the pursuit of pleasure.

Another major change came with the creation of special commissions to deal with pressing administrative problems, especially in the financial field. These commissions stood outside the regular bureaucratic structure; their heads held very wide powers, and they employed large staffs, many of them specialists. The result was a growth of specialization and professionalism within the bureaucracy, which eroded the ideal of a bureaucracy sharing a common training as generalists who could fill any vacancy in the official establishment, leaving specialist skills to their subordinates.[15]

Extensive changes in the financial system also went against the established ideas of uniform administration. New taxes were graduated according to the wealth of the taxpayer, and took account of their property in addition to their possession of a state allocation of land. Quotas were established for local revenues to avoid the complicated centralized accountancy procedures of the old system. The currency was reformed, and the transport system which brought revenues from central and southern China was reorganized. These changes undermined the basic principles of the simple financial system inherited from the past.[16]

At the same time the needs of defence against powerful and mobile enemies led to the abandonment of the old militia system, under which the army was mostly self-supporting, and its replacement by a professional army of long-service troops. These were mostly stationed in the various permanent armies on the frontier which were grouped into powerful regional commands under military governors (*chieh-tu shih*). The latter were given overall responsibility for a strategic sector of the frontier so that it would be possible to respond to foreign attacks more quickly and effectively than under the old centralized system of command. In this respect the new system was successful, but it concentrated almost all military power in the hands of a few frontier generals. Meanwhile, the decay of the militias left the central government with little armed force at its immediate disposal.

[15] See Denis Twitchett, 'The salt commissioners after An Lu-shan's rebellion', *AM* (NS), 4.1 (1954) 60–89; Tonami Mamoru, 'San-shi-shi no seiritsu ni tsuite', *Shirin*, 44.4 (1961).

[16] See Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970).

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In 755 An Lu-shan, a part-Turkish part-Soghdian general who controlled three of the north-eastern commands, rebelled. The rebellion continued after his own death and was finally suppressed only in 763. Great areas of Ho-pei and Ho-nan, the richest and most productive provinces in China, were left devastated and depopulated. The fighting spread into the lower Yangtze and the Han river valleys. By the time the rebellion was over the Chinese had abandoned their foothold in southern Manchuria, and the entire north-west (modern Kansu) had fallen to the Tibetans, their garrisons having been withdrawn to defend the capital. However, the most important long-term damage caused by the rebellion arose from the serious loss of authority suffered by the central government.[17]

In their efforts to suppress the rebels the system of provincial commands had been extended throughout the empire, producing a new level of local administration. Unlike the old prefectures, these provinces were often viable independent units, capable of seriously threatening central power. In the north some were heavily armed, and a group of provinces in Ho-pei were commanded by surrendered rebel commanders, and remained semi-autonomous paying no revenues to the capital, appointing their own officials, and claiming the right of hereditary succession for their governors. These were extreme cases, but everywhere the forces of local autonomy and of particularism had grown markedly. The central government, which had barely survived the rebellion, was forced to delegate a great measure of responsibility to the provinces in order to preserve intact the integrity of the empire.

The result was a series of institutional changes that mark the end of an era in Chinese government. The settlement with the provinces was an extremely complex matter, since there was very great regional variation in their power, independence, and internal organization. Until 780 the central government, demoralized and dominated by powerful eunuchs, a dictatorial chief minister, and a series of financial commissioners of great influence, did little to redress the situation. Then the new emperor Te-tsung (780–805) attempted to rationalize the situation, in the all-important spheres of revenue and military matters, by arriving at a *modus vivendi* by which each province agreed an overall quota of taxes to be paid to the central government, but leaving the details of how the taxes were to be raised in the hands of the local authorities. The result was a bewildering diversity. Tax rates varied from one district to the next, so that

[17] See C. A. Peterson, *The autonomy of the north-eastern provinces in the period following the An Lu-shan rebellion*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1966; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The An Lu-shan rebellion and the origins of chronic militarism in late T'ang China', in J. C. Perry and Bardwell L. Smith, eds. *Essays on T'ang society* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 33–60.

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it is no longer possible to speak of a 'Chinese' level of taxation. Similar diversity developed in other fields.

Te-tsung's policies, and the attempt made at the same time to induce the provinces to reduce their armies, led to a new rebellion in the north-east (781–5) which again almost destroyed the dynasty and ended in stalemate.[18] However, under Hsien-tsung (805–21) the central power eventually regained its authority to a very large degree, and assimilated the provincial system, with the exception of the two or three most autonomous provinces in Ho-pei, into the bureaucratic framework.[19]

However, the diversity of administrative practice that had arisen in the late eighth century, and been given formal expression in the financial arrangements of 780, remained. This tacit acceptance of a wide variety of local government practice led to a radical change in the status and importance of codified law, which has been singled out by some Japanese scholars as a major turning point in political history.[20] Until 737 the entire body of codified law, the criminal Code (*Lü*), the administrative Statutes (*Ling*), the codified amendments and amplifications to these in the Regulations (*Ko*) and the detailed provisions covering their enforcement by different government departments, the Ordinances (*Shih*) were regularly up-dated and revised, at intervals of roughly fifteen years. After the outbreak of the rebellion many of the rules in the Statutes covering the law relating to population registration, land, taxation, labour services, the military system and the details of local administration were rendered obsolete, since these systems had either fallen into disuse or had had to be abandoned with the massive movements of population coupled with the breakdown of the regular registration of households. The rules remained in the statute book – those on the land allocation, for example, were reproduced in the Sung criminal code *Sung hsing-t'ung* two centuries later – but these ceased to have any connection with the real situation. Yet there was no attempt at a general revision of the whole body of codified law. Even when the central government recovered a real measure of authority in its struggle with the provinces, first in the 780s and then under Hsien-tsung, it did not mark its new power by the promulgation of a new revised set of codified laws, an action used by earlier T'ang emperors as a formal claim to legitimacy for a new political regime. The only attempt to rationalize the legislation which piled up in the form of edicts was the intermittent

[18] See Peterson, *Autonomy of the north-eastern provinces*; Denis Twitchett, 'Lu Chih (754–805): imperial adviser and court official', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Confucian personalities* (Stanford, 1962), pp. 84–122.

[19] C. A. Peterson, 'The restoration completed: Hsien-tsung and the provinces', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 151–91.

[20] See for example Tonami Mamoru, 'Ritsuryō-taisei to sono hōkai', in *Chūgoku chūseishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1970), pp. 404–16.

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compilation of collections of *Edicts subsequent to the regulations* (*Ko-hou ch'ih*) relating back to the main body of law as codified in 737.[21]

Thus not only did the T'ang government after 755 abandon the ideal of uniform rules and practice covering its entire empire, and accept wide variations and diversity in administration. It also abandoned the principle that such a uniform and universal system of rules and procedures should be embodied in a centrally codified corpus of statute law applicable throughout the empire. There was no longer a body of codified administrative law with the unquestioned authority of that in force under the early T'ang, and the central government accepted that such uniform norms were no longer attainable.

The regional separatism and provincial autonomy of the years following An Lu-shan's rebellion had widespread effects going far beyond the new diversity of practice in local government and the decreased status of centrally codified law. The more independent of the northern provinces began to develop a new style of administration, with military personnel undertaking many of the functions previously performed by civil officials. This change also marked the beginning of the employment of many specialist officers. Thus the pattern was provided for the division of powers in the early Sung administration between the regular civil officials, the military and the financial branch of the bureaucracy.

The central government, too, was forced to innovate. No longer able to collect direct taxes from a large part of its empire, nor able to depend upon labour services as before, the government began to raise revenue through state monopoly taxes, first upon salt, and later on tea, wine and ferments. This enabled it to levy taxes indirectly through the merchants dealing in these commodities, from areas outside its control. It began to tax mineral production and to levy taxes on trade, abandoning the traditional principle that a stable state ought to raise its revenues from uniform taxes on the peasantry. These innovations, like the tax quotas we have already mentioned, were to remain permanent features of administrative policy for centuries to come.

These changes were accompanied by major institutional developments. In the aftermath of the rebellion many of the established organs of government simply lapsed, their premises left derelict, and the posts on their official establishment becoming sinecure appointments. This situation was in constant flux, and more research is needed before we can clearly distinguish which offices continued to function normally and which did not.

[21] See Denis Twitchett, 'A note on the Tun-huang fragments of the T'ang regulations (*ko*)', *BSOAS*, 30.2 (1967) 369–81.

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What is quite certain is that the rival sources of political power, the groups of informal advisers like the Han-lin scholars, and the eunuchs grew steadily in authority at the expense of the regular official hierarchy. In the late eighth and ninth centuries the power of the eunuchs was greatly strengthened and took a new form when they were given control of the Shen-ts'e armies – the elite troops which provided the main force by which the emperor could counterbalance the provincial armies. The eunuchs also sometimes gained control of the palace treasuries, and began to play a major role in the handling of official documents and the transmission of the emperor's orders. This function was formalized in the Eunuch Palace Council (Shu-mi yüan) whose senior eunuchs also acted as an advisory group in much the same way as the chief ministers of the outer court. The traditional historians were always hostile to the eunuchs, and it is difficult to get a clear picture of their activities since they never operated overtly as did the court officials, but exercised power indirectly by exerting influence on the emperor or by acting through their allies among the officials. However, during the early ninth century they were so powerful that members of the court were forced to involve powerful eunuchs in their factional intrigues. The eunuchs determined almost every succession to the throne in the ninth century, and probably murdered more than one emperor.[22]

As the real power of the court officials declined – undermined by the activities of eunuchs, Han-lin secretaries, and independent finance commissioners, and challenged from without by provincial governors exerting pressure upon them – the court was divided by violent factionalism. Ch'en Yin-k'o believed that this was the result of resurgent tension between the old aristocrats and the examination graduates, but Tonami Mamoru has conclusively disposed of this theory.[23] The violent antagonisms and personal bitterness which characterize the politics of the period are, however, real enough. The plight of the court was made still worse by the efforts of the emperor Wen-tsung to eliminate eunuch influence. In 835 an attempt to purge the eunuchs failed. The eunuchs turned the tables on their enemies, decimated the highest ranks of the bureaucracy, and emerged more powerful than ever.

The commissions which administered the new financial measures were another rival source of power. These were far more powerful than their

[22] See J. K. Rideout, 'The rise of the eunuchs during the T'ang dynasty', *AM* (NS), 1 (1949–50) 53–72 and 3 (1953) 42–58; Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai kangen kensei kakutoku in 'yū kō', *SGZS*, 63, 10 (1954) 34–48; Liu Yat-wing, 'The Shen-ts'e armies and the palace commissions in China, 755–875 A.D.', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London 1970; Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1971).

[23] Tonami Mamoru, 'Chūsei kizokusei no hōkai to heki-shōsei – Gyū-Ri no tōsō o tegakari ni', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21.3 (1962) 1–26.

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predecessors in Hsüan-tsung's reign. The Salt and Iron Commission came to control the entire fiscal system of southern China, and became almost entirely autonomous beyond the court's control. The Public Revenue Commission was almost equally powerful in the north. These and other commissions employed vast numbers of minor employees, and as in the case of the provincial administrations their subordinate staff was not appointed according to the regular bureaucratic procedures by the Board of Civil Office at the capital, but was recruited directly by personal recommendation (*pi-chao*) by the commissioners themselves. A great many of the members of the late T'ang bureaucracy entered service in this way, either in provincial administration or in one of the commissions. Such irregular recruitment offered a totally new means of entry into government service, for many of these recruits were later confirmed by central government as full-ranking members of the regular bureaucracy. The men recruited through this system sometimes came from backgrounds unheard of in civil servants before the rebellion, and the lesser officers in the provinces had often been soldiers from very humble families, and many were non-Chinese. The financial commissions also drew staff from the world of commerce, men whose merchant background would normally have debarred them automatically from official service.

These developments did far more than the examination system had done to open up to a wider segment of the population the opportunity of government service and the avenue to social advancement that this represented. During the T'ang the examinations never produced more than an elite stream of officials, probably little more than 10 per cent of the total bureaucracy. The great majority of these came, in any case, from the old aristocratic families and all from the conventionally educated elite. This continued to be the case until the end of the dynasty. The examinations did not open up a career to anyone with talent under the T'ang. What they did achieve was to make it possible for men from lesser provincial aristocratic families to attain the very highest offices, and to challenge the monopoly of political power at court previously enjoyed by the small 'national aristocracy' of pre-eminent clans. The widespread use of personal recommendation for office, on the other hand, broke the central government's rigid control over entry into official service, and made a career in bureaucratic service possible for a whole new class of people, whose origins and lack of a conventional education would have previously debarred them.

This change, although it had very broad social consequences, should not be exaggerated. Just as many of the examination candidates were aristocrats, many of those who entered service by recommendation were equally

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members of the educated elite. The old aristocratic families too continued to produce officials and candidates for the highest office until the very end of T'ang. Indeed in the late ninth century they had a resurgence of influence at court. But in the meantime they had themselves been transformed. They had successfully survived the vicissitudes and social disorders of the pre-Sui period and the transition to the T'ang, largely because they could fall back upon their regional bases where they retained extensive estates and numerous dependent families. These local bases were the foundation of their economic stability and their social standing. During the early T'ang, however, a great change had taken place. Secure in their position of unrivalled political power under a dynasty with apparently unassailable authority, they had allowed themselves to become a metropolitan elite, closely identified with the dynasty and with the court, and increasingly dependent upon their continued membership of the bureaucracy. In doing so they had abandoned their provincial bases of power. So long as the dynasty with whose fortunes their own were so closely identified survived, all was well, and to all outward appearances they remained as powerful and influential as ever. But when the dynastic power collapsed they could survive only as members of the broad educated elite. Their corporate identity as an 'aristocracy' had been destroyed.[24] When the T'ang fell, not a single one of the regimes of the succeeding Five Dynasties period, even among the southern kingdoms that closely followed T'ang models, was ruled by one of the great clans of the early T'ang 'national aristocracy'.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The decentralization of power after the An Lu-shan rising did not only have deep effects upon the political system and the pattern of administration. It also accelerated complex economic and social changes that had already begun during the conditions of peace and prosperity of Sui and early T'ang.

Ever since the Sui period the population of the Huai and Yangtze valleys had been steadily growing at the expense of the older settled areas in the great plain of the east and north-east. It is impossible to quantify this precisely, since the Sui population statistics for southern China are certainly defective. But there can be no doubt that the change was considerable. In 609 the T'ang provinces of Huai-nan, Chiang-nan and Ling-nan contained

[24] See Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang-Sung chih chi she-hui men-ti chih hsiao jung – T'ang-Sung chi chi she-hui yen-chiu chih-i', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 4.1 (1959) 211–304; David G. Johnson, *The medieval Chinese oligarchy* (New York, 1977); Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The aristocratic families of early imperial China; a case study of the Po-ling Ts'ui family* (Cambridge, 1978).

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only 12·4 per cent of the registered population. By 742 they accounted for 27·7 per cent. This trend continued and quickened. By the eleventh century the same region had well over half the entire Chinese population.

During this same period Ho-pei and Ho-nan (the modern provinces of Hopei, Shantung and Honan) which had more than half of the whole population in Sui times, declined seriously. Ho-pei bore the brunt of the civil wars following the Sui collapse, and as late as 726 still had less than a half of its 609 population. Ho-nan lost almost as many people, and in 742 the whole north-east had only about 70 per cent of its Sui population. The region was devastated severely during the An Lu-shan rebellion from 755 to 763 and again during the rising of the Ho-pei governors in 781–5. In the rebellions and constant civil conflict of the late ninth century, the great plain once more became a battle-ground. As late as the end of the eleventh century Ho-pei had less than a half of the households it had in 609. Ho-nan had roughly the same number as under the Sui, but this was largely because it now contained the Sung capital, the teeming metropolis of K'ai-feng and its surrounding commercial and industrial complex. Its rural population was certainly much below that of Sui times. The relative decline of the north-east is emphasized by the fact that during this same period the total population of China had almost doubled.

The north-west, the oldest settled centre of Chinese civilization and the political centre of the empire since Han times, also underwent a relative decline. The population of Ho-tung (modern Shansi) fell by 20 per cent between 609 and 742, and by the end of the eleventh century had fallen to little more than half of its Sui time level. Kuan-chung (modern Shensi) also suffered a 10 per cent loss of population between 609 and 742, but remained more or less stationary until the eleventh century. Szechwan's population more than doubled between 609 and 742, after which it remained almost stationary.[25]

Throughout this period then, there was a steady redistribution of China's population in favour of the centre and south. However, the economic effects of this were greater than the simple figures suggest, since the south, after the initial work of land clearance, reclamation and irrigation had been completed, was far more productive than the north. The climate was kinder, with a much longer growing season, and was far more dependable than in the north which was subject to frequent droughts, floods and other natural disasters. In the north, traditional agriculture, in spite of the development of sophisticated dry-farming techniques, and a

[25] Hans Bielenstein, 'The census of China during the period 2–742 A.D.', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 19 (1947) 125–63; Pulleyblank, *Background*, 172–7; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'Registration of population in China in the Sui and T'ang periods', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 4 (1961) 289–301.

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system of cropping which permitted three grain crops to be taken off the land in two years, had never been sufficient to create really large surpluses of grain. The generally low level of productivity had laid strict constraints on the activities of the early T'ang state, whose political centre remained in the north-west both for strategic reasons and because it was the home of the dominant group in politics. By the early eighth century the government began to depend increasingly on grain supplies brought from the Huai and Yangtze valleys by the Sui canal network. By this time the south was already producing a considerable grain surplus.

After An Lu-shan's rebellion, with the new influx of people fleeing the troubles in northern China, the south produced an ever-increasing proportion of China's agricultural production. This became crucial for the central government, for the semi-autonomous status of Ho-pei and parts of Ho-nan, previously the main sources of revenue, meant that the central government was cut off from this source of supply. By the early ninth century the only parts of China from which taxes regularly reached central government were the Yangtze valley and the south, and the government became increasingly dependent upon the shipment of southern grain and supplies by the canal to support the capital and the imperial armies. The area around the capital, Ch'ang-an, found itself in great economic difficulties during the late T'ang, owing to the neglect of the irrigation system upon which it had depended since the third century BC.

The result of these developments was a major tension, between the economic centre of the empire, which had begun inexorably to move to the south-east, and the strategic demands and the pull of sheer administrative inertia, which kept the capital at Ch'ang-an until the dynasty's final collapse. The empress Wu had already made her main capital Lo-yang, nearer to the centres of production, but her successors had returned to Ch'ang-an on purely political grounds. During the Five Dynasties and the Sung, K'ai-feng – already a vital commercial city and centre of the canal network under the T'ang – became the capital, and the north-west, the seat of the imperial power since the Western Chou period, gradually declined into a backwater.

Another major economic change came about in the system of land ownership. The collapse after 755 of the household registration system and the state land allocation which depended upon it led to a complete change in the nature of tenure, with important economic consequences. Since the third century successive dynasties had repeatedly attempted to impose systems of state land allocation. The last of these, the 'equal land allocation system' (*chün-t'ien*) first enacted by the Northern Wei and inherited with modifications by the Sui and T'ang, had originally been

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aimed at the maximum use of land and the highest level of peasant productivity by making generous grants of land to the peasants, while at the same time imposing limits on the excessive accumulation of property in individual hands. Under this system land was allocated to the individual male for his productive adult lifetime, and he in return had to produce taxes and perform labour services for the state. The tenure granted under the system was limited to the lifetime of the holder, and granted only the right of use. Disposal of land granted under the system was rigidly restricted.

The system never worked perfectly. The law contained many loopholes which permitted official households and members of the nobility to accumulate very large holdings quite legally. Parts of the ordinary allocations could be inherited by the holder's heirs as long as they were eligible to receive an allocation, and a large proportion of land passed into this hereditary category with the passage of time. It is not at all clear how far, if at all, the system was ever enforced in southern China, even at the zenith of T'ang power, and in many parts of the north there was insufficient land to allocate the full entitlement of individuals. Nevertheless, the *chün-t'ien* system was taken very seriously as the legal basis for all tenure of land, and every household's landed possessions were registered in accordance with its legal entitlement. Moreover, under the system most peasant households were granted some land of their own.[26]

Following the An Lu-shan rebellion the collapse of the household registration system on which the land allocation depended made it quite impossible to reimpose such a system on a nation-wide scale, although the government made spasmodic efforts to distribute vacant lands among dispossessed households, and to limit the accumulation of lands. These efforts to preserve the state's right to control the tenure and distribution of land proved to be fruitless, and by degrees *de facto* recognition was given to the rights of individual land-holders to the possession and free disposal of their lands. Lip-service was still paid to the Confucian maxim that 'all lands remained the emperor's lands', but in practice a free market in land grew up, and no future dynasty succeeded ever again in imposing a system of state land allocation, until the land reform carried out under the Communist regime.

This had wide repercussions. The An Lu-shan rebellion had caused massive displacement of population, and had devastated and depopulated great areas of Ho-pei and Ho-nan. Much land was abandoned and could

[26] There is an enormous literature on the T'ang land system. The more important items published down to 1969 are listed in Twitchett, *Financial administration*. A comprehensive bibliography is included in the excellent recent study Hori Toshikazu, *Kindensei no kenkyū – Chūgoku kodai kokka no tochi seisaku to tochi shoyū-sei* (Tokyo, 1975).

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simply be occupied by predatory landowners, or could be bought cheaply from households anxious to move to more settled areas. As law and order collapsed farmers could be driven from their land by simple intimidation. Estates built up in this way could be worked by employing dispossessed farmers, who provided an ample pool of labour. Such people could either be employed as tenant farmers, or simply as labourers.

Great estates (*chuang* or *chuang-yüan*) had always existed, even under the *chün-t'ien* allocation system, but their ownership had been strictly limited to certain groups: the state and the imperial clan; the great aristocratic clans, the families of the nobility and of high-ranking officials whose status entitled them to the possession of large properties; and the Buddhist and Taoist religious communities, which held special privileges and entitlements within the system. Now, however, a complete free-for-all ensued, in which all sorts of wealthy and powerful people joined, free of any effective legal restraints. Not only was there a great deal of land available, but there were many people from humble backgrounds employed in provincial government and in the financial commissions, who not only enjoyed new opportunities for self-enrichment, but who needed land to give their families a stable economic foundation, and to enable themselves to claim the status of a land-owning gentleman. Another wave of estate building followed the suppression of the majority of the Buddhist monastic communites under Wu-tsung in 843–5, when vast quantities of land formerly in the possession of the monasteries were sold off by the state.

The great landed estate now became a normal and widespread feature of the rural economy. They were for the most part worked by tenant cultivators, and tenancy itself began to take a new form. There had always been tenancy, not only on the large estates of the early T'ang, but even on lands allocated under the *chün-t'ien* system, where farmers might rent out lands situated far from their homestead to another cultivator, while taking up a tenancy of other land more conveniently situated. Apart from the special case of monastic lands, which were often worked by households of dependants (*ssu-hu*), tenancy in early T'ang times normally involved a purely economic short-term contract between equal parties. By the late ninth century very long-term agreements, under which the tenant accepted a degree of personal subordination towards the landlord, were normal, and this development led to the growth under the Sung of a type of semi-servile tenancy in some parts of China. It is quite impossible to quantify the level of tenancy in late T'ang China, but it was certainly widespread. Combined with the accumulation of land into fewer hands it helped widen the gulf between the rich and poor, and between land-

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owners and cultivators, and tended to produce a new social structure in rural areas.[27]

This problem reached its extreme only under the Sung, but the changes were well under way in the ninth century. The transformation of society which it brought about has been studied perhaps more intensively than any other issue in Chinese medieval history, and has produced a huge polemical literature. Some authors have postulated the emergence of a 'manorial economy', parallel either to the growth of the *shōen* system in Japan, or of the manor in Europe. Others have suggested that the late T'ang saw the end of a slave society (defined in terms of the 'servile' relationship of the individual to the state embodied in the legal institutions of the early T'ang) and the beginnings of 'feudalism' or 'medieval serfdom'. Others still believe that it is wrong to over-emphasize the servile aspects of tenancy, and hold that the implications of the estates and their system of tenancy were essentially capitalist.

This bitter controversy is as much bound up with rival attempts to fit China into some model of universal historical development as it is with the realities of history. But it has served to focus attention upon a crucial period of change in Chinese economic history. There can be no doubt that, although tenancy was by no means universal, the existence of large estates on a wide scale made possible important economic developments. The large landowner could undertake clearance and reclamation, using his tenants as a labour force, as the monastic communities had done with the aid of their dependants in pre-T'ang China. Large landlords could invest in new implements and milling machinery. Even the pressures of share-cropping on the tenant helped to bring about the growth of double-cropping, since share-cropping agreements covered only the main cereal crop. These developments further accelerated the growth of agrarian productivity, and the consequent economic expansion of the late T'ang and early Sung periods.

Moreover, tenancy was not merely a one-sided system of exploitation of the peasantry. Peasant farmers did not become tenants of a powerful neighbouring landlord purely out of economic desperation. A powerful landlord could shield his tenants from the rapacity of the tax collectors, while the large estate as an economic unit provided some measure of security and a chance of surviving hard times, which might be denied a small farmer just above the subsistence level. In addition, these changes took place in the context of a general collapse of authority and the break-

[27] See Denis Twitchett, *Land tenure and the social order in T'ang and Sung China*, inaugural lecture, 28 Nov. 1961, School of Oriental and African Studies (London, 1962). For additional documentation see Twitchett, *Financial administration*, and Hori Toshikazu, *Kindensei no kenkyū*.

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down of law and order. During the ninth and tenth centuries a peasant found it greatly to his advantage to sacrifice some measure of personal freedom in return for the protection of a powerful patron.

Tenancy, in fact, was only one aspect of a general emergence of personal dependency and semi-servile relationships during the late T'ang, a tendency which parallels closely what had happened in the period of division following the collapse of the Han dynasty. There was a general tendency towards the emergence of small-scale close-knit social units, and of highly personalized relationships throughout the social fabric. The re-emergence of personal recommendation as a method of recruitment in the bureaucracy, which established a lasting client–patron relationship between the bureau head and the men whom he had sponsored was one aspect of this. In the military provincial administrations it took a more extreme form, with the informal relationships of master and retainer, patron and client, often cutting across the hierarchy of established ranks. In the ninth century some military governors even adopted their subordinate commanders as fictitious sons, thus strengthening the relationship of rank with the far stronger and more personal demands of filial obedience. In some provinces hereditary succession to office, the complete negation of all Sui and T'ang policies on recruitment, reappeared.

Every one of these developments illustrates a trend towards the formation of small local units as the basis of social cohesion, and towards close-knit, semi-familial social groupings which would replace the lost stability formerly provided by a strong and effective central power, with orderly standardized methods of administration and an established national hierarchy of rank.

In this same context of a crumbling social order there was also a last flurry of activity amongst the old aristocracy who vainly attempted to define themselves as a generally accepted social elite, in a last futile effort to sustain the tottering hierarchical order of the upper ranks of society against the overwhelming tide of social change, and to reassert the role of the aristocratic elite as an alternative source of social stability in place of the lost powers of central government. Their attempt failed – although they enjoyed a brief resurgence of power at court – simply because they were now so thoroughly identified with the dynasty, and no longer had any real local power bases to which they could retreat.

The loss of central authority and the consequent decentralization and localization of power had important social and economic consequences. The decentralization of political power to the various provincial capitals meant that many of these cities became regional metropolises – large-scale administrative cities with great numbers of wealthy official families and

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great numbers of people engaged in service industries. At the same time, the new freedom granted to the provinces in the financial sphere meant that much of a province's revenues was disbursed locally, rather than sent to the capital. Although Ch'ang-an, with its population of more than a million, remained by far the largest city in T'ang China – for that matter in the world – and the centre of high level commerce until its eventual destruction during the Huang Ch'ao rebellion and the ensuing warfare, several other provincial centres grew into major cities. Prominent among these were Ch'eng-tu, Chiang-ling in the middle Yangtze, Yang-chou, Kuang-chou (Canton) and Pien-chou (K'ai-feng) which after the fall of the T'ang was to become the first great commercial city to be chosen as the national capital. These great cities with their flourishing trade and varied industries, became the regional centres of a growing network of small market towns and local markets in the countryside, many of which grew up around the garrison outposts (*chen*) of provincial military power. By the ninth century a new economic hierarchy of settlements based on the regional marketing system was beginning to emerge alongside the existing hierarchy of administrative centres, adding a totally new dimension to the process of urban growth.[28]

This general process of urbanization was founded on the all-round growth in productivity. Not only did the general movement of people to the south increase the level of agrarian production, but industry and handicrafts too began to grow in the Yangtze valley. As a result, trade and the circulation of commodities also rapidly increased. The late eighth and ninth centuries were an era of burgeoning prosperity for the merchant class who had until this time suffered under the rigid controls dictated by the anti-mercantile theories of conventional Confucianism that had been enforced by successive dynasties since Han times. The government had attempted to restrict trade to closely regulated official markets, in which the local authorities regulated the prices of commodities and rigorously controlled all the activities of the merchants. Commerce in some goods was restricted, even forbidden. The associations of merchants (*hang*) were closely supervised and used as a means of controlling their individual members. The travel of merchants was carefully controlled, and they were subjected to constant inspections and tolls. In addition, deliberate attempts were made to depress the merchants' standard of life by registering them as a special group, subjecting them to severe sumptuary laws, and by excluding merchants and artisans and their immediate descendants from entry into the official class.

[28] On the growth of urban markets see Denis Twitchett, 'The T'ang market system', *AM* (NS), 12.2 (1966) 202–48, and the secondary literature quoted there.

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With the decline of central power, all these restrictions rapidly disappeared. The official market system gradually collapsed and the conventionally hostile attitude that regarded the merchant as a necessary evil whose calling imposed a moral stigma upon him began to break down. Even the rigid exclusion of merchants' sons from entry into government service and into the schools at the capital was somewhat relaxed. Freed from the severe institutional checks imposed on them in early T'ang times the merchant community slowly began the development which by the late Sung had created a wealthy, self-conscious urban middle class with a strong sense of its separate identity and its own special sub-culture. At the same time the hitherto impassable social barriers between the rich merchant and the scholar-official elite began to break down, as merchant took official service, and official invested and participated in trade.[29]

Another change came over the commercial scene during the late T'ang. During the Sui and early T'ang, merchants, both large-scale traders and the local shopkeepers (even the pedlars in the capital city), were very often foreigners – Soghdians, Persians and later Uighurs. These were part of a vast trade network stretching to central Asia and the Middle East. The foreigners lived in their own communities, controlled by their own headmen and subject to their own laws, unless they came into conflict with the Chinese. The loss of the Chinese north-west to the Tibetans after 763 disrupted this trade, and foreign dominance of internal commerce slowly ebbed.

The ever-accelerating growth of trade, the increasing prosperity of merchants and the overall growth in productivity led gradually to a fundamental change of official attitudes towards the economy, which yet again marks off the eighth and ninth centuries as the end of an era. Superficially, at least in the public pronouncements of policy, the traditional stress upon agriculture as the 'fundamental profession' and upon the peasantry as the primary source of revenue remained unaltered. But from this time onwards, whatever their professions of faith in this classical orthodoxy, Chinese governments would always be closely involved with commerce, by the management of state monopolies, by direct intervention in profitable sectors of industry, by their increasing dependence upon taxes levied on trade, and by policies designed to derive revenue from urban populations.

The single most important change in government economic policy, however, was the abandonment of the primitive currency system under which silk cloth, collected as tax in kind, had been used as a sort of

[29] See Denis Twitchett, 'Merchant, trade and government in late T'ang', *AM* (NS) 14.1 (1968) 63–93.

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commodity money for large payments, in conjunction with a copper coinage. This system, yet another relic of the period of division, was very important under the early T'ang, since the copper coinage always remained insufficient for the needs of commerce. Once again the An Lu-shan rebellion and its aftermath exerted an influence here. The main source of tax silk used for this purpose had been Ho-pei and Ho-nan, provinces which now became largely autonomous, and paid no revenue to the capital.[30] Not only was the dynasty cut off from its main supply of silk cloth, but in the late eighth century there were important discoveries of silver in southern China, and silver gradually began to replace silk as the medium for large transactions. At the same time, the supply of copper coinage was also improved, and there was a steady development of a money economy not only in the cities, but throughout the countryside. The government neither minted a silver currency, nor regulated the use of silver bullion. This was left in the hands of silversmiths, who began to develop primitive forms of banking and credit institutions.[31] Here, once again, although governments continued to claim that control of the currency was an essential part of the state's power, in actual practice an important part of the currency was left in the hands of private merchants, and it was from private sources rather than from government that the most important change in currency policy, the beginnings of paper money, was to come in the ensuing period.

Attempts by the government to control the economy according to a long-outmoded ideal model of society were breaking down at every level. State land-allocation as a means of centralized control over the rural population, the strict state supervision of commerce and of the merchant community, and the strict control over the currency – all cardinal features of traditional political theory – were abandoned in the late T'ang and none of them was ever successfully reimposed by any later dynasty. Freed of these restraints, and fuelled by the increasing productivity of agriculture and the opening up of new territories in the south, the Chinese economy began to grow at such a rate that some historians have seriously suggested that by late Sung times the conditions were ripe for the emergence of a modern capitalist society. Whether or not we accept such a view, the late T'ang was the beginning of a major transformation of the economy which continued until the Mongol invasion.

[30] See Ch'üan Han-sheng, 'Chung-ku tzu-jan ching-chi', *CYYY*, 10 (1948) 75–176. See also Denis Twitchett, 'Provincial autonomy and central finance in late T'ang', *AM* (NS) 11.2 (1965) 211–32; Michel Cartier, 'Sapèques et tissus à l'époque des T'ang (618–906)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 19.3 (1976) 323–44.

[31] See Katō Shigeshi, *Tō Sō jidai ni okeru kingin no kenkyū* (2 vols., Tokyo, 1924).

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SUI AND T'ANG CHINA AND THE WIDER WORLD

Both the Sui and T'ang, as masters of a reunified Chinese empire, felt very conscious of their being the heirs of the Han. During the sixth and seventh centuries the recovery of territories formerly under Han rule provided a motive for Chinese expansion in northern Vietnam, for repeated campaigns aimed at the restoration of Chinese control over the former Han colonies in southern Manchuria and Korea, and for the occupation of the oasis kingdoms on the Silk Road to central Asia and the west.

In the south, the Sui met little resistance, and after an abortive attempt under Sui Wen-ti to expand still further into Champa, the southern border of Chinese territory was established in the region of modern Ha-tinh. The part of Vietnam north of this, where Chinese influence had continued since Han times, was now fully incorporated into the Chinese administration. Apart from scattered risings of its aboriginal peoples, it remained a prosperous and peaceful part of the T'ang empire. When in 939 Vietnam finally became independent, the area was firmly incorporated as part of the Chinese cultural area, ruled under Chinese institutions and Chinese laws, its ruling elite imbued with Chinese literary culture and using the Chinese written language.

In Korea the Chinese met with more powerful resistance. Unlike northern Vietnam, where Chinese dominance had continued at some level since Han times, northern Korea and southern Manchuria were controlled by the powerful and well-organized state of Koguryŏ. This kingdom put up such a fierce resistance to Sui attempts to reconquer the former Han territories that the Sui destroyed its dynasty in the attempt. The T'ang, under Kao-tsung, finally succeeded in conquering Koguryŏ, and for a few years incorporated most of Korea under a Chinese protectorate. But in the face of continued resistance their position proved untenable. Their withdrawal led to the unification of all Korea, for the first time, under the kingdom of Silla, while the former Koguryŏ territories in Manchuria and the adjacent coastal region became the nucleus of another powerful state, Parhae (Po-hai). Both Silla and Parhae were stable well-organized kingdoms, closely modelled on the T'ang pattern. In both kingdoms the ruling class used the Chinese written language, copied Chinese literary models, and practised Chinese-style Buddhism and Confucianism. Although, unlike Vietnam, this area remained politically independent of the T'ang, it too was nevertheless permanently incorporated into the Chinese cultural sphere.

The case of Japan was somewhat different. On the periphery of the world known to the Han, Japan formed no part of the territorial am-

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bitions of the Sui and T'ang. But Chinese cultural influences had already been imported through Korea, and in the seventh century the Japanese began deliberately to organize their state upon the model of the T'ang, adopting the Chinese script and literary language, Chinese artistic forms, religion, philosophy, law and institutions wholesale. During the T'ang period Chinese influence was at its peak in Japan. Although it was challenged in later centuries by the emergence of native forms, by the end of the T'ang Chinese influence had firmly and permanently incorporated Japan within its cultural sphere.

A last area of cultural assimilation was in the south-west, another area over which the Han had exercised some degree of control. During the T'ang a powerful native kingdom, Nan-chao, replaced the confused tribal groupings in the modern province of Yunnan. Nan-chao remained independent of, and for long periods actively hostile to the T'ang. The area was not formally incorporated into China until the Mongol period. But in spite of this mutual hostility, and the relative backwardness of the region, Nan-chao too adopted the Chinese language and copied many T'ang institutions. It too became a marginal part of the Chinese cultural sphere.

During the Sui and T'ang, China thus established a close cultural influence over a broad area of east Asia which was to form, until modern times, a region dominated by Chinese civilization. The states which occupied this region were quite unlike any of China's earlier neighbours. Until this time the Chinese had been bordered by peoples with totally different cultures, languages, systems of organization, and life styles. Such tribal peoples had sometimes grown extremely powerful, and had invaded and temporarily occupied large parts of China. But they were politically unstable, incapable of administering a settled agrarian population, and in respect of their culture the Chinese had every justification in looking down upon them as 'barbarians'. The new states that emerged in T'ang times were something quite new in the Chinese experience, states organized on the same lines as China itself, albeit on a much smaller scale; their rulers embraced the same ideologies, their government business was conducted in Chinese, using Chinese laws and procedures. Although they accepted tributary status, they were in fact completely independent of Chinese control, and in dealing with them the Chinese were forced to treat them on a level more equal than ever before. This set the scene for the new pattern of foreign relations pursued by the Sung with their northern neighbours.

In the north and west the T'ang faced more familiar challenges. Here the basic aims of Chinese policy remained two-fold: first, the protection

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of the areas of Chinese settlement against the incursions of the nomads living beyond the permanent environmental frontier in the steppe; and second, the control and protection of the trade routes through the modern provinces of Kansu and Sinkiang to central Asia, Iran and the West.

The Sui were fortunate in that their powerful northern neighbours, the Turks, who had controlled the whole steppe zone from the borders of the Sassanian empire in Iran to Manchuria since the mid-sixth century, had been divided into two separate empires the eastern of which, neighbouring China, was constantly divided by factional and tribal rivalries. They remained, none the less, formidable and their downfall in 630 was a major step in the final consolidation of T'ang authority. Their revival in the 680s once more posed grave problems for the Chinese, and they were kept in check only by an extremely costly defensive system along the northern frontier. Eventually they fell prey to internal dissension, and in 744 were eclipsed by the Uighurs, their former vassals.

The Uighurs proved much less troublesome neighbours, even willing to provide mercenary troops who rescued the T'ang in a number of crises. In general they were more interested in trade, and when in the 840s they in their turn were replaced as the dominant people of the northern steppe by the Kirghiz many of them settled in the oases of Kansu and modern Sinkiang giving up their nomadic life to become sedentary agriculturalists.

Another troublesome nomadic neighbour was the proto-Mongol Khitan people who with their Turkish vassals the Hsi (Tätäbi) inhabited the mountainous borderlands of northern Ho-pei and the west of modern Liaotung. In the late seventh century they became very powerful and invaded north-eastern China, and thereafter necessitated the maintenance of a formidable defensive system in northern Ho-pei and Ho-tung.

The routes to central Asia and the west were of great importance to the Sui and T'ang. They were of course important trade routes by which the Chinese exported silk textiles and imported in return a great variety of exotic goods. But they were also vital cultural links in a period when China was at its most cosmopolitan, and open as never before or since to influences from abroad. By these routes many Chinese ideas and techniques flowed to the west, but during the Sui and early T'ang much more of the traffic was in the opposite direction. Northern India and the kingdoms of central Asia remained sources from which Chinese Buddhism, by far the most lively, influential and advanced system of thought of its period, received new stimuli. From Iran and central Asia came other new religions, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity and later Islam. Together with these intellectual influences came many new developments in the arts, ranging from music and the dance to metal-work

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and cuisine, and important technical and scientific influences, in mathematics and linguistics for example. Foreigners, from Indian monks to Persian eye-doctors and Soghdian entertainers and merchants, moved freely into China.

To secure the central Asian routes upon which these things depended, the Sui and T'ang expanded westward, their armies conquering and establishing Chinese protectorates in one small oasis kingdom after another. By the 660s Chinese power had been firmly established in the Tarim basin, in Zungharia and in the Ili valley, while Chinese protectorates had been established to control the western Turkish tribes in what is now Russian Turkestan, and the numerous city states of Transoxiana, Ṭūkharistān and Afghanistan that had formerly been under Turkish rule. The Chinese even intervened militarily, if on a very small scale, in northern India. Under Kao-tsung Chinese political power reached further west than ever before or since.

However, this expansion was to prove transitory. The Chinese protectorates on the borders of Iran and in Afghanistan had to be abandoned after a few years, and although Chinese armies operated far into the Ili valley and the region west of the Issyk-Kul, and deep into the Pamirs and in Gilgit until the 750s, while the Chinese maintained a firm control of the Tarim basin and Zungharia, their influence in central Asia was challenged by the emergence in the mid-seventh century of two powerful and aggressive rival powers.

The first of these was Tibet. Until the seventh century, although Ch'iang tribesmen had created havoc during the Later Han, and later the T'u-yü-hun people living around Lake Kokonor had threatened what is now western Kansu, the western frontier had never been of crucial strategic importance to the Chinese. The environment of Tibet was too hostile to attract Chinese settlement, while Tibet was only sparsely inhabited by ill-organized and backward tribes.

During the seventh century this situation was transformed. Tibet suddenly grew into a powerful united kingdom and embarked on a career of aggressive expansion. From their original centre in southern Tibet the Tibetans expanded westward towards the Pamirs, eastward towards Yunnan, and northward to impinge upon China's fresh conquests in the Tarim, where they threatened China's trade routes to the west. Then, during Kao-tsung's reign, the Tibetans destroyed the T'u-yü-hun kingdom in modern Ch'ing-hai province, which had previously formed a buffer between them and the Chinese territories in Kansu. From this time onwards the Tibetans constantly threatened the Chinese both in the Kansu corridor and in the region around Lan-chou, in which regions the

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T'ang was forced to maintain huge permanent armies. When, after 755, the An Lu-shan rebellion forced the government to withdraw these garrisons for the defence of the capital, the Tibetans occupied most of modern Kansu province where they remained from 763 until the 840s. The Chinese outposts in the Tarim and Zungharia were cut off from metropolitan China, and they too were later overrun by the Tibetans.

After 842 the Tibetan kingdom collapsed and disintegrated and in the following years the Tibetans gradually withdrew from their conquered territories, and ceased to be a major factor in Chinese foreign relations. But it was no longer an inhospitable wilderness inhabited by a few nomadic tribesmen. The last king had fallen after attempting to destroy the Buddhist temples and secularize their monks. After the fall of the kingdom, it was the great monasteries who provided political authority, and helped preserve the cultural identity of the Tibetans.

This culture was one totally alien to the Chinese. There had been a period from about 650 to 750 when it had seemed possible that Tibet, for all its hostility to China, might still have become a part of the Chinese cultural sphere. Sons of the nobility were sent to study in China, dynastic marriages arranged with the T'ang royal house, and Chinese books and craftsmen brought to Lhasa. But this hope proved shortlived. During the eighth century Tibet was culturally united by a native culture using a script derived from an Indian model, and with cultural ties far stronger with Nepal and India than with the Chinese. It remained little influenced by China until our own times, in spite of the Manchu conquest in the eighteenth century.

The second major new power that challenged Chinese supremacy in central Asia was that of the Arabs and of Islam. During the seventh century, just as the Chinese achieved the furthest westward expansion of their power, the Arabs destroyed the Sassanian empire, and then gradually swallowed up the fragmented city-kingdoms of Ṭūkharistān and Transoxiana which had formerly been dependencies of the Turks and then briefly under Chinese protectorate. In spite of some set-backs, by the mid-eighth century Arab political dominance and Islam were firmly established in Ṭūkharistān, Transoxiana and the Farghāna region. Here, in 751, Arab troops finally clashed with a Chinese army on the Talas River, and soundly defeated it. This battle was not in itself decisive, for both the Chinese and Arab forces involved were gravely over-extended. What did prove decisive in central Asia was the An Lu-shan rebellion, far away in China. This led to the withdrawal of the Chinese troops from Kansu, and the abandonment of the Chinese garrison forces in the Tarim basin and Zungharia, who were cut off by the Tibetan occupation of the Kansu

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corridor. The Chinese were no longer able to intervene in central Asia, and the Arabs were able to consolidate their conquests without fear of Chinese rivalry.

When after 842 the Tibetan kingdom collapsed the Chinese court took the wise, but in the long term momentous, decision not to attempt the recovery of their former dominions in the far west. In the event this meant the end of effective Chinese control west of Tun-huang and Hami until the Manchu conquests of the eighteenth century. It also meant the permanent loss of central Asia as a part of the Chinese cultural area. The old oasis cities of the Tarim and Zungharia, abandoned by the Tibetans, were occupied by the Uighurs, who had been driven from their steppe homeland by the Kirghiz. The rich and complex cultures of the area, an amalgam of Indo-European, Iranian, Indian and Chinese influences, were destroyed during the successive onslaughts of Turks, Chinese, Tibetans, Arabs and Uighurs, and during the succeeding centuries the whole region from Iran to the border of Kansu gradually became an outlying section of the Islamic world rather than an outpost of Chinese culture and Chinese political influence.

During the Sui and the T'ang, China's external relations thus underwent a complete transformation. In 581 China had faced only one neighbour, Koguryŏ, that could be described as a stable well-organized state with a sedentary population. Otherwise she was surrounded by loosely organized, mostly nomadic and illiterate tribal peoples at a stage of cultural development markedly inferior to that of China. These peoples, as for example the Turks in the sixth and seventh centuries, could sometimes form powerful confederations that posed a formidable threat to the Chinese state. But such tribal confederations were always ephemeral and unstable and the Chinese could counter them by well-tried means, by strengthening the frontier defences, and by exploiting their internal divisions to destroy their unity. It was upon this type of situation, and this type of neighbouring people, that the entire traditional Chinese theory of foreign relations rested.

By the late T'ang the situation was completely reversed. The old-style frontier continued to exist only in the north, where the environmental division between settled Chinese territory and the steppes determined that the cultural distinction between China and her neighbours should be sharp cut. Even here, the nomadic neighbours were now far more stable, and had since the seventh century at least been literate. In the north-east, the south and the south-west, China was ringed by stable agrarian states on her own model, with well-developed literary cultures deeply influenced by Chinese. The Chinese-dominated east Asian cultural sphere

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had taken shape. In the west Chinese influence, political and cultural alike, had been excluded from Tibet and from central Asia which developed literate high cultures owing more to India in the case of Tibet, and to Islam in the case of central Asia, than they did to China.

The Chinese responded pragmatically to the very different relationships that grew up with each of their neighbours; sometimes attempting simple conquest, sometimes establishing a Chinese protectorate giving the native chieftain a Chinese title and Chinese advisers, sometimes attempting to ensure friendly relations by a dynastic marriage with a Chinese 'royal princess' (usually some obscure relative by marriage of the royal family), or by giving a hostage prince a post as an officer in the emperor's bodyguard, or enrolling him in the State University. From the Chinese side the relationship was always represented as one of Chinese suzerainty over 'vassal' peoples, who came to Ch'ang-an to pay tribute as a mark of their status, and of course received far richer gifts in return. It is quite clear, however, that this basic conception embraced a wide spectrum of actual relationships ranging from total subjugation to virtual equality. Unfortunately this variety was not reflected in Chinese thinking about their external relations. Nevertheless a foundation was already being laid for the more realistic system which later emerged – largely as a result of *force majeure* – between the Sung and their powerful northern neighbours.[32]

THE PROBLEM OF SOURCES

Compared with any earlier period of Chinese history the surviving record from Sui and T'ang times is very comprehensive. There is a full-scale dynastic history of the Sui, the *Sui shu*, and two for the T'ang, the *Chiu T'ang shu* and *Hsin T'ang shu*. The very detailed account of the period in Ssu-ma Kuang's *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* which draws heavily upon these and

[32] There is a very extensive literature dealing with the Chinese sources on the surrounding peoples during the T'ang period, details of which may be found in the bibliography to *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4. Much of this secondary literature attempts to use Chinese evidence to supplement native sources for the history of neighbouring peoples. Such studies provided the great bulk of western writing on the Sui-T'ang period before 1945. Since then the focus of interest among historians has concentrated upon Chinese internal developments, and foreign affairs have been comparatively neglected, though some excellent studies along traditional lines have continued to appear. There is no overall study of foreign relations, or of the concepts underlying T'ang relationships with the rest of the world. There is, however, a rich body of studies on China's cultural relationships with the rest of Asia in the works of E. H. Schafer, particularly *The golden peaches of Samarkand: a study of exotics* (Berkeley, 1963); *The vermilion bird: T'ang images of the south* (Berkeley, 1967). For some very general but important remarks on broader political issues, see Yang Lien-sheng, 'Historical notes on the Chinese world order', in John K. Fairbank, ed. *The Chinese world order* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).

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upon a great number of other works, many of them now lost, is one of the finest achievements of traditional Chinese historiography. We have in addition three of the earliest and best of the encyclopaedic works on administration, Tu Yu's *T'ung-tien*, the *T'ang-hui-yao* and the *Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei* which provide an orderly picture of the operation of government based on material drawn largely, like the dynastic histories, from accounts originally compiled by the official historians.[33] In spite of this wealth of information available to us, the T'ang remains the last major period of Chinese history for the study of which the modern historian is almost wholly dependent upon officially compiled histories and works deriving from them. It is therefore essential to give the reader some account of the limitations inherent in these sources, and of the ways in which they are responsible for the patchy and uneven record of the period which this volume provides.

The methods by which the official histories were produced is described in detail in volume 4, as are the basic intellectual premises in the light of which the historians wrote. Very briefly, history was conceived of as essentially a political record of the way in which a royal dynasty and its individual emperors governed their empire and fulfilled the mandate granted them by heaven to do so. It was also necessarily the record of the actions of the ministers and the administrative machine through which the emperor ruled. The resulting history was a court-centred record, absorbed for the most part with the activities of the ruler and those of his highest ministers who advised him on policy. It was designed to provide an approved 'Veritable Record' of events, a 'mirror of government' in which rulers and ministers of future generations could read the lessons of the past, and find examples with which their own actions might be compared. The whole discourse of politics was backward looking, seeking ideal forms of government and points of comparison in the past, and history was thus a form of writing with potent political implications. The compilation of official histories was moreover almost always undertaken as a conscious political act, and it was sometimes carried out under extreme political pressures, in an attempt to record for posterity an account of recent events which would provide legitimation and justification for the acts of the regime in power.

The writing of history was an official activity entrusted to a complex bureaucratic organization that was first set up in a formal way in the

[33] For succinct and accurate descriptions of the major sources for the period, see the introductory sections of R. des Rotours, *Le Traité des examens* (Paris, 1932) and *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1948). Although somewhat dated in detail, these notes remain generally excellent and reliable. For a detailed discussion of the sources of the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* see Pulleyblank, 'The Tzyhjyh Tongjiann Kaoyih'.

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seventh century.[34] It began with the daily compilation of a Court Diary (*Ch'i-chü chu*), sometimes supplemented by a record of the deliberations of the emperor and his chief ministers, known as the Administrative Record (*Shih-cheng chi*). These piecemeal records were edited at the end of each year, and at the end of a reign used as the basic chronological framework for a Veritable Record (*Shih-lu*). This also incorporated biographies of prominent men who had died during the reign, and was meant to provide a verdict upon the reign and its administration. The judgment was made explicitly in the 'historian's comment' appended to each chapter, but was also expressed more subtly by the selection of material for inclusion. The Veritable Records, which were a T'ang innovation, were perhaps the most important stage in the compilation of official history, and it should be borne in mind that they were usually written very shortly after the emperor's death (in a few cases they were prepared while he was still reigning), while many of the *dramatis personae* were still politically active and while many of the issues of the former reign were very much alive. At various times during the dynasty the Veritable Records were used to prepare a full scale National History (*Kuo shih*) of the reigning dynasty, including Basic Annals (*Pen-chi*), monographs (*chih*) on specific fields of administrative activity, and biographies (*lieh-chuan*). At the end of a dynasty, the new ruling house would use these materials as the basis of a standard Dynastic History (*Cheng-shih*) of the period.

The actual writing of history in this context was not so much a matter of literary composition as a continual process of selecting, abstracting and editing source material. Documents, although truncated and edited, were normally left to speak in their own words. Generally speaking the record was full, systematic and, considering the circumstances under which it was written, remarkably objective in its reporting of events. The personal opinions of the historians were clearly labelled as such, and bias mostly took the form of what was deemed worthy of mention, and what was excluded. But for all its very real merits, official historiography imposes great problems on the modern historian.

The objective of producing an official record of events having once been achieved, the material upon which it had been based was either deliberately destroyed or at best left to fall into oblivion. We can only retrieve the original documentation in full if by chance it is preserved elsewhere. The archives have long since disappeared, and with two excep-

[34] See Charles S. Gardner, *Chinese traditional historiography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938); Yang Lien-sheng, 'The organization of Chinese official historiography: principles and methods of the Standard Histories from the T'ang through the Ming dynasty', in W. G. Beasley and Edwin G. Pulleyblank, eds. *Historians of China and Japan* (London, 1961), pp. 44–59; William Hung, 'The T'ang Bureau of Historiography before 708' *HJAS*, 23 (1960–1) 93–107.

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tions mentioned below we have no surviving primary materials of the sort we take for granted in most periods of European history. What we have is history written 'for the record' to give an interpretation valid for the times in which it was compiled. The modern historian needs to look at that material from his own, totally different viewpoint. But on many matters of crucial concern to the twentieth century historian the traditional historians are silent.

The histories tell us very little about affairs outside the capital, or about routine administration. One of the great contrasts between the historiography of the T'ang and the Sung is that it is quite impossible to write a convincing history of any single region of China in Sui and T'ang times. It is equally impossible to differentiate clearly the widely varied pace of development in the individual regions, and to write the period's history with any secure sense of regional factors. Under the Sung, the first dynasty from which local histories (*fang-chih*) have survived, it is possible to achieve a level of actuality in the description of limited areas of China which is quite out of the question for the T'ang, with the exception of the extremely special case of the border region of Tun-huang.[35]

The histories, being a record of government, tell us very little about the governed. The common people – the whole complex society of peasant farmers, landlords, tenants, merchants, artisans and ordinary townsfolk over whom the court exercised its control through its local officials – appear in the histories only when they disturb the established order and become the objects of government action. The complex hierarchies of the Buddhist and Taoist clergy, who played a major role in society at every level and represented a vast concentration of wealth and influence, are barely mentioned except when they become the subject of legislation.

Even in their account of central government and court politics, the histories tend to give a great deal of detail about the members of the established bureaucracy, of which the historians themselves were a part, but very little about other groups active in government whose activities seemed to them either insignificant or hostile to their own interests. These groups are of major interest to the modern historian. Specialist administrators, who were generally looked down upon by the scholarly elite within the civil service, are given little attention, although it was often upon them that the smooth functioning of the empire depended. Even though the complete gulf between military and civil officials that developed in later centuries had not yet formed, the military also receive comparatively little

[35] On the unique value to the historian of the Tun-huang documents see Denis Twitchett, 'Chinese social history from the seventh to the tenth centuries', *Past and Present*, 35 (1966) 28–53.

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attention and are generally presented in a negative light. The eunuchs, who ran the imperial palace and played a major role in court politics and in military matters during the latter half of the T'ang, are given extremely hostile treatment, for the historians, themselves bureaucrats, were keenly aware of the threat they posed to the influence and power of the civil officials at court.

These general limitations apply to the whole of the official record for the entire period covered by this volume, and indeed to most of traditional Chinese historiography. It is also important to realize that even within these limitations imposed by the very nature of the official court-based record the quality and detail provided by the histories varies greatly from one reign to another.[36]

The surviving record of the Sui, the *Sui shu*, was compiled in 629–36, and its monographs added in 656. It was thus written during the reign of T'ai-tsung, when the new dynasty was anxious to establish its claim to legitimacy. To do so, the work is generally hostile, and gives a very negative account of the events of Yang-ti's reign. The shortcomings of Yang-ti were underlined not simply because his mis-government provided the T'ang founder with the pretext to take the throne, but also because its authors tried to use Yang-ti's example to dissuade T'ai-tsung from following similar policies. In addition to these in-built biases, the authors of the *Sui shu* worked under grave disadvantages, since a great part of the Sui archives had been destroyed during the disorders at the end of the dynasty, and in the accidental destruction of a great part of the Sui Imperial Library in 624, while it was being shipped to Ch'ang-an.

Under the T'ang the system, briefly described above, by which the official record was compiled, and the bureaucratic apparatus of the Bureau of Historiography (Shih-kuan), was only gradually formalized. The regular and orderly sequence of stages in the compilation of the final record, which became standard under later dynasties, gives a somewhat misleading picture of what happened in T'ang times. The only stage of compilation that continued throughout the dynasty was the production of the Court Diary. This was made up annually into a Court Calendar (*Jih-li*) only after 805. The Administrative Record of the confidential deliberations of the emperor and chief ministers was kept only during the reign of T'ai-tsung, for a brief period after 693, and very spasmodically from 796 to 852. The regular production of returns of specific items of

[36] Much of the following is based on two unpublished papers prepared for the Seminar on Chinese and Comparative Historiography held at Yale University in 1970–1: Denis Twitchett, 'Liu Fang, a forgotten T'ang historian' and 'Some notes on the compilation of the T'ang Dynastic Record'.

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information from various government offices, for which there were detailed rules, was allowed to lapse after the An Lu-shan rebellion.

The all-important Veritable Records were never compiled at all for the reigns following 847. For several reigns or parts of reigns there was more than one Veritable Record, and there was bitter controversy about several of them, in particular about that for the reign of Shun-tsung. The National History is also a complicated story, but the final version was that completed in 759–60 by Liu Fang.

All these early stages in the compilation of the record are lost to us, except for a version of one of the Veritable Records of Shun-tsung's reign, written by Han Yü. But what is perhaps more important is that the whole of the records for the early years of the dynasty down to 756 were destroyed in that year, when the premises of the Bureau of Historiography were burnt down during An Lu-shan's occupation of Ch'ang-an. The sole record which survived was a private draft of the National History made by one of the official historians, Wei Shu, and preserved in his home. This was completed to the end of Hsüan-tsung's reign by Liu Fang, and provided the only major source on early T'ang history, not only for the compilers of *Chiu T'ang shu* when they began work in 941, but also for the compilers of the various administrative encyclopaedias from the *T'ung tien* (completed 801) onwards. The *Chiu T'ang shu* in fact seems to have incorporated most of the National History of Liu Fang as the basis of its account of the first half of the dynasty.

The record provided by Liu Fang's National History was itself very patchy and uneven, the end of several attempts to produce a dynastic record, going back to 656. Each of these earlier National Histories, like that of Liu Fang, had been undertaken at a period of political crisis. The record they provide is quite full for the first two reigns and for the first years of Kao-tsung, to about 660. The latter years of this reign when the empress Wu was in the ascendant, and in particular the following years when she was virtual ruler and then, from 691–705, sovereign in her own right, are very sketchily covered. The attitude of the history to the empress Wu is uniformly hostile and negative. The record of the long reign of Hsüan-tsung is also affected by factors connected with its compilation. Two separate sets of Veritable Records of the early years of his reign were compiled while he was still on the throne, one covering the period to about 725, the other to 741, and these were certainly favourable to the emperor. They were probably used in the compilation of the National History. For the last years of Hsüan-tsung's reign, leading up to the disaster of An Lu-shan's rebellion, the account was put together hurriedly by Liu Fang in 759–60, without the benefit either of a Veritable

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Record or a Court Diary of the period to guide him. Liu Fang was writing at the order of Su-tsung, who had usurped his father's throne, and needed moral justification for his act. In addition, he had himself been hastily pardoned from a charge of treasonable collaboration with the rebels in order to write the history. Undoubtedly the result is blatantly biased against the ministers who had dominated the court during the 740s and 750s and against Hsüan-tsung himself. It is also very incomplete for this crucial period, and attempts to produce a fuller account in the 760s proved abortive because of the lack of essential documentation.

The compilers of the *Chiu T'ang shu* and other major surviving sources had at their disposal much more documentation for the subsequent period, from 763 to 847, for they had the Veritable Records to work with. Not only do the Dynastic Histories provide far more detail than on the earlier reigns, but much additional documentation from the Veritable Records was incorporated into the administrative encyclopaedias, particularly the *T'ang Hui-yao* and *Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei* produced in the ninth and tenth centuries. Although the Veritable Records of these reigns provided the basis for a comparatively full record of events, they raise other problems, for we know that in several instances they were strongly biased and provoked violent controversy at the time when they were completed.

For the last sixty years of the T'ang the situation again deteriorated. No Veritable Record was compiled for the reigns after Wu-tsung, and for the period from 847 to the end of the dynasty the main source available to the compilers of *Chiu T'ang shu* in 941 was the Court Calendar. This was probably itself inferior to the Court Diaries of earlier reigns, since the later T'ang emperors no longer held court regularly every day, and a great deal of official business was conducted behind the scenes, not in the open court sessions of which the Court Diaries were a record. To make matters worse most of the additional documentation and the archives for the period were destroyed during the Huang Ch'ao rebellion and the subsequent fighting during which Ch'ang-an was virtually destroyed. The historians had to fall back on meagre private records to fill out the picture. As a result the record of the last reigns is very poor and defective, and many biographies, which were inserted in the record only at the Veritable Record stage, are simply lacking.

The uneven coverage outlined above shows up most clearly in the *Chiu T'ang shu*, which derives directly and almost exclusively from earlier official records. But the compilers of the new dynastic history of the period *Hsin T'ang shu*, and Ssu-ma Kuang who, with his collaborators, systematically combed all the surviving historical material during the production of the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* and its critical supplement, the

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k'ao-i, found themselves unable to break away from the basic pattern of information which the *Chiu T'ang shu* had used. The modern historian is even less able to do so, for much of the supplementary source material still extant in the eleventh century and available to Ssu-ma Kuang and his contempories has since been lost. The level of detail at which we can describe the various periods within the T'ang remains dictated for us by the sort of historiographical factors I have described.

The unevenness of the historical record embodied in the major T'ang histories is, unfortunately, paralleled by the uneven distribution of the surviving writings of private individuals which might be used to supplement it. Comparatively few collected works of individual authors survive from the Sui and early T'ang, and there is a truly remarkable lack of surviving writings by scholars and statesmen active under Kao-tsung and the empress Wu. We know that many of these men wrote voluminously but so very little survives from the latter half of the seventh century that it is tempting to conjecture that there may have been a deliberate attempt to suppress their writings. Comparatively more survives after 700. For the period from 760 to 850 there are a large number of extensive collections of private writings. Considerably more than a half of all the prose pieces in the *Complete T'ang prose writings* (*Chüan T'ang wen*) date from the eighty years from 760 to 840, and an even higher proportion of the major political writings of value to the historian date from the same years. These writings enable us to fill out and supplement the official historical record for this short period to an extent quite impossible for any earlier period of Chinese history. During the last years of the T'ang, for which as we have seen the official record is very deficient, there are comparatively few surviving private writings, although those that do exist are particularly important in view of the poor quality of the historical record.

This very uneven level of information about different periods within the Sui and T'ang may well give a false perspective to our general picture of developments over these crucial three-and-a-half centuries. Detailed studies of almost every aspect of change, economic, demographic, social, political and intellectual alike show the late eighth and early ninth centuries as a crucial period of radical change and growth. It may be that the relative wealth of source material from this period, and the relative paucity of information about the periods immediately preceding and following focuses our attention unduly upon these years. The patchy nature of our information also makes it extremely difficult to apply any form of statistical analysis to the T'ang period as a whole, unless this is done in conjunction with a meticulous examination of the nature of the sources.

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There are two other major sources of information surviving from the T'ang which enable us to fill out the official record. The first of these is epigraphic evidence. A very large number of stone inscriptions survives from the T'ang period. Many important inscriptions were included in the collected works of their authors; others were published in collections of epigraphy from the Sung period onwards; many unpublished items exist in the form of rubbings in collections in China, in Japan and elsewhere. Many more inscriptions have been discovered in archaeological investigations in China in recent years. Systematic work on this evidence has not yet begun. However, this evidence is not novel in its contents. Most of the inscriptions are funerary texts, similar to those well known from the writings of T'ang authors. They provide biographical detail about many figures who are otherwise unknown, but most of their subjects were important members of the elite, and they are written in the context of the same set of ideas and beliefs that were shared by the T'ang historians. They do, however, occasionally provide information that can be checked against the historical record, providing testimony quite independent of the historical process. When this has been the case, they have almost invariably confirmed that the histories are factually reliable.

The second independent source of additional information is the great hoard of contemporary documents discovered at Tun-huang and elsewhere in the north-west and central Asia during the present century. The most important of these finds was the 'monastic library' walled up in one of the many cave-temples at Tun-huang about AD 1000, and rediscovered in 1902, or possibly earlier. These manuscripts, the dates of which range from AD 406 to 995, and the related documents of similar date which have been recovered in excavations of various sites in the arid north-west, notably in Turfan, include many official documents as well as a wide range of Buddhist and secular literature. This material is invaluable to the historian, since it is primary documentation which has survived intact completely by accident, and which is totally independent of the historian or of the processes of official historiography. The Tun-huang documents are invaluable for our understanding of T'ang local society and on the levels of activity which fell completely outside the scope of central government directives. Much of our knowledge of the function and nature of local society, of the social functions of the monasteries, of the operation of local government, of family structure and of the nature of land tenure and tenancy derive from this material. Constant reference to evidence from Tun-huang will be found in volume 4. The evidence, invaluable and unique as it is, needs to be used with care, since the far north-west was not

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at all typical of China as a whole and it would often be dangerous to base generalizations covering the whole empire on the situation there.

In the present volume, evidence from Tun-huang is comparatively little used, though it is the basis for our understanding of the composition of the T'ang aristocracy, and for our detailed knowledge of defence matters. However, it is important in one other respect. A quite surprising proportion of the material from Tun-huang and central Asia can be related to the information provided in the Dynastic Histories and the other compilations of official documents. Where it does so, the Tun-huang evidence provides totally independent testimony to the accuracy and precision with which the dynastic record was compiled and has been preserved. Dates, titles, personal relationships, and the workings of government down to the smallest details, correlate exactly, and when we do occasionally have copies of documents that have been transmitted in other sources, we can see that this has been done faithfully and accurately. The Tun-huang archive tells us in fact that the official record is generally reliable and accurate, which is remarkable considering the many phases of compilation that the texts preserved in the dynastic histories have passed through. The historians slanted the record by the selection of what to include, and even more by what they chose to omit. For all the political pressures under which they worked, and for all the straight-jacket of orthodoxy to which they were forced to conform, they were scrupulously accurate regarding those things they chose to record.

This should not, however, blind us to the fact that there were episodes in the history of the period which have clearly been recorded in a partial and biased way. The fact that not only the *Chiu T'ang shu* but the other major histories and the encyclopaedic collections of official documents all derive ultimately from the same sources, sources prepared by professional historians writing for the record as government servants, means that it is extremely difficult to disentangle ourselves from the historians' judgments. And finally the sheer wealth of information we have, compared with what we know about the parallel period in Europe for example, should not lead us to forget that there must have been many episodes that the historians have simply suppressed, in addition to the many areas of human conduct that are of crucial importance to the modern western-trained historian but which the contemporary official historiographer either took for granted or felt to be irrelevant to the accepted conventions of history, and simply passed over in silence.

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CHAPTER 2

THE SUI DYNASTY (581–617)

In the last quarter of the sixth century, China had been politically fragmented for nearly three hundred years – the longest period of disunion in Chinese history. The Sui dynasty brought this period to an end, swept away much of the institutional detritus that was the legacy of disunion and laid the foundations of a new unified state and society. All later empires were indebted to the Sui's accomplishments, but the immediate beneficiary was the great dynasty of T'ang (618–907) which built on Sui foundations and dominated the culture and politics of all eastern Asia for nearly three hundred years.

The problem before us in this chapter is to assess the accomplishments of the Sui and come to an estimate of the significance of this period in Chinese history. It is not enough to say, as many historians have, that the Sui was like the Ch'in (221–207 BC) in bringing to an end an older order, sweeping away the accumulated rubble of the centuries and building a new kind of empire. This is no doubt true as far as it goes, but only when we consider the vastly greater extent and complexity of China in the sixth century and measure in a tentative way the new forces – the legacy of steppe invaders, of Buddhism and religious Taoism, for example – shall we understand the character of the Sui's accomplishments.

I propose therefore to divide this chapter into five parts. First, an account of China as it was in the sixth century which will suggest some of the colour, the cultural variation and the contrasting patterns of life that were the legacy of centuries of disunion. Second, a sketch of Sui Wen-ti, the reunifier and founder of a new order – his personality, life style, political philosophy and mode of governing; this will be accompanied by brief accounts of his principal advisers. Third, a discussion of the major problems faced by the Sui in establishing a new unified institutional order and of the measures taken. Fourth, a sketch of the second emperor, Yang-ti, similar to that given of his father. Fifth, an account of the second reign, its steps towards the consolidation of power, its innovations and its final and dramatic collapse.

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SIXTH-CENTURY CHINA

The most striking feature of sixth-century China was its cultural diversity, its regional and racial differences and antipathies. In the Yangtze valley and further south a distinctive civilization had developed in the centuries following the Chinese loss of the north to the Hunnish peoples in 317. Immediately following that humiliating catastrophe which left 'barbarians' in control of the homeland and heartland of Chinese culture, many Chinese – particularly of the upper class – fled south. There, in a sub-tropical climate, in a wholly different landscape, in a region still colonial, Chinese from the north felt ill at ease. At first they were called 'immigrants' by the established families of the south, and they reciprocated by contemptuously referring to the southerners as 'natives' despite the fact that these 'natives' were heir to much of the distinctive cultures of the pre-dynastic states of Ch'u or Wu. Many of the northerners behaved like émigrés, full of nostalgia, Weltschmerz and dreams of returning to their homes. But attempts at reconquest failed, and as decades and centuries passed, the northern immigrants became assimilated and participated in the evolution of a distinctive southern civilization.

Cultural conservatism, sometimes shading into chauvinism, was typical of the south in this period. (In this chapter, 'south' refers to the civilized areas along the middle and lower Yangtze and its tributaries, plus the eastern coastal area as far as Hangchow Bay.) This took many forms: explicit claims to be the heirs and preservers of the legacy of the great Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), its classical tradition, its institutions, its literary modes, its rituals, music and customs. In fact, many of these traditions were subtly but deeply changed in the southern environment. The emperors at Chien-k'ang (the modern Nanking) despite their political weakness, went through the ritual-symbolic performances of a Han Son of Heaven, the scholars prided themselves on their classical orthodoxy and the writers on their refinement. The upper class as a whole attempted to preserve, for formal and literary purposes, the dialect of Lo-yang, which their ancestors had once spoken in the capital of a united empire.[1] Beyond the main centres of civilization in the south – in the lower Yangtze area around Yang-chou and Chien-k'ang – the work of colonization went on: aborigines were exterminated, assimilated or driven back; Chinese agriculture was established; villages and towns, temples and monastic communities grew up in the wilderness. This is the often

[1] Richard Mather, 'A note on the dialects of Loyang and Nanking during the six dynasties', in Chow Tse-tsung, ed. *Wen-lin: studies in the Chinese humanities* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1968), pp. 247–56.

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unnoticed background to the scenes which we find described in the official histories. And in these centuries the slowly expanding area of Chinese agriculture, administration and taxation in an environment far richer than the northern homeland brought wealth to the major centres of settlement and made possible an elite life of luxury and elegance.

By the mid-sixth century a 'southern' style of life had emerged, and here we mention only a few of its characteristics. Some of the festivals that punctuated the northern year had been transplanted; other annual observances had sprung from ancient southern traditions. The immigrants by this time had found rice substitutes for their favourite millet-flour dishes. Modes of address, ways of greeting others, had become sharply different from northern ways. Southern women were kept in greater seclusion, and concubinage was more widespread than in the north. Southern funerals, marriages and ceremonial observances generally were far more elaborate than those in the north. While northerners valued the multi-generation household, the southerners favoured a separate establishment for each conjugal family. Food and dress, as well as manners, likewise had their distinctive southern styles.

No more than a century after the division of China, the term 'southerner' had ceased being used contemptuously for 'natives' and had come to be a synonym for 'Chinese'.[2] Southerners, including the immigrants, had become attached to their style, their softer ways, the green hills and abundant waters of the south. They had come to feel that the northerners were crude, and expressed contempt for northern manners, classical scholarship and literary productions. One southern literary figure said that northern literature was 'like the braying of donkeys and the barking of dogs'. Something of the soft and sensuous quality of the south may be seen in the ballads of the time. Here is an example:[3]

> Set out in the morning from cassia and
> orchid isle,
> Stopped to rest at noon under the
> mulberries and elms
> Gathering rushes, you and I
> Less than a handful all day.

In the years after 317, the drier plains of the north had seen the evolution of a different civilization. For a century or more the north was repeatedly ravaged by the violent struggles among non-Chinese peoples for control of the land. Conscription of the peasants for army and labour

[2] Moriya Mitsuo, 'Nanjin to Hokujin', *Tōa Ronsō*, 6 (1948) 36–60; republished in his *Chūgoku kodai kazoku to kokka* (Kyoto, 1968), pp. 416–60.

[3] Unpublished translation, quoted by courtesy of the translator, Peter Bear; a second is quoted on p. 53.

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service was incessant, the sack of populated centres and massacres of their inhabitants were commonplace, inter-racial violence and hatred were endemic. In this terrible time some Chinese gentry families survived by their political and literary skills which they offered to one would-be conqueror after another; often they supported their tenuous status by intermarriage with the alien ruling elite, by learning their language and adopting some of their ways. The Chinese peasantry, many reduced to a semi-servile condition, endured the burden of outrageous exactions. All classes alike lived in a situation of total insecurity.

Under the Northern Wei, which began its rise to regional power in 386, a measure of stability was gradually introduced. The early Wei rulers of Hsien-pei stock were tough horsemen who slowly, over the years, adopted more and more of China's civilized ways. It was symbolic of their long-term goal that as early as 398 the Wei ruler ordered the establishment of a Chinese-style capital at their old settlement near the modern Ta-t'ung, in northern Shansi – a capital whose layout was symbolic of Chinese dynastic pretensions. It was rectangular, walled, oriented to the four points of the compass, had the traditional ancestral hall, great earth mound, etc. These recently nomadic horsemen thus signalized their intention to become Chinese type rulers and to 'pacify all within the four seas'.[4] Yet the road to such a goal was not smooth nor was it unmarked by periods of Hsien-pei atavism. Their first institutional arrangements were a compromise between their own tribal ways and the requirements of an agricultural empire. From this they moved towards a Chinese-type bureaucratic state, although within this structure most high positions and many special privileges were still reserved for the Hsien-pei aristocracy. And, reflecting in part their own heritage and in part the requirements of the time, military prowess and military rank far outweighed civil rank or literary accomplishment.

Sweeping measures of sinicization were introduced under the reign of the emperor Hsiao-wen (471–99): abolition of Hsien-pei cults and the introduction of Chinese observances in their stead; adoption of the characteristic Chinese selection system; encouragement of intermarriage with Chinese; agrarian reform – the introduction of the so-called equal-field system (*chün-t'ien*); revival of the state cult of Confucius; prohibition of the use of the Hsien-pei language at court; adoption of Chinese surnames; and perhaps most important, the move from their ancient home on the border of the steppe to a capital site at Lo-yang – a place filled with the resonance of Chinese dynastic power.

This sequence of sinicizing measures created a formidable reaction:

[4] *Wei shu* 2, pp. 33–4.

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the rebellion of a coalition of angry and vengeful groups in the north (the 'Revolt of the Six Garrisons'). Led by Hsien-pei nobles who clung to their ancient lands and ways and deeply resented the sinicized regime in Lo-yang, it was made up of professional soldiers, a motley group of convict-frontier-guards along the Great Wall and Hsien-pei tribesmen who shared some of their masters' resentments. This group, moved by its grievances and by Hsien-pei chauvinism, exploded into the central plain in 523. A vast bloodletting ensued: the massacre by one of the Hsien-pei leaders of more than a thousand Chinese dignitaries of the Lo-yang court, including an empress dowager. We need not follow the kaleidoscope of alliances and intrigues which followed. In 534 the Hsien-pei empire broke into two parts; one, the Eastern Wei (the more sinicized), with its seat at the city of Yeh (Ho-nan), and the other, the Western Wei (the less sinicized), with its capital at Ch'ang-an in the Kuan-chung plain of southern Shensi. In 550 the Eastern Wei became the Northern Ch'i, and in 556 the Western Wei was succeeded by the Northern Chou. The two states were in deadly competition for the control of the whole of north China, and in 577 the Northern Chou defeated its eastern rival and incorporated its territory, which included the whole rich and densely populated plain stretching from the Great Wall to the Huai River valley.

Racial antagonisms, intensified by differences of class and wealth, were particularly marked in the two northern states in the last decades before the Sui reunification. War, endemic unrest, massacres and pogroms made anyone, Chinese or Hsien-pei, fear for his life and fortune. The founder of the Northern Wei successor state in the east spoke in 537 of the dilemmas that racial and class antagonisms posed for him. He remarked that many of his officers' families were in the state of his Western rival (which went on to restore their Hsien-pei surnames in 549) and that the ruler was bent on seducing these officers to join him. On the other hand, he added sarcastically, 'Beyond the Yangtze there is still the southerner, the aged Hsiao Yen [Liang Wu-ti, ruled 502–49] who concerns himself solely with ritually approved clothes and caps, with rites and liturgical music. Yet the Chinese nobility of the central plain regard him with veneration and consider him the incarnation of legitimacy.' He went on to say that if Hsiao Yen did not behave with great circumspection, his officers would all go to his Western rival, and his Chinese gentry would all rush to adhere to Wu-ti in the south. With such a dispersal of talent, he asked, how would he be able to run a state?[5]

With all the tensions and turmoil, the civilization of the north, and especially the north-west, had evolved with certain definite charac-

[5] *Pei-Ch'i shu* 24, pp. 347–8; E. Balazs, *Le Traité économique de 'Souei-chou'* (Leiden, 1953), p. 258.

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teristics. Its tone was distinctly martial, and the esteem for military prowess, the cult of the hunt, of fine horses, hunting dogs and falcons was shared by Chinese and 'barbarian' alike. It had been and continued to be far more open to central and west Asiatic influences than was the south, and reflections of this were to be seen in its sculpture, architecture, dance, music and dress. Women of the north, perhaps under the influence of steppe traditions, were given work and responsibilities. Indeed a southern observer describes them as busybodies, managing all manner of family business and influencing the political process for their families' benefit. The family was generally monogamous, and the extended family was the norm. Chinese gentry families took very seriously their guardianship of the classical tradition, not only for its own sake but as insurance against a fall into the defenceless status of the peasantry. Under the circumstances, refinements of classical interpretation were out of the question; it sufficed to preserve the tradition. It is said that northerners were more open and frank than their cousins in the south, that their manners and rituals were simpler, as were their clothes and modes of address. Life was harder than it was for southerners, and this is suggested by the following northern ballad of the time:

> The quick horses are always so terribly thin,
> The young hands always so terribly poor
> It takes yellow grain to get a weak horse going,
> And a man needs money to be a man.

To reinforce the differences in recent history and culture in south and north there was the ecological line which separated the two regions: the line between millet and wheat culture, flocks and herds in the north and the rice cultivating areas of the south, with their plentiful supplies of fish from the sea, the rivers and the lakes. The population of the two areas was also vastly different. The south, after the empire was reunited, had only about 16 per cent of the total population, and this was almost entirely concentrated in the major centres along the Yangtze; behind lay a largely untamed wilderness where hostile aborigines, formidable natural barriers, malaria and other diseases were to make the progress of Chinese colonization slow and arduous for centuries to come.

Cultural diversity did not end with the two broad areas of north and south. The south, as we have noted, consisted of certain centres and bands of Chinese settlement, beyond which lay a hinterland of aboriginal occupation: the various groups which the sources call the 'Man'; the Tibeto-Burman-speaking tribes which inhabited most of the modern provinces of Yunnan and Kweichow, and the T'ai-speaking peoples inhabiting the south coastal area stretching into modern Vietnam. To the west in far

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Szechwan, the fertile plain around Ch'eng-tu was the principal centre of Chinese settlement. In the surrounding highlands lived aboriginal tribes, and along the mountainous western frontier were the Tibetan tribal peoples. The Chinese were in a long-term struggle with all these peoples, now slaughtering them, now enslaving them, slowly converting them to the Chinese mode of life. A few Chinese administrators sent out to aboriginal areas 'went native', but most of them persevered in their Herculean labours, developing a great variety of colonial techniques. Yet in the sixth century the centres of Chinese culture were seldom far from aboriginal settlements, and intermarriage was common, and though the sources for an historical ethnography of this period have not been fully exploited, we may assume considerable aboriginal influence on Chinese culture.

North China in this period was characterized by a complex racial and cultural mixture: peoples of various racial stocks who had come in successive waves since the late third century. They had intermarried with Chinese and with other invading peoples. Despite the sinicizing policies of the emperor Hsiao-wen, there were, as we have seen, strong counter-forces seeking to reassert some of the distinctive features of steppe culture. Along the land frontiers the mixed culture of north China faded into the cultures of the steppe peoples. In the garrison towns along the western and northern frontiers, at the famous horse-trading centres, one would indeed notice the tangible signs of the power of the northern dynasty which controlled them, but the people – soldiers, horse dealers, merchants and local farmers – were probably all of a common and very mixed type.

We have alluded to the break-up of the Northern Wei empire into western and eastern successor states. The border between them was not merely a political dividing line but a cultural watershed which had existed for nearly two thousand years. The capital of the Western Wei was in the centre of the plateau, flanked on three sides by mountains, which the Chinese call Kuan-chung (lit., 'within the passes'). It was, seen from the east, a natural fortress, and it had been the launching pad for several conquests of the rest of China. To the west, the Western Wei territory stretched out along the Kansu corridor which was flanked by steppe lands on the north and mountainous areas on the south. The culture of this western part of north China was closest to the steppe culture; its people were great horsemen and warriors, and there was little to be seen of traditional Chinese culture.

Contrasting in many respects was the Eastern Wei empire which occupied the great plain stretching northward from the Huai River valley to the Great Wall. This area, watered by the Huang-ho, the Huai River and their tributaries was, in the sixth century, by far the most productive

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and densely settled area of China; it then contained almost two-thirds of China's population. Though it was strongly marked by the centuries of invasion and foreign domination, this area preserved somewhat more of the ancient Chinese culture than did the west. Being far richer and more stable, life for the elite was often luxurious, the cities more bustling and opulent than those of the west and south.

Buddhism had by this time – some five hundred years after it first appeared in China – become an all-pervasive feature of life at all levels of society. Its shrines and monasteries dotted the landscape, its temples and pagodas enlivened city skylines. One could probably never travel far without meeting parties of monks or pilgrims making their way to one or another of the great shrines. Rulers and elite of north and south alike were ardent patrons of the faith, making rich gifts of lands and treasure to the monasteries, often donating their own mansions to be used for religious purposes. The religious life became an alternative for those of contemplative bent or those who were world-weary and seeking a place of retreat. The nunneries, some of them of extraordinary opulence, became the usual places of retirement for high-born widows or for whole harems of a dead prince. But Buddhism, in its popular forms, had also made its way into the peasant villages where cult organizations of all kinds proliferated. A whole range of immemorial peasant observances had been taken over and given a Buddhist cast, so that both peasant and elite life were punctuated with Buddhist holidays and festivals. Thus Buddhism, in addition to Chinese traditions, served as a powerful common bond among these diverse areas and cultures.

During the half century preceding the rise of the Sui, the areas bordering the Yangtze and the Huai rivers had been the battleground of rival forces. The outcome of countless diplomatic intrigues and years of warfare was the steady aggrandizement of north-western power. On the upper reaches of the Yangtze the area of the modern Szechwan fell in 552 to the armies of the Western Wei as a result of an ill-starred effort by one of the Liang imperial princes to set up a separate state there. Another Liang prince had set up a temporary capital at Chiang-ling on the central Yangtze where he reigned briefly as Yüan-ti of the Liang (552–4), and his courtiers discussed whether and when they could return down river to the old Liang capital at Chien-k'ang, then in the hands of the rebel Hou Ching. In 554 a strong military force from the north-west descended on Chiang-ling, defeated the imperial armies, captured and killed Yüan-ti and his courtiers, massacred most of the city's elite and carried the remainder in bondage to their capital at Ch'ang-an. The Western Wei

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then established a puppet state in the central Yangtze area, with its capital at Chiang-ling. This was the kingdom of 'Later Liang' which lasted until the Sui chose to destroy it in 587. Thus, by 554, the north-western power controlled Szechwan and much of the central Yangtze area, including the rich plains of Hupeh.

During the same half century, the power struggle in the areas south of the Yangtze had been prolonged and complex. The massive and savage rebellion of Hou Ching against the Liang (548–52) had devastated whole provinces. His army had captured and sacked the capital at Chien-k'ang, and in that sack many of the rich and powerful families of the south had been virtually extinguished. Furious fighting followed, and in the course of the struggle Hou Ching was killed (552) by the forces of a general of humble origin named Ch'en Pa-hsien. Ch'en was at first content to share power with another successful general; to preserve a semblance of legitimacy they enthroned a last Liang emperor. But by 557 Ch'en had disposed of his rival, dethroned the emperor and set himself up as first emperor of the Ch'en dynasty.

However, Ch'en Pa-hsien and his successors were able to assert real control over far less of the south than their predecessors at Chien-k'ang. Szechwan and the central Yangtze area had been lost. The Hou Ching rebellion had driven many local leaders to fortify their towns or villages, assemble their own troops, attract adherents from nearby areas and in the end to become local satraps great and small. The Ch'en eliminated some of them, but the most powerful they simply confirmed in their *de facto* local power by conferring upon them appropriate titles.

Despite the limitations upon his power, the fourth Ch'en emperor (reign 569–82) was tempted by an apparent opportunity to recapture some of the rich lands to the north of the Yangtze that had long been in northern hands. From Ch'ang-an the Northern Chou sent an embassy to the Ch'en ruler proposing that they join forces to attack the eastern empire of Northern Ch'i, which then controlled the great plain from the Yangtze north to the Great Wall, and that, if the combined effort proved successful, they should divide the empire between them. The Ch'en ruler agreed to this disingenuous proposal, moved his armies north and in 575 defeated the armies of Northern Ch'i, which was under simultaneous attack by the Chou. The Ch'en then incorporated the rich territory between the Huai and the Yangtze. But their territorial gains were shortlived, for in 577 the Chou – having finally extinguished the Ch'i – turned their formidable war machine against their erstwhile allies and totally defeated them. The Ch'en armies were routed or captured, vast quantities of war material were lost, and the dynasty at Chien-k'ang was greatly enfeebled. The

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Chou now controlled all of north China, Hupeh and the central Yangtze plus the western province of Szechwan. The Ch'en, with its western flank occupied, with its internal control and productivity weakened in the aftermath of the Hou Ching rebellion, and with its army almost destroyed by the Northern Chou, then had only a fraction of the power of their predecessors. To compound their troubles, in 583 there came to the Ch'en throne a man notorious in Chinese history for his extravagance, addiction to pleasure and general inconsequence. Even if we discount as exaggerated, which we must, the descriptions of his follies appearing in the dynastic histories, he was a feckless nincompoop. As seen from the north any time in the 580s, Ch'en must have seemed an easy conquest. It was spared for a time, first by the instability of the Northern Chou court and then by the preoccupation of the Sui founder (who had overturned the Northern Chou in 581) with overcoming resistance and consolidating his government. It was not until 588–9 that he was finally ready to move against the south and begin the long process of restoring political and cultural unity to the empire.

WEN-TI (REIGN 581–601): THE FOUNDER AND HIS ADVISERS

Yang Chien, who was to found the Sui and reign as Wen-ti, was a typical north-western aristocrat of the sixth century. His family, with its seat midway between the ancient capitals of Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang, had served the non-Chinese dynasties of the north for at least two centuries, and the Yangs made sure of their continuity and prestige by strategic marriages with well-placed families of the non-Chinese elite. Yang Chien's father had been ennobled by the Northern Wei emperor Hsiao-wu (reign 532–4) and re-enforced by the founder of the Western Wei, Yü-wen T'ai, for military services in his seizure of power. Yang Chien was born in 541 in a Buddhist temple. Until the age of twelve he was brought up by a Buddhist nun whom he afterwards fondly recalled as his preceptor (*a-che-li*, Sanskrit *ācārya*); he also attended the imperial college, the T'ai-hsüeh, for the sons of nobles and high officials. He is said to have been long-waisted and short-legged and to have been reserved and heavy in manner. When he first went to school, it is said, he was stand-offish, and even his close kinsmen did not dare treat him familiarly.

Like other young men of his class, he was at a very early age trained in horsemanship and in the arts of war. At the age of fourteen he received his first military appointment under Yü-wen T'ai and rose rapidly under T'ai and his successors. In 566 he married the daughter of one of the

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most powerful non-Chinese families in the north, the Tu-ku. Thus, in his mid-thirties, Yang Chien was a successful, well-connected military man who had held a command in the conquest of the Ch'i, who had also seen service as a civil official and had been repeatedly rewarded by grateful rulers. One of their marks of favour had been to select Yang Chien's daughter as the wife of the heir apparent, Yü-wen Pin. This act of grace was to pull Yang Chien from the comfortable periphery to the troubled vortex of power.

In the summer of 578, the Northern Chou emperor, Wu-ti (Yü-wen Yung), who had recently crushed the Northern Ch'i and thus unified north China, was about to lead his seasoned troops to curb Turkish depredations in the vicinity of modern Peking. At the age of thirty-six, he seemed likely to go on from victory to victory and to succeed, in the end, in the great enterprise of reuniting all of China under one rule. But, suddenly, he fell ill, and in the sixth month of that year, his death was announced. Yü-wen Pin, the heir apparent and son-in-law of Yang Chien, succeeded. In the second month of 579, he went through the ritual of abdication in favour of his six-year-old son, but still held the real power. It was soon obvious that he was in the tradition of pathological autocrats who had been the curse of the northern regimes for three hundred years. Whatever Yang Chien thought of this monster, we do not know, but events at court in the early summer of 580 forced his hand. The 'retired' emperor had violated the wife of an imperial prince, had driven the latter to rebellion and death and taken the unhappy widow as his fifth consort. It then appeared that he was determined to eliminate Yang Chien's daughter in order to raise the position of his new consort. The daughter's life was saved for the moment by the impassioned pleas of her mother, but it soon became clear that Yü-wen Pin would have his way, even if it meant exterminating the whole Yang family. At this juncture Pin fell ill, and friends of Yang Chien forged an edict ordering him to Pin's bedside. Pin died within the next few days, and his death was kept secret until Yang Chien's friends had persuaded him to assume the regency for the young emperor. This was an open challenge to the dynasty and its supporters; while not a usurpation in itself, a regency was an important step along one of the standard routes to the establishment of a new dynasty. Yang Chien and his friends were in no doubt as to the stakes, and his wife counselled him that it was too late to turn back, using the old proverb: 'astride a tiger, unable to get off'.[6]

[6] *SS* 36, p. 1108; Peter A. Boodberg, 'Marginalia to the histories of the northern dynasties', *HJAS*, 3 (1939) 260; A. F. Wright, 'The Formation of Sui Ideology', in John K. Fairbank, ed. *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago, 1957), p. 79.

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Yang Chien began immediately to take further steps towards the founding of a new dynasty. He moved with great ruthlessness. Late in the fifth month, the five senior princes of the Yü-wen family were summoned to the capital, ostensibly to take part in the wedding ceremony of a daughter of one of them, who was to be married to the Turkish qaghan. Three days later most of Yü-wen Pin's women were forced to become Buddhist nuns. The empress dowager and Yang Chien's daughter were exempted. The latter approved of her father's seizure of power as far as a regency but openly disapproved of his dynastic ambitions. Early in the sixth month, the Yü-wen princes – one of them under duress – arrived at the capital where they were kept under constant watch; when they attended the funeral of Yü-wen Pin the next month, they were 'escorted' by six thousand cavalry commanded by a Yang kinsman. This was evidence that by then Yang Chien had won over to his cause the commanders of the crack military units of the capital area. But the Yü-wen too were experienced in the murderous intrigues of the northern courts, and they fought back in their accustomed ways. In the sixth month, one imperial prince was apprehended plotting against the regent and was immediately executed. Late the next month, Yang Chien barely escaped assassination by two of the senior princes, who were caught and executed.

More serious by far was the open military opposition of partisans of the Yü-wen which now broke out in many parts of north China. In the sixth month, the first of these partisans, Yü-ch'ih Chiung, announced to his troops at Yeh, the old Ch'i capital, that he, as a relative and loyal servant of the Yü-wen, would rescue that dynasty from the ambitions of Yang Chien. Chiung was an aged but formidable warrior who in 552 had conquered Szechwan for the Western Wei. Moreover, the geographical centre of his power was the heart of the North China Plain where he could command formidable resources and, potentially, a strong following among the powerful local clans of the area. In the middle of the seventh month, another group of Northern Chou loyalists joined the armed opposition to Yang Chien. Later that same month, Ssu-ma Hsiao-nan, the father-in-law of the child emperor, proclaimed common cause with Yü-ch'ih Chiung and found a following in nine prefectures (*chou*) north of the middle Yangtze, where he had the backing of the enfeebled southern state of Ch'en. Early in the eighth month, Wang Ch'ien, the governor of Szechwan, also came out against Yang Chien. In the far north-east, a former Ch'i official, with Turkish allies, prepared to join the others. Yang Chien was hard-pressed indeed, but he had some substantial advantages: he had his base in the Kuan-chung plain, perennial springboard for conquest, and he had, for as long as he showed signs of succeeding,

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the loyalties of the powerful military machine inherited from the Northern Chou; he also had the advantage of a unified command against his scattered opponents with their local followings, their conflicting private ambitions and lack of a coordinated strategy.

There was, none the less, a period of great uncertainty during the seventh month of 580, when important local and regional leaders remained undecided, and a vigorous move by one of Yang Chien's rivals might have brought defeat. But the adherence of the great Kao Chiung, whom we shall discuss later, was crucial. When Yang Chien's other supporters found excuses not to take the field, Kao Chiung led the north-western forces from Kuan-chung on to the North China Plain. There he moved eastward to strike at the most formidable opponents of the Yang cause: Yü-ch'ih Chiung and his allies. Kao, using many of the ruses and tricks of traditional strategy, won some preliminary skirmishes and soon faced the main force of the enemy deployed outside the south wall of the city of Yeh. There, using the classic stratagem of 'stampeding the spectators' to disrupt his adversaries' battle plan, he alarmed and then routed Yü-ch'ih's army. The aged general took refuge in Yeh, where he was finally cornered and forced to commit suicide. Historians usually place the blame for Yü-ch'ih Chiung's defeat on his incompetent chief of staff and on his use of former Ch'i officers. However that may be, Kao Chiung had destroyed the only significant rallying point for the opposition, and the lesser dissidents proceeded to 'bet on the winner'. Between Kao Chiung's victory at Yeh in the middle of the eighth month, and the collapse of Wang Ch'ien's power in Szechwan towards the end of November, major opposition crumbled. A month later, the remaining contestants had been crushed.[7] Yang Chien had been well served by Kao Chiung, his enemies had lacked imagination and charisma, and his luck had held.

Early in 581, Yang Chien assumed the title of 'prince' and in the middle of the second month, he took over the imperial insignia, wore the imperial robes, held his first dawn audience, declared a general amnesty and proclaimed the first era-name of the dynasty of Sui – the dynastic name derived from the fief his father had been given by the Northern Chou. With these and other ceremonial acts of great antiquity, he let it be known that he now legitimately held the Mandate of Heaven. By the end of the following summer the last of the Northern Chou princes – a total of fifty-nine – had been murdered and the possibility of a counter-coup from Chou loyalists had been greatly reduced. Yang Chien's bid for power had

[7] *Chou shu* 21, *passim* (biographies of Yü-ch'ih Chiung, Wang Ch'ien and Ssu-ma Hsiao-nan); *TCTC* (Ku-chi ch'u-pan she edn, Peking, 1956), pp. 5407–31; Boodberg, 'Marginalia to the histories of the northern dynasties', pp. 258–65.

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succeeded quickly against heavy odds. But if the Sui was to become anything more than another ephemeral regime, if it was to evolve into a stable, effective government, there were Herculean tasks ahead – tasks to which Yang Chien was to devote the rest of his life (see pages 73–115). Here we turn to the character of Yang Chien and of his closest advisers.

There are many sides to the personality of Yang Chien. There are those that can be related to a traditional Chinese value or behaviour pattern, those that can be explained by the time and milieu in which he lived, still others which are related to the pathology of supreme power – something quite universal, and finally those which are peculiar to his own character. He was, as we noted earlier, a rather harsh and forbidding person of no great magnetism or warmth, much less magnanimity. As Boodberg observes, his sudden and violent rise to power left him wracked throughout his life by feelings of insecurity, of hubris, and led him to search for every form of reassurance and every sign of Heaven's favour. The current characteristic of credulousness and the pervasiveness of Buddhist belief in his family and his immediate circle led him to focus much of his search for legitimacy and personal reassurance on Buddhism; services were held each evening in the palace with Yang Chien, his empress and all the court in attendance. His insecurity led him to be suspicious of all but a few intimates, and he appears to have regarded his sons mostly as potential rivals – an attitude that was common among the Turkish qaghans. He was parsimonious, a characteristic which he shared with his wife and one which grew on him as he aged. Confucian historians delight in telling stories of his rationing of cosmetics for his palace women, of his needing a medicine which the palace did not stock, of the empress wanting to make a quite ordinary gift of woven collars only to find that they were not to be had in the palace.[8]

Yang Chien was subject to violent rages sometimes followed by bitter remorse. This is obviously related to the personal insecurity he felt and, later in life, to what I have referred to as the pathology of supreme power. He once beat someone in the throne hall and then assented to the remonstrance that this was inappropriate for the Son of Heaven, and that his bastinado should be removed. A short time later, again in a rage, he beat a man to death with a horse whip. At times he seemed deaf to appeals for imperial clemency, and the cruel punishments thatwere commonplace at the time would be duly administered.

Along with these personal traits went a number of others which formed the style of his administration. Yang Chien was, in his approach to problems, in his preferred solutions – as well as in his dislikes and hatreds –

[8] *TCTC* 175, p. 5447.

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close to the authoritarian or Hsün-tzu wing of Confucianism or indeed to Legalism itself. He is said not to have esteemed the *Shih ching* (*Book of poetry*) or the *Shu ching* (*Book of history*), and late in his reign he shut down most of the schools of the empire because the students were too numerous, idle and poorly trained. He was impatient of the standard Confucian moral remonstrances and, when his principal Confucian adviser urged him not to execute the remaining princes of the Northern Chou house, he shouted at him, 'You bookworm. You are not fit to discuss this matter!'[9] He was, like all Chinese monarchs, constrained by history and precedent. He said, at one critical juncture, that he was far inferior to the great Duke of Chou, but that he was at one with him in the even-handed application of punishment.[10] Again, when he was urged not to change the laws too soon after their enactment and thus introduce uncertainty among the people, he was quick to take offence at what he took to be the hint of comparison with the usurper of the Han. He swore a great oath and, in a fury, asked his minister, 'Would you make of me a Wang Mang?'[11] And, finally, he acknowledged – if only obliquely – that the historians would sit in final judgment on his performance; when his third son Chün, Prince of Ch'in, died (under suspicious circumstances), his retinue asked to erect a stele in his memory. Yang Chien replied, 'If one wants to seek fame, one chapter in the history books will suffice. What is the use of a stele?'[12]

For all his limitations, and his moods, Yang Chien was a strong and successful ruler. He was a glutton for work and carried back from audience hall to living quarters an enormous load of paper work. He seems to have intervened constantly at all levels of government: intruding, sometimes violently, into the work of the judicial bodies; reviewing, as was his duty, all serious sentences every quarter; receiving the provincial representatives (*ch'ao-chi shih*) and exhorting them to assiduity and virtue; examining candidates for office and officials on their performance; praising the successful officials, condemning the slack and the corrupt; presiding at the dawn audiences and discussing foreign and domestic policy with his high officials; making progresses across the land. In his style of work, in his attitude towards the law, towards the Confucians and his officials generally, we see strong influences of the Legalist tradition combined, as it often was at this time, with a private belief in Buddhism.

Typically Legalist was his drive for a centralized and rational government. This we shall see in detail in the next section, but here we should note that Yang Chien was little disposed to settle for customary, heredi-

[9] *TCTC* 175, p. 5436.
[10] *TCTC* 178, p. 5558.
[11] *TCTC* 177, p. 5527.
[12] *SS* 45, p. 1240.

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tary or archaic formulas for the solution of the gigantic problems he faced. Perhaps I read too much into the preamble to the edict which promulgated the new law code of 581, but this is what it says: 'The legislation of emperors and kings maintains or reforms the laws in different ways, *choosing what is suitable to the times*.'[13] The italicized phrase represents a typical Legalist position. In an edict of 601, twenty years later, yet another Legalist principle is made explicit, 'The teaching established by former kings is to replace mercy with justice. To cut off all feelings of affection for one's kin is to realize in full the principle of service to one's prince.'[14] In the intervening years he had certainly followed the basic Legalist policy of generous rewards and harsh punishments, but there is another and crucial Legalist principle to which he generally adhered – equality before the law. This is revealed nowhere more clearly than in Yang Chien's responses to his officials' pleas for clemency for his son, the Prince of Ch'in, who was guilty at the most of theft of public funds and was then (597) a dying man. Yang Chien's first reply was simply: 'The law may not be violated.' When he was appealed to again, he replied, 'I am the father of five sons and not the father of the masses of people. If I were to follow your idea, would I not be wrongly establishing a separate law for the children of the Son of Heaven?' And he denied the petition.[15]

There is then much evidence – of which the above is only a sample – of stern authoritarian and Legalist principles. At the same time Yang Chien was capable of great generosity to old and faithful servitors, and I introduce only one example. One of his earliest adherents, a fellow-official of the Northern Chou, was, in the course of time, appointed a governor; in a time of stringency he speculated in grain, for which the penalty was removal from the official rolls and reduction to the rank of commoner (or whatever the emperor thought appropriate). Yang Chien remarked on their old friendship and said, 'When you came to hold the rank of governor, why did you not think of repaying my kindness, but let things come to this? I cannot bear to put you to death. But this is simply twisting the law to favour one's private feelings.' Whereupon he restored him to his governorship.[16]

Yang Chien's wife, who was to become the empress Wen-hsien, was born into a powerful and long sinicized Hsiung-nu clan which had intermarried for centuries with the great families of Northern Wei. Her father,

[13] *SS* 25, p. 711. My italics.

[14] *SS* 50, p. 1324, and T'ang Ch'eng-yeh, *Sui Wen-ti cheng-chih shih-kung chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1967), p. 60.

[15] *SS* 45, p. 1240; *TCTC* 178, p. 5558.

[16] *SS* 38, p. 1143.

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Tu-ku Hsin, had gone to the west with Yü-wen T'ai and helped him found the Western Wei, later the Northern Chou. Hsin was obliged to commit suicide in 557, but the family was shortly after rehabilitated. Yang Chien's future wife was born in 544 and given the name of Ch'ieh-lo (Sanskrit Kālā, possibly an abbreviation of Kālāguru). In 566 she was married, and at the time extracted a solemn oath from Yang Chien that he would have no children by other women. This was consistent with her upbringing as a northern woman with their strong feelings about monogamy and marked managerial propensities. She was no harem beauty but a literate and cultivated woman with strong political instincts. Yang Chien and his wife were very close, and the palace attendants called them 'the two sage-emperors' (*erh sheng*). At the time of an audience the empress rode with the emperor in the carriage of state. She would wait in the vestibule of the audience chamber and send one of her eunuchs in to observe and report. When the emperor's policy decisions seemed to her mistaken, she would admonish him, and when the audience was over, they would go back together to their palace quarters.

The Tu-ku's had long been a Buddhist family, and the empress Wen-hsien was a particularly devout and busy lay patron. It was she, we may be sure, who arranged the evening sutra readings at the palace. She it was who saw to the Buddhist training of the imperial princes; one, rather sadly, was very pious and wanted to become a monk but was denied his father's permission. She combined with her piety a harsh puritanical quality, and in this she was not unlike her husband. Yet we see in the records evidence of the steady good sense which informed her advice to the emperor, at least during the first ten years or so of the dynasty. For example, some officials cited the prestigious *Rituals of Chou* to the effect that the wives of officialdom should be under the orders of the queen and urged that she follow this alleged ancient practice. She replied, 'If you get women involved in government, some are going to be tainted by this. It is inappropriate to open up this source of trouble.'[17] She shared with Yang Chien a determination to keep her family out of positions of great power, so that the familiar configuration known as 'the *wai-ch'i* problem' – the erosion of dynastic power by the usurpations of empresses' relatives – would not bring down the house of Yang (which, it will not have escaped the reader, had itself risen by this route). When a maternal relative of hers committed a crime which required the death penalty, Yang Chien wanted, on her behalf, to pardon him, but the empress said, 'This is purely a matter of state. Why should you consider personal factors?' And the man was duly executed. Yet the sources also say that

[17] *TCTC* 175, p. 5446; *SS* 36, p. 1108.

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she was so soft-hearted that she never heard about the High Court executing a prisoner without weeping.[18]

The evidence is unfortunately too slight to prove the hypothesis that the pathological jealousy and vindictiveness which came to dominate this woman were restricted to her later life. I believe they were, but here I am drawing on a recent Western notion – quite strange to traditional Chinese and Western chroniclers – that personality is not a bundle of traits with which one is endowed at birth, but something shaped in large measure by circumstances and by the process of maturing and ageing. One clue supports my hypothesis. The first datable incident showing truly pathological jealousy occurred in 593 when she would have been approaching fifty.[19] The incident is worth noting because it foreshadows the baneful influence she was to have on the court from about that time until her death in 602. The emperor had been attracted by the charms of the granddaughter of his old rival Yü-ch'ih Ch'iung who was then a palace woman, and began paying her visits. The empress chose a time when he was at audience and secretly killed the girl. When he found out, the emperor was furious; 'He rode out alone, leaving the palace grounds and, without following the roads, went deep into the mountain valleys, more than twenty leagues. His confidants Kao Chiung and Yang Su went in pursuit, and when they caught up with him and reined in his horse, they earnestly admonished him (regarding the risk he was taking). The emperor, with a great sigh, said, "I may be honoured as Son of Heaven, but I haven't any freedom." '[20] Later the imperial couple made up, but the texts agree that it was from this time on that her insane jealousy distorted her judgment and began to warp the advice her husband had long found useful. For example whenever the concubine of a prince or of a minister became pregnant, the empress invariably urged that the husband be dismissed from his rank or office. Even the faithful Kao Chiung came under attack when, after his wife's death, he had a child by a concubine.[21] One may suspect the empress's influence in the steady deterioration of relations between Yang Chien and his most resourceful and brilliant minister. But when in 599 the ministers asked that he be put to death, the emperor recalled the recent executions of important officials and, in a rare reference to public opinion, said, 'If, in addition, we execute Kao Chiung, what will the empire say of us?'[22] As time went on she became more and more

[18] *TCTC* 175, p. 5447; *SS* 36, pp. 1108–9.

[19] This incident occured at the Jen-shou palace, which was not completed until this date; *TCTC* 178, p. 5539.

[20] *TCTC* 178, p. 5565. The date given for this of 599 seems to me late.

[21] *SS* 36, p. 1109.

[22] *SS* 41, p. 1183; *TCTC* 178, p. 5568; *Pei shih* 72, p. 2491.

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suspicious of everyone's intentions, and her reactions added to Yang Chien's naturally suspicious nature. She pried into the lives – particularly the sexual habits – of her sons, and gradually she and Yang Chien together found grounds to degrade, execute or dispose of all but her favourite Yang Kuang, the future Yang-ti.

As the imperial couple grew older, their Buddhist observances grew more frequent and more elaborate. Services, vegetarian feasts for the monks, munificent gifts to the clergy, the endowment of temples grew more frequent. The climax of Buddhist activity came in 601. In this year, in conscious imitation of the pious act of the great Indian emperor, Aśoka, Yang Chien carried through an elaborate programme of simultaneously enshrining holy relics in specially built reliquaries throughout the empire. Delegations of eminent monks, with appropriate entourages, proceeded to each of thirty prefectural capitals, carrying the relics which had been placed in costly jars by the emperor himself. At the time of the simultaneous enshrinement, the emperor, in the capital, received 367 monks for Buddhist services followed by a great vegetarian banquet for them and for the civil and military officials. The empress no doubt participated in the elaborate observances of this great occasion. In 602 she died, and was promptly declared by a court historian to have become a Bodhisattva. The emperor missed her sorely, suspected the motives of his ranking concubines, and when he fell ill, said, plaintively, 'If the empress were alive, I would not have come to this.'[23] The relationship between Yang Chien and his empress may well be unique in Chinese history. Seldom has a single consort had such a strong and continuous influence on her emperor husband throughout most of his reign. We turn now to the inner circle of high officials who, for lesser periods, influenced the decisions the Sui ruler made.

Kao Chiung (555?–607) appears to have been from an undistinguished family whose seat was in the north-eastern part of the North China Plain. His father entered the service of Tu-ku Hsin, father of the future Sui empress. When the Northern Chou, in a burst of ethnic atavism, decreed Hsien-pei surnames for all the elite, Tu-ku Hsin conferred his own surname on Kao Chiung's father. During their long and intimate relationship, Yang Chien always addressed Kao Chiung as 'Tu-ku'. Kao Chiung was appointed to his first post by the Northern Chou at the age of sixteen and in 576 he was promoted because of his part in the conquest of the Ch'i. He was not among the conspirators who urged Yang Chien to seize the throne, but the latter knew of his military and other skills and managed to win him over. This was a crucial move, for Kao Chiung offered to

[23] *SS* 36, p. 1109; *Pei shih* 14, pp. 533–4.

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attack enemies of the Yang cause at a moment when Yang Chien's other adherents held back. As we noted above, Chiung was dramatically successful in this, and his standing at the court of the new dynasty was accordingly high. He was given a succession of difficult assignments and performed all with distinction. He led a successful campaign against the Turks, supervised the building of the new capital (see pages 78 ff.), devised the grand strategy for the conquest of Ch'en and led the armies to victory (with the Prince of Chin in nominal command).

His greatest contributions to Sui success during his nearly twenty years in power may well have been in the realm of financial administration. He devised the new standard form of tax registration and the machinery to make it work, and probably had a hand in all the fiscal measures the Sui took in those years. Tu Yu, writing in the early ninth century and using Legalist standards of judgment, placed Kao Chiung in the same class as Kuan Chung, usually credited with the state of Ch'i's hegemony in the early seventh century B.C., and with Shang Yang, who, as chief minister, had laid the groundwork for the rise of the state of Ch'in. And Tu Yu's measure of Kao Chiung's greatness is that despite the legacy of the years of war and disunion, he succeeded, by his registration system, currency reform and other measures in raising the taxable population of the Sui empire from about 4,000,000 households in 589 to 8,900,000 households in 606.[24]

In 627 T'ang T'ai-tsung, the second T'ang emperor, had been struck by the fact that surviving officials of the Sui all praised Kao Chiung's performance as chief minister. This prompted him to read Kao's biography which he felt confirmed their judgment. He remarked, 'It would be fair to say that he was just and equable, upright and straight-spoken with an extraordinary knowledge of the essentials of government.'[25] It is clear from the record that he was a talented strategist, a hard-headed and effective administrator, a wise counsellor who had a major role in shaping Sui policies and wide responsibilities for implementing them. He was, like his master, a devout Buddhist. As a Buddhist layman, warrior and man of action, he stands in sharp contrast to the literary Confucian official exemplified at the Sui court by Li Te-lin, who was another of Yang Chien's advisers (see pages 71–2).

It was inevitable that one who enjoyed such favour would sooner or later arouse the jealousy of the empress. It appears that Kao Chiung did so, perhaps as early as 589, when he thwarted the desire of the Prince of Chin (Yang Kuang, later Yang-ti) for the favoured consort of the Ch'en

[24] *TT* (Shih T'ung edn, Shanghai, 1936), 7, p. 42b.
[25] *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, edn of Harada Taneshige (Tokyo, 1962), 5, p. 152.

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ruler. But, in 598, after arguing against a campaign in Liao-tung, he was placed in *de facto* command of the expedition, with the Prince of Han in nominal charge. The army encountered floods and plague and returned without a victory; thereupon the Prince of Han told his mother that Kao Chiung had tried to kill him – an obvious slander which the emperor overheard. Gradually a net of slanders closed around the great minister, and when five ranking figures of the court assured Yang Chien that Kao Chiung was guilty of no crime, the response was to consign all of them to minor posts. As Yang Chien's sixtieth birthday approached, it was all too easy to prey on his dreads, and this was done by tales of evil prognostications that Kao Chiung had allegedly listened to. In the end, and on the eve of her death, the empress got her way, and Kao Chiung's name was removed from the rolls of officialdom – but not before a maudlin banquet scene with everyone (including the empress!) in tears, at the end of which Yang Chien said to Kao Chiung, 'We have not turned our back on you; you have yourself failed us.'[26] Kao Chiung was restored to office by Yang-ti, but soon displeased him and was put to death.

Yang Su (d. 606), who, with Kao Chiung and Su Wei, shared the major power under Wen-ti, was a man with a background similar to Yang Chien's. They came from the same place and were distant relatives; both were typical northern aristocrats with much 'barbarian' culture in their backgrounds. His sister had married into a non-Chinese family. In his youth Yang Su was tireless in his studies and fond of women. His handsome beard gave him a martial and heroic air. Indeed it is in warfare that he contributed the most to the Sui consolidation of power. He began his career with military service under the Northern Chou and performed with valour in the conquest of the Northern Ch'i. He was closely associated with Yang Chien in the seizure of power and in that critical summer of 580, helped to crush the supporters of the reigning dynasty. His first post under the new Sui government was as head of the Censorate. He was active in planning the campaign against Ch'en, was successful as commander of the Sui naval forces and was rewarded with vast amounts of treasure and the gift of fourteen women – sisters and concubines of the defeated Ch'en ruler. In the years immediately following the conquest, Yang Su put down southern rebellions against the Sui with great ferocity and effectiveness. Yang Su's armies, it is said, always won, and this was insured by the simple and barbarous expedient of putting to death on the spot any of his troops who broke ranks in the face of an enemy attack. He was as successful against the Turks as he was in China itself; characteristically, he discarded traditional – somewhat defensive – tactics in

[26] *Pei shih* 72, p. 2491; *TCTC* 178, pp. 5567–8.

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favour of the aggressive cavalry charge and constant harrying of the enemy force. He insisted that when recording a campaign the scribes should always emphasize his role, even if it deprived other generals of proper recognition.

As a figure in the central government, Yang Su was harsh and ruthless, a calculating and nimble opportunist who could always be found on the winning side. We shall note in our section below on laws and ordinances that he used the legal process to get rid of his enemies and better his position. The *Sui shu* tells us that he worked with the empress on the series of plots for the ruin of the other imperial princes and the elevation of Yang Kuang, Prince of Chin, as heir apparent. According to the same source he was a party to the dark plot that may have hastened Yang Chien's death and frustrated his belated attempt to reinstate the former heir apparent in place of Yang Kuang.[27] Despite his having previously been guilty of financial misappropriations and gross abuse of labourers, Yang Su was put in charge of building the new capital at Lo-yang. By the time of his death in 606 he and his sons and grandsons had accumulated treasure, silk, houses, fiefs, women and grand titles in great quantities. His last military service to the dynasty was in crushing the revolt of the Prince of Han against Yang Kuang's succession in 604. Yang Su was the 'hatchet man' of the first Sui reign. His name is not associated with any of the sweeping measures of reform, but almost exclusively with military campaigns and military occupations. He was a man without scruple or compassion, arrogant and contentious, but, according to the standards of that violent age, a loyal servant of the Sui house.

Su Wei (540–621) is the third member of the triumvirate which wielded most influence at the court of the first Sui emperor. He was recommended to Yang Chien by Kao Chiung. Su Wei was the son of a famous father, Su Ch'o, who had served the founder of the Western Wei, Yü-wen T'ai, as principal civil adviser. It appears from the fragmentary record that any rationality which public administration attained under the Northern Chou is to be credited to Su Ch'o whose master, after all, was a rough and illiterate warrior from the northern frontier. Su Ch'o had pursued an unusual pattern of cultural borrowing. Knowing that the Wei dynasty had split into two in the conflict that resulted from the emperor Hsiao-wen's headlong sinicization, he could not propose to his Hsien-pei master that he do likewise. Yet all the available models for orderly civil administration, centralized and stable government were locked away in the Chinese tradition. What could he draw on that would not antagonize his monarch? He introduced him first to the practical Legalist teachings

[27] *SS* 48, p. 1288.

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of Shen Pu-hai and Han Fei-tzu – the staple for hard-headed politicians for many centuries. This won Su Ch'o immediate favour. Thereafter he must have worked to persuade his master that there was a Chinese model for centralization untainted by the failures and improvisations of the Han successor states. This was the model provided by the *Chou-li*, a text which defined a model hierarchy of state and society, and in this case linked Yü-wen T'ai's aspirations to the idealized Chou order of antiquity. In 556 Ch'o's successor, Lu Pien, saw to the implementation of this in the renaming of all the Northern Chou offices.[28] It was in this same year that the last of the Liang rulers was crushed by Northern Chou forces, to be replaced by Northern Chou puppet states. This was a bitter blow to the 'successor to the Han' legitimists, even to the Eastern Wei which was the heir of Hsiao-wen's institutional borrowings from the Han successor states. At the same time Su Ch'o formulated and published as an imperial edict (in 544) his 'Six Articles' – a kind of epitome of statecraft and administration. This was written in response to Yü-wen T'ai's desire 'to reform contemporary government and to concentrate on a way that would greatly strengthen the state and enrich the people.'[29] This was a catechism or handbook of practical government which Yü-wen T'ai required his officials to memorize or be deprived of their posts. It is, in its ideas, Confucian morality tempered by practical experience and by the teachings of the administrative science branch of the Legalists.

Yang Chien and all his leading advisers had worked as Northern Chou officials, and they all were exposed to Su Ch'o's reforms and his 'Six Articles'. Kao Chiung said that he himself was continuing this tradition, and paid special deference to Su Wei simply because he was Su Ch'o's son. Su Wei carried a heavy load of work in a long series of important offices, and he had a hand in the institutional reforms of the early Sui. But he was in and out of favour rather frequently. He foiled Yang Chien when he was bent on killing someone who displeased him, and was thanked when the emperor had become calmer. He was incorruptible, but in discussions of state policy, he could not bear anyone to have a different opinion, and even on the smallest matters, when he was crossed, he invariably put up a stubborn fight. He lived to serve Yang-ti and to hold office under several of the rebel regimes which followed the Sui. He died in his eighty-eighth year. The *Sui shu* remarks that he was the author of many legal rulings, but these were considered to be harsh and full of petty details, lacking the quality of conciseness that made for

[28] *Chou shu* 2, p. 36, and 24, pp. 404–7; Chauncey Goodrich, *Biography of Su Ch'o* (Berkeley, 1953).
[29] *Chou shu* 23, p. 382.

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enduring law. The same source says that 'his contemporaries believed that he lacked the stature of a truly great minister'.[30] His role as a living reminder at the Sui court of the heritage of Su Ch'o was probably more important than his influence as adviser and ranking minister.

The other high officials of Wen-ti's court had far less power than the triumvirate just discussed. Many were kinsmen of Yang Chien, and, as we shall see below, the overwhelming majority were men of his own class, region and cultural background. One man alone among his top advisers had a full command of the Confucian heritage and was from the eastern plain, where he had served the Northern Ch'i. This was Li Te-lin (530–90). Li came from a learned family, and he is said to have shown a talent for the classics very early. He won a *hsiu-ts'ai* degree in the examination system which the Northern Ch'i set up alongside the ancient and corrupt system of recommending legates. He then served the dynasty in a variety of posts, the most responsible being those concerned with the drafting of edicts and with the compilation of the dynastic history. When, in 566–7, the Northern Chou conquered and incorporated the territory of Ch'i, Li Te-lin was taken west to the Northern Chou capital at Ch'ang-an. There he was put in charge of drafting edicts and ordinances which required an easterner's polished style – documents, one suspects, that were aimed at the consolidation of Chou power over the population of the conquered domains of Ch'i.

He was won over to Yang Chien's cause, and had a major hand in forging the edicts, issued in the name of the child emperor, which urged Yang Chien to assume a regency, with broad civil and military authority. He gave Yang Chien excellent advice during the tense summer of 580, and he next put his classical learning to work writing the formal and ritual documents that pronounced step by step, in ancient and acceptable form, the end of the Chou and the advent of the Sui. Shortly thereafter Li Te-lin stood in lonely opposition to the proposed murder of all the princes of the previous ruling house. For this Yang Chien called him a bookworm and unfit to make such decisions. The *Sui shu* remarks that thereafter his advancement was slower, and he continued to rank lower than the inner circle of advisers.[31] He was, however, on the commission which drew up new laws and ordinances for the Sui. In 589 he found himself in opposition to Kao Chiung and Su Wei on a scheme for local control which he felt reintroduced some of the abuses corrected by the abolition of the *hsiang-kuan*, on which see page 96. Again he lost, the scheme was put into effect, and a year later abandoned as unworkable.

He suspected certain Sui officials of treasonous intent and selfish plans

[30] *SS* 41, p. 1190. [31] *SS* 42, pp. 1199–200.

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to thwart the imminent conquest of the Ch'en. To this he responded with his *T'ien-ming lun*, 'Discourse on the Heavenly Mandate' in which he drew on his vast knowledge of the classics, of lore and precedent to argue that the Sui emperor now rightfully held the mandate, and that to oppose him was to go against the wisdom of the ancient sages, historical precedent and indeed against nature itself which had vouchsafed unmistakable signs of heaven's favour. This discourse, like those which verbalized the transfer of power and the founding of the Sui, shows his virtuosity in using the materials of the Confucian and other traditions to rationalize and justify a power position. This talent was unique among Wen-ti's advisers and set him apart from the others.

From the time of the establishment of the Sui onwards, Li Te-lin urged on his master plans for conquering the south. His biography gives him much of the credit for the successful plan, but it provides no details on its substance. Wen-ti, in an expansive mood, is said to have promised that once the Ch'en was conquered, he would load Li Te-lin with honours and riches so that 'from the mountains east, there would be no one to equal him'.[32] Notice that the emperor did not promise to reward him on the scale he would use for his own north-western followers; and, in fact, when Ch'en was conquered, Li Te-lin received a title, a fief of eight hundred families and three thousand lengths of cloth – niggardly indeed! After further disagreements with the emperor, he was sent in 591 to provincial posts where he continued to serve until his death in 599.

Li Te-lin was clearly a man of great ability, and Yang Chien used his special talents to the limit in devising the crucial procedures and documents of legitimation. But he was also a stubborn and tactless man, and, as a former Ch'i subject and a Confucian literatus, he had no natural allies among the hard-riding, practical north-westerners who surrounded Wen-ti. Thus, when he irritated the emperor once too often, he was consigned to the provinces for the rest of his career.

Such were the principal advisers of the first Sui emperor: in his empress, a devoted if jealously meddlesome confidante; in Kao Chiung, a man of great capacity and versatility who could develop civil and military policies and see to their execution in the offices of the capital or in the field; in Yang Su, the hatchet man every autocrat needs, always at the ready to carry out his master's orders, no matter what the human cost; in Su Wei, the son of a renowned father and, for all his faults, a loyal and effective court official; in Li Te-lin, a Confucian literatus who was used only as long as his learning in rituals and in classical and historical precedents was needed to provide the articles of legitimation for the usurping Sui.

[32] *SS* 42, p. 1207.

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Beyond this inner group was a wide variety of talent which the emperor made use of for long terms or short, in formal offices or *ad hoc* assignments. All his energies, and all the abilities he could find and employ, were needed to deal with the great array of formidable problems which faced the new dynasty.

MAJOR PROBLEMS OF THE SUI

The formation of a syncretic ideology

To deal first with the subject of ideology is not to imply that it is more important than the practical problems discussed later in this section, but rather that it is more general, at once more pervasive and more amorphous than the other problems of the first Sui reign. State ideology colours and subtly affects all other measures while seldom appearing as the decisive factor in any given outcome. It is at once part of the assumptions and the mental sets of the decision makers and part of the climate of opinion in which they operate. Here, as in other aspects of the Sui achievement, we must take account of the immediate historical background.

The Confucian elements in the syncretic ideology of the Sui were the ideas, values, practices and rituals which reverted to Han Confucianism and which had survived the three centuries of political instability and disunion that followed the fall of Han. These elements fall into several sub-traditions. The most obvious is the very elaborate ritual-symbolic sequence which legitimized imperial power. This sub-tradition was called upon, as we have seen in the sketch of Li Te-lin's career, to eliminate the Chou and usher in the Sui with the least possible disruption of the cosmic order. It was further elaborated and perpetuated by the Board of Ritual and in repeated ritual codifications. The outward and visible signs were the ritual observances of the Son of Heaven, of which the spring sacrifice in the south suburb, and worship of the imperial ancestors in the canonically ordered T'ai-miao were obvious examples. In this same sub-tradition the Sui adopted the colour red and the element fire; the emperor accordingly worshipped the Fire Emperor in the south suburb. This was another symbolic link with the great Han, for it too had ruled by the 'virtue' of fire. These links and the meticulous performance of all the ritual-symbolic acts appropriate for the Son of Heaven were important in establishing the Sui emperor's right to rule, and especially to extend his rule to include the area of the Ch'en state where Han traditions had been zealously preserved.

A second sub-tradition of Confucianism was that concerned with morality and the moral order. Much of the legacy of Su Ch'o was con-

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cerned with the moral health of the body politic and the body social. Yang Chien quickly discarded the archaic official titles which the Northern Chou had instituted, but he strongly supported the moral principles and the hierarchical ordering of society which were enjoined by Confucianism. Very early in the dynasty, incentives were offered to those whose conduct exemplified Confucian virtue: filial sons, obedient grandsons, widows and widowers who did not remarry were exempted from taxes and labour service. The principle of *hsiao*, filial submission – the basis of hierarchy – had particular appeal for Yang Chien. He agreed with Su Wei when he quoted his father Su Ch'o to the effect that reading the one roll of the *Classic of filial submission* (*Hsiao ching*) was sufficient to establish one's character and to govern a state.[33] A short time later we are told that Yang Chien prescribed a reading of this classic for one of his old supporters who had strayed into black magic and unfilial behaviour. In the argument that preceded his final break with Li Te-lin, Yang Chien was, as so often, in a towering rage. He exclaimed: 'We now govern the empire according to the principle of filial submission. But no doubt because this doctrine was full of gaps, they established the five moral teachings in order to amplify it. [The five as taught in the classics are: the righteousness of the father, the loving kindness of the mother, the friendliness of the elder brother, the respect of the younger brother, the filial submission of sons.] You say that filial submission comes from man's natural disposition. What need would there then be for the five moral teachings? If this were so then Confucius need not have pronounced the *Classic of filial submission*.'[34]

A third sub-tradition was classical learning. Yang Chien, as we have noted, was inclined to be anti-intellectual and had little use for Confucian scholarship that did not apply directly to the social and moral health of the empire, to the ritual duties of the Son of Heaven, or to the training of efficient administrators. He was in urgent need of literate and dedicated officials for his new centralized bureaucracy, and the Confucian curriculum was the standard way to literacy. The Confucian classics were also the cornerstone of political thought; they contained the basic store of positions and of argument in policy discussions. Throughout the 580s and 590s Yang Chien issued decree after decree aimed at recruiting literate men of good character into his bureaucracy: offering rewards to those with knowledge of a classic; ordering the prefectures to select three men each (artisans and merchants excluded) for further training in the capital, examination and appointment; asking the prefectures and the counties to recommend men 'who have clearly understood the modern and the ancient, fully comprehended the configurations of order and

[33] *TCTC* 175, pp. 5439–40. [34] *SS* 42, p. 1208.

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disorder, who have inquired deeply into the basis of political doctrines'.[35] Yet he seems to have been deeply disappointed with the results. In the sixth moon of 601 he ordered the closing of most of the schools teaching the Confucian curriculum. Parts of the edict are revealing of his attitude towards Confucianism: 'The principles of Confucian learning are to train and instruct the people, to bring them to understand the righteousness which informs the relationship of father to son and prince to minister, to make known the gradations of honourable and mean, of age and youth... Since we came to govern the empire, we have given thought to spreading virtuous teaching. We have for a long time assembled students and carefully established village schools. We have opened the way to official advancement and we have waited for men of wisdom and high quality. But though scholars in the state academy number almost a thousand, and the students in the prefectural and county schools are by no means few, they simply have their names enrolled and vainly waste their time. They have not the virtue to be exemplars for their time nor the talent to serve the needs of the state.'[36] This very day, says the *Sui shu*, he distributed the holy Buddhist relics to the various prefectures of the empire.

In earlier parts of this chapter I have shown how pervasive Buddhism had become among all classes of society, and I have pointed to the strong Buddhist influence in Yang Chien's life and in the lives of his intimates. Inevitably Buddhism became a strong if not the dominant strain in the syncretic ideology of the Sui. Yang Chien had served as a Northern Chou official and had witnessed the emperor Wu-ti's efforts, beginning in 574, to extirpate both Buddhism and Taoism, indeed all religious practices not sanctioned in the ritual canons of Confucianism. Clergy of both religions were returned to lay life, while their temples, their scriptures and images were destroyed. Yang Chien and his wife gave shelter to the Buddhist nun who had been his childhood mentor, and he may well have been at an official post in the conquered Ch'i area when the edict of suppression was ordered to be enforced there. He may have observed the growth of resentment among the groups affected by the suppression: the secularized clergy whose mode of life had been legislated out of existence; lay adherents for whom support of the clergy, endowment of temples, pilgrimage, etc. had become part of life and their hope for salvation (many powerful civil and military officials were among these); and finally the large number of artists, artisans, copyists, provisioners and others whose livelihood had depended on Buddhist establishments.

[35] *SS* 2, p. 51. [36] *SS* 2, pp. 46–7.

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After the death of the emperor Wu-ti in the sixth month of 578, the proscription of Buddhism was somewhat relaxed, but it was not ended until Yang Chien founded the Sui, and Buddhism was finally rehabilitated.

Buddhism was for Yang Chien and most of his court a personal faith, but the question here is what roles it could play in a syncretic ideology. One such role is that of supplementary legitimation. It was Confucian tradition, with all its rituals and symbolism, that could make Yang Chien the Son of Heaven, but Buddhism had a vast lore which created the image of the ideal ruler, beloved and blessed by superior beings. Here is one passage among many which associated Yang Chien with that ideal image: 'The Emperor is a great Dānapati. Although he personally attends to a myriad affairs, he rejoices in the Way to the end of the day. Bringing to renewed prosperity the Three Treasures (Triratna), he is indeed a Çakravartin king.'[37] Many of Wen-ti's public acts relating to Buddhism were meant to emphasize his role as an ideal monarch and defender of the faith (Çakravartin-rāja) and as munificent donor (Mahā-dānapati) making generous gifts to the Buddhist religion and setting an example for all his subjects to follow. As Wen-ti said in 585, his role makes him the surrogate of the Buddha: 'Buddha takes the true dharma and entrusts it to the princes of states. We, being honoured among men, accept Buddha's trust.'[38] His founding of temples known as Ta-hsing kuo ssu in all the forty-five prefectures through which he had travelled on his way to supreme power was a reminder at the local level that there ruled in the city of Ta-hsing ch'eng a 'Bodhisattva Son of Heaven'. This was important for consolidating his hold in eastern China and in his preparations for the conquest of Ch'en.

Immediately on his accession he also began to rehabilitate the Buddhist clergy, but he made sure that the candidates were properly qualified, that they were placed under strong central control from the Metropolitan Temple (Ta-hsing shan ssu) with a Master of the Vinaya (monastic discipline) as abbot. The contributions of a trained and disciplined clergy to the state were many: the carrying out of charitable projects; saying masses for the welfare of the state; and for many specific purposes, e.g. seeking rain or an end to it, stopping an epidemic, seeking spiritual felicity for imperial ancestors. Generally such activities brought into play a host of powerful unseen forces on the side of the state and its ruling house.

A third role of Buddhism in the Sui state was as a common faith of the people of all regions and classes, and thus as a unifying force, after the

[37] From the presentation in 594 of a newly commissioned catalogue of the scriptures by the monk Fa-ching; *TD* 55, p. 149a.

[38] *Pien-cheng lun*, by the monk Fa-lin, ch. 3, in *TD* 52, p. 509a.

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long period of disunion. Early in his reign Wen-ti strikes this note which is reiterated throughout his reign: 'With the armed might of a Cakravartin king We spread the ideals of the ultimately benevolent one (Buddha). With a hundred victories in a hundred battles We promote the practice of the ten Buddhist virtues.'[39] And in another edict of the early years, 'To value life and hate death is the basis of kingly government. In the teachings handed down in the Buddhist tradition good acts are what one should put his faith in... It is proper that We encourage the empire with one mind to seek salvation.'[40] This theme is especially stressed during and after the conquest of the south, when southern clergy and laity had to be persuaded to submit to their conquerors. In an edict of 601, at the time of his great relic distribution in the manner of King Aśoka, he made the point with particular fervour:

> We give our adherence to the Three Treasures and bring to new prosperity the holy teachings. It is our thought and concern that all the people within the four seas may, without exception, develop bodhi (enlightenment) and together cultivate fortunate karma, bringing it to pass that present existences will lead to happy future lives, that the sustained creation of good causation will carry us one and all up to wondrous enlightenment.[41]

These three roles or themes of Sui imperial Buddhism give to the ideology as a whole a distinctive colour – one that is unique in the annals of the Chinese empire.

The crypto-Buddhist religion of Taoism had taken shape in the fifth century AD, perhaps earlier, and by the time of the Northern Chou suppression of religion in 574, it had apotheosized Lao-tzu into its chief divinity and his avatars or emanations into an accompanying pantheon. This Taoist religion had developed temples, male and female monastic orders, holy places, scriptures and a theology in the Buddhist manner. Yang Chien, when he came into power, took steps to remove the Chou proscription. Although, as emperor, Yang Chien is reported to have had little use for Taoist adepts, he used the skills of a Taoist specialist in making the first calendar of Sui. I suspect that same specialist of influencing the choice of the first Sui era-name, K'ai-huang. In 586 he ordered his favourite writer of public documents to compose a stele inscription to be set up at Lao-tzu's 'birth-place' in Anhwei, and about the same time he ordered a high official to investigate the historic remains at the site and build a new hall of worship there. Imperial veneration of Lao-tzu and

[39] *Li-tai san-pao chi*, by Fei Ch'ang-fang, ch. 12, in *TD* 49, p. 107c.
[40] *TD* 49, p. 108a.
[41] *Kuang-hung-ming chi*, comp. by the monk Tao-hsüan, ch. 17, in *TD* 52, p. 213b.

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care of his shrine dated back at least to AD 165, so that Wen-ti was not only winning the approval of Taoist believers but also demonstrating his right to resume one of the lapsed ritual functions of the Han emperors.

There is also, in his few public statements relating to Taoism, the same stress on unity and harmony in the empire which we found in the Buddhist records. In his early edict establishing Buddhist monasteries at the five sacred mountains of China (where the Taoists would normally have prior claim), he said, 'We make humble obeisance to the transforming power of Tao and concentrate our mind on pure tranquillity. We revere the one and indivisible truth of Śākyamuni. We honour Lao-tzu's ideal of attaining one-ness.'[42] But such references are relatively few, and there are many more which deal with his awareness of the subversive potential of the Taoist teaching and measures to curb it. Illegal manipulation of the prognostic texts, alleged black magic, etc. met with stern repression. It may be significant that at the end of Wen-ti's reign, there were in his new capital 120 Buddhist establishments to only 10 Taoist.

In the development of a syncretic ideology, Wen-ti made selective use of the values, the ritual and the symbolism of the three traditions, with the themes and emphases we have described. If any theme is dominant it is the basic Chinese value of organic harmony – something the Sui had to strive to approach against a background of centuries of war and disunion.

Building a new capital

For the Sui founder, as for Chinese of many centuries, the decision to build a new capital was a particularly solemn one. For a capital was an ideological symbol – the ordered centre of the ordered space over which the Son of Heaven presided. The location and design had to respond not only to historical precedent, but also to the various symbol systems by which the Chinese had come to measure the disposition of Heaven and the unseen forces. Yang Chien had seized power in the ancient capital of the Han dynasty, which, in the centuries of disunion, had been repeatedly sacked, burnt and rebuilt. In this long period, it had served as the capital of many ephemeral dynasties, most of them, like the Northern Chou, dynasties with a non-Chinese ruling house and elite. The city, which had never been very spacious or symmetrical, was old, run down, its water supply was brackish, and it was filled with the ghosts of murdered men, tainted with memories of repeated political failures. Yang Chien and his close advisers began discussing the desirability of a move in the second year of his reign, and an edict of the sixth moon summed up the argu-

[42] *Pien-cheng lun*, ch. 3, in *TD* 52, p. 509b.

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ments that had been submitted in favour of a new capital. The new emperor assured his subjects that historical precedent had been consulted, that he had made divinations with favourable results, that he had taken account of astronomical dispositions and taken special divinations as to the productivity of the proposed site. He asked his people to take on the burden of work in these terms: 'Planning the new and getting rid of the old is like the farmer looking forward to autumn; although for the time being the work may be arduous he knows that at the end he will be peacefully at ease.'[43]

He placed in charge of planning the new city Yü-wen K'ai, one of the most brilliant architects and engineers of the age. He and all those associated with him in building the city were northerners of mixed descent; some were descended from fairly recent immigrants from central Asia, and one had a Zoroastrian personal name. All felt free to innovate, to take only what they pleased from the prescriptions of the Chinese classics. The result was a capital that was unprecedented in scale and novel in design.

The city was located south and east of the old Ch'ang-an. Its outer walls of pounded earth made a rectangle, laid out to the points of the compass but 'facing south', 5.92 miles east and west, 5·27 miles north and south. Inside, the city was divided into four functional areas. In the centre and backed up against the north wall was the walled palace city, which contained the imperial residences, the main audience hall called T'ai-chi tien: 'Palace of the Cosmic Ultimate', the courts and lesser audience halls and quarters for palace servants. South of this and separated by a wide glacis was another walled enclosure which was the administrative city, with government bureaux laid out along internal streets. The administrative city was an innovation because previous capitals, like Paris and London in recent times, had scattered government buildings throughout other functional quarters of the city. Between these two compounds and the outer walls were ranged 108 rectangular walled compounds (symbolically important: nine, the number of ordered space multiplied by twelve, the number of ordered time); 106 of these were residential wards ranged along eleven north–south and fourteen east–west avenues. Each ward was served by two internal streets in the shape of a cross, with a gate centred in each of the four sides. The other two walled compounds were the markets, one in the west city and one in the east. These were the government-supervised centres of the city's commerce.

The main axis of the city was the great south–north street which led

[43] *SS* 1, p. 17; *TCTC* 175, p. 5457.

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from the five-portalled main gate of the city due north to the central south gate of the administrative city. If one had the rank to gain thoroughfare, one could pass through the administrative city and arrive at the great south gate of the palace city, called in Sui times the Kuang-yang Gate. It was from the top of this gate that Wen-ti looked down on the defeated Ch'en grandees. The city itself, and the imperial palace were named, in Sui times, after the fief the Sui founder had been given before he became emperor, hence Ta-hsing ch'eng and Ta-hsing tien. (As a name for the dynastic capital, Ta-hsing was freighted with felicity, meaning 'great revival' or 'great prosperous revival' probably thought of as 'great and momentous revival' of the glories of the long vanished Han dynasty.)

When the villages had been cleared away, the walls laid out and the city in its bare outline constructed, the Sui ruler moved in (his palace had been completed first). This was in the third month of 583. The vast skeleton of a city must have seemed to some a grandiose gesture on the part of a monarch not yet three years in power, Yang Chien was conscious of its emptiness, and he took various measures to attract population. He ordered his sons, the imperial princes, to build their mansions in the south-western sector of the city in the hope that this would stimulate other building. He offered free imperial name-plaques to anyone who would endow and build a Buddhist temple. We read of one man who dismantled his house in the old Ch'ang-an and used the timbers to build a temple in the new city. The emperor himself gave prime space to the metropolitan temples of the religions of his subjects: on the east side of the main north-south avenue the Buddhist Ta-hsing shan ssu occupied an entire ward. Across the street, on the less auspicious west side and occupying much less than a ward, was the Taoist Hsüan-tu kuan. By the end of his reign the Sui founder could look out upon his capital and see over a hundred Buddhist and Taoist temples. No doubt, with the fall of Ch'en and the mass removal of the elite from their capital to Ta-hsing ch'eng, more of the city was occupied. But there was much that was unoccupied and unfinished at the end of the first reign, indeed at the fall of Sui. Modern excavators have identified what they take to be a run of the Sui outer wall, and they find that its construction shows signs of haste.[44] It was not until the great T'ang succeeded the Sui and improved communications with their vast and relatively stable empire that the capital city was fully developed.

The building of the capital on such a scale early in the dynasty was an act of faith expressing the confidence of the Sui founder and his advisers

[44] See the preliminary archaeological survey of the site in *K'ao-ku hsüeh-pao*, 3 (1958) 79–94.

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that their dynasty would have a wider sway and a longer life than the regimes which preceded them. About the former, at least, they proved correct, for the T'ang succeeded them in the city, and from it dominated China and all of eastern Asia for nearly three hundred years.

Reform of the central government and elite recruitment

When he took over the Northern Chou, the Sui founder inherited a central government in which titles and functions had been deliberately archaized on the model of the ancient ritual compendium, the *Chou-li*. But behind this classical facade, real power was held by members of an oligarchy of military aristocrats, mostly of Hsien-pei or mixed descent. It has been estimated that about 65 per cent of top-ranking Northern Chou officials were of non-Chinese origin.[45] Wen-ti had himself grown up within this system, and most of his friends and chief advisers came from this group. Yet he seems from the outset to have decided on a new structure of central government and on recruitment of a ruling elite from among the many groups and regions of the new empire.

In the second moon of the first year of his reign, he abolished the Northern Chou official names and proclaimed his intention of following the precedents of the last great Chinese empires, the Han and the Wei (220–65). In fact much of his official structure and nomenclature followed that of Northern Ch'i which itself reflected the radical sinicization carried out by the Northern Wei in the late fifth century. None the less, the order to follow Han and Wei precedents was further evidence that the Sui had ambitions to become something greater and more enduring than a regional successor state.

The structure of the central government, as it emerged during the first years of the dynasty, contained many offices with Han dynasty names, but the structure was new in many respects and in broad outline prefigures the T'ang central government. At the top of the imperial service were the three preceptors (*san shih*) and the three dukes (*san kung*) who were supposed to be, after the model of the early Chou, supreme advisers of the emperor. In fact these were not functional offices, and they were often unfilled for long periods; at other times the lofty title and stipend was given to someone the emperor wanted removed from actual power; again, they were from time to time conferred on imperial princes. The greatest concentration of real power lay at the next level: the three central ministries (*san sheng*), the Department of State Affairs (Shang-shu sheng),

[45] Yamazaki Hiroshi, 'Zuichō kanryō no seikaku', *Tōkyō Kyōiku Daigaku bungakubu kiyō*, 6 (1956) 17.

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the Chancellery (Men-hsia sheng) and the Secretariat (Nei-shih sheng, later Nei-shu sheng). By far the most important was the first of these, for under its jurisdiction were the six boards: Civil Office (Li-pu), Finance (Min-pu), Rites (Lǐ-pu), Army (Ping-pu), Justice (Hsing-pu), and Public Works (Kung-pu). Beyond the structure of the three central ministries and the six boards, the Sui established other offices: the Censorate (Yü-shih t'ai), the Inspectorate General of Water Works (Tu-shui t'ai, later Tu-shui chien), and the nine courts (*chiu ssu*), among which were the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, the Court of Imperial Banquets, the Court of the Imperial Family, etc. Further, they set up the supervisory office for the State University (Kuo-tzu ssu, later Kuo-tzu chien) and inspectorates general for imperial works and for imperial ateliers. All the principal officers of these bureaux had prescribed titles and a set number of subordinates at all levels, and the regulations specified the rank (*p'in*) required for each office.

This was an impressive formal structure, but one office that had been the summit and pivot of the Han bureaucratic apparatus was missing, the office of chancellor (*ch'eng-hsiang*). Wen-ti chose not to establish this position, and, as we shall see, dealt personally with the ranking officials of the three central ministries. He was, in effect, his own chancellor, and, while lacking an all-powerful chief of government, officialdom, on its side, lacked a supreme arbiter and spokesman for bureaucratic interests as a whole. Yang-ti followed the same practice and, if anything, gathered to himself even more administrative powers than his father.

A symmetrical table of organization, with the names of offices suitably redolent of Han and earlier traditions and with much of it familiar from the practices of the recently defunct Northern Ch'i, was relatively easy to construct. The real problem for the Sui lay in the recruitment of a new elite, of people who would staff the offices, share in the major tasks facing the new dynasty and link their own destinies with that of the Sui. In the process of recruitment, the new regime had to take account of a great variety of factors. Regional interests and antipathies were particularly strong after a long period of partition and war. Great entrenched families often represented their own and regional interests. Some kind of balance had to be reached between the interests of civil government and those of the long dominant military. Pervading all the other conflicting interests was the cleavage between Chinese and those of steppe ancestry – ameliorated by the long practice of intermarriage and by the sinicization of institutions, but still a latent tension that could burst into active hostility. Finally, among those with government experience there was the question of loyalty. Some had served the Northern Ch'i until its conquest by the Northern Chou, and, after 589, southern loyalties had to be considered

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when an office was to be filled. The question, 'How loyal is the candidate to the Sui?' was of obsessive concern to Wen-ti, and was especially critical in the years before the Sui had consolidated its power.

The core group, whose members helped the Sui founder in his seizure of power or rallied early to him, took part in the design of Sui policy and institutions and was the active agent for the recruitment of a broader governing elite. This group included the four close advisers discussed on pages 66–72. All were ranking officials of the three central ministries and all were eligible to participate in the audiences and less formal gatherings devoted to major affairs of state. If one eliminates temporary carry-overs from the Northern Chou and those who took office briefly in the turmoil at the end of the Sui, there remained eighteen men in this group, of whom five were princes of the blood. It may be helpful to consider briefly the make-up of the group.

Of those who had held office under a previous dynasty, eleven had been – like the founder himself – officials of the Northern Chou. The fathers of fourteen of them had served under the Northern Wei or one of its successor states – a very high proportion under the Northern Chou; the average level of their fathers' offices was well below their sons'. Only one was a southerner, and he was appointed because he was the elder brother of Yang-ti's empress. In geographic origins fifteen came from a relatively narrow west–east band of territory running from T'ien-shui in the west through the capital region and terminating at Lo-yang in the east. Five of these came from Wen-ti's birthplace near the centre of this west–east band. A total of eight out of the eighteen were related by blood or marriage to the ruling house.[46]

In culture most of these men, like their imperial master, were Chinese, but Chinese of a special northern type. In general this core group was made up of tough, ruthless men of action skilled in horsemanship and shooting, resourceful military leaders, experienced administrators. Their Confucian learning was, in general, rudimentary, and their knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy thin. Only one of them – Li Te-lin – was a fully-fledged literatus from the eastern plain with a rich background of Chinese learning and precedent. The long dominance of the steppe people was reflected in their personal culture even though those from 'Chinese' families outnumbered those from non-Chinese families in a ratio of eight to one. This was in sharp contrast to the comparable Northern Chou power group in which non-Chinese families predominated in a ratio of two to one.[47]

How were the rest of the central government officials selected and

[46] *Ibid.* pp. 15–25. [47] *Ibid.* pp. 17–23.

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appointed? From the beginning of his reign Wen-ti had been determined on centralization of power, and this policy is reflected in the machinery he set up. For appointments to offices of the fifth rank or higher, a council of ranking ministers was to select a candidate and report its recommendation to the emperor, who would, if he approved, send down an order making the appointment.[48] Persons selected in this manner staffed the whole upper echelon of government, the three central ministries, the six boards, the Censorate, the nine courts, etc., though subordinate officials in the various boards were probably chosen by the Board of Civil Office. This board was the principal mechanism for the appointment of rank and file officials – those of the sixth rank and below, and its president and vice-presidents were consequently men of great influence in the government.

If we consider for a moment the presidents of the six boards, we shall have a better idea of the character of Sui central government at its working level. Of the forty-six presidents of the six boards, 65·2 per cent were from Chinese families and 28·2 per cent from non-Chinese families. Forty-two of these men were sons or grandsons of officials who had served the Northern Wei (thirteen) or the Northern Chou (twenty-nine). Only three had Northern Ch'i backgrounds, and all of these were in the Board of Finance, which was in charge of taxation and land allotment for the empire. The highest proportion of non-Chinese was in the Board of Works where 45·5 per cent of the board presidents were non-Chinese. This is usually explained by the strong traditions of innovation in building techniques in certain of the non-Chinese families. The next highest proportion was in the Board of War where the military traditions of the non-Chinese peoples may account for their strength. In the Board of Civil Office which, we have seen, was by far the most important of the ministries, only 12·5 per cent of the presidents were non-Chinese. The geographic origins of the presidents were similar to those of the highest government officials; thirty of the forty-six came from the same narrow west–east band stretching from T'ien-shui to Lo-yang; the next highest concentration was Shansi with seven, and the balance was scattered across the North China Plain.

The Sui government at its two highest levels obviously was not representative of the various regions of north China, much less of the south. While its composition reversed the proportion of non-Chinese to Chinese that had prevailed in the Northern Chou, it strongly favoured people and families of the same region and class as the two emperors. Although neither Wen-ti nor his successor filled offices with the families of their empresses, they tended to favour blood relatives whenever

[48] *THY* (Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu edn, Peking, 1955), 74, p. 1333.

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possible, and there was a high concentration of the Yangs of Hua-yin in the upper echelons of government; imperial relatives were also favoured for posts of regional military governor. Given the rather restricted character of the upper levels of the central government, what measures did the Sui take to broaden the base of the governing class?

First of all, the Sui rulers removed from the prefects and other local officials the right to make appointments and vested this power in the Board of Civil Office. Then they gradually introduced other measures to make this centralization of the power of appointment effective. One was the 'rule of avoidance' which meant that prefectural and county officials could not serve in their place of origin. This was supplemented by two decrees, one forbidding subordinate officials to occupy any post in local government which they had already held, and the other fixing the terms for principal local government officials at three (later four) years, and for subordinate officials at four years. In 594 officials assigned to local posts were forbidden to be accompanied by their fathers, mothers or sons fifteen and over, lest they became 'conductors' of undue influence on his exercise of power. To these measures was added the requirement of end-of-year appraisals of the records of performance of local officials with promotions, demotions, rewards and punishments meted out according to the results of the evaluations. To police the new official organization, the Sui emperors used several devices. One was the imperial progress during which Wen-ti spent much of his time investigating the effectiveness of local officials; on one occasion he dismissed a mere county magistrate because of a verbal impropriety of the local elders. Another device was his practice of appointing itinerant inspectors of the local governments of the prefectures and counties, men who served as the 'eyes and ears of the emperor in distant places' and brought back their ratings of the local officials.[49] A third device was that of the special inspector sent out to report on a specific situation. A fourth was, of course, the Censorate which had wide powers to ferret out wrong-doing, not only in official business but in the private lives of officials, and to make impeachments. The Sui censors, it is said, 'made their investigations and recommendations without fear or favour, their impeachment memorials without bending or flinching'.[50] We learn from the biographies of censors that this was not hyperbole.

There was in the entire new system a tone of severe rationality, reflecting a most determined effort to end the reign of hereditary privilege in official life and to enforce new standards of official performance. To do this

[49] *SS* 66, p. 1562; T'ang Ch'eng-yeh, *Sui Wen-ti cheng-chih shih-kung chih yen-chiu*, p. 105.
[50] *Pei-t'ang shu-ch'ao* (1888 edn, Taipei reprint 1962), 62, p. 2b.

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successfully meant devising ways to recruit new men beyond the limits of the privileged families which had monopolized office for so long. Wen-ti may indeed have adopted the policy advocated by the Western Wei statesman, Su Ch'o, which declared that 'the selection and promotion of officials should not be constrained by hereditary privilege but should consist simply in getting good men'.[51] It was only with such a policy that the Sui could get a pool of talent relatively free of old ties, malleable to new standards and able to adjust to the new centralized autocracy. The need for such a talent pool brought into being the Sui examination system which was the precursor of the imperial selection system that lasted until 1905. Details of the Sui system are unfortunately few, but some of the broad outlines may be sketched.

Early in 582, Wen-ti ordered the nomination for offices of 'the worthy and the good'. In 587 he ordered that all the prefectures should send three men annually to the capital for possible appointment (merchants and artisans were disqualified). This would mean, after the conquest of the south in 589, an annual quota of nine hundred from the empire. It is to be noted that the Sui, unlike the Han, set a standard quota for each prefecture, regardless of its size and population. In 587 he further ordered the capital officials of the fifth rank and above and the prefects to examine the candidates and rank them in two groups according to their personal qualities.[52] The first mention of a degree and of a written examination is, I believe, for 595 when the examination of candidates for the *hsiu-ts'ai* degree is mentioned.[53] Miyazaki believes that this was the name of the examination and of the degree given to the candidates sent up annually from the provinces. The conduct and content of the examination is nowhere specified in detail, but from one biography we get a glimpse of how it was conducted. A certain Tu Cheng-hsüan 'was nominated as a *hsiu-ts'ai*. The president [presumably of the Board of Civil Office] examined him on modes of action to be taken in certain situations. Cheng-hsüan's responses were quick as an echo. He no sooner put his brush to the paper than his essay was complete.'[54]

Two other examinations were also administered by the central government, the *ming-ching* and the *chin-shih*, to candidates who presented themselves. The *hsiu-ts'ai* apparently required broad general learning, the *ming-ching* tested the candidates' mastery of a specific classical work, while the *chin-shih* was primarily a test of literary ability. Miyazaki's opinion is that the ranking of the three examination degrees was first *hsiu-ts'ai*, then

[51] *Chou shu* 23, p. 386; Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, p. 291.
[52] *TT* 13, p. 81a.
[53] *Yü-hai* (Hua-wen shu-chih edn, Taipei, 1964), 115, pp. 9b–10a.
[54] *SS* 76, p. 1747; Miyazaki Ichisada, *Kyūhin kanjinbō no kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1956), p. 521.

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ming-ching and then *chin-shih*.[55] Initial appointments based on examination results may well have been made, as they were in T'ang times, on a descending scale from the top of the eighth rank to the bottom of the ninth. The Board of Civil Office conducted the examinations at fixed intervals, possibly triennially, in the capital. There were, further, special examinations ordered by the throne for which the degree of *hsiu-i*, even more prestigious than the *hsiu-ts'ai*, was awarded. These were apparently conducted in the provincial capitals at irregular intervals, for example, in 589, 603, 609 and 614.

This in rough outline was the complex institution established by the Sui to ensure the flow of new talent into government. There is every evidence that both rulers took strong personal interest in its functioning, appointed men of probity and talent to the Board of Civil Office and repeatedly insisted in imperial edicts on the strict application of the merit standard to appointments and promotions. Tight administration, policing and exhortation were all needed continuously because the principle of impersonal selection – though it had its beginnings in Han institutions – ran counter to the familial and personal linkages that are built into the Confucian ethic. In the Sui period, the principle had also to be enforced against the resistance of deeply rooted aristocratic privilege. We shall examine this further in the section which follows.

The reform of local government

The Sui, when it came to power, fell heir to an antiquated and ineffective system of local administration, the result of centuries of proliferating abuses in north and south alike. According to some scholars part of the problem goes back to 106 BC when the Former Han modified the highly centralized system of local government it had inherited from the Ch'in. That system had provided for two levels of local government (*chün* and *hsien*), both directly responsible to the capital. The Han now superimposed an upper level, that of the *tz'u-shih*, often translated 'inspector'. Each was in charge of the inspection of a number of commanderies. Serious difficulties might have been avoided if the governments of Eastern Han and its successor states had retained strong central power. But weakness at the centre, plus the endemic tendency for power to devolve upon regions, led to the establishment of the prefecture (*chou*) as a formal administrative level interposed between the commandery and capital.

Under the conditions of incessant war that prevailed for most of the period of disunion, the *tz'u-shih* acquired military as well as civil responsi-

[55] Miyazaki Ichisada, *Kyūhin kanjinhō no kenkyū*, pp. 520–4.

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bilities for their prefectures. In addition to the *chou* or civil staff for the prefecture an elaborate *fu* or headquarters staff evolved. At the beginning of the Sui, the governor of a *chou* of the highest grade (according to population) was entitled to a total of 323 officials in both categories.[56] In the course of the evolution of the system of dual staffs, the power of the civil officials was slowly taken over by the military. The main reason was that in this period of constant warfare, the prefect's main responsibilities were to maintain peace and lead his troops in battle; consequently his military staff became increasingly important. And as the power of the military staff waxed, it took over more of the functions of the civil officials, and the power of civil officials gradually atrophied.[57] The *tz'u-shih* had wide *de facto* powers of appointment. They would appoint officials of the commanderies and counties under them with a *pro forma* request to the court for approval. Many of their military staff held concurrent posts as prefects or magistrates, and most of them were friends, clients or relatives of the *tz'u-shih*. Thus the Sui inherited an expensive and redundant system of local government which had perpetuated the diffusion of military and civil power and the consequent endemic weakness of the central government.

A further abuse had developed along parallel lines in the north and in the south. This was the creation, without regard to local needs or administrative rationality, of local governmental units to which officials were appointed with stipends, lands, perquisites and immunities, most of which were to be exacted from the local population. In 556 the Northern Ch'i emperor, bent on reforming the system, described how the proliferation of local units had occurred. He noted that powerful families and great clans abused their positions in the central government to set up prefectures and commanderies, and that imperial princesses, palace women and eunuchs, out of cupidity, took bribes to get them established. The result, the edict says, was that a town of a hundred houses was proclaimed a prefecture and the people of three households were proclaimed a commandery.[58]

In the south, a different sequence of events had produced similar abuses. The Chinese who fled from the North China Plain to the semi-colonial areas of the Yangtze valley and below from AD 312 onwards transplanted – as immigrants will – many of the names from their original homeland. An example was the prefecture of Cho-chou, with five commanderies subordinate to it, transplanted to the south in an area of less than

[56] *SS* 28, p. 783.
[57] Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Iwayuru Zui no kyōkan haishi ni tsuite', in his collection *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1966), vol. 2, p. 778.
[58] *Pei-Ch'i shu* 4, pp. 62–3.

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eight hundred square miles![59] It has been calculated that the number of prefectures in north and south increased twenty-two fold from the end of Han to the beginning of Sui, while the number of commanderies increased six-and-a-half fold.[60] Obviously such entities served less as units of local administration than as satrapies great and small existing for the benefit of a swollen body of office-holders bent on exploiting the people for their own or their patron's advantage.

In 583 Yang Shang-hsi, in a cogent memorial, analysed the administrative chaos which the new Sui emperor had inherited: the multiplication of local government units, the proliferation of officials, the pitiful tax yield of these units, the oppression of the peasants, etc. He remarked that the number of officials appointed in relation to population was like using nine shepherds for ten sheep.[61] Wen-ti, in an initial reform decree, ordered the abolition of all commanderies – more than five hundred – in the area he then controlled. He thus moved towards the restoration of the two-level system of field administration that had been originated by the Ch'in. After the conquest of the south, the same reform was carried out. In Yang-ti's reign the number of prefectures (by then called *chün*) was reduced to 190; the counties subordinate to them numbered 1,255, or an average of more than six counties per prefecture. The territorial jurisdiction of the average prefecture and of the average county was thus much extended, with the resulting reduction of administrative costs and increased net tax yield.

The initial reform decree of 583 had also ordered the appointment of officials of the nine official ranks to posts in the prefectures and counties. Appointments were to be made by the Board of Civil Office in the capital. The performance of these officials was subject to annual examination, governors and county magistrates were to be transferred every three (later four) years, subordinate officials every four. Prefectures and counties were established in nine grades according to their populations; each had its salary scale in bushels, payable twice yearly, plus rights to the income from official fields for public and private expenses connected with the office. The population of the local unit determined its grade in the scale. Finally, the first reform decree consolidated under the prefect the long-separated civil and military staffs at the top level of local government; the term *fu* was eliminated, and all its functionaries, including the military, were now regarded as part of the prefect's civil and administrative staff.

The second reform measure in 595 ordered that the old residual *chou*

[59] *Shang-shu ku-wen su-cheng* (Huang-Ch'ing ching-chieh hsü-pien edn, 1888), 6B, p. 30a; Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui T'ang shih* (Peking, 1957), pp. 3–4.

[60] Yen Keng-wang, *Chung-kuo ti-fang hsing-cheng chih-tu shih* (Taipei, 1961–3), vol. 4, p. 896.

[61] *SS* 46, p. 1253.

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offices, whose functions had long since been taken over by the military, should now be abolished. This reform brought to completion similar, if less sweeping, measures taken by the Northern Ch'i and Northern Chou. The continued use in the Sui and later dynasties of many local government titles that derive from the military bureaux of the period of disunion can be traced to this measure. But though the titles which survived were military, the functions were, under Sui regulations, purely civil.[62] These were the steps by which the Sui sought to rationalize the system of field administration, reduce the number of officials, and subject them to the central power. Yet much of this would have proved abortive if the Sui had not centralized the military power which had long been diffused among the governors. This is discussed under the section dealing with military reform.

The success of the reform of field administration ultimately lay with the people appointed, and the quality of appointees depended on the criteria and methods of official appointment. Here again the Sui fell heir to an antiquated and corrupt system. The system of provincial and sub-provincial Recommending Legates (*chung-cheng*) had its origin in the chaos of the end of the Han, when both the educational system and the system of official selection had broken down. These Legates were then appointed – usually while holding other offices – to recommend and rank candidates from a given area for posts in the imperial bureaucracy on the basis of their local reputation, family status, intelligence, moral worth and social conformity. Within a few years, the posts of Recommending Legate were virtually monopolized by the great aristocratic clans. The basis of their recommendations tended to become first of all the genealogy (as validated by official genealogical records) and power connections of the candidates, and second the personal likes and dislikes of the Legates. Both south and north were saddled with this system, though in the north it did not come into use until the sinicization measures of the Northern Wei in the late fifth century, and it was weakened by Northern Chou institutional changes. Here is an interchange between two sixth century officials in the north, both wanting to be named Grand Recommending Legate of the province of Yen: Contestant *A*, boasting of his lineage, says, 'My family for successive generations have been governors [*tz'u-shih*] of this province. Yours for generations have been old servitors of my house.' Contestant *B* replied, 'From the time your ancestor Pi Kuei was executed (in the third century AD) your family has been inactive and has produced no notable personalities. In recent times, the governorship of this province has been awarded on the basis of military accomplish-

[62] *SS* 28, pp 792–3; Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Iwayuru Zui no kyōkan haishi ni tsuite', p. 781.

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ments. Then and now, what have you to boast about? How can you match our Han Dynasty Metropolitan Prefect, our Chin Dynasty Grand Preceptor of the Heir Apparent, our moral and scholarly achievements spreading excellence for one hundred generations.'[63] This interchange illustrates the overriding influence of genealogy on appointments that derived, in part, from the operation of the system of Recommending Legates.

The Sui abolished this system in 583, eliminating the positions of the various Recommending Legates and, we may assume, the staff positions that had grown up under them. They substituted for it central appointment by the Board of Civil Office, as noted above, with the added safeguards of annual reviews by a special bureau of the Board of Civil Office (or, at his pleasure, by the emperor himself). The *T'ung-tien* sums up the change in Legalist terms: 'From this time on, all within the four seas was under a single rule; thereby...the prefectures and counties did not again have corrupt officials.'[64] As usual our sources take action decreed for action completed, and give us few details on implementation. Six years after the reform decree the official Li Te-lin was arguing against a proposal to create a new echelon of local officials: 'Moreover, at present, people chosen at large by the Board of Civil Office cannot staff more than a few hundred counties out of the whole empire. If, out of a population of six or seven million families it is only possible to select a few hundred county magistrates – and still without being able to say much for their abilities, then ...etc.'[65] This gives us a glimpse of recruitment difficulties which probably took a decade or more to overcome.

There was a further problem which the Sui central government had to deal with: how to keep in close touch on policy matters and administrative performance with officials sent to the various local government posts for three-year terms. To deal with this, the Sui established the institution of *ch'ao-chi shih*, 'delegates to the court assembly'. Each prefecture (*chou*) sent a representative to a special assembly held in the presence of the emperor. While in the capital they were lodged in special quarters in the south-east part of the city. The assemblies were held on the fifteenth of the second, seventh and tenth moons. We know more about the functioning of the system under the T'ang, which held such assemblies annually. The T'ang delegates were generally prefects or other ranking officials who were expected to bring to the capital their candidates for the official examinations plus tribute gifts for the emperor. An examination into the performance of the local officials in each local unit was held, and this was

[63] *Pei-Ch'i shu* 43, p. 576.
[64] *TT* 14, p. 81a.
[65] *SS* 42, p. 1200.

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followed by an audience. In the Sui, the procedure was perhaps less elaborate, at least at the beginning of the dynasty. On one occasion, the emperor addressed the assembled representatives of the provinces and held before them the model of a certain county magistrate whose administration had been judged the best in the areas near the capital. The imperial speech, in well-worn Confucian phrases, was as follows:

Fang Kuang-i's will is fixed on maintaining the integrity of the dynasty, and he loves and cherishes my people. These indeed are the qualities which high Heaven and the spirits of my ancestral temple cherish. If We should ignore him and fail to reward him, high Heaven and the ancestral spirits would certainly punish me. All of you should take him as your master and model.[66]

Whereupon, we are told, the emperor promoted him to be governor of a province. As a result of such recognition and rewards for exemplary conduct the local officials are said to have been kept up to the mark and the people became more numerous and more prosperous. Confucian interpretation aside, it is obvious that these thrice-yearly assemblies provided a useful check on the administration of the provinces, on the performance of the officials and an occasion for reindoctrinating local officialdom on what was expected of them, with a public distribution of rewards and punishments to drive home the message.

Estimates of the significance of the Sui reforms differ, but on a number of points the record is clear. First, placing the appointment of local officials under the Board of Civil Office – a step anticipated in part by the Northern Ch'i – brought to an end the centuries-old diffusion of the appointment power among provincial and local governments and introduced a new era of centralization. Second, the re-establishment of a two-level, rather than a three-level system of local administration and the fixing of a standard by which the central government determined the size and character of the regional units, brought to a timely end the chaotic and abusive practices of the age of disunion. Third, appointment of local officials by the central government was a serious blow to the interests of entrenched aristocratic families which had been accustomed to controlling the officials in their locality; the abolition of the system of Recommending Legates and the elimination of genealogical criteria in the selection of officials further strengthened the power of the central government. Miyazaki regards these reforms as 'revolutionary', productive in the end of such hostility from entrenched interests as to destroy the dynasty.[67] Whether one agrees with this or not, the effects of these reforms cast a long shadow on the subsequent history of imperial China. Fourth, the

[66] *TCTC* 175, p. 5448.
[67] Miyazaki Ichisada, *Kyūhin kanjinhō no kenkyū*, pp. 542–3.

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introduction of an examination system, rudimentary as it was, was the beginning of an institution for selecting candidates for office on the basis of merit that again was to have far-reaching effects on the subsequent evolution of imperial China. Fifth, this system worked as a counterweight to the 'in-group' character of the Sui central government and began a practice of recruiting an elitė from all corners of the great empire. Sixth, the disentanglement of the military and civil functions of the prefects, completed in the reign of Yang-ti, represented the final steps in the rationalization of function and the consolidation of power in the hands of the central government.

Land distribution and land tax

No Chinese empire could prosper without adequate arrangements for the distribution of agricultural land and for collecting the taxes based on agricultural production. The Sui was no exception. As early as 582, when the consolidation of north China was far from complete, the emperor proclaimed a new set of ordinances. These are said to have been based in large part on the regulations of the Northern Ch'i dynasty, and those in turn derived from the *chün-t'ien* (equal field system) introduced in 486 by the Northern Wei emperor, Hsiao-wen. The Sui ordinances provided for periodic distributions of land to the common people. Such land was divided into the following categories: (*a*) arable land (*lu-t'ien*) which was to be held and worked by the recipient during late adolescent and adult years (seventeen to fifty-nine were the outside limits for the Sui) and then returned to the authorities for redistribution; (*b*) inheritable land (*yung-yeh t'ien*), usually that planted in mulberry or hemp; (*c*) land for a house and garden (*yüan-chai t'ien*), also inheritable. The basic allotments decreed in these ordinances were as set out in table 6.[68]

Further land was allotted to those holding noble ranks and/or offices, and this land was divided into two categories: (*a*) inheritable plots, ranging in size from ten thousand *mou* for the highest, ranging to forty *mou* for the lowest; these were not outright grants, but were quotas of land which individuals were permitted to hold; (*b*) lands attached to specific offices, the income to be used for part of the salary of the incumbent and for public administration, buildings, etc. How did this fixed and rather rigid system actually work? Something is now known of the working of the *chün-t'ien* system under the T'ang, but little about the Sui. It seems reasonable to suppose that the system worked far less equitably than the provisions of the ordinances would lead one to think. There is

[68] Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, p. 215.

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Table 6. *Land distribution under the Sui dynasty*

	Lu-t'ien	*Yung-yeh t'ien*	*Yüan-chai t'ien*	Total
		(Figures in *mou*)		
Males	80	20	0·33	100·33
Females	40			40
Married couples	120	20	0·33	140·33
Male household dependants (*nu-pi*)	80		0·20	80·20

(1 *mou* = 0·14 acres; the average family holding in China in 1932 was estimated at 21 *mou*)

evidence that in densely populated areas, the amount of land available for lifetime allotments often did not approach the amount specified in the ordinances, and we have no evidence on the application of the popular allotment system in the south after that area was incorporated in the empire. Furthermore, the officials responsible for the equal apportionment system and for the land and family registers that provided the statistical base for its operation were often themselves land-hungry and avaricious. For the most part they were more likely to subvert the system than maintain it.

Such systems generally work best at the beginning of any regime when land confiscated from rival pretenders and from the ruined elite of the previous regime, give the emperor a large supply of land available for distribution. The Sui was no exception to this rule. But difficulties in maintaining the initially generous scale of allotment (designed to get vacant land into cultivation) in the more populated regions cropped up as early as 592. The emperor in that year, having taken note of the over-population and shortages of grain and textiles in the central provinces, and having rejected a plan for mass resettlement, sent out officials to equalize land holdings. In the more populous rural areas the land available for an adult male was only twenty *mou*, as opposed to eighty specified in the ordinances of 582. We may guess that the lands accumulated by great magnates and by the Buddhist temples had already begun to absorb the surplus available for perennial allotments. This was one of the major economic problems of the T'ang empire and eventually contributed to the abandonment of the *chün-t'ien* system.

However the Sui system may have worked in detail, the ordinances of 582 make it clear that taxes and labour services were to be exacted from the common people on the basis of their ownership or occupancy of land. The standard Sui tax then was of three varieties: (1) land tax at the rate of

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three bushels (*shih*) of grain per family per annum; (2) contribution of twenty (earlier forty) feet of silk or linen cloth of a prescribed width plus three ounces of silk floss or three pounds of hempen thread; (3) labour service of twenty days per annum levied on all adult males. The first two of these were levies on the arable lands worked by the men and on the labour of the women respectively. The third was a levy on the male labour force. Exempted from these levies were all those under seventeen or over fifty-nine or those of official rank, those with titles, and exemplars of the various Confucian virtues.[69]

Most of the loopholes in the tax system involved the falsification of records, e.g. falsely recording adult males as 'infants' or 'old men', forming fictitious 'families', many of whose members could as 'dependants' thereby escape taxes and corvée service. In 585 the emperor ordered the local officials to investigate the registers of households and persons. If they found cases where the registers did not accord with the facts, the responsible local headmen were to be punished by deportation to a distant place. This same group of measures also prescribed the separate entry on the registers as heads of families of those of relatively distant kinship who had been hiding their tax and labour liabilities under a single family head. By these measures, it is said, some 1,641,000 persons were added to the tax rolls.[70]

At about this time Kao Chiung recommended, and the emperor approved, measures to correct the falsification of registers by local headmen who, Kao maintained, were making it impossible to get an accurate list of taxable subjects. He proposed that a standard form be developed and used for keeping the tax records and that inspectors should proceed to the local areas on the fifth of the first lunar month to bring together in a single unit (*t'uan*) three or five associations of 125 families (*tang*) and classify the families and their tax obligations according to the standardized form.[71]

Sui fiscal policy was based on grain and textile taxes drawn from a peasantry which the state sought, by the equal field system, to settle productively on a workable amount of land. By the reform of field administration they sought to get efficient and relatively cheap administration down to the county (*hsien*) level. Yet the working of the whole system depended on the sort of control that could be maintained over the rural population which, by its natural inclinations, would, for example, seek to avoid taxes and labour service whenever possible, disguise unauthorized acqui-

[69] These exemptions were continued under the T'ang; see Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 26, 146.

[70] *SS* 24, p. 681; Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, p. 154. The figure is in doubt; see Balazs, p. 218.

[71] *SS* 24, p. 681; Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, pp. 154–5.

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sitions of land, and hoard and hide surplus grain supplies. The new ordinances, promulgated in 582, dealt with this problem along time-tested lines by establishing local groups, each with a responsible head, ranging from the smallest unit of 5 families (*pao*) to the largest of 125 families (*tang*). A still larger unit of 500 families (*hsiang*) was introduced in 589 to make up for the abolition of many small counties. The purpose of these groups was mutual surveillance under the threat of group sanctions for infractions of the law and particularly for tax and corvée evasion. The Sui tried briefly to give the heads of the largest groupings the authority to decide disputes and law suits arising among their constituent families. This was abandoned in 590 when it was shown to produce favouritism and bribery. We do not have data on the precise working of the system of mutual surveillance, but we should note that local responsibility for the various tax registers and tax allotments discussed above rested squarely on the headmen of the various groups of families, and that punishments were decreed for malfeasance. It is perhaps safe to assume that the system proved effective – at great human cost – and contributed to the fiscal strength of the first Sui reign.

In addition to this elaborate system, the Sui ordered in 585 and 596 a network of relief granaries (*i-ts'ang*) to be built and peasant families to pay into them an average of 0·7 bushels of grain per annum. The size of the local unit (*she*, in Han times 25 families), the nature and function of the controllers of these granaries (*she-ssu*) and the extent of the effective working of the system is not known. We do know that they were meant to provide local relief grain in bad years and that they were subsequently used for this purpose. In general they provided a vital network of food reserves supplementing the five major granaries in which the government stored its tax grain for subsequent disbursement; the contents during the height of the Sui fluctuated between ten million and 'several' million bushels. Tu Yu, commenting on these reserves and on the storage of tax cloth and other commodities, remarks 'From Wei and Chin times down there was never such abundance.'[72]

The military heritage and military reforms

The Sui owed much of its military heritage, like so many other things, to the Northern dynasties which preceded it. The Northern Wei (386–534), we should recall, had been overthrown after a great upheaval which resulted in the establishment of two separate regimes, called Eastern and Western Wei, in north China. These regimes were succeeded by the

[72] *TT* 7, p. 42c.

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Northern Ch'i and Northern Chou which became deadly rivals for hegemony over north China until the Chou's triumph over its eastern enemy in 577; this forcibly reunified north China and left the usurper of the Chou's power, the founder of the Sui, four years later with a legacy of successful reunification and a well-organized military machine. The Sui built on these foundations, used the military force to crush the enfeebled Ch'en in 589, and thereafter, as the country was pacified, introduced reforms that gradually demilitarized the government and reduced the size of existing forces. At the end of the dynasty the trend was reversed by the demands of the Koguryŏ campaigns, whose failure spelt the end of the Sui.

One of the most debated institutions of the sixth and seventh centuries is the *fu-ping* system, often translated as a 'militia' system. In the period with which we are concerned the *fu-ping* were not 'militia' but 'territorially administered soldiery' of a rather special kind. We must make a brief detour into the history of the Northern Wei and the Northern Chou to understand how this system had developed. In the early decades of the Northern Wei, army units had been set up along the northern frontiers to ensure the defence of the Wei empire against the incursions of their nomadic enemies. In consonance with the military tradition of the Northern Wei, the various units along this frontier were drawn from respected tribes and the officers of these units often from Hsien-pei nobility. These more or less elite units of hereditary soldiers were often linked to their commanders by tribal or pseudo-tribal bonds. What happened to these units with the sinicization of the Northern Wei can be easily imagined. The once proud units became, in the Chinese manner, the dumping grounds for criminals, fertile fields for exploiting functionaries, and social classes at once *déclassé* and rebellious. The rebellion of those people of the marches against their favoured cousins at the new Northern Wei capital at Lo-yang (from 494) was, in its origins, a social revolt which historians have labelled 'the Revolt of the Six Garrisons'. Beginning in 524, it ravaged the North China Plain, rent the fabric of Northern Wei society and produced in the end two rival successor states. One of these, called Western Wei, was established in 534 in the ancient plain of Kuan-chung (southern Shensi) – traditional springboard for the conquest of China.

The founder of the Western Wei dynasty, Yü-wen T'ai (505–56), meant to use Kuan-chung for this purpose, and quickly took steps to organize his forces. At the outset he followed the Northern Wei military patterns. His imperial army (*chin-wei chün*), of unknown size but probably mostly Hsien-pei troops, was stationed at his capital (Ch'ang-an) and was the central force under the ruler's immediate command. These troops

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were intended as the major striking force of the Western Wei. They soon proved inadequate, however, especially after the dynasty suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Eastern Wei in 543, resulting in losses estimated at four hundred commanding officers and sixty thousand troops. This forced the Western Wei to turn to Chinese manpower, and that same year the dynasty began the recruitment of local contingents of Chinese soldiers (*hsiang-ping*), mainly from Shensi and Kansu, to supplement their own depleted forces. These were not simply peasant conscripts, but men already formed into local units by the native Chinese military elite (*hao-yu*), though with strictly local responsibilities. With the new recruitment they became part of the Western Wei military system, under the control of the ninety-six territorial military bureaux (*i-t'ung-fu*); these local military bureaux were in turn organized into forty-eight regiments (*t'uan*) and twenty-four armies (*chün*), with an appropriate hierarchical command structure.[73] Scholars as far back as the T'ang have regarded this organization as the beginning of the *fu-ping* system, which we translate as 'territorially administered soldiery'.[74] There is some justification in this assertion, since the soldiers of the territorial military bureaux were indeed under local control, though ultimately forming part of a centralized command structure. But as we shall see, the character of this *fu-ping* system changed rapidly, so that any generalizations about its nature must be treated cautiously.

The Western Wei continued the enlistment of local Chinese troops, with major recruitment efforts in 546 and 550. The predominance of these Chinese troops in the Western Wei army became so great that the non-sinicized Hsien-pei leaders were forced to take dramatic steps to help Hsien-pei officers maintain their status. In 549 the non-Chinese elite from the border peoples, who had adopted Chinese surnames during the period of intense sinicization at the end of the fifth century, had been ordered to resume their original tribal surnames. In 554 the dynasty ordered that all military officers whose families had been given Chinese surnames under the Northern Wei sinicization were to resume their Hsien-pei surnames; even Chinese officers were to take Hsien-pei surnames. Furthermore, all soldiers serving under a particular officer were to adopt the surname of that officer.[75] This attempt to restore traditional Hsien-pei tribal relation-

[73] Kikuchi Hideo, 'Hokuchō gunsei ni okeru iwayuru gōhei ni tsuite', *Shigematsu sensei koki kinen Kyūshū Daigaku Tōyōshi ronsō* (Fukuoka, 1957), pp. 108–9; Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Sei-Gi no nijūyongun to gidōfu', in *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1966), p. 205.

[74] See Li Fan (d. 827), *Yeh-hou chia-chuan*, quoted in Ts'en Chung-mien, *Fu-ping chih-tu yen-chiu* (Shanghai, 1957), pp. 16–20.

[75] See Ku Chi-kuang, *Fu-ping chih-tu k'ao-shih* (Shanghai, 1962), pp. 34–7, and Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Sei-Gi ni okeru ryosei saikō no jijō', in *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 737–59.

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ships shows the concern of the alien dynasty over the dangers inherent in losing their self-sufficiency and being forced to draw on Chinese resources.[76] This was of course a predicament with which any conquest dynasty had to deal.

One year after the death of Yü-wen T'ai in 556, the Western Wei dynasty was succeeded by the Northern Chou, which, as we have seen, restored traditional Chinese forms of government. The restoration of tribalism was terminated, and the armies were brought even more firmly under central control. The army was expanded, mainly by the establishment of greater numbers of territorial military bureaux (*i-t'ung-fu*). In addition, a defensive network of fortresses was built around the capital. Control of this formidable military establishment was not in the hands of the emperor Yü-wen Yung, who had only a small imperial guard. The real head of the army was the emperor's cousin, Yü-wen Hu, who as Chancellor (*ch'eng-hsiang*) also dominated the civil administration. As superintendent of army affairs (*tu-tu chung-wai chu-chün shih*), Yü-wen Hu made all military decisions for the dynasty. He even stationed the bulk of the troops from the imperial guard in his own residence. In 573 the emperor finally regained control of the government by ordering the assassination of Yü-wen Hu. Two years later, in preparation for an imminent campaign against the Northern Ch'i, he ordered a major mobilization of his forces. Chinese soldiers were again drafted from local areas. But this time, rather than bringing in established Chinese military contingents, the dynasty conscripted common peasants.[77] The emperor ordered the names of new recruits to be removed from the registers of the civil authorities, and, to emphasize his personal control over his forces, he ordered that henceforth all soldiers were to be known as 'attendant officers' (*shih-kuan*). These soldiers were exempt from all regular taxes and corvée, and, anticipating the T'ang system, were made liable to periodic duty in the capital. Recruitment was successful, for, as the sources say (no doubt with some exaggeration), 'Half the Chinese became soldiers.'[78] Territorial soldiery recruited in this way manned the twenty-four armies and played a role in the Northern Chou's forcible unification of north China in 577. I say 'played a role' advisedly, for the men of these twenty-four armies – that is the *fu-ping* – formed only a part, though probably the best-trained and disciplined part, of the huge 200,000-man army of unification. The rest were troops of many kinds, including units

[76] Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Sei-Gi no nijūyongun to gidōfu', p. 230; Ku Chi-kuang, *Fu-ping chih-tu k'ao-shih*, p. 37.

[77] Kikuchi Hideo, 'Fuhei seido no tenkai', in *Iwanami kōza: Sekai Rekishi* (Tokyo, 1970), vol. 5, p. 414.

[78] *SS* 24, p. 680.

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of steppe peoples who had recently submitted to the Northern Chou, and additional contingents drawn from Shensi, Kansu and Szechwan. One of the fruits of victory was the forced settlement in Kuan-chung of forty thousand hereditary military families from the Eastern Plain.

Four years after this victory, the Sui founder took over the Northern Chou and its military institutions. Quite early in his reign, however, he ordered a major re-organization of the troops under imperial command. Their numbers had of course been tremendously increased when Yü-wen Yung ordered in 575 that all soldiers in the twenty-four armies be called 'attendant officers' and placed directly under the emperor's personal command. He had, however, made no attempt to integrate these troops into his regular imperial guard. Yang Chien now rationalized this awkward duplicating system by reorganizing all of these troops into twelve units – four guards (*wei*) and eight army headquarters offices (*fu*).[79] In addition to his central command structure, regional military commands (*tsung-kuan fu*), which had overall control of an area, sometimes of a few prefectures (*chou*) and in other cases of more than ten, were established in areas of major strategic importance. These districts were officered by ranked military officials appointed from the capital; in some cases the generals appointed were made concurrently civil governors of the regions in which they were to serve.

Like their predecessors, the twelve capital guards and military headquarters were commanded by officers from the upper strata of Hsien-pei society and from militarized Chinese families. Yamazaki Hiroshi has studied the composition of the Sui central military elite, and we should pause to consider his findings. Examining only the sixty top officers (*ta-chiang-chün*) of the twelve guards whose official ranking was equal to that of the presidents of the six boards, he finds that for the whole Sui period, Chinese (probably from families strongly influenced by Hsien-pei military traditions) accounted for 53·3 per cent, non-Chinese for 40 per cent and the balance unknown. Of these sixty generals no less than fifty-two had previously served under the Northern Chou, while the fathers or grandfathers of forty-six of them had served either the Northern Wei (seven) or the Northern Chou (thirty-nine). These figures attest the overwhelming influence of the Northern Chou military elite on the Sui establishment. When we turn to the geographical origins of these generals, we find a wider distribution than that of the high-ranking civil officials. Twenty-six came from the Shensi–Kansu area, twenty-four from north-east China, five from south China, and the rest unknown. The generals from the south appeared late in the dynasty; they were not from southern

[79] Kikuchi Hideo, 'Fuhei seido no tenkai', pp. 416–17.

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military families but achieved their high rank by merit. They were needed, in the final years of the dynasty, for the command of southern units which Yang-ti called up for his Koguryŏ campaigns: it is also worth noting that the relatively even distribution between Kuan-chung and east China probably reflects the need to have generals who 'knew the men' from the various units scattered across the land.[80] This brings us to the question of manpower.

The *fu-ping* recruits for the central military machine of the Sui were drawn initially from two sources: 'military families' with hereditary vocations such as we found in the Northern Chou *fu-ping* system, and secondly, certain ordinary families which were chosen to furnish soldiers as a special duty in lieu of their corvée obligation. The length and frequency of service for the various sorts of recruits are not altogether clear, but it is clear that the capital armies drew recruits from territorially administered units of military manpower and did not use raw corvée manpower when either a regular or an extraordinary mobilization occurred. This early Sui system is linked by its use of hereditary families and local military administrations to the earlier *fu-ping* system, but these links to the past were weakened by a decree of 590 which marks a watershed in Sui military history.

Some points in this decree have been much debated by specialists, but the important section of it seems clear. After speaking of the ills of the recent period of civil war, the emperor goes on to deplore the evils of arbitrary mobilization of forces and the consequent suffering and insecurity of life for men conscripted into the army and for their families. He then says: 'Now let all military men without exception be subject to the prefectural and county authorities; let their land allotments and registration be the same as the common people's.'[81] The emperor's objectives in this decree, which followed by a few months the reunification of the empire, were several. The most general was to advance the gradual demilitarization of the country and strengthen the social control powers of the civil officials. A second, made explicit in the edict, was to demilitarize the entire North China Plain, always a centre of possible dissidence, while leaving intact the military command structure in Kuan-chung and Ho-tung. The third was obviously to eliminate the instability which had arisen from the chaotic military conditions of the preceding decades. A fourth was more subtle, and we must infer it from other Sui measures: that was to get rid of hereditary privilege in the military as he was trying to do in officialdom. Finally, the original *fu-ping* system was in its origins

[80] Yamazaki Hiroshi, 'Zuichō kanryō no seikaku', pp. 44–58.
[81] *SS* 2, pp. 34–5.

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peculiar to the north under alien dynasties; it was thus inappropriate for a dynasty bent on restoring the glories of Han. After this edict, the twelve guards and army commands drew their men from those selected, trained and administered locally for such service throughout their adult lives. This prefigured the *fu-ping* 'militia' system of T'ang times.

Besides the demilitarization of the North China Plain the dynasty sought in other ways to pacify the country. In 595, Wen-ti ordered the confiscation of all weapons in the empire and decreed that those who attempted to manufacture them privately would be punished; the Kuan-chung area, the staging area for all the Sui's military operations, was once again exempted. In 598, to prevent water-borne rebellion, Wen-ti ordered the confiscation in the south of all boats which were thirty feet long and over.

A second major reform of the military system was ordered by Yang-ti in 605. This reform aimed at the further centralization of forces under the central command structure. Its main feature was to order that all units under the regional military commands (*tsung-kuan fu*) were henceforth to come under the direct control of the twelve guards and army commands in the capital. After the pacification of the south, the number of these regional military commands had already been reduced, but in 604 approximately thirty-six remained, with the most heavily garrisoned of these concentrated along the northern and north-western frontiers. Together with the incorporation of these units in the central army administration, Yang-ti ordered that the names of the territorial military bureaux be standardized; henceforth, all local units were to be known as *ying-yang fu*.[82]

After the second reform of the military system, the Sui had firm control over all military units in the interior of China. The major military problem that remained for the dynasty was the threat of foreign incursions from the north. The northern frontier was subject to severe T'u-chüeh and T'u-yü-hun raids in the early years of the dynasty, and the troops required in that area were very numerous. Wen-ti, to reduce the supply problem, ordered the establishment of military agricultural colonies (*t'un-t'ien*) beyond the Great Wall to provide their provisions. He placed in charge a ranking general of notorious severity, and the colonies are said to have worked successfully. Wen-ti was less fortunate in his effort to use fortified hamlets along the north-western frontier as a counter to inroads by border nomads. He settled instead for another time-honoured frontier policy: dispersal of the pastoral population and the maintenance of a network of military posts. The classic defence line against the nomadic threat to China was, of course, the Great Wall. Following considerable

[82] Kikuchi Hideo, 'Fuhei seido no tenkai', p. 418.

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activity by their predecessors, the Sui rulers made efforts to repair, extend and man it. The work began in the year of Wen-ti's accession to the throne, when local 'barbarians' were mobilized to work on the wall for the twenty days' annual requirement for corvée labour. In the same year the emperor ordered one of his trusted officials to mobilize 30,000 corvée workers to build (or rebuild) a section of the Wall. This was only the beginning, for in 586, 110,000 workers were mobilized; in 587, 100,000; in 607 more than 1,000,000 for a new north–south section between the Ordos region and the modern Shensi province; in 608 more than 200,000. In most of these cases the labourers worked only the twenty days of forced labour required annually, and much of the Wall was rebuilt on foundations surviving from earlier times. The building materials were the traditional ones of pounded earth and sun-dried mud bricks.

The military establishment of the Sui was impressive. It was able to cope easily with minor incursions and disturbances and to field effective armies for larger campaigns. The capacity to assemble arms and supply a force of more than a million against Koguryŏ in 612 testifies to the efficiency of the system, even though the outcome was disastrous. The key to this efficiency was the centralization of power, both military and civil, in the capital and in the person of the emperor. The Sui emperors had learned well the lessons of history from the preceding centuries of disunion, and this is nowhere more clearly seen than in their military policies.

The Sui Codes and Statutes

No dynast with ambitions for the permanence of his house came to the throne in China without taking steps towards the re-codification of the laws and ordinances. The Confucians, from early times, had argued that laws were superfluous if virtue in the ruler and his surrogates was assured. But finding few such situations, they agreed with those of other persuasions that codified law was necessary to the orderly exercise of power. The Sui dynasty, when it came to power, adopted this time-worn compromise between the ideal and the actual. But the Sui codification of the laws and ordinances had effects that were to be felt down the centuries which followed.

Early in the first year of the dynasty an imperial order was given to a commission of ranking officials, jurists and ritualists to revise existing laws and fix a new code. Their report was presented to the throne, and in the tenth month of that year, the New Code (*Hsin-lü*) in 1,735 articles was duly promulgated. This Code ameliorated many of the most severe punishments of earlier codes – for example, exposure of the severed

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head of the criminal, dismemberment of the body, and use of the whip. The imperial edict of promulgation closed on a lofty and hopeful note: 'The unusually severe penalties established on the basis of the Miscellaneous Regulations are to be eliminated entirely. Preliminary to publishing laws and ordinances, it is Our wish that men should have no disposition to trespass and that, the state having regular punishments, they be administered in accordance with the lofty principle of no animus. Perhaps the time is not far distant when, though they have been promulgated, they are not used. Let the ten thousand regions and the myriad princes know these Our intentions.'[83]

Two years later the emperor ordered that the Code be drastically simplified, and members of the same commission reduced the laws to 500 articles. This was the K'ai-huang Code. The most learned and influential figure on the commission was P'ei Cheng, who had served in judicial offices under the Liang in the south and, after his capture in the sack of Chiang-ling, under the Northern Chou. In Balazs's view, his broad knowledge and experience were vital in making the K'ai-huang Code a workable synthesis of northern and southern legal traditions: basic structure from the Northern Ch'i Code, elements from the Codes of the Wei and the Chin, the Southern Ch'i and – most importantly – the Liang.[84] It was thus, in its new and simplified form and in its derivation, well suited to become the legal basis for a reunified China.

The K'ai-huang Code retained four main types of punishment: (1) the death penalty; (2) deportation, usually with a term of forced labour (sometimes specified as military service on the frontier); (3) a term of forced labour without deportation; and (4) the bastinado. For all officials the Code provided a scale of commutation of these penalties into fines calculated formally in pounds of copper. Officials also could have their salaries used to pay the fine or could commute the sentence into an official demotion. A most drastic penalty for an official was to have his name struck from the official rolls and his status reduced to that of a commoner subject to normal taxes and corvée duty. The Code thus preserved the ancient distinction – going back at least to the *Chou-li* (systematized in Han times) – in legal treatment of officialdom and plebs.

Emperor Wen, characteristically, was not satisfied with merely promulgating the New Code. In 586 he summoned ranking provincial officials to the capital, where they were examined on whether they understood the provisions of the New Code or not. For local administrators had the judicial as well as the executive power in their areas, and routine trial and

[83] *SS* 25, pp. 711–12; E. Balazs, *Le Traité juridique du 'Souei-chou'* (Leiden, 1954), p. 77.
[84] Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, p. 149.

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punishment were part of their regular duties. This autonomy did not extend to certain categories of serious crime specified in the Code. These fall under the jurisdiction of the Censorate (Yü-shih t'ai) whose chief was charged not only with the investigation and prosecution of very serious crimes but also with the general supervision of all officials in the empire.[85] The Supreme Court of Justice (Ta-li ssu), including both high officials and legal experts, considered the written evidence regarding a serious crime, determined the character of the crime and recommended the final sentence, which was pronounced by the emperor. It is probable that the Supreme Court was primarily a court of appeal or referral while the Board of Justice of the Department of State Affairs gave judgments in many cases where the law was clear.

For all the speed of codification and the instruction of officials on how to apply the Code, bureaucrats remained attached to their old and frequently corrupt ways. Emperor Wen-ti tried many expedients. In a rage at malfeasance, he abolished all the posts of legal specialists at the provincial and capital levels. Again and again he tried exhortation and procedural legislation. He also tried his own type of retributive justice against robbers in the capital, ordering that anyone committing robbery of articles valued at one cash or more should be subject to public execution. He executed officials for minor derelictions, other officials for failing to denounce a crime, still others for accepting minor gifts. Quite characteristically he personally reviewed the status of all prisoners each quarter, and before the autumn equinox (the time for executions) reviewed all the provincial reports on pending criminal cases. The K'ai-huang Code, despite its simplification and amelioration of earlier laws, failed to compel automatic compliance among officialdom, much less to constrain the vagaries of the supreme autocrat. Indeed the whole enforcement process was constantly abused. The *Sui shu*, referring to two sycophantic officials of the Supreme Court of Justice, says, 'If the Emperor was displeased with someone, they manipulated the procedure so that he was severely condemned.' They also knew how to please Yang Su, the *éminence grise* of the Sui court. One of them, each time he met Yang Su in the street, 'announced to him the names of those who had been given light or heavy punishments according to Yang Su's wishes. Among those who were approaching their end and being taken to the market for execution, there was none who did not cry out against injustice, and, weeping, call upon heaven as his witness.'[86]

The K'ai-huang Code exists only in fragments, but enough is known

[85] Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, p. 25.
[86] *SS* 25, p. 716; Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, p. 89.

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of its contents to show that it was a remarkable synthesis of the legal traditions of the age of disunity, and that it was the direct model for the T'ang Code and through it for all the subsequent legal Codes of imperial China. Wang Fu-chih, writing in the seventeenth century, made an extraordinary comment on the Sui Code: 'The law of today in its broad outlines was all established by P'ei Cheng of the Sui. Cheng's contributions are indeed far back in time. For a period of a thousand years, though we were not without tyrannical rulers and harsh officials, still they were not able to work at will their foul oppressions. The reason was that the law had been established.'[87]

Of equal importance for the governance of the realm was the body of codified Statutes (*Ling*), promulgated probably in the seventh moon of 582. This included provisions relating to officialdom, bureaucratic procedure, the rules on land, tax levies and many other subjects of concern in day to day administration. Although the K'ai-huang Statutes have disappeared, substantial quotations survive in other works. Again, in scope, length and topical divisions, this compilation appears to be ancestral to the first set of T'ang codified statutes, issued in 624. The K'ai-huang Statutes, like all such compilations, were subject to additions and amendments as the emperor decreed. We have referred to their specific provisions in discussion of the administration of the equal fields system, the tax system and the military establishment.

Although the emperor Yang ordered the compilation of a law Code and Statutes for his reign, which were promulgated in 607, these seem to have followed closely the K'ai-huang models, and indeed the principal compiler had also been prominent in the earlier codifications. Emperor Yang is credited, however, with a general reduction of penalties in two hundred out of the five hundred articles of the Code. This amelioration of sanctions was, we are told, reversed as the dynasty had to deal with the crises accompanying its unsuccessful campaigns against Koguryŏ.[88]

Frontier defence and territorial expansion

An eighth century chronicler lists the arenas in which Sui military power prevailed over its enemies: in the south, the conquest of the Ch'en empire; in the north, successful strikes against the T'u-chüeh (Turks); in the west, the conquest of the T'u-yü-hun; in the far south, the seizure of Champa (see page 109); in the east, the conquest of Liu-ch'iu

[87] Wang Fu-chih, *Tu T'ung-chien lun*, 19, p. 2a, in *Ch'uan-shan ch'üan-chi* (Taipei reprint, 1965), vol. 10, p. 7991.

[88] *SS* 25, p. 717; Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, pp. 92–3.

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(see pages 138–9).[89] He might have added relentless pressure on the aborigines of the south and south-west and the final effort to force Koguryŏ into submission – the one military operation that failed catastrophically. The only one of these which does not represent the assertion of Chinese power beyond China proper is the conquest of Ch'en which we shall consider separately. The other major arenas in which Sui military power was deployed were places and peoples over whom the policy makers, from early times, had considered Chinese control vital for the empire's security, and which had at times of great dynastic power been under Chinese control. Geography dictated many of these areas of concern, but history too was a powerful influence. Here, as in so many other policies, the Sui attempted to re-enact the triumphs of the long-dead Han and to reassert Chinese centrality and omnipotence in eastern Asia. The Sui succeeded remarkably well with this reassertion of regional power on the Han model. They had striking military successes on many fronts, and they revived and developed the tributary system, which should be viewed as a flexible set of policies and stratagems for the ordering of China's relations with its diverse neighbours. Let us consider how the Sui dealt with some of the more critical areas and peoples on China's periphery.

When the future Wen-ti was still an official of the Northern Chou, the T'u-chüeh to the north loomed as a serious threat. They had emerged out of the kaleidoscopic pattern of tribal warfare in the steppe-land and by the 550s had attained loose but formidable control of a vast area stretching from the Liao River in Manchuria across to the borders of Persia. They grew strong and rich from successful raids on agricultural peoples and from their control of the silk routes between China and the West. Politically they were divided into two qaghanates, an eastern and a western, with the western subordinate to the eastern. The eastern qaghanate had its centre in the Orkhon region of what is now Outer Mongolia, and the western had its summer and winter encampments at seasonally favourable sites in Western Turkestan.

The western qaghanate increased its power and wealth by a series of complex moves involving the Ephthalites, Byzantium and Sassanid Persia, while the eastern looked down upon a divided north China which it could manipulate to its advantage. The Northern Chou emperor humbly asked for a daughter of the eastern qaghan, and was granted this favour in 565; each year the Chou gave to the T'u-chüeh a hundred thousand pieces of silk, and Turkish residents at Ch'ang-an were lavishly fêted and carefully courted. The Northern Ch'i state in the east nervously poured

[89] Li Fan, *Yeh-hou chia-chuan*, quoted in Ts'en Chung-mien, *Fu-ping chih-tu yen-chiu*, p. 43.

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out treasure for fear the T'u-chüeh would side with its enemy, the Northern Chou. From his tents in the Orkhon, the T'u-chüeh ruler could contemplate the Chinese world with some complacency. He is alleged to have said to his entourage on several occasions, 'My two children to the south (the emperors of the Northern Chou and Northern Ch'i) are always filial and obedient, so why should I fear poverty?'[90] In 582, after a large-scale T'u-chüeh raid into parts of the modern Shensi and Kansu, Wen-ti, in his usual trenchant manner, analysed the situation:

In days gone by the Wei's course declined, and disasters came thick and fast. The Chou and Ch'i contended and divided the land of China. The T'u-chüeh caitiffs trafficked equally with the two states. The Chou looked anxiously eastward, fearing that the Ch'i would get on better terms with the T'u-chüeh, while the Ch'i looked anxiously westward, fearing that the Chou would get on more intimate terms with them. This is what is called: the caitiffs' opinion tipping this way or that, and the country as a consequence having peace or war.[91]

If the power of this great Turkish empire had continued to dominate the northern marches and all of central Asia, the Sui could not have reasserted Chinese power in those areas and might well have had to take a defensive position such as that later taken by the Sung in the face of the Khitan. But fortune favoured the Sui. The qaghanate of the Western Turks fell to an impulsive and quarrelsome man called Tardu, and sometime between 582 and 584, he pre-empted the title of qaghan (Great Khan, in Chinese, K'o-han), previously reserved for the ruler of the Eastern Turks. Thereafter the two Turkish empires were no longer united and were often at war. More than this, the Eastern empire, with the contested accession of a new qaghan in 582, offered the sort of opportunity Chinese statesmen were long accustomed to exploit. They backed sometimes a qaghan, sometimes an anti-qaghan so that the political unity of the Eastern Turks was destroyed. At the same time, they saw to it that the Eastern empire did not so far disintegrate as to make possible the forcible reunification of the two empires by Tardu. This, Tardu attempted to do when in 601 he threatened the Sui capital and in 602 attacked the Chinese puppet qaghan in the Ordos region. But suddenly, while he was far from his base, his empire was riven by a revolt of one of its principal tribal components: the Tölös. We may suppose that the agents of the Chinese had done their work well; Tardu disappeared from the scene in 603. His grandson was able to assert power over only the extreme western portion of his empire. For the rest of the Sui the Chinese had to deal mainly with the qaghans of the Eastern Turks. Grousset sums up the Sui success: 'In Mongolia as in Western Turkestan, the Sui had, without major

[90] *SS* 84, p. 1865. [91] *SS* 84, p. 1866.

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military action but solely by traditional intrigue, broken Turkish power, eliminating all recalcitrant qaghans and bringing to power only those qaghans resigned to their suzerainty.'[92]

Nevertheless, despite the Sui's early successes, the T'u-chüeh remained the principal nomadic power on the north and north-west frontiers. We shall discuss Yang-ti's handling of this problem later in this chapter.

Vietnam

In Han times Chiao-chou, the modern Hanoi–Haiphong area, had been a bustling port and an outpost of Chinese culture in the far south. But in the sixth century, the weak dynasties at Chien-k'ang no longer controlled the area, and a local satrap of mixed Annamese–Chinese stock set up his own dynasty. Wen-ti appointed the tough and experienced general Liu Fang to retake Chiao-chou, and the last ruler of the local dynasty surrendered in 602. The Kingdom of Champa (Lin-i) stretched along the coastal lands of what has in more recent times been called Annam. Its capital was south of the modern Danang. It too had discontinued any tribute relations with the enfeebled Ch'en state at Chien-k'ang, but its king, Çambhuvarman, prudently sent tribute to the Sui in 595. But unfortunately for him, there was a myth, fostered by a successful Chinese raid in the fifth century, that Champa was a kind of El Dorado where fabulous riches were to be had for the taking. Wen-ti's well-known avarice overcame his accustomed caution, and he authorized an attack on Champa by Liu Fang with experienced officers, a land force and a naval squadron. Cambhuvarman deployed war elephants, but the Chinese force broke through to the capital, and managed to get away with the golden ancestral tablets of the royal house. On the route back to China, the invading force was hit by an epidemic which carried off large numbers of the officers and men, including Liu Fang. The Sui effort to administer parts of Champa directly was shortlived, Çambhuvarman reasserted his power, sent an embassy to the Sui to 'acknowledge his fault', and thereafter, we are told, 'the tribute missions were uninterrupted'.[93] But the whole effort south of Chiao-chou was a costly failure, and all the Chinese remnants had to show were the stolen ancestral tablets, some cases of Buddhist scriptures, and a troupe of captured musicians.[94]

[92] René Grousset, *L'Empire des steppes* (Paris, 1948), p. 135; see also the translation by Naomi Walford, *The empire of the steppes* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1970), p. 89.
[93] *SS* 82, p. 1833.
[94] Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume de Champa* (Paris and Brussels, 1928), pp. 82–5.

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The conquest of the Ch'en and the consolidation of Sui power in the south

Earlier in this chapter I described the reduced territory and the enfeebled state of the Ch'en regime at Chien-k'ang. Wen-ti fell heir to the greatly expanded territories of the Northern Chou, so that from 581 onwards the dynasty at Chien-k'ang – outflanked by the loss of Szechwan and stripped of all territory to the north of the Yangtze – could hope for little more than a postponement of its inevitable fate. For six or seven years Yang Chien was preoccupied with the threat of the Eastern Turks (see above) and by problems of reform and the consolidation of power. But he had been on the throne barely a month when he appointed two of his most successful and most feared generals to governorships along the lower Yangtze frontier with the Ch'en, where they are said to have begun preparations for the eventual attack. Yang Su was later appointed governor in the area of the Yangtze on the Hupeh–Szechwan border and began the building of a fleet to take part in the campaign. Meanwhile the granary system was being put into operation, and work on the first section of the canal system had begun. In 587 Wen-ti extinguished the puppet state of Later Liang and took direct control of the central Yangtze area. During this period he entertained a number of proposals from his ministers as how best to conquer the Ch'en. Although Wen-ti appears to have listened attentively to all of them, it was the scheme of an old school friend, Ts'ui Chung-fang, which was finally adopted.

One suspects that this plan appealed to Yang Chien because it was very carefully detailed and provided for many contingencies. In 588 the emperor sent an imperially sealed letter to the Ch'en ruler listing the twenty crimes of an oppressive ruler which made it not a crime but a heaven-imposed obligation to relieve him of his territory. At the same time Wen-ti issued an edict justifying the coming attack on moral and political grounds. In it he accused the Ch'en regime of bad faith, wastefulness, licentiousness, oppression of the people, execution of upright remonstrators and other crimes and took note of the unnatural occurrences which gave clear signs of the withdrawal of heaven's favour. He had 300,000 copies of this edict made and distributed throughout the south in the hope of softening up resistance. This may well be an early use of the 'pamphlet' in psychological warfare.

Early in 589 the campaign began. Everything proceeded according to the elaborate plan which had been so long in preparation. From Szechwan to the sea well-equipped forces struck the Ch'en. The most dramatic moment was the struggle in the Yangtze gorges between the fleet com-

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manded by Yang Su and the defending Ch'en fleet. Yang Su, in command of a flotilla of several thousand vessels called 'Yellow Dragons', stole by the Ch'en fleet in the night, and when dawn came the Ch'en fleet was surprised by land forces attacking from both the north and the south bank and was utterly defeated. Further downstream the Ch'en general put chains across the river in the hope of destroying the Sui fleet. But Yang Su and another Sui general took to the land and destroyed the stockades that guarded the chains' moorings. In a final engagement four of Yang Su's large ramming ships known as 'Five Toothed' and manned by Szechwan aborigines destroyed the Ch'en defensive fleet. Yang Su sailed on to Wu-han where he joined forces with a large army commanded by Chün, Prince of Ch'in, which had descended the Han River valley from Hsiang-yang. Smaller forces crossed the Yangtze to the south and to the east of Chien-k'ang and moved on the capital. The main army, under Kuang, Prince of Chin, and Kao Chiung, moved east from Shou-yang, just south of the Huai River, and crossed the Yangtze east of Chien-k'ang. The Ch'en armies strongly defended the approaches to their capital, but they lacked a unified strategy, and their supreme commander, the Ch'en ruler, continued to behave – if we can believe the sources – with remarkable silliness. There was some fighting in defence of the north gate of the capital, but the main south gate was opened to the Sui forces by the Ch'en general who said to his troops, 'Your elders have already given up; what is the use of fighting?'[95] While many of the Ch'en grandees received the victors with appropriate dignity, the ruler and his two favourite concubines were found in a dry well. They were ignominiously hauled out, and the Ch'en ruler was eventually taken to the Sui capital where he lived until his death in 604.

With the capture of the Ch'en ruler, his local governors all along the Yangtze were surrendering to the Sui forces. Only the coastal provinces east and south of Chien-k'ang held out, and these were finally subdued by Sui water-borne forces which had come down the coast from a port near the modern Tung-hai to land near the site of modern Shanghai. The pacification of the far south meant dealing with groups of aboriginal tribes and scattered Chinese settlements. In one case, the Prince of Chin ordered the captive Ch'en ruler to write to one of the tribal leaders, saying that the Ch'en was extinguished and the chief should give allegiance to the Sui. In the end all the southern tribal chiefs made their submission, and were duly recognized and rewarded. The Sui had taken over a total of thirty prefectures, one hundred commanderies and four hundred counties – the whole of eastern China south of the Yangtze. An edict

[95] *TCTC* 177, p. 5508.

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ordered the destruction of the entire city of Chien-k'ang – the capital of southern dynasties for 282 years; its walls, palaces, temples and houses were to be destroyed and the land returned to agriculture. The Ch'en ruler, his sons, nobility and high officials were all taken to the Sui capital. There, the ranking Ch'en nobles and their prized possessions were first presented to the Sui ancestors in the imperial ancestral hall. A few days later the Ch'en ruler and two hundred nobles and ministers were brought before the great gate of the palace city. Wen-ti looked down from the gate tower above. After preliminaries an official of his palace secretariat proclaimed an edict which accused the Ch'en ruler and officials of failing to help each other, thus bringing their state to ruin. 'They prostrated themselves on the ground in shame and...could not reply.'[96] This having been done, the Sui emperor forgave them. The final ceremony was the grand feast given by the emperor to his victorious army. On this occasion he gave out rewards to all, a total of thirty million lengths of cloth!

The leniency towards the Ch'en elite was part of the Sui strategy aimed at the gradual amelioration of southern hostility. Some Ch'en officials at central government level were taken into the Sui system, the Ch'en ruler was shown great consideration and his sons were given grants of land in various locations in the northern border areas. More directly affecting the general populace was a Sui remission of taxes in the old Ch'en areas for ten years. One wonders how much Sui officials could have collected anyway. The old Ch'en administrative units were in most cases replaced by Sui prefectures and counties, and Ch'en officials by Sui appointees. In Ts'en Chung-mien's exhaustive study of prefectural officials under the Sui, I could find no case of a former Ch'en prefect being reappointed by the Sui. In that study I noted thirty cases of the renaming or establishment of a prefecture by the Sui in the years 589 and 590 (the total number of prefectures in the Ch'en domain had been forty-two); where anything is known of the prefects, they were all northerners.[97] If we also recall the cultural differences which had developed during the period of disunion and the linguistic differences (which even made conversation between Wen-ti and the captured Ch'en ruler impossible), we see that conflict between the victors and the vanquished was almost inevitable. Two things provided the spark. One was a minor punishment devised by Su Wei for those whose behaviour deviated from the Confucian norms; this was to memorize the 'Five Teachings' (*Wu chiao*) which I take to be a moral catechism on the proper gradations of respect to be shown to one's betters. The second was the rumour that the Sui were planning to trans-

[96] *TCTC* 177, p. 5516.
[97] Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui-shu ch'iu-shih* (Peking, 1958), pp. 134–332.

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port all the people of Ch'en to the north-west. Revolts broke out in many places, Sui officials were attacked; some were dismembered and eaten, others were disembowelled; the natives are supposed to have said to their victims: 'This will make you more able to memorize the Five Teachings!'[98] The revolts ranged in size from a few thousand to several tens of thousands, and disorder fed on disorder.

Once again the ruthless Yang Su was called into service. After many bitter battles in difficult terrain Yang Su managed to subdue the rebels in the lower Yangtze valley and the south-eastern coastal region. P'ei Chü (of whom more later in this chapter) was successful against the rebel tribal groups in the far south. Yang-chou was given special status as 'Yangtze capital' (Chiang-tu), and Kuang, Prince of Chin, was made governor of Yang-chou with military responsibility for the whole south-east. For nearly a decade Yang Kuang was virtually viceroy of the south-east, and was undoubtedly responsible for the measures of consolidation which were taken. About many of these measures we know little or nothing, but for his policies towards southern Buddhism there is considerable material.

The ruined city of Chien-k'ang had been the centre, for centuries, of a royal and aristocratic Buddhism. Even after its sack by the Hou Ching rebels, many great Buddhist establishments had been rebuilt within the city, and in the Ch'en realm as a whole, 1,232 temples are said to have been built during the thirty-four-year life of the dynasty. Now, the munificent donors – royal, aristocratic and official – had been taken off to the north, monasteries and temples had been destroyed, and the numerous clergy in Chien-k'ang and in the provinces were in dire straits. But, as we noted in the section devoted to ideology, the Sui sought to use Buddhism to break down regional and cultural barriers. As early as 590 a Sui edict ordered the re-ordination of southern clergy. An aged Master of the Discipline (Vinaya) who had mobilized the clergy for military transport duties under the Ch'en, began to 'purify' the clergy, i.e. to root out those with known anti-Sui or rebellious sentiments as well as those who were lax in their religious duties. In 592 the founder of the T'ien-t'ai school, Chih-i (who had preached at the Ch'en court), wrote to the Prince of Chin protesting against the destruction or secularization of temples in Chien-k'ang. Chih-i received a mollifying reply, but the patrons who had supported many of these temples had gone, and there is evidence that the Sui put many southern Buddhist temples to official use.

Gradually, however, the Prince of Chin emerged as a pious and considerate patron of the southern clergy and southern establishments. He

[98] *TCTC* 177, p. 5530.

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ordered his troops to collect the sacred books which were scattered in the invasion and by the civil war which followed; a special building was erected in the compound of the vice-regal residence at Yang-chou to house a choice collection; the rest – augmented by hand copies to the number of 903,580 rolls – were distributed to deserving temples in Yang-chou and elsewhere. He established at Yang-chou four religious centres (*tao-ch'ang*) to which he summoned learned clerics, both Buddhist and Taoist, to serve for a time as monks in the vice-regal household. He continued, after the death of Chih-i, his role as regular patron of the principal temple of the T'ien-t'ai school. Perhaps of greatest importance was the building programme at Yang-chou which began to give it some of the colour and the glory it was to have in later times, but meanwhile gave it some of the opulence and magnetism as a cultural centre that Chien-k'ang had long possessed. Gradually, with the coming and going of clergy, with the special favour shown to southern Buddhists, and with official patronage of the faith, anti-Sui sentiment lessened, and finally dwindled to almost nothing.[99]

The beginning of an empire-wide communication system

Although the second Sui emperor is usually associated with canal building, it was his father, Wen-ti, who began construction of the network. In 584, when he had barely occupied his new capital, he ordered Yü-wen K'ai to design a canal from the capital eastward to the vital T'ung-kuan Pass, near the confluence of the Wei River and the Huang-ho.[100] The building of this canal, known as the Kuang-t'ung ch'ü ('Canal for expanded communication'), was made necessary by two pressures. One was that the capital region was a food-deficit area (and was to become more so as the population increased), and grain had to be shipped in regularly from the fertile plain to the east. Secondly the Wei River, which flowed eastward just north of the capital and joined the Huang-ho near its great bend, was subject to silting and was seasonally shallow. The new canal provided a more reliable waterway. The emperor's edict, like that proclaiming the plan for a new capital, promised that the fatigue of the corvée labourers in the short run would be more than rewarded by the great convenience of the new canal which he promised would be available for private, as well as official, transport. He also expressed the hope that the resources of Tai-pei (the modern Shansi province) could be sent by water

[99] Tsukamoto Zenryū, 'Zui no kōnan seifuku to Bukkyō', *Bukkyō bunka kenkyū*, 3 (1953) 1–24.
[100] Chang K'un-ho, 'Sui yün-ho k'ao', *Yü-kung*, 7 (1937) 201–11; Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, pp. 159–61.

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down the Fen River, then down the upper course of the Huang-ho, and finally by canal to the capital. The Kuang-t'ung Canal was rapidly completed, probably because it followed, for the most part, the route of a Han dynasty canal that had been built for the same purpose seven hundred years before. When the canal, which was a little under a hundred miles in length, was completed in 589, the emperor went out from the capital to inspect the work, and gave suitable rewards of silk to the supervisors of corvée labour. At the eastern end of the canal a granary of the same name was built which served as a major grain storage place whence supplies could be sent on to the capital area or to other regions when there was a crop failure.

This was the beginning of Sui canal building; it was the second emperor who moved from the building of regionally important canals to the creation of an empire-wide system of water transport. We shall discuss this on pages 134–8.

YANG-TI (REIGN 604–17): PERSONALITY AND LIFE STYLE

Yang Kuang, known to history as Yang-ti, was born in 569, the second son of Yang Chien and his non-Chinese wife. The first twelve years of the young man's life were, we may suppose, devoted to the pursuits common to his class and time: the rudiments of Chinese, regular Buddhist observances (he and his brothers had Buddhist childhood names, one aspired to become a monk), training in horsemanship and the arts of warfare and the chase. His biography says that he was studious and gifted in literary composition. It also tells us that he was deeply serious and of dignified bearing. His father's usurpation altered completely the life of Yang Kuang and his four brothers. From their comfortable, perhaps humdrum childhood as sons of a ranking official, they were catapulted into the life of a sixth century court. They became imperial princes, were given fiefs and high-sounding titles, but they also became pawns in the insidious intrigues around the centre of power, where officials, palace favourites, soothsayers, monks and charlatans jockeyed for advantage. As we have seen earlier, Yang Kuang's parents were uneasy and fearful in their sudden eminence – attained, as they knew, by usurpation, violent warfare and wholesale murder. Their suspicions were easily aroused and played upon. The empress was puritanical and insanely jealous, and she meddled constantly in the lives of her sons, censuring the slightest deviation from her strict standards. The emperor had an obsessive fear that one of his sons, as he grew to manhood, would emerge as the centre of a clique or cabal bent on replacing him. Of the five sons, Yang Kuang was the only one who

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consistently escaped the hostility of both parents. We shall see that this was not wholly accidental.

Yang Kuang's first official post was as nominal head of a newly established inspectorate in the north of the North China Plain. He was then only thirteen and the emperor sent with him seasoned civil and military chiefs of staff to assist him – men who also had, and used, the authority to discipline their young charge. About the same time the emperor – perhaps as a stratagem in his unification plans – sought a bride for his second son in the kingdom of Later Liang which was in effect a satellite of the Sui on the central Yangtze. Oracles were taken, and they pointed to a daughter of the former ruling house, a girl descended from the emperors of the older Liang dynasty at Chien-k'ang. The young lady had been well brought up; she was fond of study, highly intelligent and had literary abilities. Yang Kuang loved and respected her. As empress Hsiao, she was his consort and confidante throughout his life. It may well be that she introduced him to southern ways and encouraged his fondness for the south that grew to be almost obsessive.[101]

We have discussed already the Sui conquest of the Ch'en which occurred in 589. Yang Kuang was nominally the commander in chief of the expeditionary force, but the planning of the complex military and naval operation was largely the work of Kao Chiung and other seasoned officers. Kao Chiung is said to have refused Kuang the favourite concubine of the captured Ch'en ruler, and we are told that this was how Kuang's hatred of his father's chief counsellor began. On the other hand, Kuang's behaviour in the conquered capital is said to have been exemplary: he publicly executed some notoriously oppressive officials of the conquered Ch'en and sealed up the state storehouses so that nothing was stolen. He was richly rewarded for his part in the conquest and returned briefly to a northern post. When serious disorders broke out in the old Ch'en domains, Yang Kuang was assigned to replace his brother as viceroy of the south-east with headquarters at Chiang-tu (the modern Yangchow). The next nine years were spent in this post, with only one trip each year to report to his father in the capital and one brief period in 600 as commander of an army sent against the Turks.

His tasks in the south were many and complex: to reduce southern hatred and suspicion, to introduce rational administration in the wake of military occupation, to break down the many political and cultural barriers that prevented southerners from becoming loyal subjects of the Sui. The measures he took to these ends complemented the general orders con-

[101] *SS* 36, pp. 1111–13; A. F. Wright, 'Sui Yang-ti: personality and stereotype', in A. F. Wright, ed. *The Confucian persuasion* (Stanford, 1960), pp. 49–56.

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cerning the conquered south which emanated from the imperial capital, for example, the order of 589 remitting all taxes in the former Ch'en domain for ten years, and the order of 598 restricting the size of boats that could be built in the south to about thirty feet so as to prevent water-borne dissidence. Yang Kuang concentrated on what might be called a cultural strategy meant to persuade southerners that their new rulers were not barbarians but civilized men sharing and appreciating the same heritage. In this strategy his personal cultivation was an asset; so no doubt were his increasing fluency in the principal southern dialect (Wu) and his high-born southern wife.

He moved into his post after widespread armed revolt against the Sui conquerors had been put down with great savagery by Yang Su, and anti-Sui feeling was running high. The Ch'en dynasty and aristocracy had long been generous patrons of Buddhism, and now the monks – many of whom had taken up arms in the anti-Sui uprisings – found themselves without patrons, eking out an existence in the ruined and half-empty temples at Chien-k'ang and elsewhere. Yang Kuang set about immediately to build a capital to replace Chien-k'ang which for nearly three centuries had been the cultural and political hub of the south. It was from this new capital, Chiang-tu, that he issued orders for the collection and re-copying of Buddhist scriptures scattered in the war and subsequent civil disorder. There he built Buddhist temples and a library to house the holy books. And to his capital he summoned eminent southern monks to live in his temples and carry on religious and scholarly work. Perhaps the most noted among them was Chih-i, founder of the T'ien-t'ai school, who had long enjoyed the patronage of the Ch'en imperial house.

In Chiang-tu, late in the year 591, Yang Kuang gave a lavish vegetarian feast for a thousand southern monks. After the banquet the young prince knelt to receive from Chih-i the 'Bodhisattva vows' for lay Buddhists and the religious sobriquet of *tsung-ch'ih p'u-sa*, 'Bodhisattva of absolute control'. After Chih-i's return to his monastery at Mount T'ien-t'ai, Yang Kuang continued his patronage of the community there and corre-sponded regularly with the great prelate. Chih-i sent on to his patron petitions from southern clerics: one that begged him to stop the razing of Buddhist temples in the former Ch'en capital, to which Yang Kuang replied ambiguously; one which requested that two local temples con-taining the holy remains of saintly monks be spared from noisy post-house traffic – a request that was granted; one a report by Chih-i himself on Sui officials' dispersing – presumably on 'security' grounds – a gathering of a thousand monks who had come to hear him speak. When

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Chih-i sent him a Bodhisattva chaplet, the prince wrote in his letter of thanks:

The chaplet seems in its conception to be the work of a divine will, and its design comparable to something made by Maudgālyayāna (Buddha's disciple famed for his supernatural powers).... This chaplet does honour to its wearer. With formal solemnity I knelt and had it fitted to my head. As I looked in a hand mirror and walked back and forth, it seemed to flatter my homely face; adding grace, it altered my appearance.[102]

In his considerable exchange of letters with Chih-i we see something of Yang Kuang's character at this time: a wide acquaintance with Buddhist scriptures and what appears to be genuine religious feeling; strong political instincts – the skilled mixture of flattery, cajolery and patronage to win over the leading southern monks – a mixture also likely to please his pious parents.

Yang Kuang's cultural strategy in the south was by no means limited to Buddhism. Although this was by far the most influential tradition he invoked, he also built at his capital two Taoist monasteries to which he invited learned southern adepts. He issued invitations to noted Confucian scholars, who had formerly served the Ch'en, to come to his capital to teach and write under his patronage, and one of them compiled a huge collection of ritual texts in 120 rolls under the prince's patronage. In addition to 'representatives' of the two religions and of Confucianism, Yang Kuang assembled more than a hundred noted literary men of the south. It is obvious that this was not only a shrewd further move to allay anti-Sui sentiment among the southern elite, but something very close to his own heart. He enjoyed literary companionship, and perhaps his favourite among these men was Liu Pien, sometime official of the Later Liang. Liu polished the young prince's prose and influenced him to move away from Yü Hsin (513–81) as a literary model. Liu was a much-favoured drinking companion, and his talk was said to have been slanderous and hilarious. This relationship – which lasted the rest of his life – may also be viewed as part of Yang Kuang's conversion to southern culture.

Although there is no comprehensive account of Sui administration of the south, the absence of further rebellions and his long tenure at Chiang-tu suggest that it was a considerable success, and that the credit for many measures of cultural reunification should be his.

When, in the year 600, he was about to return to his Yangtze capital after a visit to the court, Yang Kuang paid a farewell visit to his mother the empress. He found her in a towering rage about the behaviour of her

[102] *Kuo-ch'ing pai-lu*, ch. 2, in *TD* 46, p. 807b.

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eldest son, Yung, the heir apparent; his principal consort had died with mysterious suddenness in 591, and he continued to be infatuated with his favourite concubine by whom he had four sons. His mother had set people spying on him, and their reports further outraged her puritanical and monogamous sentiments. The *Sui shu* tells us that Yang Kuang saw in this growing estrangement his chance and that he returned to Chiang-tu to plot with his intimates for his brother's downfall. Such plotting meant secrecy and subterfuge; it involved great risks and also the chance of great rewards both for the principal and his confederates. One of the more blunt-spoken of the men who joined Yang Kuang's group said, in effect, 'what have we got to lose? If the plot succeeds, you become heir apparent; if not we can always fall back on the Huai valley and the sea-coast and return to the old pattern of a southern dynasty like the Liang and Ch'en.'[103]

It is impossible to know what credence to give the account of what followed, but it is plain that the wily and ruthless Yang Su was a principal conspirator. Sufficient 'evidence' was eventually concocted to mislead the ever-suspicious emperor, and he finally proclaimed the edict deposing Yung as heir apparent to an assemblage of ranking officials and imperial kinsmen gathered in one of the palace halls. Yang Kuang, who, it is said, had carefully engineered his 'image' with his ageing parents as a hard-working, pious, loyal and monogamous young man – easier to manage at a considerable distance from their capital – now won the coveted prize. In the eleventh month of the year 600 he was proclaimed heir apparent and shortly thereafter moved his household to the imperial capital.

By this time his father was completing the fifty-ninth year of his life – a particularly solemn anniversary in China where the sexagenary cycle was the most usual measure of time – and he was preparing the empire-wide enshrinement of holy Buddhist relics on the model of the great emperor Aśoka of Mauryas, which was carried out simultaneously in thirty prefectural capitals on his birthday in the sixth month of 601. The newly elevated heir apparent showed himself to be appropriately pious and in 601 built a spacious temple in the south-eastern sector of the city; to it he invited learned monks – one third of them from his own temple at Chiang-tu and all but three from the Huai and Yangtze valleys.[104] He thus contributed to the introduction to the north of southern traditions of Buddhism. When his mother died in 602, the eminent monks from the prince's temple figured largely in the funerary observances.

After the empress's death, the emperor gradually handed over the

[103] *SS* 61, p. 1470.
[104] Yamazaki Hiroshi, 'Yōtei no shidōchō', *TYGH*, 34 (1952) 22–35.

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management of state affairs to the heir apparent. When he spent the summer at the Jen-shou palace, a hundred miles or so north-west of the capital, he left everything to Yang Kuang. In 603, the emperor was persuaded by alleged evidence of black magic to degrade his fourth son; the evidence was so presented as also to raise suspicions about the loyalty of the fifth son, Liang, Prince of Han. In the summer of 604, the emperor fell ill. There is textual evidence that the heir apparent and his confederates, Yang Su and Chang Heng, hastened Wen-ti's end, and that they intercepted his death-bed message reinstating Yung as heir apparent. There are grounds for doubting some of these texts, but although much of the evidence is tendentious, it seems possible that Yang Kuang or one of his confederates hastened his father's death. Eight days later Yang Kuang ascended the throne as the second emperor of the Sui. His youngest brother Liang, Prince of Han, rose in revolt in the east, and advisers urged him to carve out a hegemony for himself in the rich North China Plain – the former territory of the Northern Ch'i. But he was indecisive, and proved no match for Yang Su, who crushed his armies and took him prisoner. The new emperor graciously did not impose the death penalty but Liang shortly afterwards 'died in prison'.

Characterization of the man known to history as Sui Yang-ti is exceedingly difficult, and one cannot hope for more than glimpses of the human reality behind the mass of doctored history and mythology that has gathered around him as a classic 'bad-last' emperor. The historical texts contrast his father's prudence with Yang-ti's profligacy, but – as we shall see in the sections on building the eastern capital and on the completion of the canal system – the starkness of the contrast is overdrawn. The image of Yang-ti in popular literature paints him as licentious – as indulging his lusts in fantastic ways. But then one finds that even the hostile historians do not disguise the fact that his principal consort, a sensitive and educated woman, was never put aside for some palace favourite, but was honoured and, apparently, loved until the bitter end. Sui Yang-ti who was, after all, a connoisseur of beautiful things, an accomplished poet and prose stylist, may have been something of a political aesthete who, as a type, has been characterized thus: 'Indeed, self-deception is perhaps the rule, for the political personality with a strong artistic component possesses a florid imagination which dramatizes his personal history and subordinates all reality to ambitious plans.'[105] He did indeed inherit a newly unified and prosperous empire from his hard-working father. And he planned and executed the armed expansion of its territory and of its influence. But these dreams and these expeditions were neither fantastic

[105] Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and politics* (Chicago, 1930), p. 50.

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nor unprecedented. They were rather a filling out of the Han model of a Chinese empire which his father had adopted and Yang-ti sought to complete. It was only the disastrous failure of his last adventure that casts a ghastly light backwards and colours all the chronicles of his reign. Perhaps we can glimpse more of his complex character as we consider his political style and the men who were his ranking officials and close advisers. We should note at the outset that his empress, though obviously in his confidence, did not assume – as his mother had done – an active political role.

If one looks at the tables of the upper officialdom of the Sui – both civil and military – as presented by Yamazaki, Yang-ti's appointments seem very similar to his father's. There was the same inclination, it would seem, to appoint kinsmen, people from their native place and, in general, north-western aristocrats of mixed ancestry. A few of the same men served both father and son in high office. Yü-wen K'ai, for example, was a great engineer. He worked on the planning and construction of the new Sui capital and was continuously engaged in building projects: canals, palaces, tombs, sections of the Great Wall, the mobile audience hall and the vast tent palace with which Yang-ti impressed the Turks. He designed the bridge over the Liao River used in the first campaign against Koguryŏ, and at the time of his death in 612 he was serving as president of the Board of Works. Another faithful minister under both father and son was Niu Hung – an imperturbable north-westerner with a long beard and a speech impediment. He had an extraordinary career. At the beginning of the Sui he had persuaded Wen-ti to embark (as the Han had done so long before) on the systematic collection of the Chinese literary heritage, the books scattered in the upheavals of the centuries of disunion. He recommended getting works from private collections by purchase or by confiscation; the imperial library became in turn the basis of the 'Bibliography' chapter of the *Sui shu*, our prime guide to the literature of the age of disunion. Niu was the chief voice in developing the Sui ritual code and served as president of the Board of Rites for at least three years. Balazs believes he had a major hand in compiling the Sui law Codes.[106] From 599 until his death in 610 he was president of the prestigious Board of Civil Office to which the Sui emperors delegated great powers over the selection, appointment and promotion of officials. During Niu Hung's management of the selection system, the *T'ung-tien* tells us, personal character was favoured over literary ability.[107] We shall see that the powers of this office were somewhat eroded under Yang-ti. The stolid, apparently incorruptible minister and Yang-ti were fast friends. They had exchanged poems when Yang-ti was heir apparent, and Niu is said to have

[106] Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, pp. 162–3.

[107] *TT* 14, p. 81a.

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been invited to feast and drink in the inner palace in the presence of the empress – a mark of special esteem. When he died at the Yangtze capital, the emperor mourned him deeply and had his corpse sent back to Niu's native place far in the west.

We could continue with a portrait gallery of those who served Yang-ti in posts of high rank and prestige, but from about 609 the locus of power, of critical decision making, shifted away from the formal organs of government and the men who staffed them. It was characteristic of Yang-ti to be always on the move. He had three capitals: the principal, Ta-hsing ch'eng in the west, Lo-yang in the southern part of the North China Plain, and Chiang-tu, his beloved 'Yangtze Capital' where he had spent nine years as viceroy of the south. He moved frequently by canal boat between the three capitals, taking a considerable entourage with him. At other times, and often, he travelled north to the Great Wall to inspect defences or negotiate with the T'u-chüeh qaghans; in 608 he proceeded with an impressive entourage to Heng-shan, Ho-pei, one of the five sacred mountains of China, where he performed the imperial sacrifices. In 609 he personally led an expedition out from the Kansu corridor against the T'u-yü-hun. Yang-ti was a restless man; he apparently abhorred routine and enjoyed travel. More significantly, he believed in showing the wealth and power of the dynasty to his subjects and in looking into local conditions himself. In 609 he is reported to have said: 'From ancient times the Sons of Heaven have carried out the ritual of imperial tours of inspection. But the emperors in the south (during the period of disunion) mostly perpetuated womanly ways. They sat in the innermost palaces without ever meeting their people face to face. How would you interpret this?' A courtier present replied, 'This is precisely why their hold on power could not be prolonged.'[108] For Yang-ti, then, the imperial progress was almost a way of life, and he built a number of detached palaces around the country where he might relax for a day or a week in the course of his tours.

This style of life meant that he could not conduct the business of government in the closely scheduled and orderly way so characteristic of his father – a style suited to the functionally-zoned areas of the principal Sui capital. Indeed he is reported to have been advised by one of his courtiers to hold formal audiences only once every five days and to avoid 'imitating Kao-tsu [his father] who wore himself out in toilsome labour'. Yang-ti is said to have agreed with this advice.[109] Whether we accept this account or not, the physical circumstances just noted, his own personality, and the connivance of skilled courtiers combined to make

[108] *TCTC* 180, p. 5644.

[109] *SS* 61, p. 1470.

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him increasingly dependent on a diminishing circle of intimate advisers. This group, of course, ultimately made him their captive, and meanwhile they fed his ego, catered to his prejudices and 'took care of' the independent spirits who sought to offer advice. We must deal with this latter process before we turn to the functioning of the inner group itself.

One case lies somewhat outside this pattern. Yang Su – whom I called the *éminence grise* and the hatchet man of the first Sui reign – was richly rewarded by the second emperor for his part in crushing the revolt of Liang, Prince of Han, the only serious challenge to Yang-ti's accession. Yang Su was given high office and exalted feudal rank and income, but – if we are to believe the texts – he 'knew too much' about the series of plots which got Yang-ti the throne. When, in 606, he fell ill, the emperor sent the imperial physician with, we are told, instructions to see to it that Yang Su did not survive. The old warrior knew what he was in for and downed his 'medicine' saying to a relative with a belated burst of Buddhist piety, 'Shall I not be reborn in a moment?'[110] He left an estate of immense proportions, testimony to his cupidity no doubt but also to the recognition given him by two emperors who, when they wanted a particularly difficult or dirty job done, knew his value and his price.

Kao Chiung, the master statesman and general of the first Sui reign, had been rusticated by the jealous counsels of Wen-ti's empress. Yang-ti, at the beginning of his reign, restored the old man to office and gave him a high-sounding title. But in 607 Kao Chiung and others of his generation became vocally critical of the new emperor's policies and of the atmosphere of his court. The criticism was duly reported, and as a result Kao Chiung was condemned to death and his sons exiled to the frontiers. Ho-jo Pi, one of the Sui's most gifted and successful generals, who, like Kao Chiung, had played a major role in the conquest of Ch'en, was indicted at the same time. He was executed, and his wives and children were made slaves of the state and transported to the frontier. Yü-wen Pi, another singularly talented and high-ranking official of the previous reign and, at the time, president of the Board of Rites was also implicated and suffered a similar fate. The *Sui shu*'s comment on his case may be applicable to other senior statesmen: 'Having become famous for his talent and ability and having held a succession of exalted ranks and offices, his reputation was weighty indeed. In policy discussions his remarks were nearly always praised by others. As a result the Emperor conceived an envious dislike for him.'[111] The aged Hsüeh Tao-heng, probably the greatest Confucian scholar of his time, was recalled from a provincial post early in Yang-ti's reign and given an important office. But he

[110] *SS* 48, p. 1292.

[111] *SS* 56, p. 1391.

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proved tactless in praising the previous reign and even invoked the name of Kao Chiung. Yang-ti went into a rage and turned Hsüeh over to the judicial authorities. After hoping against hope for either imperial justice or mercy, the old Confucian was ordered to be strangled and his wives and children banished to central Asia. All these men, whether for their intimate association with his father, or for their independent reputations combined with outspokenness, or for unknown personal reasons, incurred Yang-ti's disfavour and suffered accordingly. All, except possibly Yang Su, were the type of officials who were skilled in the traditional style of remonstrance and discussion in open audience. Yang-ti, as we have suggested, favoured another mode of reaching decisions, and this mode dictated the kind of official who shared the emperor's secrets and his power. Let us look at Yang-ti's inner circle more closely.

It is significant that those who became the most powerful of the inner circle were both southerners. Yü Shih-chi was the son of a Ch'en official and had served that dynasty before its conquest by the Sui. The rise to power of this unimpressive man began with the accession of Yang-ti, and in a short time he became something like a confidential secretary – a role which someone had to fill, given Yang-ti's style of government. The *Sui shu* speaks of this style and of Yü's role: 'With Su Wei, Yü-wen Shu, P'ei Chü and P'ei Yün, he managed the court administration. Whereupon, as the affairs of the empire multiplied, the memorials coming in from all quarters reached a daily total of more than a hundred. The emperor was then solemn and preoccupied, and matters were not subject to audience decision. Rather, after the emperor had reached his council-chamber, he would first of all summon Shih-chi and orally indicate the disposition he wanted made of them. When Shih-chi reached his own office, he would turn these instructions into imperial orders. Although his daily output came to one hundred pages, they were without omissions or errors.'[112] From such an intimate relationship with the supreme autocrat, Yü Shih-chi's power spread. The *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* tells us that, although the Board of Civil Office was headed by Niu Hung who was assisted by seven other ranking officials, 'the brush that granted or took away was held by Yü Shih-chi alone; when he received a bribe, the candidate jumped in rank; when he did not, the candidate's name was simply entered on the official roster.'[113] That he took bribes is not confirmed by any other source, but his power was built into the arrangement. He was not incapable of giving good advice. The *Sui shu* tells us, in one of the versions of the siege of the emperor by the Turks at Yen-men in 615, that after the military

[112] *SS* 67, p. 1572. The composition of the inner circle is confirmed in *SS* 41, p. 1188.
[113] *TCTC* 180, p. 5624.

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had failed to break out, Yü Shih-chi urged his master to encourage the troops and to offer them bounties; he drafted an edict for the emperor announcing an end to the campaigns against Koguryŏ. The emperor went along with these measures. But when the soldiers broke the siege, Yang-ti went back on his word, failed to distribute the promised bounties and again proclaimed an invasion of the Liao valley. This, the text tells, marked the end of the emperor's 'credibility' in court and countryside; his confidential secretary stayed with him to the end and died at the hands of the same assassins.[114]

Yang-ti's style of government also required a chief of intelligence, and the emperor found him in P'ei Yün, grandson of a Liang official, son of a Ch'en official who had been taken prisoner by the Sui and saw service under the Sui founder. Yün 'because his father was in the north' secretly petitioned Wen-ti to serve as a Sui agent in the Ch'en domain, and, when the Ch'en fell, was rewarded by a succession of high offices. Yang-ti tested him in a series of assignments and eventually made him part of his inner circle. Yün was utterly ruthless and, as his power increased, was made chief censor and encroached increasingly on the powers of the judiciary. In 613, when Yang Hsüan-kan, the son of Yang Su, revolted, the rising was quickly crushed, but the emperor's confidence was severely shaken. So he ordered Yün to ferret out all those in any way implicated, and Yün hunted them down savagely. The *Sui shu* says that tens of thousands were executed and their property confiscated. He is said to have connived at the execution of the aged Hsüeh Tao-heng, and he engineered the dismissal of a long-time member of the inner circle, Su Wei, when that venerable statesman tried indirectly to tell Yang-ti about the extent of rebellion in the empire.

Yü-wen Shu was a northerner of non-Chinese origin. He had achieved military recognition under the Northern Chou and helped the Sui founder in the consolidation of power. He commanded a unit of thirty thousand men in the campaign against Ch'en, saw some hard fighting and achieved notable success. During the campaign he met Yang Kuang, then Prince of Chin, and the latter was much taken with this warrior whose background was so similar to his own. Yang Kuang petitioned and had Yü-wen Shu appointed to a post near the vice-regal capital at Chiang-tu and later involved him in the plot to get the succession changed to his own favour. When this succeeded Yü-wen Shu was richly rewarded, and rewarded again when Yang Kuang came to the throne. In 608 Yü-wen Shu drove the T'u-yü-hun from their ancestral lands, took their leaders and some four thousand captives who were enslaved. From 609 on, he

[114] *SS* 67, pp. 1572–3.

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and the others we are discussing became part of the emperor's inner circle. Yü-wen Shu is said to have shamelessly abused his position; his avarice was unlimited, and he was the terror of the court. He never heard of a rare or costly object without trying to get it for himself. As is often the case in the Chinese histories, his greed was linked to a total sycophancy; from a look on his master's face, he knew what advice he wanted (not what might be best for the monarch or the empire), and he would then proffer it. How much of this we should believe is debatable. But Yü-wen Shu took on some difficult assignments. After a military disaster to his armies in the first campaign against Koguryŏ, he was briefly cashiered and reduced to the rank of commoner. But a year later, while *en route* to the north-east, he was ordered to proceed against the first of the rebels, Yang Hsüan-kan. He crushed Yang's armies, captured Yang and sent his head to the emperor. After the emperor had withdrawn to his southern capital late in 616, on Yü-wen Shu's advice, Shu fell ill and died. He had previously begged his imperial master for clemency for his two sons, then under house arrest. One of them shortly thereafter led the band which assassinated Yang-ti. Yü-wen Shu was, first and last, a military man, perhaps less of a master strategist – P'ei Chü had that role – than a tough, relentless field commander. Such people often get an undeservedly negative biography from bureaucratic historians.

Su Wei was discussed as a member of Wen-ti's group of advisers. We find him under Yang-ti, sometimes in favour, sometimes under heavy censure, wily, ambitious, corrupt, carrying out a succession of difficult civil and military assignments, but probably considerably less influential than other members of the inner circle. It is not untypical of him that, having served both Sui emperors, he took service under Yang-ti's assassin, later under other contenders for power, and died in his mansion in Ch'ang-an at the age of eighty-seven.

P'ei Chü, the member of the inner circle most concerned with foreign and barbarian affairs, has been the subject of a detailed study.[115] He appears to us, through the cloudy glass of the sources, to be a relatively honest official, somewhat less of a hatchet man than Yang Su or P'ei Yün, somewhat less of the bloodless *alter ego* than Yü Shih-chi. He was a native of modern Shansi and grew up under the Northern Ch'i; he met the future Sui founder when the latter arrived to take over a prefecture after the Northern Chou conquest of the Ch'i. After the establishment of the Sui he held a series of lesser posts until Wen-ti sent him south to relieve Kuang-chou (the modern Canton), then under pressure from aboriginal

[115] Fritz Jaeger, 'Leben und Werk des P'ei Kü', *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, 9 (1920–2) 81–115, 216–31.

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rebels; he was successful, executed the leaders, and, in the time-honoured manner, settled the aborigines of 'twenty-odd prefectures' under their own chiefs. When he returned north he was rewarded and promoted. From that time on his concern was mainly with the T'u-chüeh and the northern and western frontiers generally. He was used in planning and executing both military and diplomatic moves to check the Turks, and he seems to have been quite successful. He was rewarded with important civil posts at the end of Wen-ti's reign.

When Yang-ti succeeded to the throne, P'ei Chü soon became his principal adviser on frontier problems and foreign peoples. In carrying out his duties, P'ei went out to the border trading posts in modern Kansu and there gathered intelligence regarding Inner Asia. He was an indefatigable geographer and ethnographer, and presented to his imperial master an *Illustrated account of the western regions* (*Hsi-yü t'u-chi*) in which he described the characteristics of some forty-four 'states' to the west of China and sketched the principal trade routes to the 'Western Ocean' as well. His account was accompanied by a detailed map. His policy recommendations were to use peaceful means – mainly the wealth and prestige of China – to win over as many of these people as could be reached, or whose representatives could be impressed. But P'ei Chü also encouraged Yang-ti to establish garrison and trading towns further out and force the submission of certain ethnic groups. For example in 608 territories of the T'u-yü-hun, to the south of the Kansu corridor, were seized by the forces of Yü-wen Shu, divided into Chinese administrative units and colonized with Chinese 'convicted of minor crimes' and thus condemned to exile. Whether P'ei Chü was the principal advocate of foreign adventures, or whether Yang-ti would have embarked on them without his advice is an insoluble problem. The *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, in a particularly blatant piece of editorializing, says that in 607 Yang-ti, having listened to P'ei Chü, impulsively dreamed of emulating the achievements of Ch'in Shih-huang and Han Wu-ti and of conquering the whole of central Asia. And, after making much of the exactions upon the local populace of missions going to and fro from the Sui capital to Inner Asia, Ssu-ma Kuang delivers the ultimate indictment: 'That, in the end the Central Kingdom was weakened and thereby brought to ruin was entirely because of the siren songs of P'ei Chü.'[116] That this is absurd seems beyond doubt. We shall return to P'ei Chü's career in the closing section of this chapter.

These sketches, brief as they are, must suffice as characterizations of Yang-ti's inner circle of advisers. These men enabled him to deal with the

[116] *TCTC* 180, p. 5653.

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business of government in his own style, and nearly all of them accompanied him on his endless journeying up and down the land. It should be noted that, with the exception of P'ei Chü and possibly Su Wei, they were expediting officials, not policy advisers with any of the function of 'remonstrance' so necessary for Confucians in the balancing of imperial and bureaucratic powers over affairs of state. It is this configuration which may indeed have brought the empire to ruin, but certainly brought upon Yang-ti the harsh judgments of subsequent (invariably Confucian) historians.

PROBLEMS OF YANG-TI'S REIGN

Before turning to the problems and policies of Yang-ti's reign, we might see whether there is any division during the span of years we are considering, from his accession in 605 to his deposition in 617. There are grounds for thinking that there is such a point of change, and that it should be placed about 609. Ssu-ma Kuang singles out this year as the 'height of the Sui', and he points to orderly and stable administrative units – 190 prefectures and 1,225 counties; to the vast extent of the empire which he estimated as 3,100 miles east and west and 4,938 miles north and south (taking a Chinese *li* as equivalent to one-third of a mile); and, most significant of all, to its large population – approximately nine million registered households, or about fifty million people.[117]

But there are other grounds for believing that approximately this year marked a change in the political tone of the reign. Prior to 609, Yang-ti seems to have concentrated on such measures as would further solidify the empire inherited from his father, increase its power and prosperity and elicit the consent of the governed. After 609 there is a growing preoccupation with foreign expansion developing into an obsession with the conquest of Koguryŏ, a relative neglect of domestic problems, and a growing dependence on his inner circle of advisers. Let us look briefly at some of the measures which, perhaps, reflect the mood of the first period of his reign.

Many of the actions of the first years of his reign were the standard and expected performances of a new ruler: elevation of his wife to the status of empress, selection of an heir apparent, an empire-wide amnesty, the choice of appropriate ceremonial colours, costumes, etc. But other early measures were far from standardized. He remitted taxes for ten years to

[117] *TCTC* 181, p. 5645. The interpretation of these population figures has been much discussed. See Hans Bielenstein, 'The census of China during the period 2–742 A.D.', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, 19 (1947) 160–1; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The registration of population in China in the Sui and T'ang periods', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 4 (1961) 289–301.

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Map 1. Sui China, 609

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families who had members killed in the brief but sharp war against his brother, the Prince of Han. He ordered the abolition of the office of regional commander (*tsung-kuan*) which had existed in many of the prefectures of the empire. He announced his intention to sponsor on a large scale the revival of traditional Confucian learning (of which more below). He ordered the making of a new law Code far less severe than his father's, and while it was being prepared, he ordered the suspension of the articles dealing with the 'ten odious crimes' (of insubordination). The grandiloquent phrases of the edict ordering the recodification may catch something of the feelings of the new emperor as he first saw himself as supreme autocrat, wise ruler and cosmic pivot.

We shall, with total abnegation of self, devote Ourselves to good government, and in Our thinking We shall follow the ancient standards. We shall renounce Our personal feelings the better to serve others, and We shall always follow a policy of leniency.... That, in Our judgments, inadvertent errors would ever be allowed to obscure true virtue is utterly unthinkable.[118]

In the second year of his reign he proclaimed from atop the south central gate of his eastern capital a general amnesty and a remission of taxes for the whole empire. Later in the year he issued an ordinance that all officials who did not attain their rank by examination had to be of outstanding ability to be proposed for promotion. In the same year he continued building on the granaries begun by his father, and huge installations were completed in the vicinity of Lo-yang. At the end of the year he issued an edict saluting the rulers of the past who were worthy of posterity's respect and deploring the poor state of their tombs; he allocated the labour service of ten nearby families to the repair and protection of each and every tomb. This was also the year for a massive effort, carried through by P'ei Yün, to collect the music, instruments and performers in the several musical traditions of the period of disunion. These traditions were lodged in hereditary families who had been supported by the several states; P'ei winnowed out the incompetents, selected the best performers and gave them ranks and positions in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (T'ai-ch'ang ssu). The emperor was greatly pleased because, of course, music was not only pleasurable but also had its part in the organic harmony of the cosmos which, as Son of Heaven, he was obliged to maintain. In the eighth moon of 608, an imperial progress made its way north from T'ai-yüan to Heng-shan, the northernmost of the sacred mountains of China, mentioned in the most ancient classics and taken into the imperial cosmology during the Han. There, in the presence of the prefects of the area north of the Huang-ho and of representatives of ten or so king-

[118] *SS* 25, p. 717; Balazs, *Le Traité juridique*, p. 91.

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doms of central Asia assembled by P'ei Chü, Yang-ti made the solemn sacrifices for the welfare of the realm – sacrifices whose traditions reached back to the mythological sage emperor Shun. Having performed the sacrifices, he declared a general amnesty and on his return to the capital issued an order remitting one year's taxes in the districts through which the imperial progress had passed.

In these same early years the sources make much of his penchant for extravagance, pomp and display. I am inclined to discount this, but not his violent action against his three senior critics and their execution which occurred in 607, the year of the promulgation of the new Code with its generally lighter scale of punishments. These harsh measures prefigure a pattern of action which unhappily increases in subsequent years. But if, for a moment, we suppose that there may have been some substance to the charges that led to the execution of the three leading statesmen of the previous reign, the judicial murder of the aged Hüeh Tao-heng in 609 for mild criticism of the status quo surely ushers in the second and darker phase of Yang-ti's reign.

Confucianism and the revival of schools

The first emperor, in his later years, had become disillusioned with the schools established by his government for training young men for possible appointment to government posts. On his birthday in the sixth month of 601 – the day he announced empire-wide Buddhist celebrations echoing King Aśoka's – he issued an edict greatly curtailing the Confucian schools (see page 119). While reviewing his high hopes for such schools and the value of Confucianism for moral and practical training, he complained of the proliferation of students at the capital and local levels, of their idleness and their failure to develop either into moral exemplars or potential officials. He therefore abolished the schools in the prefectures and counties. Of the three higher schools in the capital, he retained only one, and he cut the number of state-supported scholars from one thousand to seventy. There was also a decline, in Wen-ti's later years, in support for Confucian projects of all kinds.

Yang-ti came to the throne with something of a reputation as a literary man and with a record of patronage of Confucian scholars during his years at Yang-chou. He was far too shrewd not to recognize the value of the Confucian tradition as the basis of a public morality of subservience to one's elders and betters, and as the nexus of all the ramifying symbolism of the imperial order – seasonal sacrifices, prayers and invocations of ancestors and deities, and all the ritual procedures by which the Son of

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Heaven was to maintain harmony in the cosmos. In the first year of his reign he signalled the reversal of his father's policies in a grandiloquent edict which began: 'For governing the people and building an enduring dynasty, teaching and learning have first place. Changing customs and altering traditional ways must all begin from this.' He then reviewed the disruption of scholarly traditions in the period of disunion and contrasted the period of peace, prosperity and unity over which he presided. He went on to order the appropriate commissioners throughout the empire to search out learned and talented people, select some suited for office and provide other scholarly specialists with state stipends, 'equitably according to the profundity of their professional skill and their family's standing'. Finally he ordered the resumption of instruction in the capital schools (elsewhere we learn that the local schools were also re-opened). 'Let the students be instructed and drilled to prepare them for the procedure of examination which will complete the process of "grinding and polishing" (an old metaphor for education).'[119] Earlier in the same year his commissioners of inspection sent to the provinces were ordered, among their other duties, to search out men of noteworthy conduct, scholarly skills or specialized competence, examine them and send them to the capital. As a result, the *Sui shu* tells us, Confucian scholars came from far and near and were put to debating with one another on learned points. A high official established their rank order and reported this to the throne. Whereupon many a destitute scholar was rehabilitated, and classical studies throve and encompassed both northern and southern traditions. Commentaries were written to all the classics. But, the text continues, this rehabilitation was shortlived with the shifting of emphasis to foreign affairs and military concerns.[120] The *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, in one of its few passages favourable to Yang-ti, says that late in his reign, he enlarged the palace library secretariat by 120 posts and filled them all with scholars. This occasions a retrospective account of Yang-ti's scholarly projects. Ssu-ma Kuang says that Yang-ti was devoted to reading and to literary composition throughout his adult life. He had a hundred compilers working in his vice-regal office at Chiang-tu, and this interest continued throughout his reign. Great libraries were built in Ta-hsing ch'eng and Lo-yang, and the final result was a superb central imperial library, with the best editions kept in Lo-yang and amounting to more than 370,000 rolls. For use in the various palaces, ministries and offices of the two capitals, he ordered abridged reference libraries to be prepared.[121]

Yang-ti was frequently concerned with the ritual aspects of imperial

119 *SS* 3, pp. 64–5.
120 *SS* 75, p. 1707.
121 *TCTC* 182, p. 5694.

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Confucianism, the stately ceremonies which dramatized supreme power. On these the scholars were the recognized authorities. For example, the choosing of appropriate times for imperial sacrifices, the conferment in 608 of a new title on Confucius accompanied by an order to search out and list the descendants of the great sage, the proper performance of the Heng-shan sacrifice and many other rituals. On the eve of the first advance against Koguryŏ, at his base camp near the modern Peking the emperor performed three of the ancient sacrifices traditionally made by a ruler before setting out on a campaign.

The record of the second reign is thus one of far greater interest in all aspects of Confucian ritual, scholarship and education than characterized Wen-ti's rule. Perhaps this was only natural, for it has long been observed that Confucians are not useful in the forcible seizure of power but find their ideal role in helping a ruler hold on to what he has. For a time Yang-ti's Confucians assumed that role to some degree, but violent events, beginning in 612, were to drive them from their projects and their posts to wait out once again a period of dynastic transition.

Establishing a new capital at Lo-yang

A month after Wen-ti's death, his youngest son Liang, Prince of Han, who by his father's favour had accumulated great power in the eastern plain, rose in revolt. He was crushed by the formidable Yang Su. At the end of the same year Yang-ti announced his intention of establishing his eastern capital at Lo-yang which dominated the eastern plain. Early in the following year, 605, he appointed Yü-wen K'ai, working with Yang Su and Yang Ta (Yang-ti's cousin), to rebuild the city. Labour was recruited from among the people of the eastern plain, and work went on apace, and when it was finished the emperor moved the residents of the former prefectural capital and 'several tens of thousands' of families of rich merchants and traders into the rebuilt city to fill it up. In 607 he ordered the prefectures of the Ho-nan area to send artisan families to reside in Lo-yang, thus doubling the available complement of skilled workers. He set up twelve special wards to accommodate them.

Yang-ti is condemned by moralists for his unconscionable extravagance in rebuilding this capital, but if one looks at his own arguments for it and at the geo-political rationale, one finds ample justification. In his two edicts ordering the construction, he refers to the notable precedents for building at this site: the Duke of Chou's building of an eastern capital there (*c.* 1100 BC) and Han Kao-tsu's strong praise for the site. He might have mentioned that the Eastern Chou and Later Han had their main

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capitals there, as did the principal successors of the Han until the fall of the city to 'barbarians' in 312. It had also been the site chosen for his new capital by the sinicizing emperor of the Northern Wei in 494. He mentions the Chou's need for a second base in the east from which to control the conquered Shang (*c.* 1100 BC), and refers to the recent example of his brother the Prince of Han's rising in the eastern plain as showing a parallel need; the Kuan-chung area was too distant a base from which to check dissidence in the east. Moreover Lo-yang was a natural hub of land and water transport and a key point in the storage and transshipment of grain tribute. The same factors were to influence the T'ang to keep Lo-yang as an eastern capital for nearly three hundred years.

We know little in detail about the Sui's second capital. In size – as reflected in the newly excavated outer walls – Sui and T'ang Lo-yang was roughly half the size of the western capital. It had the same division into three walled complexes: the palace city in the north, the administrative city to the south of the palace compound, and the rest of the city forming an uneven U-shaped area divided into wards and crossed about half way to the south wall by the Lo River as it flowed eastward to its confluence with the Huang-ho. The city was similar in general plan to its predecessor, the Northern Wei capital at Lo-yang. It was not built *de novo* as was the western capital of Ta-hsing ch'eng. It seems to have been a 'capital' only when the emperor chose to take his personal entourage and reside there for a time; there is no sign of the double staffing of the upper bureaucracy that was characteristic of the dual capital system of the Ming. But it was an important city, strategically and economically; more than this it was an important symbol of imperial authority for the elite of the eastern plain at a site hallowed by myth and by history.

Completion of an empire-wide communication system

Although Yang-ti is roundly condemned for extravagance in city and palace building, it is his canal building that became the object of the Confucian historians' most heated fulminations. The writers of fiction of many centuries have taken the already biased work of the historians and added layer upon layer of extravagant embroidery. We must somehow read through these layers and describe the canal building in more sober terms and account for its scale by reference to the economic and political strategies Yang-ti was pursuing.

The first edict ordering the building of a canal was issued in the first year of Yang-ti's reign, 605. This was for the T'ung-chi ch'ü which linked Lo-yang with Ssu-chou on the Huai River and connected with a very old

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canal route from Huai-yin south to the Yangtze at Yang-chou. Nearly all the links in this long canal followed the courses of earlier canals and it should be noted that the building of this and the rest of the system occurred in flat alluvial plains. No doubt a great deal of dredging and new construction was needed, and if the canals were indeed bordered by imperial roads shaded by planted trees, as the sources tell us, the labour exactions must have been heavy. The *Sui shu* tells us that for the northern and longer stretch of this canal Yang-ti mobilized a million or more workers and that later in the same year, for the stretch from the Huai to the Yangtze, he mobilized a hundred thousand or more workers. These figures become somewhat more credible if they count not the people engaged at any one time but the total number of corvée labour periods of twenty days each.[122] There was yet another southern extension. In 610 Yang-ti ordered a canal from the Yangtze opposite Yang-chou south to the head of Hang-chou bay. This was about 270 miles in length. But here again, many stretches followed the courses of existing rivers or earlier canals.

By far the longest of all the canals was the Yung-chi ch'ü which also began not far from the confluence of the Lo River and the Huang-ho and flowed in a north-easterly direction. The Ch'in River which rose in Shansi was redirected to provide water for the canal, and it was fed along its course from other rivers, normally tributaries of the Huang-ho. It ended, where late Grand Canals were to end, in the vicinity of modern Peking. Work was begun in 608 when 'a hundred odd tens of thousands' were mobilized for the work. The *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* says that adult males were insufficient to supply the labour and so, for the first time, they conscripted women.[123] The southern sections of this canal also followed the routes of ancient canals.

If one looks at a relief map of China and envisages the area of settled agriculture it is clear that these canals, plus the natural waterways, assured for the Sui the resources of all the most productive land with the exception of Szechwan (which was linked to the capital by a well-established road). We have no figures on tax, grain or cloth shipments in Sui times, but the great granaries were well stocked, and several became important prizes in the struggle for power at the end of the Sui. Much of the prosperity of the T'ang can be attributed to this network which they inherited and improved. The Yung-chi ch'ü to the north-east was built not only to bring in the tax revenues of Ho-pei, but also partly with an important strategic purpose, namely to supply the armies which, it was assumed, might be

[122] Lien-sheng Yang, 'Economic aspects of public works in imperial China', in his collection *Excursions in sinology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 203–4.
[123] *TCTC* 181, p. 5636.

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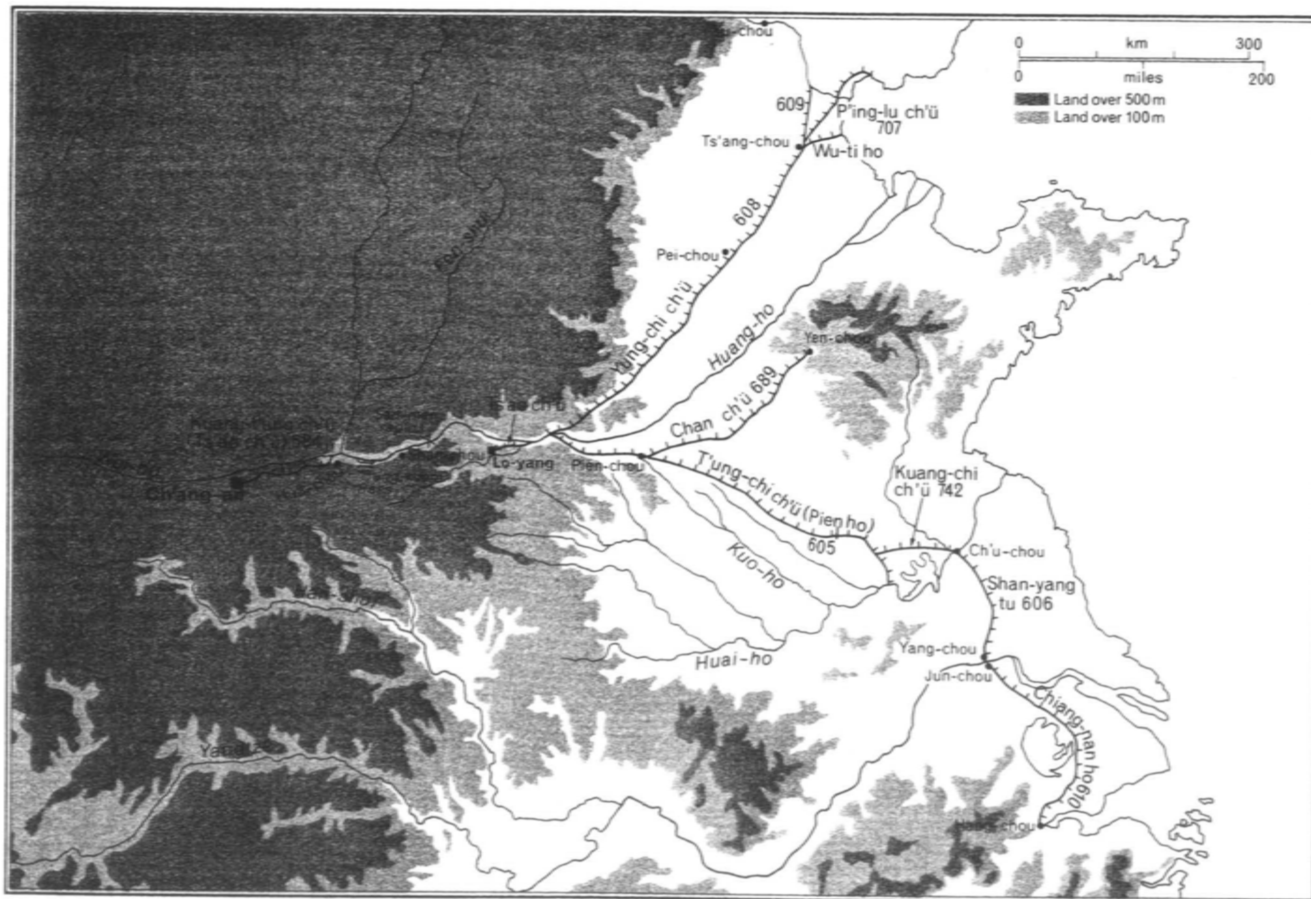

Map 2. The Sui and T'ang canal system

For full details see Dennis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 182–9.

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needed to defend the northern and north-eastern regions. The canals also had a political use. China, as we have noted, had only recently been forcibly reunified after a long period of disunion. The ability to display the wealth and majesty of the new monarch throughout the empire was an important advantage; obviously the capacity to get armed men and supplies by boat to areas of potential dissidence was even more important. South-eastern China below the Yangtze was already in the process of settlement, and the extension of the canal system to Hang-chou, for example, greatly stimulated its growth from a frontier outpost to a thriving commercial city.[124]

If these strike us as the solid advantages of the canal system, such views are not reflected in Chinese historical writings. Here is a passage from the 'Treatise on economics' in the *Sui shu* describing Yang-ti's progress from Lo-yang to Yang-chou in 605, the year of the building of the T'ung-chi ch'ü.

Moreover the emperor caused to be built dragon boats, phoenix vessels, war boats of the 'Yellow Dragon' style, red battle cruisers, multi-decked transports, lesser vessels of bamboo slats. Boatmen hired from all the waterways...pulled the vessels by ropes of green silk on the imperial progress to Chiang-tu (Yang-chou). The emperor rode in the dragon boat, and civil and military officials of the fifth grade and above rode in the multi-decked transports; those of the ninth grade and above were given the vessels of yellow bamboo. The boats followed one another poop to prow for more than 200 leagues [about 65 miles]. The prefectures and counties through which they passed were ordered to prepare to offer provisions. Those who made bountiful arrangements were given an additional office or title; those who fell short were given punishments up to the death penalty.

There follows a catalogue of the goods requisitioned from the whole empire and then this flight of hyperbole:

Requisitioning was hurried and relentless; the morning's order had to be carried out by evening. The common people sought out food with snare and net to such an extent that on land and waters, the birds and the beasts were almost extinguished, and still they could not give what was demanded but found themselves buying from rich and powerful families which had amassed provisions. Prices leapt up, and in this year the tail of a pheasant cost ten rolls of fine silk.[125]

How shall we explain the discrepancy between such passages as these and the solid advantages of a canal network seen by some contemporaries and by modern historians? Confucian officials who kept the records and wrote the histories in general did not favour great increases in central

[124] Henri Maspero, 'Rapport sommaire sur une mission archéologique au Tchö-kiang', *BEFEO*, 14 (1914) 5.
[125] *SS* 24, pp. 686–7; Balazs, *Le Traité économique*, pp. 54–5.

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power and frowned on its flamboyant use by a reigning monarch; their physiocratic economic view saw no advantage in economic growth; their counsels as statesmen and their records as historians emphasized the high cost and the disadvantages of foreign military adventures. All emperors were, however covertly, the natural opponents as well as the necessary allies of all officials. In the case of Yang-ti, who came to a bad end, this latent hostility expresses itself in the terms we have just sampled.

The continuing expansion of Chinese power

Since there is no sharp break in the foreign policies of the two Sui emperors I have given a general account of Sui relations with some foreign peoples on pages 106–9. There I discussed the invasion of Champa which in fact began in the first reign and ended in the second, and the successes of the Sui against the Eastern Turks who none the less continued to be a problem during the second reign. On the other hand expansion westward, including conquest and dispossession of the T'u-yü-hun from their ancestral grazing lands, the expedition into the East China Sea, and the establishment of relations with Japan are part of the history of the second reign. Although Wen-ti, in 598, launched a brief and disastrous land and sea campaign against Koguryŏ, he was satisfied with the pro-forma submission of its ruler and declined to intervene further. Yang-ti, as we shall see, was more ambitious and persistent in that quarter – to his ultimate undoing. The conventional judgment in Chinese histories has generally been that Wen-ti was prudent and wise in the conduct of foreign relations while Yang-ti was impetuous and profligate. Yet in both emperors' reigns there were two kinds of operations beyond the borders: those aimed at assuring the geo-political dominance of the new empire in eastern Asia, and those that started out of a desire for loot or personal curiosity. The former were justified in terms of the old Han tradition of a central political and cultural order whose superiority in all realms justified not only its defence but its bringing lesser people under its sway. The latter – lesser in scale and cost – are likewise in an old tradition, going back to Ch'in Shih-huang, of an imperial autocrat indulging his curiosity or his taste for the exotic by state-financed expeditions. Let us consider both types of foreign involvements.

Liu-ch'iu

The identification of the islands called Liu-ch'iu has been much debated. One can take the view, generally held by Japanese scholars, that the term refers to Formosa; or there is the alternative view of Haguenauer and several

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Chinese scholars that it is in Sui times a vague term for all the islands in the East China Sea from the Philippines as far as Japan. In 610 Yang-ti, having first sent an expedition which failed to 'pacify' Liu-ch'iu, appointed generals to recruit a new assault force in the area of modern Chekiang. The Sui force met stubborn resistance. In the texts there are two outcomes of the expedition: (1) the usual success story, the triumph of Chinese arms, the defeat and execution of the King of Liu-ch'iu, return of the Chinese generals with numerous captured slaves, rewards and promotions for the successful generals; (2) a story of failure, in which the capture of prisoners is followed by an over-extension of Chinese power in the country, the onset of disease and the death of 80 or 90 per cent of the officers and men of the invading force. Whichever outcome one chooses, the sources in general do not indicate a significant or permanent establishment of Sui power in the islands of the East China Sea.

Japan

Japan was a very different case. She had been receiving cultural influences from China since Han times, mostly by way of Korea where she had considerable influence. During the period of disunion, Japanese principalities paid at least nominal tribute to the major north China dynasties. When they learned of the reunification of China, the Japanese were naturally interested in finding out more about the new order on the continent. There may have been a mission from Japan to China during the K'ai-huang period (581–600), but the first full embassy arrived in 607. The ambassador referred to Yang-ti as 'the Bodhisattva Son of Heaven who gives the full weight of his support to the Buddhist teaching', and went on to say that he had brought with him a number of monks who wanted to study Buddhism. The envoy then produced a written communication from his monarch which began, 'The Son of Heaven in the land of the rising sun sends this letter to the Son of Heaven of the land where the sun sets.' The emperor was displeased at this piece of unintentioned effrontery and said that the letter from these barbarians was discourteous, and that such letters should not again be brought to his august attention. Despite this gaffe, the Chinese sent a fairly low-ranking emissary to Japan the next year who brought back a fuller and more accurate account of Japan than had previously been available. The embassy apparently went off without a hitch, and the opening of relations at this time had highly important effects on the cultural history of Japan.[126]

[126] *SS* 81, pp. 1825–8; R. Tsunoda and L. C. Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories* (Pasadena, 1951), pp. 28–36.

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T'u-yü-hun

The T'u-yü-hun had long been vassals of the Turks during the great days of the Eastern Turkish empire. They had their grazing lands around Kokonor, south of the string of garrison towns along the route to the Jade Gate – towns which they had harassed for centuries. When, in 608, they came under attack by the Tölös, their qaghan sent an emissary asking to submit to China and asking for China's help. Yang-ti sent out an army under the redoubtable Yü-wen Shu to 'welcome' them. Seeing the size of the welcoming army, the T'u-yü-hun fled. The Chinese attacked, took several thousand heads, captured their leaders and made slaves of some four thousand men and women. Thus, as the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* says, their old lands were emptied, and an area approximately 1,300 miles east–west and 660 miles north–south became a Sui possession; it was divided into Chinese administrative districts and settled with Chinese criminals convicted of 'light' crimes.[127] This 'conquest', like others, did not survive the Sui's downfall, and the T'u-yü-hun had to be dealt with afresh by the next dynasty of T'ang.

T'u-chüeh

We have noted earlier how the dual empire of the Western and Eastern Turks – fortunately for the Sui – split into two separate and often hostile empires.

The Western Turks, in the days of Yang-ti's prosperity, seem to have been a minor problem, a nuisance to be manipulated at little cost for the benefit of the Central Kingdom. They then occupied territories immediately to the west of China but the far-flung empire of their ancestors was no more. Their qaghan, Ch'u-lo, had a Chinese mother who remained in the Sui capital where she served both as hostage and as intermediary between the Chinese and the Western Turks. When, in 610, Ch'u-lo showed signs of independence, the emperor, acting on the advice of P'ei Chü, set up an anti-qaghan, Shih-kuei, who succeeded in driving Ch'u-lo, accompanied by some of his cavalry, from his lands. Ch'u-lo's Chinese mother was sent out to his place of refuge in the west and persuaded him to come to the capital, where he was received by the emperor with fulsome honours. He remained there, with his own entourage, until 612, kept as a kind of potential rival qaghan in reserve to be used, possibly, against the Eastern Turks or as a challenge to the waxing power of Shih-kuei. Ch'u-lo and his cavalry accompanied the emperor on the first campaign against Koguryŏ and was richly rewarded for his accomplishments. Yang-ti

[127] *TCTC* 181, p. 5641.

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hoped to restore him to his ancestral lands, but the fall of the Sui intervened.

But it was the empire of the Eastern Turks, occupying steppe territories roughly the same as modern Mongolia, which posed a threat to the central sector of China's northern frontier. As we have noted, the Sui began early to repair and extend the Great Wall, and Yang-ti in 607 built or reconstructed a long L-shaped section; the longer part paralleled the north–south course of the Huang-ho, along the border between the modern provinces of Shansi and Shensi; the shorter ran from west to east roughly along the northern border of Shansi, and was joined with long-existing parts of the Great Wall. But to keep the Turks in check required more than walls, and the second Sui emperor resorted periodically to one or several of the traditional Chinese stratagems: keeping sons and nephews of the Turkish qaghans resident in the Sui capitals (for 'education'), settlement of tribes in Chinese territory, marriage diplomacy, investiture and deposition of qaghans, tribute missions and return gifts from China, barter at fixed places and times along the frontier (usually Chinese silk for Turkish horses) and political intrigue of all kinds. The frontier policy specialist on whom Yang-ti relied was P'ei Chü who, as we have seen, used his assignments to the far western towns of Chang-yeh (Kan-chou) and Tun-huang to gather intelligence for his imperial master, to intrigue successfully among the tribes and to bribe and awe them into becoming subjects of the Chinese. Yang-ti's tours of the north-western and western frontiers in 607–8 must here serve to illustrate the complexity of the Sui's relations with frontier peoples and P'ei Chü's role.

Early in the year 607, the emperor sent P'ei Chü ahead to Tun-huang while the emperor began the first, north-western, stage of his tour. This took him to Yü-lin inside the north-west elbow of the Great Wall. There the emperor in his sumptuous travelling palace received the homage of the qaghan, Ch'i-min – previously won to China's side by P'ei Chü – and his consort the Chinese princess I-ch'eng. The qaghan presented the emperor with three thousand head of horses and received in return thirteen thousand lengths of silk. This high level barter was accompanied by an exchange of courtesy visits – the Chinese emperor proceeded to Ch'i-min's tent capital – gifts and appropriate sentiments. Yang-ti, in 608, was ready for his trip to the far west, and P'ei Chü had made careful preparations. The imperial tour was a triumphal progress. At one point, still in Shensi province, he received the king of Turfan (long under T'u-chüeh influence), the Tudum-shad of Hami and the representatives of twenty-seven 'barbarian' tribes. According to the biography of P'ei

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Chü, all these properly submissive people 'received decorations of gold and nephrite as well as garments of brocade and other fabrics. There were musical performances, noisy feasts with singing and dancing, burning of incense.' Then the whole male and female population of two garrison and trading towns 'was ordered to dress up in splendid clothes and show themselves to the barbarians. Horsemen and carts were ordered to crowd together in a space several tens of *li* in circumference, so as to display the prosperity of the Central Kingdom.'[128] P'ei Chü was, of course, the successful stage manager of this and other shows of Chinese opulence, and the foolish herdsmen, we are told, were suitably impressed, the emperor greatly pleased.

Behind all these measures lay one of the solid objectives of Sui Realpolitik. This was further to weaken the Turks, to prevent their forming alliances with other tribal groups to the east or west of them and, when possible, to use them as a striking force against the Sui's other potential enemies. For example in 605, after the Khitan had raided into China, the emperor sent a Chinese general to lead a cavalry force of 20,000 Eastern Turks against them. The Khitan were badly defeated, and their women and livestock were given to the Turks as a reward. In 608 the Turks were to join forces with the Chinese in an attack on the central Asian oasis of Hami, at one time a Han garrison town on the northern route across Inner Asia. In this case the Turkish allies apparently did not appear, but the Sui army captured the place, built a new fortress and left troops to defend it. The bland rationale given for this expedition was to save the Inner Asian peoples from travelling great distances to trade with the Chinese.

During the emperor's visit to Ch'i-min Qaghan's capital in 607, the qaghan had been greatly embarrassed by the presence of an embassy from the state of Koguryŏ and had tried to make the best of it by formally presenting the emissary to his imperial visitor. Such evidence of what was intended to be secret intercourse between potential enemies always alarmed the Chinese. P'ei Chü advised his master to instruct the Koguryŏ ambassador: he was to return to his country and tell his king to present himself forthwith to pay homage at the Sui court; if he did not do so, he was to be told, the Chinese would lead a Turkish army to chastise his contemptible country. Niu Hung was promptly ordered to make this plain to the ambassador. The ambassador returned with the message, but his king refused to make the appropriate gestures of submission. The authority of the Central Kingdom had been flouted, and sooner or later the response would have to be the application of overwhelming force against the miscreant.

[128] *SS* 67, p. 1580; Jaeger, 'Leben und Werk des P'ei Kü', p. 97.

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P'ei Chü's advice to his master is susceptible of two interpretations. One is that he thought Koguryŏ would quickly submit and thus allow an entire civilized area to return to its appropriate tributary status. The other is that he expected resistance which could however be quickly overcome by the use of Turkish mercenaries; then Koguryŏ could be made an integral part of the empire. He noted that the Han had conquered this same area and had divided it into three prefectures. He reminded the emperor that his father had attempted a conquest but had failed because of the incompetence of his field commander. He pointed out that Koguryŏ was 'civilized' and thus ready for incorporation into the empire, but here were their representatives paying court to the wretched nomad Ch'i-min Qaghan! What he did not say because his experience, wide as it had been, included no first-hand knowledge of the north-east, was that victory might not be easy. P'ei Chü was intelligent, steeped in the accepted values, deeply knowledgeable about some areas of tension and conflict but totally uninformed about the one area where, none the less, he promised cheap and easy victory.

The first thing to go wrong with his scheme was the failure of the Eastern Turkish mercenaries to materialize. The submissive Ch'i-min Qaghan died in 609 while paying court at Lo-yang. His son Shih-pi was elevated to succeed him, loaded with gifts and given a Chinese princess to wed. But Shih-pi was far more shrewd than his father, and when P'ei Chü began the oft-repeated game of building up his younger brother as rival qaghan, so as to weaken the Eastern Turks, Shih-pi turned hostile and soon stopped coming to the Sui court. Thus the chastisement of Koguryŏ fell to the Chinese alone at the moment when uncertainties were developing about the security of their north and north-west frontiers.

Koguryŏ

In the early seventh century, the kingdom of Koguryŏ occupied the modern Manchuria east of the Liao River plus the northern part of the Korean peninsula; its capital was on the site of the modern P'yŏngyang. Most of the peninsula was divided between the state of Paekche in the south-west and Silla in the south-east. The northern kingdom had paid tribute to the Northern Wei and its successor states in north China. But it was in response to Koguryŏ incursions to the west of the Liao that Wen-ti had launched his ill-fated attack by land and sea in 598. Koguryŏ was militarily strong at this time, but its potential threat to China was multiplied and complicated by other elements (in addition to the threat of its alliance with the Eastern Turks). North of them was a militant coalition of Tungusic tribes called the Malgal (Mo-ho in Chinese), who joined with

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Koguryŏ in territorial incursions across the Liao River. In the lower reaches of the Liao valley were the Khitan who in 605 had invaded Ho-pei but, as we have seen, were then defeated by an Eastern Turkish force under Chinese command. They remained a threat, alone or in alliance with one of their restive neighbours. Further the hypothesis has been advanced that the court in its distant capital in the west feared the possible influence of a militarily strong Koguryŏ in the Ho-pei area where separatist sentiments dating from the Northern Ch'i period were far from dead.[129]

It may have been Yang-ti's intention to wait for the completion of the long Yung-chi ch'ü – the great length of the Grand Canal linking the heart of China to Peking – before launching a 'punitive expedition' against Koguryŏ. However that may be, this canal was completed in 609. In 610 special war taxes were levied on the rich, and military preparations went on apace; a large force (said by the *Sui shu* to be the largest in history) with massive logistic support was assembled at Cho-chün in the area of the modern Peking. A flood of the Huang-ho plain, which inundated forty prefectures, disrupted planning and caused desertions among the conscripts. None the less in the first month of 612, the emperor, his generals and a sizeable force were ready to strike by land while a naval force was to strike by sea. Sacrifices were duly performed (as described earlier), and a grandiloquent edict appropriate for the occasion was issued. In it the emperor insisted on the virtue, the cosmic ordering force, and the great accomplishments of the Sui, with appropriate allusions to sage rulers and great emperors of the past. He castigated the king of Koguryŏ for his failure to submit, for his cunning, and his nefarious collusion with the Khitan and the Malgal in violating Sui territory, etc.[130] P'ei Chü was with him as strategic adviser, the great engineer Yü-wen K'ai bridged the Liao River, and the enormous force advanced. The plan had been for a quick thrust to the Koguryŏ capital, but the walled cities along the east bank of the Liao resisted until the late summer rains made military operations impossible. Yang-ti withdrew at the end of August with, we are told, heavy losses and returned to Lo-yang. There he disciplined several of his defeated generals and tightened up his administration.

In the first month of 613 he announced a second mobilization, and moved north in the early summer for a second attempt against Koguryŏ. Bingham has noticed the ominous increase in the number of domestic rebellions during the early part of this year; he notes seven of them heavily concen-

[129] John C. Jamieson, 'The *Samguk Sagi* and the unification wars', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1969, pp. 20–32; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955), p. 77.

[130] *SS* 4, pp. 79–81.

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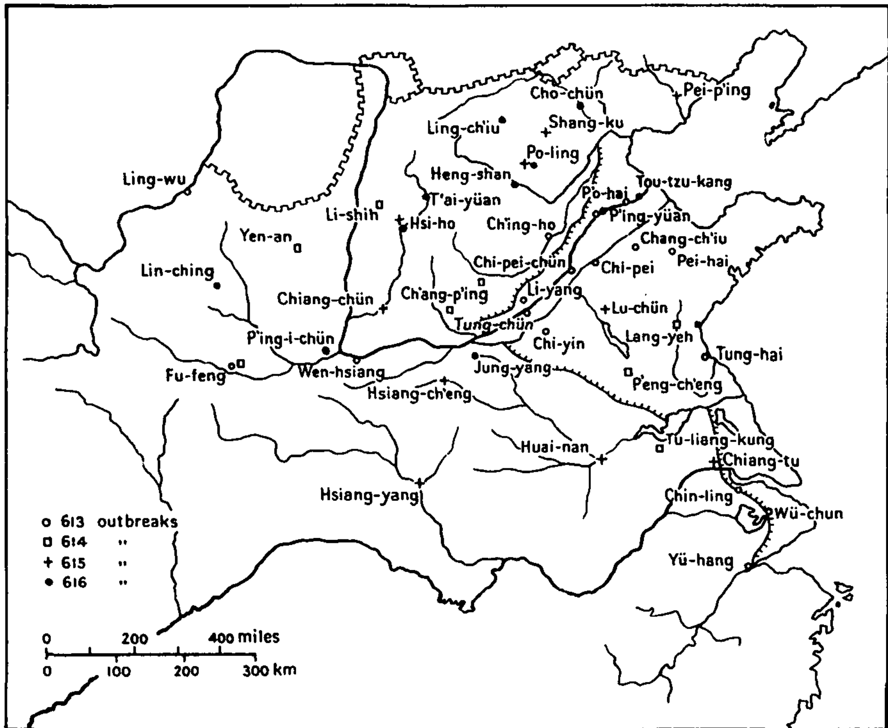

Map 3. Late Sui rebellions, 613–16

trated in the areas affected by the Huang-ho flood of 611.[131] The emperor again crossed the Liao River, but in the midst of the campaign word reached him of the serious revolt of Yang Su's son, Yang Hsüan-kan, then president of the Board of Rites and in charge of the supply centre at the southern end of the Yung-chi ch'ü. Hsüan-kan's revolt was the first defection of a major political figure and it occurred near the very heart of the empire, not far from Lo-yang. Yang-ti sent his best general Yü-wen Shu back from the north-eastern campaign to crush the rebellion. A short sharp civil war ensued, and Yang Hsüan-kan's forces were defeated, his head sent as evidence to the emperor in the field; but the social fabric, the tax, militia and supply systems had been badly disrupted. In view of this and of the outbreak of eight widely distributed rebellions in the second half of the year, it is strange to find the emperor announcing a third campaign for 614. He did so after asking his officialdom to present their views, but, the *Sui shu* tells us, 'for several days, no one dared speak out'.[132]

[131] Woodbridge Bingham, *The founding of the T'ang dynasty: the fall of Sui and the rise of T'ang* (Baltimore, 1941), p. 43.
[132] *SS* 4, p. 86.

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So, in the second month, he issued an edict, this time in a self-justifying tone. He said he had always devoted himself whole-heartedly to his kingly task and to military matters; he invoked the precedent of the fifty-two battles of (the mythical) founder of the Shang. To these he added the military exploits of the founder of the second Han. He spoke of his hatred of war, of his distress at the loss of life in the previous campaigns, and ordered that the remains of the war dead be collected and properly buried and that a Buddhist shrine be erected where masses would be performed to confer grace on the souls of the departed, and allay the suffering of the unhappy ghosts.[133] Preparations were begun, and despite shortages of supplies and horses, and the failure of many conscripts to report for duty, the Sui armies again crossed the Liao. Again the strong-points along the river held, but the Sui forces penetrated the outskirts of P'yŏngyang. Later in 614, the king of Koguryŏ, sorely beset, sent an emissary with his offer of submission, and the emissary brought with him a Sui general who had defected to Koguryŏ. The Sui vanguard wanted to take P'yŏngyang, and capture the king, but they were summoned back by imperial order. Yang-ti once again ordered the king of Koguryŏ to appear at the imperial court to pay homage. When he did not come, the emperor ordered the armies to stand by for a fourth expedition, but by this time the country was seething with rebellion, and foreign adventures were at an end.

Yang-ti was driven to these repeated campaigns, ruinously expensive in manpower and material, by his conception of the majesty and cosmic centrality of the empire, by his urge to restore the glory of the Han, by his image of himself as destined to great victories against all who resisted the benevolent transforming influence of the Central Kingdom, and by considerations of Realpolitik persuasively put to him by P'ei Chü and his other military men. Why he persisted in the face of repeated disaster seems clear. Why he failed has long been a matter of speculation. Recently John Jamieson has summarized his own, Ch'en Yin-k'o's and others' explanations. These may be briefly stated as follows. (1) The terrain and climate favoured the defenders. The area attacked was forbidding, densely forested in parts, where heavy summer rains were quickly followed by long severe winters; the fighting season for invaders was only from April to the beginning of the rains in July. (2) Koguryŏ strategists, knowing their terrain and having most of the year to prepare themselves, were formidable in defence. The nodes of their defence were the walled towns stretching north from An-shih near the mouth of the Liao all the way up

[133] *SS* 4, pp. 86–7; Yamazaki Hiroshi, 'Zui no Koguryŏ ensei to Bukkyō', *Shichō*, 59 (1953) 1–10.

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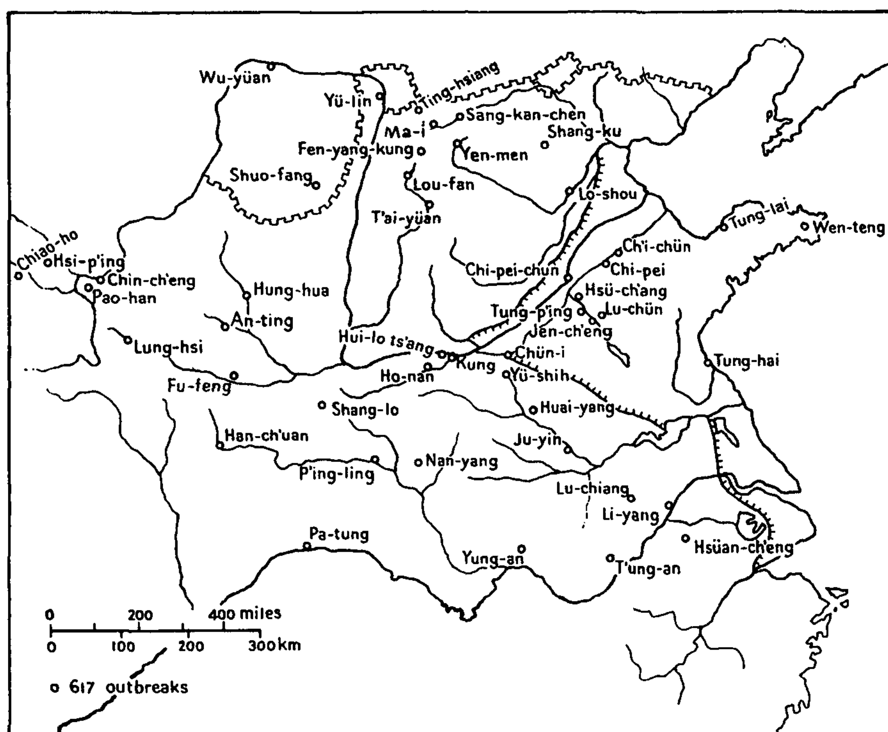

Map 4. Late Sui rebellions, 617

the east bank. Time after time they tied down the besieging armies until the onset of winter forced withdrawal. (3) The distance of the campaign base from the capital of the Chinese empire was formidable, close to a thousand miles; it took nearly a month, for example, for the news of Yang Hsüan-kan's revolt to reach Yang-ti in the field. Koguryŏ enjoyed a compensating advantage. (4) The Sui use of naval forces was costly but inept, and Koguryŏ's coastal defences were good.[134] These factors continued to be decisive in the disastrous campaign of T'ang T'ai-tsung, and the balance was changed only when the Chinese persuaded and 'assisted' Koguryŏ's southern neighbour, Silla, to open a second front.

Dénouement

When the emperor returned first to Lo-yang and then to the capital in the west in the tenth month of 614, he ordered the general who had defected to Koguryŏ to be dismembered outside the west central gate of the city. Thereafter an attempt was made to conduct imperial business as

[134] Jamieson, 'The *Samguk Sagi* and the unification wars', pp. 32–4.

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usual. At the new year, 615, Yang-ti feasted his officials, and, the *Sui shu* tells us, received tributary emissaries from the Turks, Silla, the Malgal, the Khitan and a number of Inner Asian states. Later in the same month he entertained representatives of the southern and eastern aborigines and made them gifts. In the second month he reviewed in an edict the strains and disruptions of the campaigns but urged his people back to their settled peacetime pursuits. He told them that after all their troubles 'the empire is pacified and united, all within the four seas quiescent'.[135] In fact, however, all sections of the empire were in turmoil, and the imperial troops were engaged on a dozen fronts in an effort to contain or exterminate the rebels. The emperor spent the summer season at the Fen-yang Palace which he had built near T'ai-yüan. Late in the summer while on a progress to the north, he was almost captured by a force of Eastern Turks under Shih-pi Qaghan and took refuge in the walled city of Yen-men. There are various accounts of panic and disaffection among the defenders, of brash proposals to escape or drive off the enemy. But an order was apparently got out to prefects in the vicinity to bring troops to their emperor's aid. The siege was lifted, but the emperor had been severely alarmed, his confidence badly shaken; later he became more and more depressed.

We do not know how much he knew at this time about the state of the empire which was increasingly in the grip of numerous local rebels. His particular style of governing made it inevitable that his inner circle would try to keep the whole bitter truth from him. According to one account his advisers indulged in delphic utterance, double talk and outright lying to do so. One man who spoke out was beaten to death in the audience hall. In the autumn of 616, at the urging of Yü-wen Shu, the emperor sailed with his newly built canal fleet for the Yangtze capital. He left officials in charge of the north, the centre of empire, but he himself never returned. His last days in Chiang-tu were melancholy. He was wracked by fear and self-doubt, unable to tolerate news of the empire much less take any action upon it. By 617 two of his grandsons had been enthroned as his successors by rival rebels in the north, and he had been given by one of them the exalted but empty title of Retired Emperor (*t'ai-shang-huang*). In 618, he was murdered in his bathhouse by Yü-wen Hua-chi, descendant of the house his father had so ruthlessly displaced and the son of his most trusted general Yü-wen Shu.

The moral judgments on Yang-ti by the Confucian historians have been harsh indeed for they made of him a minatory stereotype of the 'bad last' emperor. His popular image in folklore, theatre and story is

[135] *SS* 4, pp. 88–9.

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extravagantly coloured by the wish-fulfilment fantasies of writers and audiences alike – people who could live only vicariously in a world of unlimited power, magnificent palaces, and boundless opportunities for sensual indulgence. Among Chinese emperors he was by no means the worst, and in the context of his own time he was no more tyrannical than others. He was a very gifted man, well suited to consolidate – as he first intended – the great work his father had begun. Yet his visions of what the history of his reign would say of him, and his taste for pomp and glory soon came to outweigh his judgment. Such extravagances could only thrive in the hothouse of a sycophantic circle and this, fatally for him, is what he had. The conquest of Koguryŏ – attempted, I believe, with a rational if traditional end in mind – became after each defeat a greater obsession, and obsessions tend to be fatal for supreme autocrats and for the people they govern.

Despite this tragic débâcle and the period of civil war which followed, the Sui reunification of China after its longest period of disunion was a formidable achievement. So was the Sui elimination of the outworn and ineffective institutions of their predecessors, the creation of the fabric of a centralized empire, and the development of a sense of common culture in areas long politically separated. No one studying any aspect of the structure and life of the great T'ang empire which followed can fail to see at every turn one or another dimension of the Sui's achievement – surely one of the most impressive in China's history.

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CHAPTER 3

THE FOUNDING OF THE T'ANG DYNASTY: KAO-TSU (REIGN 618–26)

In 617 Li Yüan (566–635), the Duke of T'ang and one of the most powerful Sui generals, joined the scores of rebels who had arisen in the waning years of the Sui dynasty. His armies marched on the Sui capital, overwhelmed its defences, and took the city. There, six months later, he founded a new dynasty which was to endure for almost three centuries, and would rank alongside the Han as one of China's two golden ages of empire. As Li Yüan went on to impose firm central authority throughout the country, he was fortunate in being the heir to the great achievements of the Sui, who, barely three decades before, had brought centuries of disunion to an end. The institutions of his new dynasty were established on the solid foundations left by his predecessors.

Like the majority of rebel leaders throughout Chinese history who succeeded in founding dynasties of their own, Li Yüan was not a commoner but a nobleman of distinguished lineage. His ancestry can be traced with certainty as far as his grandfather, Li Hu, one of the 'Eight Pillars of State' (*Pa Kuo-chu*), the chief commanders associated with Yü-wen T'ai in the foundation of the Northern Chou state in the 550s. At that time the Li clan was centred on Wu-ch'uan chen, a garrison established by the Toba state of Northern Wei inside the Great Wall near modern Ta-t'ung, which was also the home of Yü-wen T'ai. Li Hu's ancestry is not absolutely clear. The T'ang royal house claimed that his grandfather was Li Hsi and his father Li T'ien-hsi, both prominent military commanders under the Northern Wei (386–535), and that Li Hu's family was thus descended from the prominent north-western Li clan of Lung-hsi, and from the ruling house of the petty kingdom of Western Liang which had controlled western Kansu during the early fifth century, until it was extinguished by the Hsiung-nu in 420. The founder of the Western Liang, Li Ping, was the head of a distinguished local clan descended from a Han general, Li Kuang, who had commanded part of the defence line against the Hsiung-nu, and whose descendants had become hereditary governors of Tun-huang commandery. After the fall of the Western Liang, the son of its last king, named Li Ch'ung-erh, fled to southern China, and later

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took service under the Toba Northern Wei, rising to become a prefect. Li Hsi was said to have been his son.

This genealogy claimed by the T'ang royal house established its claim to be descended from a notable Han clan and to be members of a prominent north-western lineage. However, there is some reason to believe that this line of descent, presented as solid fact by the T'ang histories, was in fact a deliberate fabrication. It has been suggested that the Li clan was not connected with the royal house of Western Liang, or with the prestigious Li clan of Lung-hsi, but was a minor offshoot of an eastern lineage, the Li clan of Chao-chün in Ho-pei, who had settled in the north-west under the Toba Northern Wei, and had intermarried widely with the non-Chinese tribal aristocracy. Two of the men who, it has been suggested, were among the ancestors of Li Hu were the generals Li Ch'u-ku-pa and Li Mai-te, whose names show that they had either adopted or been granted the Chinese surname Li, but retained alien, perhaps Hsien-pei, personal names.[1]

Whatever its ultimate origins, however, the Li clan was an extremely important one in the nobility in the latter half of the sixth century. Among Yü-wen T'ai's other associates in the founding of the Northern Chou state were Tu-ku Hsin, a member of a very prominent Turkish clan, and Yang Chung, the father of Sui Wen-ti, whose families were linked by a series of marriages. Tu-ku Hsin had several daughters. The eldest was married to Yü-wen T'ai's son who became the first Northern Chou emperor, Ming-ti (reign 557–61). His seventh daughter was married to Yang Chung's son Yang Chien, the future Sui emperor Wen-ti (reign 581–605). The fourth was married to Li Hu's son, Li Ping, and from this union was born Li Yüan, in 566.[2] Li Yüan was thus not only descended from a line of prominent military men and a member of the mixed Chinese/Hsien-pei/Turkish aristocracy which dominated north-western China, he was also closely related through his mother with the royal families both of the Northern Chou and of the Sui.

The family was also among the highest ranking hereditary nobility. Li Hu was ennobled as the Duke of T'ang at the beginning of the Northern Chou in 558. The title passed to his son Li Ping, and on the latter's death in 572 was inherited by Li Yüan, then a child of six.

When the Sui came to power, Li Yüan became a special favourite of

[1] See Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao*, first published 1944, reprinted with some corrections in *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun-chi* (Taipei, 1971), pp. 109–17. Ch'en's evidence is not absolutely conclusive, but he makes an extremely powerful case, which has never been convincingly refuted.

[2] For a study of the interrelationships of these great families based upon recently excavated epigraphical evidence, see Okazaki Takashi, 'Zui Chōkoku Kō Dokuko Ro no boshimei no kōshō', *Shien*, 83 (1960) 31–62. There is a clear family tree on p. 40.

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Wen-ti, and his close relationship with the empress Wen-hsien assisted him to a distinguished career in official service. Beginning his career as a member of Wen-ti's personal bodyguard (*ch'ien-niu pei-shen*) in 581, he served as prefect or governor of a succession of important strategic prefectures in the metropolitan area and in the north-west. Under Yang-ti he continued to serve as governor of important commanderies, and was later called to the capital, appointed vice-president of the Imperial Household Department, and given other important court posts.

In 613, at the age of forty-seven, he was vice-president of the Court of Imperial Insignia (*wei-wei shao-ch'ing*), the office in charge of arms and arsenals in the capital, and was given the task of supervising the transportation of military supplies to the far north-east (modern Liaoning province) for Yang-ti's second Korean campaign.

Later in that same year, after some three years of sporadic civil disorder and banditry, the first serious uprising against the Sui, led by Yang Hsüan-kan, the disaffected son of Wen-ti's great adviser Yang Su, erupted at Li-yang in northern Ho-nan.[3]

Yang Hsüan-kan, cultured patron of literature and like Li Yüan a member of the empire's social elite distantly related to the royal house, had risen to the high rank of president of the Board of Rites, and had been posted to Li-yang, a major supply base for the Sui armies at the beginning of the Korean campaign. In spite of his privileged aristocratic background, Yang Hsüan-kan inherited the suspicion and ill-feeling which had grown up between his father and the two successive Sui emperors, and may well have believed, as did many of his contemporaries, that Yang-ti had Yang Su poisoned in 606. He had already once been dissuaded from rebellion in 609, during the disastrous expedition against the T'u-yü-hun. He now found himself in an area seething with discontent resulting from the disastrous floods of the Huang-ho in 611, from the hardships caused by labour levies employed in the construction of the northern section of the imperial canal (Yung-chi ch'ü) in 609, and from the conscription of vast numbers of peasants from the stricken areas for Yang-ti's Korean campaigns. Early in 613 a series of peasant insurrections had broken out to the east of Li-yang in modern Shantung. Yang Hsüan-kan, taking advantage of the widespread opposition to the Korean expedition and resentment against Yang-ti, raised a rebel army, marched on the Sui Eastern Capital at Lo-yang, and placed it under siege.

Yang-ti was forced to abandon the Korean campaign, and to concentrate his army against the rebels, who were speedily routed by vastly superior loyal forces. Yang Hsüan-kan was captured and slain, his family

[3] See Nunome Chōfū, 'Yō Genkan no hanran', *Ritsumeikan bungaku*, 236 (1965) 91–5.

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and followers ruthlessly extirpated. His rebellion had lasted less than two months.

However, during the same year rebellion became widespread. No less than eight other armed uprisings were reported, from widely separated regions. Li Yüan was sent from the north-east to command an army in Shensi protecting the western approaches to the capital. In the north-west a rebel named Pai Yü-wang had caused chaos in Kansu, disrupting the state horse pastures on which the Sui cavalry depended for mounts, and in 613 and 614 risings had also broken out in Fu-feng commandery, immediately to the west of the capital. These minor risings were soon put down, but remnants of the various rebel forces continued at large, and the progressive breakdown of authority and order was accompanied by numerous minor disorders and ever more serious uprisings (see map 3).

In 615 and 616 Li Yüan was given another important military assignment, this time in Ho-tung, the northern part of modern Shansi province, where he destroyed more local 'bandit' groups, and successfully opposed Turkish incursions across the border. In recognition of Li Yüan's victories in the field, early in 617 Yang-ti promoted him to the post of garrison commander of T'ai-yüan fu, where he had been stationed since 615. His headquarters were established at Chin-yang.

By this time Yang-ti had himself withdrawn to his Southern Capital at Chiang-tu, and had no effective administrative or military control over most of the north. Li Yüan's new appointment merely confirmed the *de facto* military power which he already wielded over the region of modern Shansi.[4] But nevertheless, until this time Li Yüan had remained a loyal and extremely valuable supporter of the Sui royal house.

THE SEIZURE OF POWER

By the time of Li Yüan's appointment at Chin-yang, years of natural calamities compounded by Yang-ti's lavish spending, burdensome corvée impositions, and the great human costs of the repeated military campaigns against Korea and defence against the resurgent power of the Turks, had created deep discontent among the general populace and among many Sui officials. Banditry and rebellion soon spread across the country (see map 4). Reports of the mounting violence poured into T'ai-yüan fu, where Li Yüan's friends and military advisers, realizing that the Sui regime was in a desperate plight, encouraged him to seize the opportunity to found a new dynasty.

[4] See Woodbridge Bingham, *The founding of the T'ang dynasty: the fall of Sui and the rise of T'ang* (Baltimore, 1941), pp. 79–80.

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Li Yüan was in an almost ideal position to lead a successful revolt. His family and personal credentials were impeccable: he was an aristocrat, related to the imperial house, and at the age of fifty-one, he was at the peak of a long and successful career that had spanned the reigns of both Sui emperors. He was a member of the social elite which had provided the rulers of one dynasty after another in northern China. As commander of the T'ai-yüan garrison, he was in a strong military and tactical position, for he was in control of an area which has been considered virtually impregnable throughout Chinese history, from which an attack on the traditional centres of political power at Ch'ang-an (the Sui Ta-hsing ch'eng) and Lo-yang could easily be mounted.

Li Yüan was also in a position to gain widespread popular acceptance as a result of the fact that, since about the year 614, a ballad of enigmatic wording, prophesying that the next person to occupy the throne would be surnamed Li, had become popular among the people. The career of at least one other rebel against the Sui, Li Mi, had already been affected by the prophecy. Li Yüan also knew of the ballad, which had spread among the people of Chin-yang.[5]

As bearer of the Li surname, Li Yüan was naturally suspect in the eyes of the Sui emperor. In 615, a soothsayer also warned the emperor that someone named Li would soon become emperor, and led Yang-ti to execute people of that surname throughout the country; the purge included one of his highest generals, the powerful and well-connected Li Hun, and thirty-two members of his clan; other more distant relatives were banished to the frontier. Li Yüan must have realized that his position under the Sui was precarious, and that since its power was obviously on the wane, he might be in a strong position to replace it with a dynasty of his own.

Men of Li Yüan's generation were unaffected by the later Confucian conception of 'loyalty' (*chung*), which forbade a man who had served one royal house from serving its successor. He and his contemporaries felt far more of a sense of loyalty towards the social order than towards any particular reigning dynasty. Thus, in the fifth month of 617, he mobilized his army in T'ai-yüan fu and began a march on the capital.

Somewhat surprisingly, the full extent and nature of Li Yüan's role in the T'ai-yüan uprising has been revealed only recently. In the traditional accounts found in the two Dynastic Histories of the T'ang and in Ssu-ma Kuang's *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, he was portrayed as a mediocre and lack-lustre man, devoid of ambition and burdened by the weight of years.

[5] *TCTC* 183, p. 5709. See Woodbridge Bingham, 'The rise of Li in a ballad prophecy', *JAOS*, 61 (1941) 272–3.

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By contrast, his second son, Li Shih-min, who was seventeen years old in 617, was portrayed as a superb military leader, forceful, ambitious and charismatic. Thus Li Shih-min, who later became the second T'ang emperor (T'ai-tsung), was in these accounts given full credit for founding the T'ang.

According to the traditional interpretation in the Standard Histories, in 617, when Li Yüan was appointed garrison commander of T'ai-yüan fu, Li Shih-min made his first plans for a rebellion with Liu Wen-ching, an official who had been in charge of the city of Chin-yang, but had been imprisoned on Yang-ti's order because he was related by marriage to the rebel Li Mi. Visiting Liu in jail, Li Shih-min proposed a campaign which would unite popular discontent and sweep away the already moribund Sui dynasty. When Li Yüan was first told of this idea, he would have nothing of it; he was, after all, related to the Sui ruling family and one of the dynasty's principal defenders. But Shih-min forced his father's hand by bribing P'ei Chi, the assistant director of the emperor's detached palace at Chin-yang, to take women from Yang-ti's harem there and present them to Li Yüan without informing him of their origin. When Li Yüan discovered his complicity in this crime against the emperor – which would be punished by death – he was forced to consent to his son's plans and reluctantly raised his troops in rebellion. The traditional narrative stresses, too, that in the subsequent campaign leading to the capture of the Sui capital, Shih-min more than any other person contributed to the military strategy and leadership which led to the T'ang triumph.

In recent years historians have begun to re-examine the evidence for this account of events contained in the Standard Histories and have concluded that important elements were probably fabricated during the reign of T'ai-tsung at the emperor's own insistence. On the basis of other material, most importantly a previously neglected early T'ang dynasty source, the *Diary of the founding of the Great T'ang* (*Ta-T'ang ch'uang-yeh ch'i-chü chu*), they have been able to correct some of the bias and distortions of this traditional account of the T'ang's founding.[6]

The author of the *Diary*, Wen Ta-ya, was a native of T'ai-yüan fu and an eyewitness to the founding of the T'ang dynasty. His detailed narrative emphasizes that it was Li Yüan who masterminded the T'ai-yüan revolt and ably guided the T'ang army to victory in its campaign to take the Sui capital. Wen Ta-ya's Li Yüan is a very different personality from that of the traditional histories – a bold and courageous leader, a fierce adversary

[6] See Woodbridge Bingham, 'Wen Ta-ya: the first recorder of T'ang history', *JAOS*, 57 (1937) 368–74; Lo Hsiang-lin, *T'ang-tai wen-hua shih* (Taipei, 1955), pp. 1–29; Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang shih k'ao-pien* (Taipei, 1965), pp. 1–98, 276–309; and Fukui Shigemasa, 'Dai Tō sōgyō kikyo-chū kō', *Shikan*, 63.4 (1961) 83–8.

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and a cunning strategist. According to the *Diary*, not only did Shih-min, who was still in his teens, play a secondary role in these events, but he contributed no more to the founding of the dynasty than did his elder brother, Li Chien-ch'eng, who later became the T'ang heir apparent. Wen Ta-ya's *Diary* shows that even before the T'ai-yüan revolt in the middle of 617, Li Yüan had already begun to have designs on the Sui throne. The events which stirred his ambition are, moreover, clearly discernible. One of the earliest of these occurred in the year 616 when Li Yüan was appointed to combat banditry in the T'ai-yüan region. T'ai-yüan was an area traditionally associated with the legendary sage ruler Yao, also known as 'T'ang Yao' (Yao of T'ang) because he had once resided there at a place called T'ang. T'ang was also the seat of Li Yüan's dukedom, although like similar noble titles, this gave him no territorial authority. When Li Yüan, Duke of T'ang, received his new appointment, he viewed the coincidence of his noble title and place of duty as a propitious sign from heaven.[7] The following year, when he became garrison commander of T'ai-yüan fu, Li Yüan said to Shih-min: 'T'ang is certainly our country, and T'ai-yüan is its territory. My coming here now is Heaven's conferment. If we do not take what is conferred, calamity will befall us.'[8] The *Diary* also suggests the effect which the 'Li Ballad' – and its prophecy that the next man to rule China would be surnamed Li – had on Li Yüan, for it quotes him as saying: 'I ought to rise up [and march] a thousand *li* to fulfil that prophecy!'[9]

Early in the fifth month of 617, Li Yüan sent word to his eldest and fourth sons, Li Chien-ch'eng and Li Yüan-chi, who were serving in southern Shansi, to raise additional troops in their area, and ordered his second son Li Shih-min, Liu Wen-ching and others to do the same in T'ai-yüan. Within ten days almost ten thousand troops were recruited and encamped at the Hsing-kuo Temple in Chin-yang.

Having come this far, Li Yüan decided to purge his staff of men whose loyalty was doubtful. When Li had been posted as garrison commander of T'ai-yüan fu, Yang-ti had personally appointed two deputies, Wang Wei and Kao Chün-ya, to assist and, no doubt, to spy upon him. Li Yüan had taken advantage of their temporary absence from T'ai-yüan to recruit additional troops for his army, but he realized that they would soon become suspicious of the build-up of his forces and inform Yang-ti. Thus, on the fifteenth day of the fifth month, after summoning both Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi to T'ai-yüan, Li Yüan had the two deputies seized

[7] Wen Ta-ya, *Ta T'ang ch'uang-yeh ch'i-chü chu*, Chin-tai mi-shu edn of Mao Chin (hereafter *Ch'i-chü chu*), 1, pp. 1a–b.

[8] *Ch'i-chü chu* 1, p. 3b.

[9] *Ch'i-chü chu* 1, p. 15b.

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and executed on the pretext that they had called in the Turks, who had at that moment raided the T'ai-yüan area.[10]

Before Li Yüan could safely begin a campaign, however, he had to deal with the Eastern Turks, the extremely powerful coalition of tribes that lived both north and south of the Gobi, and at this time dominated central Asia, controlling the territory north of the Great Wall from Liao-ning to Mongolia. At the end of the Sui the Eastern Turks were the dominant power in northern Asia, and many of the rebels who had appeared in north-west China since 613 had declared themselves their subjects in order to secure Turkish support. The qaghan, or great khan, of the Eastern Turks, Shih-pi, variously bestowed the insignia and titles of emperor or qaghan on these rebels. He had also supplied them with soldiers, arms and horses in the hope of profiting by the collapse of the Sui.[11] The Eastern Turks in late 615 had besieged Yang-ti himself for a month in the Shansi border city of Yen-men during one of his periodic tours of inspection along the Great Wall,[12] and had recently mounted several invasions of Shansi and of the T'ai-yüan area. In 617 they renewed their pressure, this time in collaboration with the rebel Liu Wu-chou, who had proclaimed himself emperor in Northern Shansi early in 617, and been invested as qaghan by the Turkish leaders. At the time that Li Yüan seized his two deputies the Turks had advanced as far as the walls of Chin-yang before retreating.

It was evident that Li Yüan would have to remove the threat of an attack by the Eastern Turks and their allies on his rear before he could proceed with his revolt. He thus sent a letter to Shih-pi Qaghan, falsely claiming that he had raised troops only to restore order in the empire, which he said would permit the re-establishment of friendly relations between the Chinese and the Turks. This he argued would be to everyone's benefit. He then came to an agreement with the qaghan in which he promised that Shih-pi would receive all the booty from the T'ang campaign if he would aid their cause. This agreement was negotiated by Liu Wen-ching.[13]

[10] The traditional accounts in the Dynastic Histories and in *TCTC* give credit for this move to Li Shih-min. Wen Ta-ya, however, indicates that the troops involved in seizing the two deputies were actually led by another general, although they were nominally under Li Shih-min's command. See *Ch'i-chü chu* 1, p. 9b.

[11] The following are merely the major rebels who received support from the Turks; Hsüeh Chü, Li Kuei, Liu Wu-chou, Tou Chien-te, Liang Shih-tu and Kao K'ai-tao. There were many minor rebels in addition.

[12] This incident too is coupled with the name of Li Shih-min by the Dynastic Histories. But Shih-min was only a boy of fifteen at the time, and according to Wen Ta-ya it was Li Yüan who led the forces which relieved Yang-ti. See *Ch'i-chü chu* 1, p. 1b. See also Bingham, *The founding of the T'ang*, p. 49, n. 82.

[13] See Bingham, *The founding of the T'ang*, pp. 99–100; Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang shih k'ao-pien*, p. 217.

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The letter was worded very respectfully, and against the counsel of his advisers, Li Yüan affixed the character *ch'i*, which was used by an inferior writing to his superior, suggesting that he, like some of the other rebels, may have decided to become a nominal Turkish vassal. But when Shih-pi demanded that Li Yüan renounce his allegiance to Yang-ti and declare himself emperor, Li Yüan refused. Instead, he informed the qaghan that he would place Yang-ti's grandson, Yang Yu, Prince of Tai, who was then in the Sui capital, on the throne. Whether Li Yüan actually declared himself a subject of the Eastern Turks or not, some form of *rapprochement* was certainly made, for on the eve of his departure from T'ai-yüan, Shih-pi Qaghan sent him a thousand horses, and later supplied him with several hundred soldiers and thousands of additional mounts.

Once the problem of the Eastern Turks had been dealt with, Li Yüan formally established his military campaign organization, the Administration of the Grand General (Ta-chiang-chün fu). This was composed predominantly of Sui military and civil officials from the vicinity of T'ai-yüan. Large elements of Li Yüan's army were initially recruited and supplied thanks to the support of these officials, many of whom had served as officers in the Sui militia (*ying-yang fu*) in T'ai-yüan and who now simply transferred their troops to Li Yüan's command.[14] P'ei Chi, the assistant director of the detached Sui palace at Chin-yang, likewise provided the T'ang army with abundant supplies of grain, weapons and armour from the palace storehouses.

Early in the seventh month of 617, Li Yüan and his sons Shih-min and Chien-ch'eng led thirty thousand troops out of T'ai-yüan, while the other son Yüan-chi remained behind to guard the area. Their objective was the Sui capital city Ta-hsing ch'eng, immemorial political capital of the empire, and centre of the strategically vital Kuan-chung area of southern Shensi.

After meeting strong resistance from Sui forces and encountering heavy summer rains midway down the Fen River valley, which led towards the vitally strategic T'ung Pass, the gateway to Shensi, Li Yüan called a temporary halt to the T'ang advance.[15] He now received a message from Li Mi,[16] a powerful rebel leader in the vicinity of Lo-yang in Ho-nan,

[14] See Nunome Chōfū, 'Ri En shudan no kōzō', *Ritsumeikan bungaku*, 243 (1965) 27–9. This is reprinted in Nunome's *Zui Tō shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1968), pp. 112–49.

[15] According to Wen Ta-ya (*Ch'i-chü chu* 2, pp. 12b–13a) Li Yüan, his army bogged down by the rains, awaiting the horses promised him by the Turks, and apprehensive about rumours that Liu Wu-chou was planning to attack his base at T'ai-yüan, was on the point of abandoning his campaign and was only dissuaded from ordering a retreat by his sons.

[16] Li Mi's biography is in *CTS* 53, pp. 2207–25; *HTS* 84, pp. 3677–87; *SS* 70, pp. 1624–33. On his regime see Nunome Chōfū, 'Zuimatsu no hanranki ni okeru Ri Mitsu no dōkō', *SGZS*, 74.10 (1965) 1–44; also *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 53–100, which is a revised and supplemented version of the same study.

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proposing an alliance. Li Mi, a member of the north-western aristocracy and previously a minor Sui official, was one of the strongest of Li Yüan's rivals. In early life a protégé of Yang Su, he had left the Sui capital in 613 to join the rebellion of the latter's son Yang Hsüan-kan. He had escaped at the time of Yang Hsüan-kan's defeat and from 616 onwards became the leader of a coalition of rebel groups which dominated the region surrounding Lo-yang after Yang-ti withdrew to his southern capital. When he made his offer of an alliance to Li Yüan, he was already in control of a large part of Ho-nan and southern Ho-pei.

Li Yüan was afraid that if Li Mi discovered his plans, he would intercept the march on Ta-hsing ch'eng. He therefore wrote a polite but deceptive letter in which he described himself as a loyal subject of the Sui who had raised an army only to re-establish order, and disclaimed any ambition greater than being left with his noble title, Duke of T'ang. At the same time, he disingenuously encouraged Li Mi in his own efforts to win the empire: 'Heaven has created the common people who need a shepherd. And now, who else is that shepherd if not you!' Li Mi was flattered and reassured by the letter and allowed Li Yüan to march on the Sui capital without attempting to hinder him, a decision which he was subsequently to regret.[17]

When the rains stopped in the eighth month of 617, the T'ang army, with the aid of two thousand horses and five hundred warriors sent by the Turkish qaghan, quickly overcame Sui resistance at Huo-i and continued its advance southward.[18] In the ninth month the T'ang army reached the Huang-ho, leaving a part of the force to invest the Sui garrison in P'u-chou city, which dominated the route from Shansi and the Fen valley into the plain of southern Shensi, while the rest of the army crossed the Huang-ho. As they crossed they were engaged by a large Sui force, which they routed. Li Yüan was now joined by the Sui magistrate of Hua-chou, the crucial city inside the T'ung Pass, who surrendered the great granary at Yung-feng to the T'ang armies. The way was now open to Ta-hsing ch'eng.

As Li Yüan moved into the capital region, he was joined by several thousand troops who had been raised in the area around the capital by his daughter, the Lady Li (the wife of Ch'ai Shao, later Princess P'ing-yang), and by his cousin, Li Shen-t'ung. His daughter had brought together a sizeable army by distributing the property of her estates near

[17] *TCTC* 184, p. 5743.

[18] *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, pp. 13b–14a. Wen Ta-ya reveals that in the battle of Huo-i and throughout the T'ang campaign to take Ta-hsing ch'eng, both Chien-ch'eng and Shih-min were placed in command of T'ang military units. Accounts in the T'ang Standard Histories, on the other hand, emphasize Shih-min's role at the expense of his elder brother.

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Ta-hsing ch'eng to buy the allegiance of people who had recently fled to the area from more disturbed parts of China, and by making alliances with rebel and bandit groups in the region of the capital. In the tenth month the combined T'ang forces, said to have numbered more than two hundred thousand, were encamped outside Ta-hsing ch'eng.[19]

A siege was mounted against the capital, while Li Yüan made elaborate military preparations for the final assault. When the attack was finally begun some five weeks later the population was already beginning to suffer from starvation. On the ninth day of the eleventh month of 617, troops under the command of Lei Yung-chi, one of Li Chien-ch'eng's subordinates, breached the walls and the city was overrun.[20] Li Yüan had given strict orders guaranteeing the safety of the Sui imperial family. Then, as previously planned, Yang-ti's young grandson Yang Yu was made a puppet emperor (with the title Kung-ti), although the T'ang generals clamoured for Li Yüan to ascend the throne himself. Yang-ti, who had long since fled to his southern capital Chiang-tu on the Yangtze, was given the empty title of Retired Emperor (*t'ai-shang-huang*).

Early in the next year Li Yüan mounted a major campaign against the Sui eastern capital, Lo-yang.[21] Then, on the twentieth day of the fifth month of 618 – the first anniversary of the seizure of his deputies and the effective beginning of the T'ai-yüan revolt – Li Yüan deposed the puppet Sui child-emperor, and ascended the throne himself as the first emperor of a new dynasty. Li Yüan, whom we shall hereafter call by his posthumous temple name, Kao-tsu, named the dynasty he founded after his hereditary fief, T'ang. As was customary, he also selected a name for his own reign; it was Wu-te, or 'Military Virtue'. Although Kao-tsu established his capital at Ta-hsing ch'eng, he renamed it Ch'ang-an, the name of the old capital of the Han and of many of the dynasties during the period of disunion which had been located nearby. Kao-tsu's eldest son, Chien-ch'eng, was appointed heir apparent; Shih-min, the second son, was made Prince of Ch'in; and Yüan-chi became Prince of Ch'i.

EXTENSION OF DYNASTIC CONTROL THROUGHOUT CHINA

The T'ang now occupied the Sui capital, and parts of Shensi (Kuan-chung) and Shansi (Ho-tung) provinces. But they remained only one of many regional regimes. They were not even the only claimants to the title of emperor. More than two hundred rebel organizations were involved in the

[19] *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, pp. 25a–b.
[20] *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, p. 27a. See also Lo Hsiang-lin, *T'ang-tai wen-hua shih*, p. 19; Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien*, pp. 279–80.
[21] See Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, p. 263.

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fighting at the end of the Sui and during the early T'ang, although only about ten of these had any chance of establishing a stable regime and conquering the empire. The rest occupied small towns, waiting to gain at least some local influence by surrendering to a likely victor at the most advantageous time. Many areas remained under the control of Sui civil and military officials who remained loyal to Yang-ti or who were simply trying to hold on to their local position. In other areas local gentry raised armies to oppose banditry and civil strife, and were ready to give their support to anyone who would bring peace and stability to their region. Kao-tsu's tasks were on the one hand to secure the support of as many as possible of these petty rebels, Sui officials and gentry leaders and on the other to destroy the power of his major rivals. He accomplished the first end by astutely administered policies of amnesty, appointment and reward and the second by skilful deployment of his own ever increasing military strength.

On the whole, the T'ang pacification effort was marked by considerable restraint. Those who surrendered voluntarily with their armies and territory, and many of those defeated on the battlefield as well, were given amnesty. Even in cases where rebel leaders were executed, their followers were generally pardoned. Defeated troops were absorbed into the T'ang army, and the armies of important rebel leaders were often incorporated as whole units under the same commanders,[22] a situation which no doubt contributed to the willingness of rebel leaders to transfer their allegiance to the T'ang. Sui local officials were often reappointed to the posts they already held, while the *de facto* authority of bandit or rebel leaders over given localities was frequently legitimized by appointing them as prefects under the T'ang.[23] Thus, while Kao-tsu was attempting to ensure the loyalty of former rebel leaders, he was at the same time providing for general continuity in local administration and for the maintenance of law and order.

Besides appointments to the provincial bureaucracy, the emperor offered other inducements to those who gave him allegiance. He was scrupulously attentive in rewarding his own troops after battle.[24] He also liberally rewarded surrendered rebels and often granted them noble titles. He even bestowed the imperial surname Li on some important rebel leaders, thus conferring very high prestige upon them and giving them right of precedence at court over other officials of equal rank.[25] Most important, once former enemies became part of the T'ang administration

[22] See for example *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, pp. 16a and 23a.
[23] See for example *CTS* 69, p. 2521; *CTS* 57, pp. 2301–2; *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, p. 19b.
[24] *Ch'i-chü chu* 2, pp. 15b–16a.
[25] *TCTC* 187, p. 5840.

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Kao-tsu exhibited a remarkable lack of suspicion towards them. The resulting large number of voluntary surrenders to the T'ang was a consequence not only of their overwhelming military power, but also of Kao-tsu's successful efforts to create an image of himself as a forgiving, generous and trusting ruler, who wished only to forgive and forget in an effort to restore peace to the empire.

Military efforts to conquer the rest of China were begun by the T'ang almost immediately after the capture of Ta-hsing ch'eng late in 617. They were not fully completed for more than ten years, although the major sources of resistance were overcome by early 624. The T'ang armies sent out to do battle with rebel forces were known as armies-on-campaign (*hsing-chün*). They were not permanent forces but were created *ad hoc* as the situation required; their troops were raised by conscription on a local or regional scale from among the general population, by incorporating defeated enemy forces, and, later, by mobilizing T'ang militia units.

At the time when the T'ang set up its regime in Ch'ang-an the principal rival powers in China were the following. To the north-west of the capital, within easy striking distance of the T'ang base, were the forces of the Kansu rebel Hsüeh Chü[26] (617–18). To the north of Ch'ang-an on the borders of the Ordos was Liang Shih-tu[27] (617–28), vassal of the Turks. In the north of Shansi was Liu Wu-chou[28] (617–22), who had been given a patent as qaghan from Shih-pi and had proclaimed himself emperor. The area around present-day Peking was under the control of Kao K'ai-tao[29] (617–20 and 621–4), self-styled 'Prince of Yen'. Central and southern Ho-pei was in the hands of Tou Chien-te[30] (611–21), the rival emperor of the Hsia dynasty proclaimed in 617. Li Mi 'the Duke of Wei' (617–18), the former follower of Yang Hsüan-kan, whom we have already encountered, controlled southern Ho-pei and Ho-nan to the east of Lo-yang. Lo-yang itself was held by a Sui general, Wang Shih-ch'ung,[31] ruling after the fifth month of 618 in the name of a Sui puppet emperor. The remnants of the Sui empire around Yang-chou and in the Huai and Yangtze valleys were controlled after Yang-ti's murder early in 618 by his regicide, Yü-wen Hua-chi,[32] ruling in the name of yet another Sui puppet. On the coast of Kiangsu and in Chekiang was the territory of Li Tzu-t'ung[33]

[26] Biographies in *CTS* 55, pp. 2245–7; *HTS* 86, pp. 3705–7.
[27] Biographies in *CTS* 56, pp. 2280–1; *HTS* 87, pp. 3730–2.
[28] Biographies in *CTS* 55, pp. 2252–5; *HTS* 86, pp. 3711–13.
[29] Biographies in *CTS* 55, pp. 2256–7; *HTS* 86, pp. 3714–15.
[30] Biographies in *CTS* 54, pp. 2234–42; *HTS* 85, pp. 3696–703.
[31] Biographies in *Pei shih* 79, pp. 2660–4; *SS* 85, pp. 1894–8; *CTS* 54, pp. 2227–34; *HTS* 85, pp. 3689–96.
[32] Biographies in *Pei shih* 79, pp. 2654–8; *SS* 85, pp. 1888–92.
[33] Biographies in *CTS* 56, pp. 2273–5; *HTS* 87, pp. 3726–8.

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(615–21), and in the Yangtze valley in the Nanking area the regimes of Tu Fu-wei[34] (613–21) and Fu Kung-shih[35] (613–24). Most substantial of the southern regimes was that of Hsiao Hsien, self-styled emperor of Liang[36] (617–21) who controlled the whole middle Yangtze and much of southern China. Each of these leaders exercised some measure of stable control over a considerable area and had military forces of some size.

The first military challenge to the T'ang came out of the north-west, from the rebel Hsüeh Chü, who had controlled large parts of Kansu since the middle of 617 and had proclaimed himself emperor. He had planned to take the capital himself, but had been diverted by a further rebellion, backed by the Turks, in this year. When the capital was captured by the T'ang forces, his army was already advancing down the Wei valley and had occupied the nearby city of Fu-feng, which had been the site of two early rebellions against the Sui. At the beginning of 618 Li Shih-min was dispatched with an army to drive Hsüeh Chü's forces out of Fu-feng. He easily defeated the army, which was led by Hsüeh's son Jen-kao, and drove them west to the Kansu border, but returned to the capital without following up his victory. Hsüeh Chü then planned to ally himself with Turkish forces and with another rebel Liang Shih-tu, whose power base was on the border of the Ordos desert in northern Shensi, to march on Ta-hsing ch'eng, but Kao-tsu foiled the plan by secretly bribing Mo-ho-to, the leader of the Turks (who was later to win fame as the qaghan Hsieh-li). Later in that same year, Hsüeh advanced alone on Ch'ang-an from the north-west and, after disastrously defeating the T'ang forces sent to oppose him under Liu Wen-ching, moved to take the capital. Fortunately for the T'ang, Hsüeh Chü fell ill and died on the eve of his planned attack in the eighth month of 618. He was succeeded by his son Hsüeh Jen-kao, whose relations with his father's generals were very strained, and as a result morale in the rebel army was very low. He retreated from the Ch'ang-an area to consolidate his position in the territories to the west. In the eleventh month of 618, Shih-min invested Jen-kao's camp, which was now located at Ching-chou, to the north-west of the capital on the border of Kansu. After suffering had induced many of his officers to defect with their troops to the T'ang, Jen-kao was soon forced to surrender to Shih-min. He was sent to Ch'ang-an and executed. The major threat to the T'ang from the west was removed. The capture in 619 of another Kansu rebel leader, Li Kuei,[37] finally consolidated T'ang control in the north-west.

It was the military situation on the north-eastern plain, in the Ho-pei–

[34] Biographies in *CTS* 56, pp. 2266–8; *HTS* 92, pp. 3799–801.
[35] Biographies in *CTS* 56, pp. 2269–70; *HTS* 87, pp. 3724–5.
[36] Biographies in *CTS* 56, pp. 2263–6; *HTS* 87, pp. 3721–4.
[37] Biographies in *CTS* 55, pp. 2248–52; *HTS* 86, pp. 3708–11.

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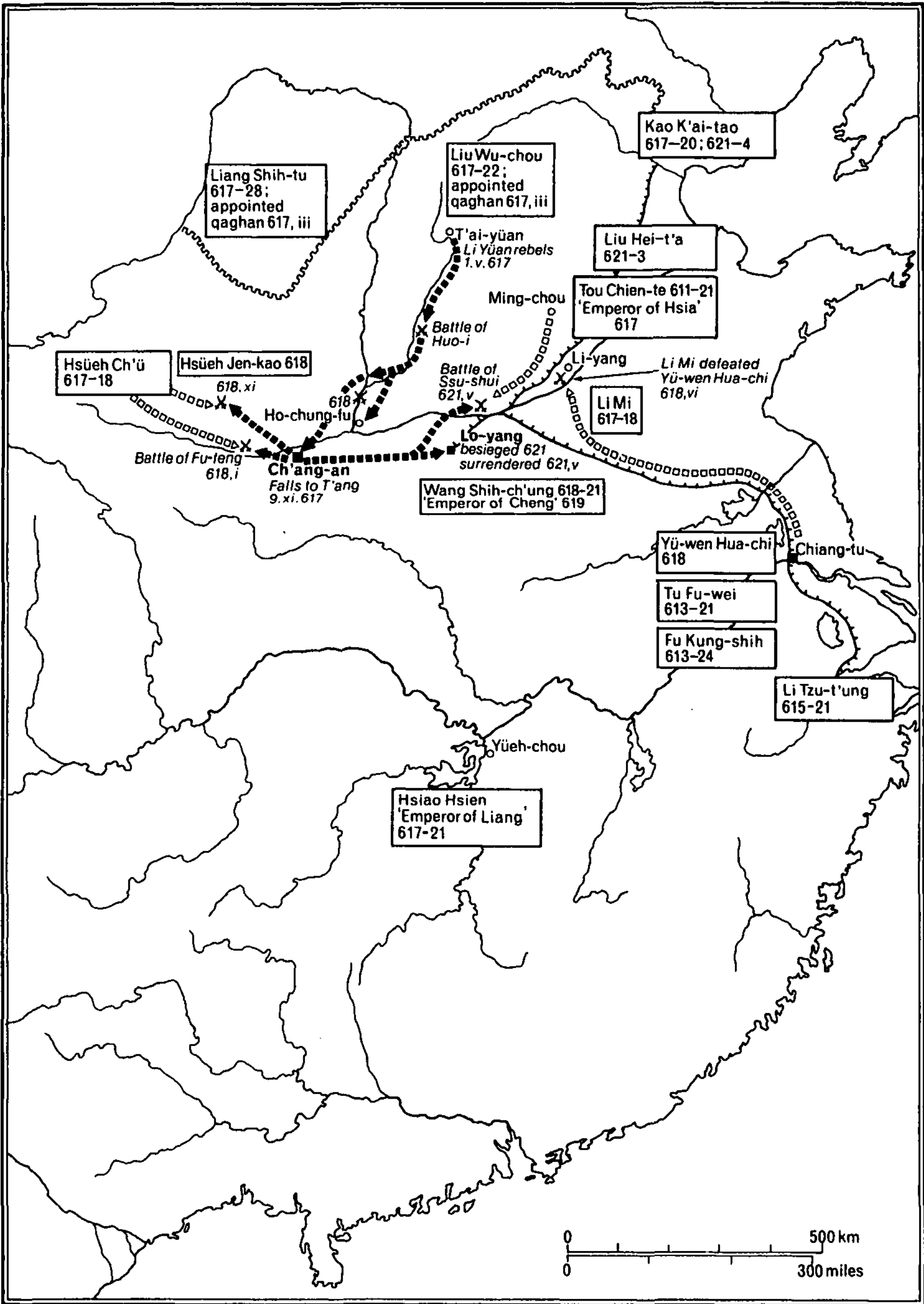

Map 5. The T'ang conquest

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Ho-nan region, however, which was ultimately to decide whether the T'ang would remain a regional regime or whether they would succeed in uniting the country under its control. The T'ang still controlled only Kansu, Shensi and most of Shansi – comprising the politically and strategically vital north-western section of the Sui empire, but containing less than a quarter of its people. During the Sui, Ho-pei and Ho-nan, the provinces of the Great Plain, were by far the most productive area of China, supporting well over half of the entire Chinese population. At the same time the valleys of the Huai and Yangtze in central China had become increasingly important centres of food production, and canals had been built linking these regions to the capitals. Along the canal routes, in both Ho-nan and southern Ho-pei, several large granaries were constructed for grain storage and transshipment. These had been the object of several of the early rebellions. Gaining firm control of the wealth and productive power of the Eastern Plain was indispensable if a dynasty was to reunify the empire. Occupying key areas within this region were four of Kao-tsu's most powerful rivals: Li Mi, Wang Shih-ch'ung, Yü-wen Hua-chi and Tou Chien-te.

The Sui general Wang Shih-ch'ung had been sent by Yang-ti to defend his eastern capital, Lo-yang, in the middle of 617. When news of Yang-ti's assassination by his general Yü-wen Hua-chi at Chiang-tu in early 618 reached Lo-yang in the fifth month of that year, Wang placed Yang T'ung, another young grandson of Yang-ti, on the throne as a puppet Sui emperor with the same title as Li Yüan's puppet emperor (see page 160). Although the rebel Li Mi had failed to capture the city of Lo-yang after prolonged efforts, he had gained control of much of the surrounding region, including the important base at Li-yang, and continued to threaten the city itself. When Yü-wen Hua-chi, who had set yet another Sui prince on the throne in the south as a puppet emperor, led an army northward from Chiang-tu towards Li-yang, the city in northern Ho-nan which was Li Mi's principal base, Wang Shih-ch'ung devised a scheme which would simultaneously weaken both Li Mi and Yü-wen Hua-chi, and so enable him to destroy them. The Lo-yang administration of Wang Shih-ch'ung offered to pardon Li Mi in return for his cooperation in opposing Yang-ti's assassin. Li Mi had to protect his base at Li-yang, and moreover, he believed that he could turn this *détente* to good advantage and eventually remove Wang Shih-ch'ung, thus gaining control of Lo-yang and the whole Ho-nan–Ho-pei plain. Accordingly, he accepted the offer of amnesty, and following a period of conciliation in Lo-yang, led his armies in several victorious battles against the Sui regicide, destroyed a large part of his forces, and compelled him to retreat north to Ta-ming fu.

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Wang Shih-ch'ung then became increasingly concerned over the growing power of Li Mi, who at his own instigation had been pardoned and appointed to high office in Lo-yang and who had been victorious over Yü-wen Hua-chi on the battlefield. In the seventh month of 618, using as a pretext reports of a plot against him, he launched a counter coup in Lo-yang which liquidated his own political opponents and closed the city to Li Mi. Although Li Mi had been able to rout Yü-wen Hua-chi and force him to retreat from the Li-yang area into southern Ho-pei, he had seriously depleted his own military strength in the process, as Wang Shih-ch'ung had hoped. Wang had meanwhile carefully built up his own military strength in Lo-yang, and seizing his opportunity launched a sharp assault against Li's weakened forces. According to one account, one of Wang's soldiers greatly resembled Li Mi; Wang had this soldier trussed and bound, and at the height of the fighting displayed him to Li's troops, who were thrown into a rout. Li Mi, completely defeated, was now compelled to flee to Ch'ang-an and throw himself on the mercy of the T'ang. Kao-tsu accepted his surrender with the remnants of his army in the tenth month of 618.[38]

Elated by his victory over Li Mi, Wang's ambitions soared. Now fully in control at Lo-yang, he appointed a top echelon of officials, which included the powerful Sui minister Su Wei. In the fourth month of 619 he deposed the Sui puppet ruler Kung-ti and set himself up as emperor in his stead, and proclaimed a new dynasty of Cheng and a reign title. At first, successes in the field made Wang the master of virtually all of Ho-nan, but later internal dissent caused by his own cruel and repressive administration and constantly increasing pressure from the T'ang armies caused him steadily to lose ground. By early 621 he had been pushed back to the walls of Lo-yang, and Li Shih-min mounted a siege of the city which was soon reduced to famine conditions. Realizing the gravity of the situation Wang now proposed an alliance with his fellow rebel Tou Chien-te.

Tou had been one of the earliest rebels against the Sui dynasty, having taken up arms in 611. By this time he had succeeded in occupying extensive territory in northern Ho-pei and Shan-tung where, in 617, he had proclaimed himself emperor of Hsia with his capital at Ming-chou in southern Ho-pei. His regime was noted for its good order, deference to the literati, and for his own personal austerity. Early in 619 he captured and beheaded the Sui regicide Yü-wen Hua-chi, who had fled first from Li Mi and then from the T'ang forces. Later in that year Tou drove through south-western Ho-pei, defeated a T'ang army under the leadership of Kao-tsu's

[38] *TCTC* 186, pp. 5813–17.

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cousin, Li Shen-t'ung, and occupied the granary town of Li-yang, Li Mi's former stronghold in northern Ho-nan. He had been attacked by the forces of Wang Shih-ch'ung, who saw his occupation of Li-yang as a threat to his own territory, but the two sides saw the need for at least a temporary alliance. Tou realized that a T'ang conquest of Lo-yang would give it such a great military advantage in the north-eastern plain as to threaten his own existence. He therefore agreed to lead a force to relieve the beleaguered city.

Li Shih-min's strategy was first to attack Tou Chien-te, whose army was the stronger but exhausted from long marches, and to deal with Wang Shih-ch'ung after Tou had been defeated. In the fifth month of 621 Shih-min led his men to a great victory against Tou Chien-te's army; Tou was himself wounded and captured in battle. When Tou was brought beneath the walls of Lo-yang four days later, Wang had no other recourse than to capitulate to the T'ang. Contrary to Kao-tsu's general policy of leniency towards his surrendered rivals, Tou was sent to Ch'ang-an where he was beheaded, while Wang was killed on the way to his place of exile.

In the last analysis, Kao-tsu held a great advantage over his adversaries in the struggle for the north-eastern plain. Relatively isolated and militarily secure in Shansi and Shensi, he was able to preserve his strength, build up resources, and await the exhaustion of his rivals. The rebels of the Ho-pei–Ho-nan region, on the other hand, occupied regions with no natural defences and were under continuous military pressure both from each other and from the increasingly powerful T'ang campaigns mounted against them. They were forced to divert much of their strength into defensive operations and to divide their forces along several fronts. Consequently they were hindered in mounting effective offensives against each other and, especially, against the T'ang.

The conquest of Lo-yang and of the north-eastern plain finally tipped the balance of power in China in Kao-tsu's favour, removing his strongest and best organized opponents. Yet powerful rebel forces still remained active both in the north and the south, and these were joined from time to time by new groups who rebelled against the T'ang's new authority. In northern Shansi, the very homeland of the T'ang regime, Liu Wu-chou maintained a rebel regime which until 622 caused constant trouble in the area of T'ai-yüan fu which he repeatedly invaded with Turkish support.

But it was in the eastern plain that the most serious new challenge to the authority of the T'ang arose. Fearing that they would suffer the same fate as their former leader, in late 621 partisans of Tou Chien-te rose in revolt in Ho-pei under the leadership of Liu Hei-t'a, a former commander under Tou Chien-te. The revolt was quelled early in 623, but only after Liu

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had recaptured huge areas of the north-eastern plain from the T'ang forces.[39] Even after its suppression the north of Ho-pei remained under the control of yet another rebel, Kao K'ai-tao, who having once surrendered to the T'ang in 620, again rebelled in 621 and was finally removed only in 624, murdered by one of his own officers.

However, gradually the empire was falling under permanent T'ang control. Late in 621 Hsiao Hsien – a member of the former imperial house of the Liang, and self-styled 'emperor of Liang' who since 617 had controlled most of Hupei, Hunan, Kiangsi and Kwangtung and was by far the strongest ruler in southern China – capitulated to the T'ang forces at his capital Yüeh-chou on the middle Yangtze.[40] Soon afterwards Li Tzu-t'ung who had controlled extensive territories in Chekiang and southern Kiangsu surrendered, brought to ruin by another rebel Tu Fu-wei, who was himself preparing to go over to the T'ang. In 622 Liu Wu-chou, who had occupied much of northern Shansi, was killed by his erstwhile protectors, the Eastern Turks. With the death of Kao K'ai-tao in Ho-pei, and the final suppression of Fu Kung-shih's regime in the Chien-k'ang area in 624, large scale opposition to the T'ang regime came to an end. Kao-tsu then proclaimed a formal amnesty and issued new laws to his united and pacified empire.[41]

INTERNAL POLICIES

The first T'ang emperor has sometimes been portrayed as a mediocre ruler and an unwilling administrator who preferred the frivolous joys of the hunt to the more burdensome tasks of everyday administration. Kao-tsu, like most members of his class, was an expert horseman and bowman and was certainly fond of hunting, and enjoyed an active life. He was also criticized by puritanical Confucians at his court for his love of lavish musical entertainments. As emperor he sometimes allowed personal factors to influence appointments to office; on one occasion he outraged the court by awarding an official post to one of his favourite entertainers.[42]

Later commentators sometimes criticized him for partiality, and for his being too easily influenced by court gossip or by the ladies of his harem. He was certainly quick-tempered, sometimes arbitrary and over-hasty in meting out punishment. In 619, for example, Liu Wen-ching, one of his veteran supporters from T'ai-yüan, was executed without hesitation on the suspicion that he was planning to revolt.[43]

[39] Biographies in *CTS* 55, pp. 2258–60; *HTS* 86, pp. 3715–18.
[40] *TCTC* 189, pp. 5934 ff.
[41] Text in *TFYK* 83, pp. 30a–31b.
[42] *TCTC* 186, p. 5834.
[43] *CTS* 57, pp. 2293–4; *TCTC* 187, pp. 5861–2.

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These character traits, however, should not be allowed to obscure his solid and impressive achievement: the re-establishment of a strong and highly centralized state which endured for almost three centuries. Under Kao-tsu the T'ang successfully established political, economic and military institutions which became hallmarks of the T'ang age, which in many cases continued to influence deeply Chinese civilization down to the present century, and which provided the basic institutional models for the newly emergent states of Chinese-dominated east Asia – Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

Formation of the central government and bureaucracy

Kao-tsu must have encountered very considerable difficulties in rebuilding a viable central government in the midst of an extensive civil war. When the T'ang occupied the Sui capital in 617, for example, there was little paper available for its use, and officials were forced to use the reverse sides of earlier Sui and Northern Chou documents.[44] The Sui treasury and storehouses were almost empty and became further depleted because of the generous rewards Kao-tsu gave to his supporters. At first it proved difficult to attract suitable personnel to government service, an indication that many people suspected that the T'ang would not long survive and preferred to wait until the outcome of the civil war was more clear. But problems such as these were gradually overcome as the dynasty expanded its territorial authority, demonstrated its military power, recuperated its financial position, and gradually regained the people's confidence in its future.

The basic structure of the T'ang central government was inherited from the system of the three central ministries (*san sheng*) used by the Sui. This system comprised the Chancellery (Men-hsia sheng) and Secretariat (Nei-shu sheng, the name of which then became Chung-shu sheng) which acted as policy formulating and advisory organs, and the Department of State Affairs (Shang-shu sheng), which was the chief organ of the executive. When the Sui fell from power the operation of the three department system had not yet developed the formal precision which it later acquired and the responsibilities of its various offices often overlapped or were ill-defined. During the early part of Kao-tsu's reign, the system continued to experience growing pains, and in the resulting administrative confusion Kao-tsu would sometimes personally issue edicts instead of having them processed and promulgated through the correct bureaucratic channels. However, the system of the three central ministries was gradually rationalized, and by the middle of T'ai-tsung's reign the functions of each of the

[44] *THY* 56, p. 961.

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departments had become fixed: The Secretariat drafted edicts, the Chancellery reviewed and commented on them, and the Department of State Affairs with its six subordinate boards put them into effect.[45]

The civil central bureaucracy of Kao-tsu's reign was very small compared to the size it reached later in the dynasty, and was relatively informal at the highest level, reflecting the common backgrounds of the emperor and the men he appointed as his officials. Because Kao-tsu felt insecure in his enterprise of founding a new dynasty, he staffed his administration with those persons he could trust most: close friends, veterans of the T'ai-yüan uprising and the campaign to take the Sui capital, and relatives. No fewer than eight of Kao-tsu's twelve chief ministers (*tsai-hsiang*) were related by marriage to the Sui and T'ang imperial families.[46] A great many of the highest civil and military posts in his administration were filled by former members of Kao-tsu's military staff in T'ai-yüan.[47] Virtually all high-ranking members of Kao-tsu's central bureaucracy fell into one or more of three categories: they had prior experience as Sui officials; or were sons or grandsons of officials of the Northern Chou, Northern Ch'i or Sui dynasties; or were descended from former imperial houses. The coming to power of the T'ang dynasty thus brought with it no significant challenge to the ruling elite of the preceding dynasties, much less a social revolution.[48]

Kao-tsu's court was dominated by a comparatively small number of high-ranking advisers, most of whom shared the dynastic founder's background and had been involved with him in the early stages of his rebellion. Undoubtedly the most powerful figure at his court was P'ei Chi (569–628).[49] The son of a prefect under an earlier dynasty, P'ei Chi had been orphaned as a small child and brought up by an elder brother. Under Yang-ti he had held a number of posts, eventually becoming deputy director of the Sui palace at Chin-yang, where Kao-tsu began his rebellion. P'ei Chi rendered valuable assistance to the T'ang cause in its earliest stages and was handsomely rewarded. After Kao-tsu took the

[45] See Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang-tai san-sheng-chih chih fa-chan yen-chiu', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 3.1 (1957) 39–41.

[46] See Tsukiyama Chisaburō, *Tōdai seiji seido no kenkyū* (Osaka 1967), p. 29. See also the extremely detailed study of the marriage relationships of Kao-tsu and his children in Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 314–67.

[47] See Nunome Chōfū, 'Tōchō sōgyōki no ichi kōsatsu', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 25.1 (1966) 3–15, reprinted in *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 154–67.

[48] See Nunome Chōfū, 'Tōchō sōgyōki no ichi kōsatsu'; Tsukiyama Chisaburō, *Tōdai seiji seido no kenkyū*, pp. 15–33. See also the ch. by Ikeda On in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4; Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 47–84; and H. J. Wechsler, 'Factionalism in early T'ang government', in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, p. 105.

[49] Biographies in *CTS* 57, pp. 2285–9; *HTS* 88, pp. 3736–9.

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throne, he was appointed head of the Department of State Affairs and chief minister, which posts he retained throughout the whole reign. He had little aptitude as a commander, and during the wars of pacification his troops were often badly defeated.[50] But Kao-tsu treated him as a personal friend with great deference, constantly giving him gifts of all kinds and inviting him to share his throne at court. This personal link was cemented by the marriage of Kao-tsu's sixth son to P'ei Chi's daughter.

A second great power at court was Hsiao Yü (575–648).[51] The son of the emperor Ming of the Later Liang dynasty and younger brother of Sui Yang-ti's empress, Hsiao Yü had held a variety of posts under the Sui, including the tutorship of the future Yang-ti when he was heir apparent. At the end of the Sui he was serving in the provinces in the north-west, where he resisted the Kansu rebel Hsüeh Chü. After Kao-tsu occupied the capital, Hsiao Yü submitted with his territories and was rewarded with high honours. From 618 to 623 he was president of the Secretariat, and thereafter vice-president of the Department of State Affairs together with P'ei Chi. Hsiao Yü was a dedicated administrator, highly critical of his colleagues, constantly carping, and disliked and feared by many of his fellow courtiers. But Kao-tsu valued him highly, and gave him an important part, with P'ei Chi, in the formulation of the administrative laws promulgated in 624.

A third outstanding official, who might perhaps have had an equally distinguished career under Kao-tsu, was the ill-fated Liu Wen-ching (568–619).[52] A staunch supporter and one of the planners of the campaign from T'ai-yüan, Liu Wen-ching was appointed president of the Chancellery and chief minister when Kao-tsu first formed an administration. However, during the pacification campaigns of 618–19, Liu Wen-ching proved a successful commander, and as a result a bitter personal animosity arose between him and P'ei Chi. The emperor, believing this to be a sign of disaffection with the regime, took the advice of P'ei Chi that he should be removed as a possible danger to the dynasty. Liu was executed in the ninth month of 619, an episode which has led almost all historians from the earliest times to criticize Kao-tsu for his unbalanced reaction to unproven hearsay, and his biased treatment of personal favourites.

Ch'en Shu-ta (d. 635)[53] was the sixteenth son of the emperor Hsüan-ti of the southern dynasty of Ch'en (reign 569–82), who had served as a chief secretary in the Chancellery in Yang-ti's reign, later being appointed

[50] See *TCTC* 187, p. 5867; Ssu-ma Kuang bluntly calls him a coward.
[51] Biographies in *CTS* 63, pp. 2398–404; *HTS* 101, pp. 3949–52.
[52] Biographies in *CTS* 57, pp. 2289–94; *HTS* 88, pp. 3733–6.
[53] Biographies in *Ch'en shu* 28, p. 372; *Nan shih* 65, p. 1589; *CTS* 61, p. 2363; *HTS* 100, pp. 3925–6.

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to a provincial post. He joined the T'ang during the campaign against the capital and became a secretary on Kao-tsu's staff. From 619 to 626 he served as president of the Chancellery and as chief minister, and although little is known of his role in politics, he is an obvious example of Kao-tsu's deliberate policy of giving representation to all the major regions at the highest level of government. Ch'en seems to have exercised considerable patronage for southern scholars wishing to join the T'ang administration.

Yang Kung-jen,[54] a member of the Sui imperial family, had led Sui troops in suppressing the rebellion of Yang Hsüan-kan. A scrupulously honest and upright official, he had fallen foul of the highest officials of Yang-ti's court, and as a consequence had been sent out to Ho-nan to suppress banditry. Defeated, he fled to Chiang-tu, where he accepted appointment to office by the regicide Yü-wen Hua-chi. On his campaign into Ho-pei, Yang Kung-jen was captured by a rival rebel leader, who sent him to Ch'ang-an as a gesture of goodwill. Kao-tsu treated him extremely well, ennobling him as a duke and appointing him president of the Chancellery from 619 to 623, after which he was transferred to be president of the Secretariat until 626. He was thus an ex-officio chief minister from 619 to 626. At court he was notable as a moderating influence, a good-natured, incorruptible and scrupulously proper figure. But above all he represented continuity with the Sui regime. This is underlined by the fact that he was succeeded as president of the Chancellery by two great ministers of Yang-ti's court, P'ei Chü (from 624 to 625)[55] and Yü-wen Shih-chi (from 625 to 626),[56] the son of Yang-ti's famous adviser Yü-wen Shu.

In complete contrast to the upright and honourable Yang Kung-jen was the last of Kao-tsu's principal advisers, Feng Lun (Feng Te-i) (568–627)[57]. The son of a Sui prefect, and descendant of high officials of the Northern Ch'i, Feng Lun was a north-easterner from Ho-pei. At the end of Sui Wen-ti's reign he became a protégé of Yang Su, who had him appointed chief secretary in the Secretariat. Under Yang-ti he attached himself to Yü Shih-chi, and the historians blame Feng Lun for the deterioration of government under Yang-ti, for the increasing severity of the laws, and for the concealment of the true state of affairs from the emperor. Retiring with Yang-ti to the south, Feng Lun became a party to the emperor's assassination by Yü-wen Hua-chi. The latter appointed him president of the Secretariat under his own regime. But when Hua-chi suffered defeat at the hands of Li Mi, he and Hua-chi's brother, Yü-wen

[54] Biographies in *CTS* 62, pp. 2381–2; *HTS* 100, pp. 3926–7.
[55] Biographies in *SS* 67, pp. 1577–84; *Pei shih* 38, pp. 1387–93; *CTS* 63, pp. 2406–9; *HTS* 100, pp. 3931–4.
[56] Biographies in *CTS* 63, pp. 2409–11; *HTS* 100, pp. 3934–6.
[57] Biographies in *CTS* 63, pp. 2395–8; *HTS* 100, pp. 3929–31.

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Shi-chi, fled to Ch'ang-an and surrendered to the T'ang. Although Kao-tsu at first proved hostile, Feng Lun managed to win his favour by presenting him with 'secret stratagems', and he was made vice-president of the Secretariat. Later he became president (620–1, and again in 623–4) with the status of chief minister. From 621 to 623 he served in the crucial office of president of the Board of Civil Office.

Feng Lun became an adviser to the future T'ai-tsung during the campaign against Wang Shih-ch'ung, after which he continued to support him outwardly. However, he was a complete opportunist and during the succession struggle he seems to have secretly aided T'ai-tsung's opponents. Nobody knew of this, however, until after his death in 627. So well was it concealed that on his accession to the throne T'ai-tsung appointed him vice-president of the Department of State Affairs (626–7).

Reviled by later Confucian moralist historians, and contrasted to his disadvantage with such ministers as Wei Cheng, Feng Lun none the less clearly had very considerable gifts. He was long experienced in the advisory and policy making organs of government before he joined the T'ang, and we are told that his conduct as president of the Board of Civil Office was greatly praised by his contemporaries.

Such were the principal figures among the small group of advisers which surrounded Kao-tsu and participated in the highest level decisions. When we examine the broader group of high-ranking ministers during the reign it is clear that the majority had backgrounds very similar to that of the imperial house. Most were descended from families prominent under the northern dynasties and under the Sui. Of the forty-five men who held the highest civil offices under Kao-tsu, twenty-seven had served under the Sui, often in high positions. Most of the rest had a father or grandfather who had served either the Sui or their predecessors, while only four had ancestors who had served the southern dynasties.[58] Roughly the same proportions were to be found in the household of the future T'ai-tsung.[59]

Some attempt was also clearly made to bring into the government some sort of balance of the various regional groups within the ruling elite, particularly to avoid the preponderance of men from the north-western aristocracy which had characterized the Sui court.[60]

This striking continuity in personnel was matched, as we shall see, by an equal continuity in basic policies.

[58] See Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 153–97 for a penetrating and well-documented analysis of the ruling group.

[59] There was, however, a large group of southerners in his College of Literary Studies (Wen-hsüeh kuan). See Fukuzawa Sōkichi, 'Bungaku kan gakushi ni tsuite', *Kumamoto Daigaku Kyōikugakubu kiyō*, 1 (1953) 40–4.

[60] See Wechsler, 'Factionalism in early T'ang government', pp. 87–120.

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The composition of this bureaucracy was a source of strength for the T'ang. Its members were for the most part experienced in government. The large number of high level officials with relationships to the imperial house served to strengthen T'ang control, and the broad range of dynastic affiliations they represented reassured disparate elements throughout the country and eventually facilitated its reunification.

Extension of centralized control to the countryside

For his provincial administration, Kao-tsu established prefectures (*chou*) to replace the Sui commanderies (*chün*). This change was chiefly one of nomenclature, for the Sui had itself employed the term *chou* during the period 589–607. Counties (*hsien*) remained the next level of administration under the jurisdiction of the prefectures. These two provincial administrative levels were governed by prefects (*tz'u-shih*) and county magistrates (*hsien-ling*), respectively. We do not know precisely how many prefectures there were during Wu-te, but it is said that because Kao-tsu wished to reward former rebels, Sui officials, and veterans of the T'ang campaigns with offices, he created more than twice the number (190) of prefectures existing during the Sui and also greatly increased the number of counties.[61] The emperor, however, continued the Sui practice of placing provincial appointments under the control of the Board of Civil Office in the central government.

The establishment of local administrative units did not mean that the country could at once return to normal civilian rule. Kao-tsu's reign was one of constant military activity, and the emperor kept the country under strict military control for most of his reign. He not only maintained twelve large standing armies to protect the approaches to the capital, but also established local regional commands (*tsung-kuan fu*, after 624 called governments-general (*tu-tu fu*))[62] in all parts of China. This was no innovation, for the Sui had also established such commands, and many rebels had styled themselves regional commanders (*tsung-kuan*) during the fighting at the end of the Sui. These regional commands, forty-three in

[61] *THY* 70, p. 1232 mentions a total of 360 prefectures in 627. *TCTC* 192, p. 6033 gives a list of prefectures under the same date, but this is full of anomalies, including several prefectures which were established only in the late seventh century, and does not reflect the position in 627 as claimed. In fact there were even more prefectures and counties created under Kao-tsu, totalling far more than twice the number under the Sui. There is a wealth of detail on the changes in local administration under Kao-tsu in the Geographical Monograph of *CTS* (*CTS* 38–41), although no scholar has yet attempted to reconstruct the complex and fluid situation. It seems clear that very many new units were set up after 618, which were gradually eliminated from about 624 and radically reduced by T'ai-tsung in 627.

[62] *THY* 68, p. 1192; *CTS* 38, p. 1384. The latter says that they were established on the frontiers and in areas of strategic importance.

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number, were placed over the civilian administration of the area and had full authority over all military affairs in that region. They were quite large, each having several prefectures under its command; the largest, called superior regional commands (*ta-tsung-kuan fu*) had control over as many as thirty-nine prefectures.

Besides these regional commands, during the early years of the dynasty the government also set up regional mobile administrations (*hsing-t'ai*), located at strategic points in eastern Shensi, Shan-tung and Szechwan, as well as in the middle and lower Yangtze areas. These were essentially governments in-the-field, established on a temporary basis to coordinate local administration and implement government policies. These mobile administrations were placed under the command of the dynasty's most trusted supporters; Li Shih-min himself had command of two or three of them. These units were abolished within a few years, once the normal administrative units had begun to function smoothly.

The T'ang also lost no time in establishing local military units to provide a reliable, locally-based source of manpower for the military needs of the dynasty. In this they were following a policy which went back to the Western Wei's decision in 543 to draw on local military manpower to supplement its depleted forces. In the capital region of Kuan-chung 261 local units (*fu*) were created.[63] For the first few years of the dynasty, while fighting was still intense, these Kuan-chung units were put under the command of the twelve armies (*chün*) which protected the capital region. These *fu* were maintained after the twelve armies were dissolved late in Kao-tsu's reign, but were then put under the control of the capital guards (*wei*).[64] Although Kuan-chung was by far the most heavily militarized area in China, with some places reporting nine-tenths of available men doing military service, local military units were established in other parts of China as well, the total eventually coming to 633.

Each of these local units had a full complement of officers, and was organized on strict military lines. They were established in three sizes, with 800, 1,000 or 1,200 men per unit. Unlike the Sui dynasty, which had in 590 explicitly ordered that all locally-based soldiers be placed directly under the local civilian authorities, the T'ang maintained the *fu* as separate military units, although the soldiers were also registered on the civilian registers. But the T'ang followed the Sui policy by placing these local forces under direct control from the capital. To ensure their control, the T'ang ordered that the local *fu* send soldiers on a rotating basis for military service in Ch'ang-an. In 636 these local military units were renamed

[63] The total is given as 261 in *HTS* 50, p. 1325; as 361 in *THY* 72, p. 1298.
[64] *HTS* 50, p. 1324.

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che-ch'ung fu. By that time the central government had established firm control over the entire country, and could rely on these local, self-sufficient units, individually too small to pose any threat to the dynasty, as a ready and reliable source of manpower.[65]

The effort to attain fiscal authority and solvency

One of the most pressing problems in the early years of the dynasty was the securing of funds to pay for T'ang military campaigns and for the salaries of the growing number of bureaucrats as T'ang administrative control was extended over the country. At first, loot seized by T'ang armies-on-campaign and the reserves from the captured Sui government granaries and treasuries provided Kao-tsu with the major source of his revenue, but it was obvious that more permanent methods of financing the government would be required.

In 618 the emperor instituted a system whereby offices in the capital and prefectures were endowed with a fixed amount of capital which could be invested in trade or lent out at interest. The management of these funds was placed in the hands of special 'clerks', often from merchant backgrounds, and the profits thus obtained were used by the government to pay its officials. In the same year the emperor began the establishment of 'lands pertaining to office' (*chih-fen t'ien*) for offices both in the capital and the provinces, the rents from which formed a portion of their incumbents' salaries, and of 'lands of the public administration' (*kung-chieh t'ien*) to provide office overheads. This system of providing for salaries and office expenses by specific endowments of land was adopted from the practice of the southern dynasties.[66]

As the basic means of securing government revenue, under laws of 619 and 624 Kao-tsu re-established the 'equal-field' (*chün-t'ien*) system, a state controlled system of land tenure and land allocation which had been first established under the Northern Wei dynasty and employed by the subsequent northern dynasties and by the Sui. This system, the details of which are dealt with in a later chapter, was designed both to guarantee a fixed amount of land to every adult male taxpayer according to age and status, and to limit the amounts of land in individuals' hands and restrict their rights of free disposal of landed property.[67] At the same time, a

[65] See Tu Ch'ia, 'T'ang-tai fu-ping k'ao', *Shih-hsüeh nien-pao*, 3.1 (1939) 9–10.

[66] See Kikuchi Hideo, 'Nanchō densei ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu', *Yamanashi Daigaku Kyōikubu kiyō*, 4 (1969) 1–44.

[67] On the land system see Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 1–6. The extensive literature on the subject is listed in the bibliography.

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system of direct taxation known as the *tsu-yung-tiao* was instituted, under which fixed taxes in grain, cloth and labour service were paid by each registered taxpayer. To what extent these systems actually functioned throughout China in Kao-tsu's reign, and the stages by which they were implemented, have not been fully determined, however. It is to be noted that Kao-tsu's basic financial policies followed northern practice very closely and paid little attention to the non-agricultural sector of the economy. Nor did money taxation, which had been commonplace in south China, play any role. The whole system also assumed a uniform, identical tax-load on all taxpayers, irrespective of their actual circumstances or the region in which they lived.[68]

Although the Sui had attempted to provide China with a viable currency in the north for the first time since the fall of the Han, this had proved insufficient and in the late Sui, with the breakdown of public order, counterfeiting had become prevalent. As a result people were employing all kinds of commodities in place of coinage. In 621 the emperor began minting a new coinage of a uniform size, weight and metal content. The new money, known as *K'ai-yüan t'ung pao*, remained the standard coin throughout the T'ang.[69]

Although the T'ang made no systematic effort to tax commerce until the eighth century, from the very beginning of the dynasty they exercised strict control over trade, especially in the major markets of the capital and the prefectural cities. In addition to the three great metropolitan markets in Ch'ang-an, which had continued from Sui times, the emperor ordered all prefectures and governments-general to establish official markets. Controlling the markets in the capital and large towns in the provinces was an official market director (*shih-ling*) who was charged with keeping order, registering all market shops, inspecting weights and measures, fixing approved schedules of prices, and ensuring the quality of goods being sold.[70]

Kao-tsu also continued the Sui policy of developing irrigation and canal systems. A waterworks system constructed in Shensi in 624 irrigated more than eighty thousand acres of land by diverting water from the Huang-ho, and the following year a grain transport canal was built, also in Shensi, to help supply the capital.[71]

[68] See Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 24–8.
[69] See Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 66–70.
[70] See Denis Twitchett, 'The T'ang market system', *AM* (NS), 12.2 (1966) 202–48.
[71] *THY* 89, p. 1619; *TFYK* 497, p. 7b.

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The codification of the law

When Kao-tsu first rebelled at T'ai-yüan, he issued a series of lenient laws relaxing the rigours of Sui Yang-ti's system, and upon the capture of Ta-hsing ch'eng in 617, in an attempt to win the allegiance of the city's population, he immediately promulgated a simplified set of laws in only twelve articles, probably modelled on Han Kao-tsu's establishment of a simplified system of law (*yüeh-fa*), as an act of clemency to inaugurate his new dynasty. These laws reduced the number of crimes punishable by the death penalty to murder, violent robbery, desertion and rebellion.[72] As soon as the dynasty was formally established in 618, he issued an additional group of fifty-three ordinances which adopted rules from Sui Wen-ti's K'ai-huang administrative and penal Code to replace the harsh and complex laws subsequently introduced under Yang-ti.[73] The Sui Code, which was a revision of the 'New Code' of 581 completed in 583, had itself been made up of elements taken from the Northern Wei, Chin, Northern Ch'i and Liang Codes. In the same year, 618, a high-ranking imperial commission was appointed to compile a comprehensive code of penal and administrative law for the T'ang. Presented to the throne in the third month of 624 and promulgated in the next month, the new Wu-te Code (*Lü*) was closely modelled on that of K'ai-huang and contained the identical number of articles – five hundred. The early T'ang Code was thus largely a product of the law of the Period of Disunion, as this had been rationalized under the Sui, and contained comparatively little new. However, the commission included not only the former president of the Sui Supreme Court of Justice (Ta-li ssu), but also at least two prominent southerners, and some effort was made to incorporate some features of southern administrative practice.[74]

Together with the Code the commission presented a new set of administrative Statutes (*Ling*) in thirty chapters, and detailed administrative Ordinances (*Shih*) in fourteen chapters, which gave legal force and a standard codified form to the new types of government and institutions which Kao-tsu had set up. As the edict to proclaim their promulgation said, they were 'To provide for ever legal norms; to hand down a grand design to our posterity.'[75] In this Kao-tsu certainly succeeded: with modifications, the Code drawn up by his commission remained authoritative until the fourteenth century, and provided a model for the first legal Codes in Vietnam, Korea and Japan. In China, too, the careful regulation of

[72] *CTS* 50, p. 2133; *TCTC* 184, p. 5762. [73] *CTS* 50, pp. 2133–4.
[74] See Niida Noboru, *Tōryō shūi* (Tokyo, 1933), pp. 12–13.
[75] *TTCLC* 82, p. 470.

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administrative procedures by codified law, regularly updated, was to remain a major preoccupation during the next century of T'ang rule.

Establishment of the examination and school systems

Just when Kao-tsu reintroduced the Sui government examination system is not clear, but by 621 candidates for various degrees were already competing in examinations held at the capital.[76] However, it would be a mistake to think that the examination system exerted much influence at the early T'ang court. First, the number of examination graduates at this time was extremely small in terms of the total number of T'ang officials. Second, although a few senior officials of Kao-tsu's reign had received examination degrees under the Sui, those who had passed the examinations held under the T'ang were still very young and in junior posts at the very beginning of their careers. The men at the top of Kao-tsu's bureaucracy generally owed their position either to their relationship with the imperial house or to the role they had played in the founding of the dynasty. If they held a degree, this was merely coincidental. Lastly, aristocratic influence was still very strong, and many officials were able to reach office through hereditary (*yin*) privilege.

For those who intended to take the examinations, Kao-tsu re-opened three Sui schools in Ch'ang-an; the School of the Sons of State (Kuo-tzu hsüeh), the Superior School (T'ai-hsüeh), and the School of the Four Gates (Ssu-men hsüeh), all of which emphasized the teaching of the classics. These schools eventually came under the control of the Directorate of the State University (Kuo-tzu chien) created in 627. In 626 they had only 342 students altogether, drawn almost exclusively from the sons of the imperial family, the nobility and the highest ranking officials. Only in the lowest ranking school of the Four Gates was this exclusiveness slightly relaxed.[77] In 624 Kao-tsu ordered the establishment of schools in all prefectures and counties.[78]

Efforts to regulate the religious orders

During the Period of Disunion, Taoism and Buddhism had become the major religious and philosophical interests of a demoralized official class. The two religions also gathered huge followings among the common

[76] *HTS* 44, p. 1163; *T'ang chih-yen* (TSCC edn), 15, p. 159. See Fukushima Shigejirō, 'Todai no kōkyosei', in *Chūgoku Nambokuchō shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1962), pp. 58–65; R. des Rotours, *Le Traité des examens* (Paris, 1932), p. 160.

[77] *THY* 66, p. 1157; *TCTC* 185, p. 5792.

[78] *HTS* 49B, p. 1314; *TCTC* 185, p. 5792; *TTCLC* 105, p. 537; *CTW* 3, pp. 1a–2a.

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people and created great religious communities of priests, monks and nuns. They presented a growing challenge to the central power of successive dynasties by their enormous material wealth, lands, temples, monasteries and relics made of precious metals; by the great loss of manpower to the state represented by the members of religious communities who had virtually opted out of all their responsibilities towards the state, their families and society; and by the immense numbers of dependent families, men and women who toiled as serfs on monastic lands.

With the reunification of the country under the Sui and especially under the T'ang, Confucianism again became an important concern of officials who were now preoccupied with consolidating their own power within the new highly centralized regime. A keen rivalry developed among Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism for the allegiance of the educated elite, and during the early T'ang, representatives of these three schools often participated in heated debates at court, presided over by the emperor.

In 621 and 624 the court astrologer (*t'ai-shih ling*) and conservative Chinese spokesman Fu I presented memorials to the throne attacking Buddhism as a foreign and unwholesome religion which removed tens of thousands of men and women from participation in the regular activities of society, and called on the emperor to expunge it from China.[79] Kao-tsu was naturally reluctant to interfere with a religion which had such a strong popular following, yet the increasing economic power wielded by both that religion and Taoism must have concerned him as much as it had his predecessors.

It was not until the fifth month of 626 that the emperor took any effective measures against Buddhism, and on this occasion he sought to exert greater state control over the Taoist religious establishment as well. He placed a limit on the number of Buddhist temples and Taoist monasteries allowed in the capital and the prefectures; at the capital the number of Buddhist temples was to be cut from over 120 to a mere 3; those of the Taoists from about 10 to 1. Each prefecture was to be allowed only one temple for each faith. All monks and nuns not genuinely attached to religious institutions were to be returned to lay life.[80] These directives can barely have had time to be carried out, for they were reversed three months later, on the day that Li Shih-min usurped control of government. This raises the possibility that Kao-tsu's removal from power might in some way have been related to his repressive measures against Buddhism and Taoism. We at least know that members of Shih-min's retinue had

[79] *THY* 47, p. 835; *TCTC* 191, pp. 6001–2. See A. F. Wright, 'Fu I and the rejection of Buddhism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12 (1951) 33–47.
[80] *THY* 47, p. 836; *CTS* 1, pp. 16–17; *Chi ku-chin fo-tao lun-heng* 3, in *TD* 52, p. 381a.

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made both written and verbal defences of Buddhism prior to his rise to power, which suggests that Shih-min and his men were bidding for the support of the Buddhist faithful throughout the empire.[81]

RELATIONS WITH THE EASTERN TURKS

Domestic affairs and the establishment of the institutions of a new dynasty preoccupied Kao-tsu for most of his reign. Yet by far the greatest threat to the T'ang during its first years came not from any domestic adversary but from a foreign power, the Eastern Turks. Fully aware that the T'ang was still in a weak military position, Kao-tsu regularly bribed the Eastern Turks not to invade T'ang territory or to assist those rebels who had declared themselves Turkish vassals. The giving of large gifts to the Turkish qaghan was a common practice during his reign. But Kao-tsu's buying-off policy was not very successful, for the Turks demanded more and more. Their envoys to Ch'ang-an showed little respect for the emperor and caused havoc throughout the capital. In one such instance, Kao-tsu was forced to permit the Eastern Turk envoys to assassinate their enemy, Ho-sa-na Qaghan of the Western Turks, who had previously sent tribute to the T'ang and was at that time in Ch'ang-an. Moreover, the Eastern Turks resumed their invasions of China in alliance with various northern rebels.

On the eve of a planned invasion of China early in 619, Shih-pi Qaghan died. His son was not yet of age, so his brother succeeded him and ruled as Ch'u-lo Qaghan for a short time before his own death in 620. Ch'u-lo was succeeded by another brother, Hsieh-li Qaghan (Illig Qaghan, reign 620–30), who was to prove to be a major menace to the T'ang throughout the reign of Kao-tsu and the early years of T'ai-tsung.

In 622 Hsieh-li led a force said to have numbered 150,000 men in an invasion of T'ai-yüan, the old T'ang base, but was repulsed by armies led by the heir apparent Chien-ch'eng and Li Shih-min. Turkish incursions into the area around the capital Ch'ang-an became so serious that late in 624 the city itself had to be placed under martial law. According to traditional accounts Kao-tsu seriously considered moving the capital to an area more secure from the Turks, and sent an official to examine various possible locations for a new capital.[82] The following year the twelve imperial standing armies that had been disbanded in 622 were re-established to deal with the Turkish threat. In the middle of 625 Hsieh-li

[81] See A. F. Wright, 'T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism', in Wright and Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang*, pp. 245–6.

[82] The traditional historians suggest that Li Shih-min dissuaded him from following this course. On this see Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang shih k'ao-pien*, pp. 55–60.

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Qaghan led a great force to attack T'ai-yüan yet again, and the T'ang suffered heavy losses. Even during the last months of Kao-tsu's reign, the Eastern Turks were still attacking the northern frontier, and the emperor was forced to order the local authorities to fortify their cities against them and to construct moats around their towns.

Although Kao-tsu has been heavily criticized over the ages by ethnocentric Chinese historians for his subservience to the Turks at the beginning of the dynasty, and although his buying-off policy failed to stem the tide of successive Turkish invasions, he succeeded in purchasing security for the T'ang during a critical period. This breathing space allowed the T'ang army first to enter the Sui capital without fear of attacks on its rear, and then to consolidate its military power in Shensi. It also enabled the T'ang to begin making defensive preparations on its northern border under the direction of the heir apparent, Li Chien-ch'eng, which, while unable completely to prevent Turkish incursions, laid the foundation for strong Chinese resistance to the Turks during the remainder of Kao-tsu's reign.

THE HSÜAN-WU GATE INCIDENT AND THE TRANSFER OF POWER

As Kao-tsu's rivals for the throne were defeated on the battlefield and an atmosphere of relative stability and calm was built up at court, a growing enmity between the heir apparent Chien-ch'eng and his younger brother and supporter Li Yüan-chi on the one hand, and his brother Li Shih-min on the other, which had been submerged during wartime, finally surfaced and developed into a fierce struggle for power.

Both Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi are portrayed in the Standard Histories as unsavoury types. According to these accounts, Yüan-chi was addicted to the hunt, treacherous in battle, lascivious and sadistic; the heir apparent was wild, unruly and a drunkard. These unflattering portraits are at least in part the result of the deliberate distortions introduced into the record of the period in the traditional sources. The great Sung historian Ssu-ma Kuang (1019–86), for example, was well aware that the Veritable Records of the period were biased against Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi.[83]

By 621, as the result of his victories over Tou Chien-te and Wang Shih-ch'ung, Shih-min had gained immense prestige, while the heir apparent, who had for the most part commanded the garrison on the northern frontier against the Turks, had been unable to build a similar reputation. In that same year 621, Kao-tsu raised Shih-min's position above all the

[83] *TCTC* 184, p. 5738, *k'ao-i*; *TCTC* 190, p. 5960, *k'ao-i*.

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other nobles of the empire and placed him in charge of both the civil and military administration of the eastern plain with his headquarters at Lo-yang. Shih-min soon built up under his command a formidable entourage of some fifty civil and military officials, many of whom he had recruited from the officer corps of his vanquished enemies on the north-eastern plain, and began to challenge the heir apparent's pre-eminence.[84]

Shih-min may also have intimidated Chien-ch'eng in other ways. In 621 he created his own College of Literary Studies (Wen-hsüeh kuan), in which he maintained a staff of eighteen scholars who served as his advisers on state affairs. The establishment of such a body may well have suggested to the heir apparent that Shih-min had aspirations to succeed to the throne.[85]

From this time onwards Chien-ch'eng sought to undermine the effectiveness of Shih-min's staff by having several of its members transferred to other posts.[86] At the same time he increased his own power in Ch'ang-an by recruiting more than two thousand young men, who became known as the Ch'ang-lin Troops because they were stationed in the vicinity of the Ch'ang-lin Gates inside the heir apparent's residence, the Eastern Palace. Chien-ch'eng and his ally in the struggle against Shih-min, Yüan-chi, also won the support of many of the ladies in Kao-tsu's harem, who interceded with the emperor on their behalf in constant court intrigues. Shih-min, on the other hand, often out of the capital on military missions, was not as successful in gaining support in Ch'ang-an or within the palace. Instead, he built a base of support among military and civil officials in the Lo-yang region in order to counter his brothers' advantage in Ch'ang-an.[87]

At first, the heir apparent's strategy worked well. However, in the sixth month of 624, the Regional Commander of Ch'ing-chou (in Kansu), Yang Wen-kan, who had previously been a guard at the heir apparent's Eastern Palace, rebelled. It was alleged that Yang Wen-kan had been persuaded to raise troops on behalf of the heir apparent, who had been left in command of the capital while Kao-tsu was at his summer palace, and place him on the throne. The plot was disclosed, the heir apparent summoned from Ch'ang-an, and Yang Wen-kan from his garrison post. When the emperor's envoys arrived, the heir apparent refused

[84] Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 189–256, esp. pp. 218–49.

[85] *Ibid.* pp. 217 ff.; Fukuzawa Sōkichi, 'Bungaku kan gakushi ni tsuite'.

[86] See Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 296 ff., who discusses the following built up by Chien-ch'eng.

[87] *CTS* 69, p. 2515. The question of the supporters of the rival princes is discussed in Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Lun Sui-mo T'ang-ch'u so-wei "Shan-tung hao-chieh" ', *Ling-nan hsüeh-pao*, 12.6 (1952) 1–14; Chang Ch'ün, 'Lun T'ang K'ai-yüan ch'ien ti cheng-chih chi-t'uan', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 1.2 (1956) 290; Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang shih k'ao-pien*, pp. 134–5.

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the advice of a subordinate to seize the throne and instead went to beg the emperor's forgiveness. Yang Wen-kan, however, raised his troops in rebellion. Kao-tsu, according to some accounts promising Li Shih-min to appoint him heir apparent, sent forces under Li Shih-min and other generals against Yang Wen-kan, whose own troops killed him as soon as the imperial forces arrived.

Meanwhile, the heir apparent's supporters, Li Yüan-chi, the palace ladies and the chief minister, Feng Te-i, had succeeded in white-washing the whole affair; and although some of the heir apparent's advisers and at least one of Li Shih-min's staff were banished, Li Chien-ch'eng was sent back to Ch'ang-an, still heir apparent. Some historians have doubted whether Li Chien-ch'eng was ever actually involved and at least one modern scholar believes that the charge was fabricated by Li Shih-min and his supporters.[88]

The emperor made some efforts to reduce the growing tension between his sons. He attempted to keep Chien-ch'eng and Shih-min out of direct contact with one another, and made some feeble, unsuccessful attempts to heal their rift. But he was caught in a crossfire of calculated duplicity in the palace and at court as each side tried to discredit the other, and his attitude towards Chien-ch'eng and Shih-min fluctuated wildly, depending, it would seem, on how successfully he was manipulated by either side. Meanwhile, events rushed towards a violent conclusion.

By 626 Shih-min had become increasingly alarmed at the success of manoeuvres by Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi designed to turn the emperor against him and to deplete his staff. Not long after the Yang Wen-kan incident, Kao-tsu, on being told of Li Shih-min's growing pretensions, summoned him to the palace and told him plainly that he could expect no assistance from him.[89] Fang Hsüan-ling and Tu Ju-hui, two of Shih-min's most important advisers, had been dismissed from his service through the machinations of his brothers. His general, Yü-ch'ih Ching-te, had narrowly escaped death at the hands of assassins hired by Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi, and when he was subsequently slandered by them at court, he was saved from execution only through Shih-min's intercession. When the Turks invaded the border in early 626, Yüan-chi, at the

[88] There is some evidence to suggest that the heir apparent was falsely implicated. See *TCTC* 191, p. 5986, *k'ao-i*. Li Shu-t'ung goes further and suggests that the traditional account was deliberately fabricated by T'ai-tsung's supporters and later historians, notably Hsü Ching-tsung. However, in *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 276–81 and 'Genmu Mon no hen', *Osaka Daigaku Kyōyōbu shūroku*, 16 (1968) 29–32, Nunome Chōfū rejects this view, though without giving specific reasons.

[89] *TCTC* 191, p. 5990. Kao-tsu told Shih-min 'An emperor receives Heaven's Mandate naturally. It cannot be sought, either by mere cleverness or strength. Yet how eagerly you are seeking it!'

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suggestion of Chien-ch'eng, was assigned to oppose them, and took many of Shih-min's best generals and crack troops with him. The two brothers also offered lavish bribes to Shih-min's key men in the hope of subverting their allegiance to him. The emperor seems to have made no attempt to oppose these stratagems. Finally, although the date and even the fact is disputed, it is said that Chien-ch'eng tried to poison Shih-min.

For some time, Shih-min's most influential officials had been urging him to take strong action against his brothers. Yet he was slow to formulate an offensive strategy. He had, however, prudently consolidated his influence among the local military elite (*hao-chieh*) of the Lo-yang region by the generous use of bribes, and had garrisoned the city with one thousand of his own troops. It is probable that he planned to utilize Lo-yang as a safe haven and as a base for operations against Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi in case he was forced from the capital.

The event which finally spurred Shih-min into action against his brothers was a report by one of his spies that they planned to murder him when, as was customary, he went to see Yüan-chi off at the beginning of his campaign against the Eastern Turks. Now he secretly summoned Fang Hsüan-ling and Tu Ju-hui, disguised as Taoist priests, to his camp to aid in the planning of strategy, and also bribed Ch'ang Ho, the commander of the imperial guards at the Hsüan-wu Gate, into following his orders. The Hsüan-wu Gate was located at the centre of the north wall of Ch'ang-an, and gave access to the palace city. Because of the strategic importance of this gate, imperial guards were quartered in its immediate vicinity, charged with the duty of resisting any attempt at a coup d'état.[90]

On the third day of the sixth month, Shih-min falsely accused his brothers of having had illicit relations with members of the imperial harem. Kao-tsu responded by calling for an investigation of the matter. Early the following day, Chien-ch'eng and Yüan-chi, informed by one of Kao-tsu's concubines of Shih-min's accusation, decided not to go to court but to intercede personally with the emperor, and rode to the palace to defend themselves against the charges.

In the meantime, however, Shih-min had led twelve[91] of his most trusted followers to take up positions at the Hsüan-wu Gate, which he now controlled. As the brothers approached the entrance to the palace, the Hsüan-wu Gate, they were attacked by the waiting men. Chien-ch'eng was cut down by Shih-min; and Yüan-chi was killed by Yü-ch'ih Ching-te, one of Shih-min's officers. The followers of the brothers then mounted

[90] See Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao*, pp. 140–3.
[91] According to Nunome Chōfū, 'Genmu Mon no hen', there were twelve followers, not nine as in the traditional accounts of the coup.

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an attack on the gate, but when the severed heads of their slain masters were exhibited to them, their efforts abruptly collapsed.

In the period immediately preceding the Hsüan-wu Gate incident, Kao-tsu had betrayed an unfavourable attitude towards Shih-min: he had allowed the transfer of several key men from Shih-min's staff and had watched silently as Chien-ch'eng's forces in the capital grew to a clear numerical superiority over Shih-min's.[92] Immediately after the incident, then, Shih-min sent his trusted general Yü-ch'ih Ching-te, whom Kao-tsu had lately sentenced to death, to announce the result of the coup to the emperor. During the events at the Hsüan-wu Gate, it is said that Kao-tsu had been sailing on a lake inside the palace compound. Now, entering the palace in full armour and armed with a spear – an act normally punishable by death – Yü-ch'ih Ching-te confronted the visibly startled emperor with the news of the deaths of his two sons. It was Li Shih-min's dramatic way of announcing to his father that the tide of events at court had turned and that he was now in full command.[93]

Just three days after the Hsüan-wu Gate incident, Li Shih-min was proclaimed heir apparent and took over the actual control of the administration from his father. On the ninth day of the eighth month, probably under duress, Kao-tsu relinquished the throne and Li Shih-min became the second T'ang emperor (known posthumously in Chinese history as T'ai-tsung). Meanwhile Kao-tsu was given the title of Retired Emperor (*t'ai-shang-huang*).

Following his abdication, Kao-tsu became a retired emperor in fact as well as in name, emerging only briefly from time to time to attend ceremonial functions at court. We know little of the relationship between father and son in the years after 626, but the scars of the recent past seem not to have healed. In 632 the examining censor (*chien-ch'a yü-shih*) Ma Chou charged that the ageing Kao-tsu was living in the cramped Ta-an palace in the western part of the palace city, and that although it was close to T'ai-tsung's palace, the latter had not visited his father for a long time. Ma further charged that when T'ai-tsung moved his summer residence to the countryside, Kao-tsu was left behind to suffer the heat in Ch'ang-an.[94] When T'ai-tsung did extend invitations to his father to spend the summer with him sometime later, however, Kao-tsu declined. T'ai-tsung then built the Ta-ming Palace to the north-east of the palace city as his father's summer residence, but Kao-tsu grew ill while it was under construction, and died in the fifth month of 635 without ever having lived

[92] See Fu Lo-ch'eng, 'Hsüan-wu Men shih-pien chih yün-niang', *Wen-shih-che hsüeh-pao*, 8 (1958) 174–5.
[93] *TCTC* 191, p. 6011.
[94] *CTS* 74, p. 2613.

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there. It is also certainly significant that the tomb which T'ai-tsung constructed for his father was conspicuously smaller than the grandiose one he built for his own wife, and which he intended to be his own final resting place. The meaning of this action was certainly not lost upon one of T'ai-tsung's officials, who ridiculed him for his unfilial behaviour.[95]

It would not be an exaggeration to say that T'ang Kao-tsu has been one of the most underestimated monarchs in all Chinese history. His reputation has suffered first from the fact that his short reign came between those of two of the most striking figures in Chinese history, the arch-villain Sui Yang-ti and T'ai-tsung whom later historians saw as a political paragon, and second because his own role in the founding of the T'ang was deliberately obscured by his successor, as we have already seen. In reality, despite his age – he was over fifty years old when he raised arms against the Sui – Kao-tsu was an ambitious, vigorous and able leader. It is well attested that he had great ambitions, and it was undoubtedly he who masterminded the T'ai-yüan revolt and led the victorious T'ang march on the Sui capital. His diplomatic offensive against Li Mi and the Eastern Turks enabled the T'ang to capture Ta-hsing ch'eng and to organize and consolidate its power in Shensi without obstruction from enemy forces. Later, his policies of amnesty, appointment and reward, complemented by Li Shih-min's victories in the field, helped to attract much needed support for the dynasty and facilitated the reunification of the country. It was Kao-tsu, too, who set up the institutional and political framework of the early T'ang. By any realistic criteria the Wu-te reign was eminently successful, and by its conclusion the T'ang had been placed on solid administrative, economic and military foundations. In short, it was Kao-tsu who laid the essential groundwork for the brilliant reign of his son.

[95] *HTS* 97, p. 3871; see H. J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, 1974), pp. 136–7.

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CHAPTER 4

T'AI-TSUNG (REIGN 626–49) THE CONSOLIDATOR

The future T'ai-tsung, Li Shih-min, the second son of Kao-tsu, was born in the year 600[1] in Wu-kung county in modern Shensi. His mother was a member of an extremely powerful clan, the Tou. Her elder sister was the consort of Yang Kuang, the future Sui emperor Yang-ti. Their clan, which like the Sui and T'ang imperial houses was of partially alien origin (their original surname was Ho-tou-ling),[2] continued to be very influential throughout the early T'ang, producing two empresses, six consorts of royal princes, eight husbands of royal princesses, and a great number of officials of the highest ranks.[3] T'ai-tsung's mother had been brought up at the court of her uncle, the emperor Wu-ti of the Northern Chou (whose younger sister was her mother), where Li Yüan is said to have won her hand in an archery contest. She died in 614.[4]

During his childhood Li Shih-min was, of course, simply a son of a nobleman, and thus would not have received any special preparation as a potential ruler. He certainly received the upper-class Confucian education typical of the time: later, as emperor he proved to be well versed in classical and historical learning and was a calligrapher of note. The Li clan, bearer of a strong northern tradition, was naturally Buddhist, and several of Kao-tsu's sons bore Buddhist childhood names. But, as with most noblemen of mixed Chinese and Turkish blood, the emphasis of T'ai-tsung's early education was upon the martial arts – particularly archery and horsemanship. Tales of his bravery and military genius fill the histories of the period. He was a great horseman, and the bas-reliefs of six of his favourite steeds, which decorated his tomb, are still preserved.

Like his brothers, he had his first experience of war when very young. When still in his early teens he accompanied his father on numerous campaigns against various rebel groups in present-day Shansi and against the Eastern Turks. According to traditional accounts T'ai-tsung when only fifteen had led a military party that rescued Sui Yang-ti from the

[1] There are several theories about the date of T'ai-tsung's birth, which is variously given as 597, 598, 599 and 600.

[2] See Yao Wei-yüan, *Pei-ch'ao hu-hsing k'ao* (Peking, 1955), p. 175.

[3] *CTS* 61, p. 2369.

[4] *CTS* 51, pp. 2163–4.

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Eastern Turks who had surrounded him at Yen-men on the Great Wall in northern Shansi. This story, which has traditionally marked T'ai-tsung's first emergence in the historical record, may well, however, be apocryphal.[5]

After the beginning of the T'ang rising, Li Shih-min's career remained essentially a military one. A dashing and successful commander, his character had been formed by the time he seized the throne by years of arduous fighting in the field. He had a truly imperial bearing and cut an intimidating and magnificent figure at court. Highly emotional and easily provoked, his face would turn purple with rage and strike fear into those around him. Much of his success in dealing with the Turks derived from his forceful personality and his heroic presence.

T'ai-tsung believed that men, rather than heaven, shape human destiny, and adopted a rationalism that went against the conventional beliefs of the age. Shortly after taking the throne, for example, when officials from various parts of the empire began to report lucky and unlucky omens to the throne, he retorted that whether the dynasty prospered or declined depended on the quality of its government and on the actions of man, not on heaven or its portents.[6] Later he ordered the elaborate capping ceremonies, marking the majority of his son the heir apparent, to be held at a time when they would not interfere with agricultural labour, although he was advised that this date was inauspicious.[7] He ridiculed the many past sovereigns who had attempted to prolong their lives by magical elixirs.

The emperor was a very self-conscious monarch, deeply concerned over the historical image he would bequeath to posterity. We have seen that he attempted to improve his historical image by changing the Veritable Record narrating the founding of the dynasty, and its account of the Hsüan-wu Gate coup. Much of the emperor's public behaviour seems to have been dictated less by his own personal convictions than by a desire to gain the approbation of his court officials – in particular the diarists responsible for its historical record.

T'ai-tsung had an unquestioned flair for the dramatic, flamboyant gesture. As an example of his penchant for histrionics, we might take an episode that occurred in the year 628, when swarms of locusts descended upon the metropolitan area. He went out into the Imperial Park north of the palace to see for himself the damage they had caused. He picked up a handful of the insects and cursed them crying, 'The people regard

[5] See Woodbridge Bingham, *The founding of the T'ang dynasty: the fall of Sui and the rise of T'ang* (Baltimore, 1941), p. 49, n. 82.

[6] *THY* 28, p. 531.

[7] *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, edn of Harada Taneshige (Tokyo, 1962), 8, pp. 242–3.

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grain the same as life itself, yet you devour it. Better that you devour my own lungs and bowels!' He then lifted his hand to his mouth and was about to eat them, when his attendants restrained him, warning him that he might become ill. 'Since we will suffer this calamity for the sake of the people,' he calmly replied, 'how can we try to avoid illness!' So saying, he ate them.[8]

In the early part of his reign T'ai-tsung constantly attempted to demonstrate both his empathy with the people and his respect for the opinions of his court advisers. He was constantly expressing his fears that he lacked the talent to rule wisely, claiming that the military career he had led in his youth had left him ill-prepared for his role as emperor. He once remarked:

> When we were young and fond of archery, we obtained ten excellent bows, and thought none could be better. Recently we showed them to a bow-maker, who said; 'All are of poor quality.' When we asked the reason, he replied: 'The hearts of the wood are not straight, so their arteries and veins are all bad. Although the bows are strong, when you shoot the arrows they will not fly true.' We began to realize that we were not yet good at discriminating. We pacified the empire with bows and arrows, but our understanding even of these was still insufficient. How much the less can we know everything concerning the affairs of the empire![9]

The emperor thus adopted the humble pose of a student before his ministers, eager to learn, anxious for their advice and frank criticism.

In spite of this outward show of modesty, after his formal accession to the throne on the ninth day of the eighth month of 626, T'ai-tsung proved to be a vigorous and successful administrator as well as a superb military leader. Although, unlike his father Kao-tsu, he was relatively inexperienced in civil administration, he soon imparted a fresh, highly personal and attractive style to T'ang government, largely based on his own keen intelligence, boundless energy, diligence and reliable judgment of men.

The sheer energy which he devoted to affairs of state was prodigious, and he demanded equal exertions from his officials. His chief officials slept in shifts in the Chancellery and Secretariat so that he could summon and question them at any time, night or day, about the affairs of the empire. When memorials became numerous, he had them posted on the walls of his bedchamber so that he could examine and consider them well into the night.

He scrupulously followed the Confucian precepts which called for scholar-official participation and authority in government, and proved

[8] *TCTC* 192, pp. 6053–4; *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, 8, p. 241.
[9] *TCTC* 192, p. 6034.

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unusually sensitive and responsive to literati advice and pressure. He deliberately sought the frank criticisms of his ministers and advisers, and made honest attempts to employ their criticism to improve his administration. Soon after taking the throne he ordered the remonstrating officials (*chien-kuan*) to follow the great ministers of the Chancellery and Secretariat into their formal discussions of affairs, so that any short-comings could be immediately rectified.[10] He also commanded that all officials should comment on his administration without fear, and made it easier for them to present memorials and petitions directly to the throne.

The emperor went further than these general exhortations to the bureaucracy at large and established a deep personal rapport with the officials of his court, who were made to feel that they shared to a significant degree in the formulation of policy and in the general governance of the state. If we find that T'ai-tsung's portrait in traditional historical sources is often idealized, this is to be attributed not only to his own attempts to influence the historical record, but to the historians who, influenced by their own role as scholar-officials, naturally idolized an emperor who had shown such marked consideration towards their own class, and whose conduct approached the Confucian ideal.

Another Confucian virtue which T'ai-tsung observed conscientiously in the early years of his reign was frugality. He severely curtailed the construction of large public works in order to reduce the loads of corvée labour and taxation on the people. A few months after coming to power he remarked to the court: 'The ruler depends on the state, and the state depends on its people. Oppressing the people to make them serve the ruler, is like someone cutting off his own flesh to fill his stomach. The stomach is filled but the body is injured: the ruler is wealthy but the state is destroyed.'[11] Such declarations of frugality and concern with the welfare of the people naturally delighted the Confucians at court, and brought him wide popularity.

On the first day of 627 T'ai-tsung took as the title of his reign 'True vision' (Chen-kuan) and the idealized picture of his administration has been referred to reverently by later Chinese historians as the 'good government of the Chen-kuan period' (*Chen-kuan chih chih*). It proved a potent model which inspired later rulers as varied as the Ch'ien-lung emperor, Kubilai Khan and Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Nevertheless this ideal image is appropriate only to the first years of T'ai-tsung's reign. By the mid-630s, as dynastic power was consolidated and the frontiers of empire extended, and T'ai-tsung became more and more confident in his own administrative skill, he began to become

[10] *TCTC* 192, p. 6031. [11] *TCTC* 192, p. 6026.

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increasingly arbitrary and self-willed. His earlier policies of economy, frugality and restriction on the use of corvée labour gave way to a spate of palace building and extensive public works.

Persuaded by his advisers in 629 and again in 630 not to undertake large-scale rebuilding of the old Sui palace at Lo-yang, on the grounds that the events of the late Sui might too easily be repeated, in 631 T'ai-tsung nevertheless ordered its refurbishment, but the new work was destroyed soon after its completion because T'ai-tsung felt it was unduly ostentatious.[12] In the same year, 631, the emperor rebuilt the Sui Jen-shou palace at Feng-hsiang fu,[13] and subsequently no fewer than four new palaces were built: the Ta-ming palace, later to become the emperor's principal permanent residence, was built in 634,[14] the Fei-shan palace in 637,[15] the Hsiang-ch'eng palace in 640,[16] and the Yü-hua palace in 647.[17] To give some idea of the scale of these works, the building of the Hsiang-ch'eng palace alone involved nearly two million man-days of labour. In spite of this, when it was completed in 641 T'ai-tsung found that it had been built on a hot and unpleasant site, and had it razed to the ground and its architect demoted.[18] In 647, the cost of extensive public works was given as one of the reasons for postponing the celebration of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, scheduled for the following year.[19]

T'ai-tsung's restraint and frugality broke down in other respects. In the early years of his reign he seldom held the great formal hunts to which his father and brother Li Yüan-chi had been devoted. These hunts, which were massive affairs more like large-scale military manoeuvres than a simple hunting party, were extremely expensive and burdensome for the local people. During the second half of T'ai-tsung's reign, however, they again became a frequent event, keeping the emperor away from court for long periods. In 637 one of the imperial princes, who had been over-indulging in hunting, was demoted. T'ai-tsung observed to the court 'The official Ch'üan Wan-chi [the prince's tutor] served my son and was not able to reform him. For such a crime he deserves death.' The censor Liu Fan coolly replied '[Your chief minister] Fang Hsüan-ling serves your majesty yet cannot prevent you from hunting: surely it is not only [Ch'üan] Wan-chi who is guilty.' The emperor then withdrew in a great huff.[20]

[12] *THY* 30, pp. 551–2; *TCTC* 193, pp. 6079–80; *ibid.* p. 6088.
[13] *TCTC* 193, p. 6088.
[14] *THY* 30, p. 553. Its name, originally the Yung-an palace, was changed to Ta-ming kung in 635.
[15] *THY* 30, p. 560.
[16] *THY* 30, p. 560.
[17] *THY* 30, p. 555; *TCTC* 198, p. 6248.
[18] *THY* 30, p. 560.
[19] *TCTC* 198, p. 6248.
[20] *CTS* 77, p. 2681.

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The first signs of dissatisfaction among T'ai-tsung's officials concerning his abandonment of the principles of behaviour that had characterized the early years of his reign began to appear in the early 630s. By 637 concern was being voiced loud and publicly. In that year Ma Chou complained about the rising burden of labour services and about T'ai-tsung's growing disregard for the people, and advocated a return to the policies of his early years.[21] In the next year Wei Cheng also complained of the changes in the emperor's style of administration since 627, of his increasing arrogance, self-satisfaction and wasteful expenditure.[22]

As his power grew more secure, T'ai-tsung began increasingly to make policy himself and to disregard the opinions of his court. Some of the rapport he had developed with his bureaucracy broke down; he began to chafe under criticism and to intimidate those who disagreed with him. On his death-bed in 648 his great minister Fang Hsüan-ling sadly observed that by this time no one at court dared to remonstrate with the emperor.[23] The humility which the emperor had once showed to his court advisers was replaced by an imperious assertiveness. In his later years T'ai-tsung constantly dwelled on his own former military achievements. He believed that he had surpassed the other great rulers of China, and his ministers sought to feed his pride with lavish praise.

Nevertheless, despite his failure to live up to the high ideals of his early years on the throne, the larger-than-life figure of T'ai-tsung and the concept of the 'Good government of the Chen-kuan period' were to remain potent political symbols, not only for the rest of the T'ang period but throughout Chinese history.

T'AI-TSUNG'S MINISTERS

In the highest offices of his administration, T'ai-tsung gathered around himself a remarkable group of ministers. Most of them had been his subordinates in the various military and civilian organizations which he had headed as Prince of Ch'in during his father's reign. But two of his most eminent officials, Wei Cheng and Wang Kuei, had formerly been advisers to the murdered heir apparent Chien-ch'eng, eloquent testimony that T'ai-tsung was concerned with obtaining men of ability, regardless of their backgrounds. He himself once wrote:

The enlightened ruler employs men in the manner of a skilled carpenter. If the wood is straight, he uses it for a shaft of a cart; if it is crooked, he uses it for

[21] *CTS* 74, pp. 2615–18.
[22] *Wei Cheng-kung chien-lu*, edn of Wang Hsien-kung (Changsha, 1883), 1, p. 23a.
[23] *TCTC* 199, p. 6260.

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a wheel. If it is long, he uses it as a roof-beam; if it is short, he uses it as a rafter. No matter whether crooked or straight, long or short, each has something which can be utilized. The enlightened ruler's employment of men is also like this. From the wise man he takes his plans; from the stupid man he takes his strength; from the brave man he takes his courage; from the coward he takes his caution. No matter whether wise, stupid, brave or cowardly, each can be employed [according to his abilities]. Therefore the skilled carpenter has no rejected materials, and the enlightened ruler has no rejected officials.[24]

The young emperor did, however, generally choose ministers who were congenial to him. He gradually dismissed those men who had served under Kao-tsu in favour of his own younger supporters, and greatly reduced the proportion of relatives of the imperial family among those holding the highest offices, the only notable exception being his brother-in-law Chang-sun Wu-chi. His highest ranking ministers were almost entirely men who had considerable previous experience as officials, and were the sons and grandsons of officials under previous dynasties. With the advent of T'ai-tsung there was a change of personnel in high court offices, but no new class of official came into power.[25]

Throughout his reign one of T'ai-tsung's closest and most trusted advisers was his brother-in-law Chang-sun Wu-chi (*c.* 600–59). Descended from a Northern Wei noble family, Chang-sun was born in Lo-yang about the same time as T'ai-tsung and had been on close terms with the emperor since childhood. He had joined the T'ang army on its march against the Sui capital, proved to be an able military strategist, and later accompanied T'ai-tsung on many of his campaigns of pacification in the eastern plain. As a completely trusted and loyal supporter, he had helped plan T'ai-tsung's coup against his brothers, and was among the small group of men who had cut them down at the Hsüan-wu Gate.

Upon T'ai-tsung's succession, Chang-sun Wu-chi was appointed vice-president of the Department of State Affairs, with the title of chief minister. His younger sister also became the principal imperial consort, bearing the posthumous title of the empress Wen-te. Chang-sun Wu-chi was the most highly honoured of all T'ai-tsung's ministers, and by a special edict permitted unrestricted access to the imperial apartments. He became so influential that a memorialist accused him of wielding excessive power and he was forced to give up his post, though he continued to be an imperial adviser. From 633 he held the highest ranking (though essentially honorary) offices in the bureaucracy (*ssu-k'ung* and *ssu-t'u*), and his influence on the emperor remained undiminished. In 643

[24] *Ti-fan* (TSCC edn), 2, pp. 15–16.
[25] Tsukiyama Chisaburō, *Tōdai seiji seido no kenkyū* (Osaka, 1967), pp. 33–42, p. 123; Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1968), pp. 231–50.

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his immense personal influence enabled him to settle the succession dispute in favour of the future Kao-tsung. From 645 until the end of the reign he again held the highest offices in the Chancellery and Department of State Affairs, and undertook the revision of the T'ang law Code, completed under his direction after T'ai-tsung's death. He, together with Ch'u Sui-liang, was chosen to receive T'ai-tsung's last will and formal testament. Just before his death T'ai-tsung generously praised Chang-sun Wu-chi and asked Ch'u Sui-liang to protect him from slander and harm. Chang-sun's life-long friendship and collaboration with the emperor, and his relationship by marriage, gave him a special place in the emperor's esteem and marked him off as the most influential of T'ai-tsung's ministers and advisers.[26]

The second of T'ai-tsung's great ministers was Fang Hsüan-ling (578–648). A member of a clan from Ch'i-chou in modern Shantung, his father had been a prefect (*tz'u-shih*) under the Sui and he himself had passed the *chin-shih* examination under the Sui, at the precocious age of seventeen. Under the Sui he had held a series of high offices both in the provinces and in the capital, where he became vice-president of the Board of Civil Office. It was therefore as an experienced and successful official that Fang Hsüan-ling joined T'ai-tsung's retinue, shortly after the T'ang occupation of Ch'ang-an. He became the future emperor's constant companion and accompanied him on all his campaigns, acting as adviser and secretary.

While the future T'ai-tsung was Prince of Ch'in, Fang Hsüan-ling recruited many men into his personal administration and retinue: a great many were fellow easterners and often were former officers of Li Shih-min's vanquished opponents in the north-eastern plain. Together with Chang-sun Wu-chi, Fang Hsüan-ling helped plan the Hsüan-wu Gate coup, and after T'ai-tsung ascended the throne continued to act as his adviser and personal secretary, drafting edicts for the emperor which were said to have been perfectly composed, even in their first draft.

Where Chang-sun Wu-chi was essentially a personal influence, an *éminence grise* with an intimate rapport with the emperor, Fang Hsüan-ling was an eminently practical, pragmatic man of affairs. Together with Tu Ju-hui (see below) he recruited top-ranking officials, and together with Tu perfected the basic system of executive administration (they were joint heads of the Department of State Affairs from 629 to 630). The names of Fang Hsüan-ling and Tu Ju-hui became synonymous with fair yet efficient administration. Fang's thirteen years (629–42) as vice-president of the Department of State Affairs was the longest tenure in a single office of any of T'ai-tsung's chief ministers.

[26] Biographies in *CTS* 65, pp. 2446–56; *HTS* 105, pp. 4017–22.

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Fang was an extremely practical and straightforward adviser, and more influential than the puritanical Wei Cheng (see below) whose incessant moralizing and admonitions were often in the end ignored. Fang was willing to give in when necessary and is sometimes shown as over submissive to the emperor. However, he was a pragmatic and popular figure, fair, generous in his judgments, moderate in his views, and completely trusted and liked by the emperor and his junior colleagues alike. He was a vital source of stability and moderation at court, particularly during T'ai-tsung's increasingly imperious later years. Though pliant, and not over ambitious, he was second only to Chang-sun Wu-chi in his power and influence throughout the reign.[27]

Tu Ju-hui (585–630), whose name is intimately coupled with that of Fang Hsüan-ling, was a member of a famous north-western clan, and like T'ai-tsung's other high ministers had been born into an official family. His grandfather had served both the Northern Chou and the Sui. Tu Ju-hui had himself held a minor provincial post under the Sui, but had resigned. He had joined Li Shih-min's personal staff shortly after the establishment of the T'ang, and like Chang-sun Wu-chi and Fang Hsüan-ling had accompanied Li Shih-min on his pacification campaigns in the north-eastern plain. He had also helped plan the Hsüan-wu Gate coup; he may, indeed, have taken part in the assassination of Li Shih-min's brothers. T'ai-tsung had complete confidence in Tu Ju-hui's judgment and powers of decision; so much so that he told Fang Hsüan-ling that Tu's support was necessary in all major government decisions. Tu Ju-hui and Fang Hsüan-ling were complementary characters and worked smoothly together. Between them they staffed and set in operation the whole executive side of government. Unfortunately Tu died of an unspecified illness in 630, at the very peak of his power.[28]

In sharp contrast to these decisive and effective practical statesmen, the dry and humourless Wei Cheng (580–643) represented the Confucian moralist end of the spectrum of politics at T'ai-tsung's court. Wei was descended from a minor official family from southern Ho-pei; his ancestors had served as petty officials under the Northern Wei and Northern Ch'i dynasties. At the end of the Sui, Wei Cheng was serving as a secretary on the staff of the rebel Li Mi. When Li Mi surrendered to the T'ang at the end of 618, Wei accompanied him to Ch'ang-an. He was then appointed to the staff of the heir apparent Li Chien-ch'eng, whom he supported and advised in his struggle against Li Shih-min. Shortly after Li Chien-ch'eng was murdered at the Hsüan-wu Gate, Wei Cheng had a

[27] Biographies in *CTS* 66, pp. 2459–67; *HTS* 96, pp. 3853–7.
[28] Biographies in *CTS* 66, pp. 2467–9; *HTS* 96, pp. 3858–60.

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conversation with Li Shih-min in which he displayed his extraordinary directness. When asked by Li Shih-min why he had quarrelled with Li Chien-ch'eng and Li Yüan-chi, Wei replied that they had rejected his advice on how to deal with their ambitious (and now victorious) brother: 'If they had followed my advice, they would never have met this disaster.' Li Shih-min decided that he could make good use of a man of such uncompromising forthrightness, and appointed him to his staff.

When Li Shih-min ascended the throne a month later, Wei Cheng was appointed imperial counsellor and given a noble title. Soon afterwards he was sent as T'ai-tsung's personal emissary to the north-eastern plain, where he was to try and make peace with remaining disaffected groups. Wei was an excellent choice for such a mission, for he was himself a one-time supporter of a major rebel. He could thus show from his own experience that former opponents of Li Shih-min or of the dynasty itself were not barred from service under the new regime. In addition to this sort of 'diplomatic' mission, Wei Cheng was involved in other court activities. He was connected with several scholarly projects, participating in the compilation of a new code of ritual, the 'New Ritual' (*Hsin-li*; also known as the *Chen-kuan Li*), which he and Fang Hsüan-ling presented to the throne in 636; and acting as co-editor of the histories of the preceding dynasties compiled between 629 and 636. (See page 216.)

But Wei Cheng was rarely involved in real administrative and policy decisions, and it was not as a practical statesman that he became a symbol both for his contemporaries and for those in later times. It is as an unbending moralist and fearless remonstrator that Wei Cheng has always been known – and indeed the Chinese have always regarded him as the most outstanding of T'ai-tsung's ministers. A memorial of 637 exemplifies the kind of blunt criticism that Wei Cheng often delivered. It was submitted in response to T'ai-tsung's inquiry as to how his present rule compared with that of his first years on the throne. Wei Cheng comes straight to the point: 'Long ago, before the empire was pacified, you always made righteousness and virtue your central concern. Now, thinking that the empire is without troubles, you have gradually become increasingly arrogant, wasteful, and self-satisfied.'[29]

Wei Cheng's function at court was that of the incorruptible, unrelenting conscience, a restraint on imperial power. He was a symbol of the deep mutual trust between ruler and minister and the frank exchange of blunt advice which came to characterize the political climate of T'ai-tsung's court. His great reputation among scholars and officials of later ages

[29] See H. J. Wechsler, *Mirror to the Son of Heaven: Wei Cheng at the court of T'ang T'ai-tsung* (New Haven, 1974), p. 147.

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surely derives from this role, so compatible with their own interests and values.[30]

Another minister who played a primary role as a moral censor, although he has not shared Wei Cheng's posthumous reputation, was one of the few great ministers of Kao-tsu's court who continued in office under T'ai-tsung, the unyielding and cantankerous Hsiao Yü (575–648). His constant carping and quarrelling with other ministers finally provoked the emperor to dismiss him at the end of 627 from his post as chief minister. However, he remained in high court office. Head of the Censorate in 630, he was again briefly a chief minister in 630, and also in 635–6. T'ai-tsung seems to have valued him for his administrative experience but above all for his utter incorruptibility and unbending morality, in spite of his abrasive character and his bad relations with colleagues. In 643, following the moral crisis of the succession dispute (see below) he was once again appointed chief minister and concurrently tutor to the new heir apparent (the future Kao-tsung). He retained these posts until 646, when he requested to retire to become a Buddhist monk, quarrelled publicly with T'ai-tsung and was sent out to the provinces. During the whole reign he remained a powerful, if often negative force in politics: an irritant, but a force whose moral stature and absolute integrity could never be ignored.[31]

In the last years of T'ai-tsung's reign other figures began to achieve prominence at court. After Wei Cheng's death, his role as the embodiment of the 'imperial conscience' was taken over by Ch'u Sui-liang (596–658). Ch'u was a southerner, whose father had held office both under the Ch'en and under the Sui. His father, Ch'u Liang, had been involved in the abortive rebellion of Yang Hsüan-kan, and was sent in disgrace to a provincial post in the north-west, where he defected to join the rebel Hsüeh Chü. After the defeat of Hsüeh Chü in 619 both father and son joined the T'ang and the father became a member of Li Shih-min's personal College of Literary Studies (Wen-hsüeh kuan). Ch'u Sui-liang was a gifted scholar, a famous calligrapher and a historian. His career under T'ai-tsung was spent in 'pure' offices of a literary type, in the Imperial Library, as court diarist and as imperial counsellor. As a diarist he was notable for his resistance to T'ai-tsung's attempts to influence the contents of the court record. In the succession dispute of 643 he supported the future Kao-tsung as the new heir apparent and subsequently became his preceptor. He began to play an active role as imperial adviser, advocating moderate domestic policies and opposing activist foreign policies. In 647 he became

[30] Biographies in *CTS* 71, pp. 2545–62; *HTS* 97, pp. 3867–82. See also Wechsler, *Wei Cheng*.
[31] Biographies *CTS* 63, pp. 2398–404; *HTS* 101, pp. 3949–52.

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a chief minister and was given high office in the Chancellery and Secretariat. When T'ai-tsung was on his death-bed, it was Ch'u Sui-liang who was chosen together with Chang-sun Wu-chi to receive the emperor's dying testament.

Ch'u was certainly a great power in the last years of the reign. He was unfortunate in that by the time he achieved high office T'ai-tsung was no longer responsive to moral exhortations. Yet he clearly maintained good relations and considerable influence with the emperor, and established a great personal authority at court which lasted well into the next reign.[32]

So far, we have discussed officials who, although they had briefly acted as military commanders during the consolidation period of Kao-tsu's reign, were essentially civilian statesmen. Two further powerful figures at T'ai-tsung's court were primarily military men.

The first was Li Ching (571–649). A native of the metropolitan area in the north-west, his grandfather and father were provincial officials under the Northern Wei and Sui. He himself had a long career in office under the Sui – he was the oldest of T'ai-tsung's close associates. Joining the T'ang after their capture of Ch'ang-an, Li Ching spent the first years of the dynasty as a major commander in the pacification of the various rebel regimes in southern China. In 625–6 he was engaged in fighting the Eastern Turks. After T'ai-tsung came to the throne he was appointed to various high court offices, but was sent out on campaigns against the Hsüeh-yen-t'o and the Eastern Turks. From 630 to 634 he was appointed a chief minister and was clearly influential with the emperor, replacing Tu Ju-hui as Fang Hsüan-ling's partner in control of the Department of State Affairs. Although he was retired with high honorary office in late 634, in the next year he led a successful campaign against the T'u-yü-hun in the Kokonor area. In the following years he continued to be a powerful personal influence with the emperor, until his death in 649.[33]

The other military man who played a dual role at court was the much younger Li Shih-chi (594–669). Descended from a family of provincial officials in modern Shantung, Li Shih-chi, whose original surname was Hsü, had as a very young man joined a rebel band led by Chai Jang which was active near Lo-yang. Later he became a commander under Li Mi, and was persuaded by Wei Cheng to submit to the T'ang after Li Mi's surrender. This he did in 619, and became a major commander in the T'ang suppression of Ho-pei and Shan-tung, second only to Li Shih-min. At the end of Kao-tsu's reign he became military commander of the original T'ang base at T'ai-yüan in northern Shansi, where he was placed in charge

[32] Biographies in *CTS* 80, pp. 2729–39; *HTS* 105, pp. 4024–9.
[33] Biographies in *CTS* 67, pp. 2475–82; *HTS* 93, pp. 3811–15.

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of defence against the Turks. T'ai-tsung confirmed him in this post, and he remained the chief commander of the crucial T'ai-yüan area until 641, playing a key part both in the campaigns which crushed the Eastern Turks in 629–30 and in their subsequent resettlement. T'ai-tsung once commented that Li Shih-chi was better than the Great Wall for holding back the Turks.

In 641 he was appointed president of the Board of War and called to court. After leading a brief campaign against the Hsüeh-yen-t'o in 641 (see below), he settled down to life at court. In 643 he became a chief minister, which post he held until the end of the reign. For much of this period he was away from court on campaign, first in Koguryŏ in 644, then against the Hsüeh-yen-t'o in 646. However, in spite of his long absences in these last years he was also a powerful influence in court politics, being not only a chief minister but also a preceptor in the new heir apparent's household after 643. T'ai-tsung, at the end of his reign, was deeply concerned that Li Shih-chi should continue to be a loyal servant of his successor.[34]

Li Ching and Li Shih-chi were examples of a type of official which remained common throughout the seventh century, the man who was equally at home as a court official or as a commander-in-the-field, characterized by the phrase *ju-hsiang, ch'u-chiang*. These officials are a reminder that the new T'ang ruling group still came from a society in which a leader needed not only to be adept as an administrator and a scholar, but also to be trained in the martial arts, as was the emperor himself.

'REGIONAL POLITICS' AT THE COURT

Traditionally Chinese historians have portrayed T'ai-tsung's reign as an ideal age of politics, characterized by excellent relations between the emperor and his officials and by a good *esprit de corps* within the bureaucracy. On only one occasion, that of the succession dispute in 643, did the court show signs of strong factional alignments. Yet, like all administrative systems, T'ai-tsung's bureaucracy was susceptible to tensions and internal conflicts.

One source of tension, which has been greatly emphasized by modern Chinese and Japanese scholars, was the rivalry between regional groups within the ruling class. Ch'en Yin-k'o and Ku Chi-kuang[35] made much of the idea that north-eastern China, in particular Ho-pei province, was

[34] Biographies in *CTS* 67, pp. 2483–9; *HTS* 93, pp. 3817–22.
[35] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955), pp. 75–8; Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao* (Chungking, 1944), pp. 19 ff.; Ku Chi-kuang, 'An-Shih luan-ch'ien chih Ho-pei tao', *Yen-ching hsüeh-pao*, 19 (1936) 197–209.

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estranged from the T'ang ruling house. This estrangement, which they traced back to the division of the Northern Wei empire between the Northern Chou and Northern Ch'i, has certainly been exaggerated. But nevertheless, Ho-pei had resisted the T'ang conquest for several years, and it was almost certainly suspicion of the local leadership in this, the most densely peopled region of China, which prevented T'ai-tsung from establishing more than a few militias (*che-ch'ung-fu*) in the province.[36] T'ai-tsung himself knew the area well, since he had been responsible for pacifying Ho-pei, and distrusted the potentially rebellious population. In addition, many of the confederates of his murdered brothers, Li Chien-ch'eng and Li-Yüan-chi, had been from the north-east.

On the other hand, T'ai-tsung had prevented his father from carrying out unduly harsh measures against the area. And, whatever their suspicions and public attitudes, both Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung employed many high officials from north-eastern families. Even among the military staff of Kao-tsu when he began his rebellion at T'ai-yüan, about a quarter were from the eastern provinces of Ho-pei and Ho-nan.[37] One member of the exclusive north-eastern aristocratic elite (*Shan-tung ssu hsing*), Ts'ui Min-kan, served as vice-president of the Chancellery under Kao-tsu; and there seems to have been a quite deliberate attempt to balance high officials from the north-west (Kuan-lung) with men from other regions, including people from the eastern plain. Further evidence that Kao-tsu had no over-riding prejudice against the north-east is the pattern of marriages arranged for his daughters. Before his accession his elder daughters were all married to members of the north-western elite, whereas after his ascent to the throne, two of his younger daughters were married to members of one of the most prestigious families from the Ho-tung area, where Kao-tsu had begun his rise to power.[38]

T'ai-tsung, who spent the early years of the dynasty on campaign in eastern China and was centred for a long period in Lo-yang, recruited many of his followers from the north-eastern plain. Before his coup in 626, when Kao-tsu had planned to send him back to Lo-yang to separate him from his brothers, the heir apparent had objected on the grounds that his associates were all Shan-tung people and that if he were sent back to Lo-yang he would never return to the court.[39] Wei Cheng was sent to the area to patch things up with the north-eastern leaders in 627. After his accession to the throne, the emperor continued to recruit his highest

[36] See below pp. 207–8; Tu Ch'ia, 'T'ang-tai fu-ping k'ao', *Shih-hsüeh nien-pao*, 3.1 (1939) 1–27; Ku Chi-kuang, *Fu-ping chih-tu k'ao-shih* (Peking, 1962), p. 142–58; Kikuchi Hideo, 'Tō setsushōfu no bumpu mondai ni kansuru ichi kaishaku', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 27.2 (1968).

[37] See the table in Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū*, pp. 114–15.

[38] See *ibid.* pp. 317–41.

[39] *TCTC* 191, p. 6004.

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officials from all parts of the empire and to prevent any one regional group from dominating the principal ministries.[40]

The well known antipathy of T'ai-tsung to the exalted aristocratic clans of Shan-tung (the '*ssu hsing*') was a quite separate issue. The objection was *not* to their regional affiliation – most of these families were already in the process of becoming a metropolitan social elite in any case – but to their pretensions and social exclusiveness and their assumption that their clans were the social superiors of the royal house. There is no real evidence that T'ai-tsung's dislike of this small – if extremely powerful and influential – group was extended to all men from the region in which they had had their traditional power bases.

Lastly, not only is it clear that under T'ai-tsung the complete political predominance of the old north-western aristocracy at court had been broken and that the highest officials were recruited from all parts of the empire; it is also clear that the regional origins of ministers and regional groupings played no important part in the formulation of policies. In none of the issues which sharply divided opinion at court did the regional affiliations of the ministers concerned play any role; indeed in issues which vitally concerned the eastern provinces, north-eastern ministers were found arguing against the interests of their native region. It seems clear nevertheless that T'ai-tsung was well aware of the implications of such regional groupings. The pattern of his appointments of men to high office shows that he was sensitive to the problem, and he generally seems to have deliberately avoided policies directed against any specific area.

But such regional interests seem not to have provided a basis for any permanent polarization of politics, nor to have generated 'regional cliques'.[41] Nor, during most of T'ai-tsung's reign, was there any political issue which divided the court into durable factional groups; rather, it appears that during this period political lines were not rigid, and political allegiances were in a highly fluid state and essentially personal. It was only with the bitter divisions at court resulting from the succession dispute of 643 that factionalism became overt. But even so, until the end of the reign it remained a comparatively minor problem and did not seriously interrupt the political process.

[40] See H. J. Wechsler, 'Factionalism in early T'ang government', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 87–120.
[41] See *ibid.* for greater detail on this issue.

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DOMESTIC POLICIES AND REFORMS

When T'ai-tsung ascended the throne on the ninth day of the eighth month of 626, China had already been unified, and the basic institutions and policies of the new dynasty had been formulated and set in operation. The young emperor's task was then to consolidate and extend the achievements of his father. During the twenty-three years of his reign T'ai-tsung re-examined, rationalized and improved where necessary the administrative and institutional structure he had inherited, and devised new policies to meet the exigencies of an expanding empire.

Administrative reorganization

By the time T'ai-tsung succeeded to the throne the actual administrative structure of the country had become out of balance. Kao-tsu had ennobled most members of the imperial clan and many of their relatives by marriage, as well as many of those who had supported him in his rise to power. He had also rewarded many of those who had aided in the founding of his dynasty, by creating great numbers of new prefectures and counties for them to administer. By the end of his reign in 626 there was a swollen nobility, and the number of prefectures and counties was more than double that under the Sui.

T'ai-tsung made a systematic attempt to halt this runaway growth of he bureaucracy. In 627 he ordered Fang Hsüan-ling to reduce the number of military and civil posts at the capital on the grounds that 'employing the right men was far more important than the sheer numbers of established posts'.[42] In the provinces, during the first years of his reign, T'ai-tsung radically reduced the number of administrative subdivisions by combining prefectures and counties on a wide scale.

The control of local administrations through the higher level 'governments-general' (*tu-tu fu*), which had replaced the regional commands (*tsung-kuan fu*) in 624, continued, in theory at least. In 639 there was a total of 43 of these governments-general, which controlled the frontier areas and the strategic areas of the interior. In all they were established over some 272 of the empire's 358 prefectures; the system, whose primary function was military coordination, did not include the metropolitan areas, the region between the Huang-ho and the Huai, central Ho-pei, south-western Ho-tung (i.e., modern Shansi) the Yangtze Delta,

[42] *TCTC* 192, p. 6043, gives the new figure of 643 posts; *HTS* 46, p. 1181 gives the figure 730 for both the capital and provinces; cf. R. des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1947), p. 2, n. 1.

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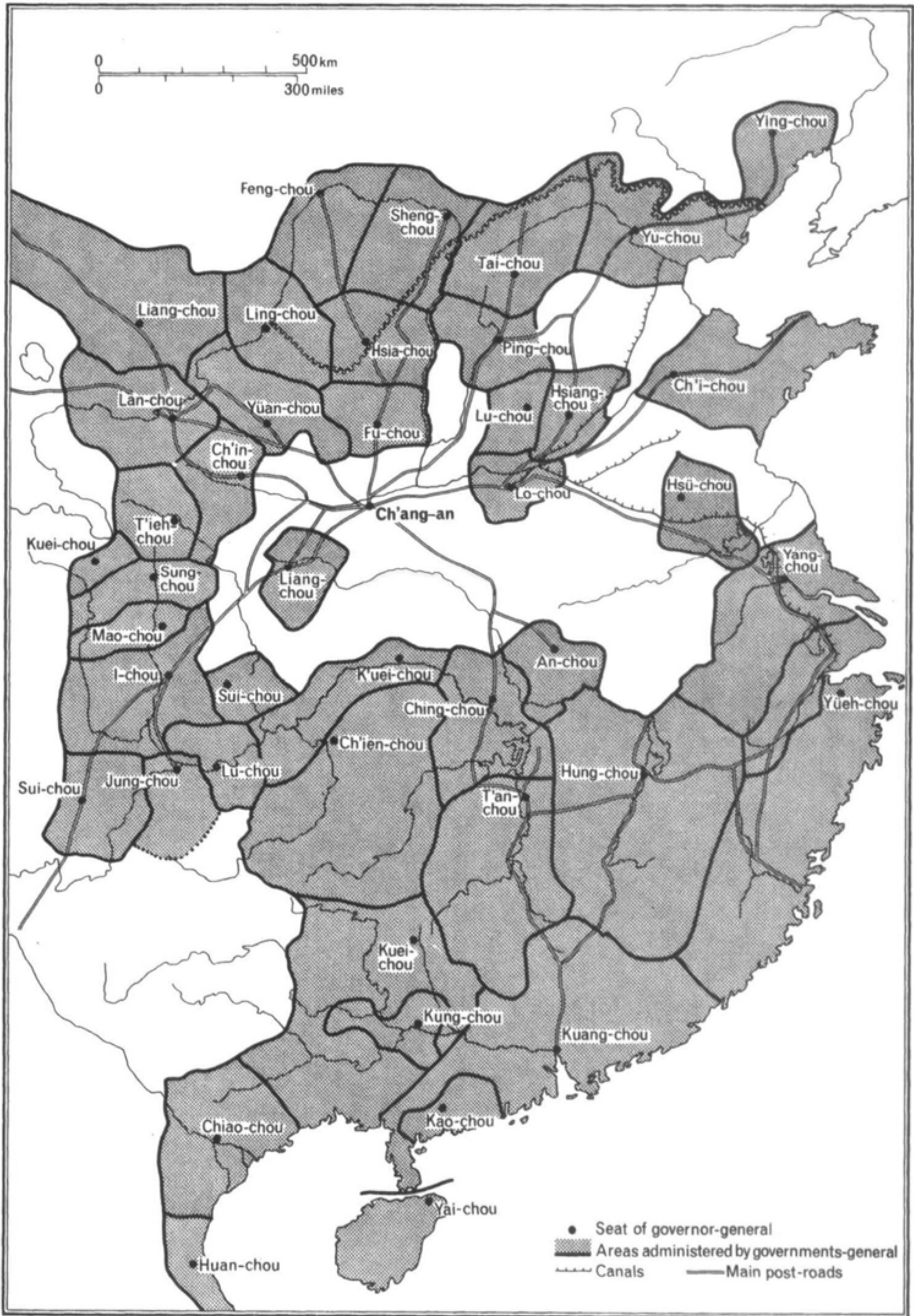

Map 6. T'ang China, 639

Based on Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang-shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Hong Kong, 1969), pp. 237–84, and map on p. 284.

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and eastern Szechwan. The overall control of the governments-general over their subordinate prefectures was however largely nominal. After some decades of peace their powers had become a dead letter, and they remained only slightly more important divisions on the same level as the prefecture.[43]

T'ai-tsung divided the empire afresh, into administrative regions called '*tao*' (lit. 'routes', 'circuits'); Kuan-nei and Lung-yu in the north-west; Ho-tung in the north and Ho-pei in the north-east; Ho-nan, Huai-nan, Shan-nan and Chien-nan in central China; and the two huge regions of Chiang-nan and Ling-nan in the still relatively sparsely peopled south. No permanent administration and no permanent officials were set up to govern these regions. They were not new administrative divisions but convenient circuits of inspection for imperial commissioners (*shih*) sent out at irregular intervals to inspect the operation of local government in the prefectures within the 'circuit'.[44]

Reform of the provincial bureaucracy

For a long while prior to the T'ang dynasty, appointments to metropolitan offices had been esteemed far above those of equal rank and formal status in the provinces, and this had continued during Kao-tsu's reign. Military men were often appointed prefects or county magistrates; local subaltern functionaries were frequently appointed to provincial offices when they qualified for transfer to a post 'within the current', and metropolitan officials who had committed some offence were often transferred to provincial appointments as a punishment. Office in the provinces, even when it carried high rank and great responsibilities, was thought of as banishment, and an ambitious man saw provincial service as a set-back in his career.

T'ai-tsung attempted to change this pattern, to increase the esteem in which provincial office was held, and to improve the conduct of provincial administration. He personally scrutinized the careers of individual officials; the names of officials were pasted on screens in his own chambers, and he determined their promotions and demotions according to the merits and shortcomings indicated beside each one. In 637, after receiving a memorial on the persisting deficiencies of provincial administration T'ai-tsung began to select personally all candidates for appointment as prefects, and charged the officials in his central administration with the

[43] See Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang-shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Hong Kong, 1969), pp. 237–84. This also gives a map of the governments-general as in 639.

[44] R. des Rotours, 'Les grands fonctionnaires des provinces en Chine sous la dynastie des T'ang', *TP*, 25 (1927) 222.

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duty of recommending new men to become county magistrates.[45] Twice, in 634[46] and again in 646, investigating commissioners were sent out on circuit throughout the empire to scrutinize the conduct of local administration and to recommend the promotion or demotion of local officials. In the inquisition of 646 many thousand local officials were punished for poor administration, including seven who were executed for their misdeeds.[47]

Corruption was not limited to provincial government. It appears that the taking of bribes even by high court officials had become a flagrant abuse under Kao-tsu. T'ai-tsung deplored this, and attempted to curb corruption by sending officials with bribes to test the probity of his courtiers. Not unnaturally this produced a storm of protest. The emperor then began to shame corrupt officials before the whole court by rewarding those guilty of taking bribes. By this means, corruption and even the acceptance of customary gifts in return for favours was discouraged during his reign.

Revision of codified law

T'ai-tsung was constantly preoccupied with the operation of penal law and punishments, particularly during the first years of his reign. Upon ascending the throne he is said to have felt that many of the T'ang laws enacted under his father were too strict and he ordered that the severity of the penalties for certain crimes should be reduced. There were frequent court discussions concerning law and ethics, the philosophy of punishment, and the relative advantages of harsh or lenient laws. The emperor seems in general to have favoured lenient policies, and some harsh punishments were abolished. Strict regulations were placed on corporal punishment, and limits imposed on judicial torture in 630,[48] and in 632 the amputation of the feet, the last of the ancient mutilatory punishments, was abolished and replaced by penal banishment.[49] In the following year, in order to prevent hasty executions and miscarriages of justice, T'ai-tsung ordered that men condemned to death were to be executed only after the officials had memorialized the throne about their case on three separate occasions.[50]

The codification of the law also continued. As early as 627 P'ei Hung-hsien drew the emperor's attention to a large number of sections in Kao-tsu's Code and Statutes of 624 which needed amendment.[51] T'ai-tsung ordered Fang Hsüan-ling, P'ei Hung-hsien and various legal officers

[45] *THY* 68, p. 1197.

[46] *THY* 77, pp. 1411–12.

[47] *TCTC* 198, p. 6234; *THY* 77, p. 1412.

[48] *CTS* 50, p. 2139; *HTS* 56, p. 1411.

[49] Debate on the mutilatory punishments went on for several years, from 627 onwards. See *THY* 39, pp. 707–8; *CTS* 50, pp. 2135–6.

[50] *CTS* 50, pp. 2139–40.

[51] *CTS* 50, pp. 2135–6; *THY* 39, p. 707.

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to revise the codified law. Ten years went by, however, before the commission headed by Fang Hsüan-ling completed its task. Presented to the throne at the beginning of 637 the new Code, known as the *Chen-kuan Lü*, substantially reduced the number of offences carrying the penalties of death or banishment and decreased the penalties for many lesser crimes. At the same time the administrative law in the Statutes (*Ling*) was revised and expanded into thirty chapters and 1,590 articles, and the supplementary Ordinances (*Shih*) were augmented. Lastly the first series of Regulations (*Ko*) were completed. These codified the legislation which had originally been promulgated in edicts and individual decrees. Rationalized, revised and collected together in eighteen chapters and 700 articles, they incorporated the substantive changes in law and procedure embodied in some 3,000 edicts issued since 618.[52] T'ai-tsung's interest in law continued, and his dying testament enjoined his heir to revise the system of codified law yet again.[53]

Reorganization of the military system

The development of military institutions under Kao-tsu is dealt with above. Here again T'ai-tsung further rationalized existing organizations. In 636 the existing militia organizations were reorganized into 'intrepid militia' (*che-ch'ung fu*) units, and their troops became known as 'militia troops' (*fu-ping*). These militias, which numbered some 633 in all, were heavily concentrated in the metropolitan area. In the province of Kuan-chung alone there were 261 militias; the rest were almost entirely quartered in Ho-tung and in western Ho-nan around Lo-yang. In these areas the militias must have included a large proportion of the adult male population. Few militias were established in the populous provinces of Ho-pei and Ho-nan in the Great Plain, and very few were established in central or southern China.

Each militia comprised 800, 1,000 or 1,200 men, with a cadre of officers and administrators. The commander of each militia was an official of quite high rank. The militia was organized in battalions (*t'uan*) of 200 men, platoons (*tui*) of 50 men, and sections (*huo*) of 10 men. These men included both cavalry and mounted archers, and foot soldiers; they also had their own pack animals. The soldiers were expected to provide and maintain their own weapons and equipment, and their own rations. Armour and the more sophisticated weapons were supplied from the militia's armoury.

[52] See *THY* 39, p. 707; *CTS* 50, pp. 2136–8 on the promulgation of Ordinances and Regulations.
[53] *TTCLC* 11, p. 67.

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The militias of the area close to the capital were each attached to one of the twelve guards (*wei*), which formed the central government's principal force, and their men served periodic turns of duty in their guard at the capital.

Besides their turns of duty at the capital in the guard, the militia was supposed to train during the slack season for agriculture, and to conduct formal manoeuvres followed by a grand hunt at the end of every winter. Guardsmen served from the age of twenty to sixty. In return for their service they received exemption from tax and corvée.

Smaller numbers of militias were also established along the frontiers, but it seems clear that from very early in the dynasty there were also professional long-service garrison troops quartered on the frontiers. Among these, and particularly among the cavalry, were many Turks who had taken service with the T'ang armies after the defeat of the Eastern Turks in 630 and the consequent resettlement of many Turks along the northern frontier.

However, in case of a major expedition these forces were insufficient, and not only were militia forces mobilized and hastily organized into 'armies on campaign' (*hsing-chün*), but troops were conscripted from among the common people.[54]

The militia system is usually assumed to have been officered by members of the old aristocratic families. It is clear that, although the dominance of the martial north-western elites had been broken in the highest civil offices, the bulk of the militias (at least two-thirds of the total) was quartered in the same areas where the Kuan-lung and Tai-pei aristocratic groups had been dominant and had their home bases, in modern Shensi and Kansu, and northern and central Shansi. Soldiers both for the militias and those conscripted for campaigns were supposed to be chosen from among the better-off families, and thanks to tax and corvée exemption, service was considered a privilege rather than a serious imposition.

Economic policies

One major failure of T'ai-tsung's administration was in the imposition of the T'ang fiscal system throughout the empire. Where the Sui had registered almost nine million households in 609, this figure had dropped to less than two million under Kao-tsu, and by the end of T'ai-tsung's reign was still below three million – less than a third of the Sui total. This

[54] See Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 61–3, and nn. on pp. 140–1; des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, pp. xxx–xlv, 761–73, *passim*; also the classic study of Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Fuhei-seido yori shinhei-sei e' first published in *SGZS*, 41 (1930) and reprinted in the author's collected essays *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 3–83.

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difference did not represent a catastrophic decline in actual population, but lax and inefficient registration – upon which all collection of revenue was based. This under-registration was most extreme in the richest and the most populous provinces of China, Ho-pei and Ho-nan, where only a tiny proportion, 17 and 10 per cent respectively, of the Sui population remained registered. It was thus fortunate that T'ai-tsung's administration was comparatively economical, since about two-thirds of the empire's potential taxpayers were escaping scot-free.[55]

However, by T'ai-tsung's time the economic dislocation which had accompanied the widespread civil disorders of the late Sui and the first years of the T'ang reunification was beginning to improve. The years immediately following the foundation of the dynasty had been marked by high prices, and a shortage of grain which had led to a ban on the brewing of wine. Even after T'ai-tsung's accession grain remained expensive and in short supply, so that high officials working outside the capital were ordered to send back home the portion of their salaries paid in grain. Conservative officials, such as Wei Cheng, for some years continued to use arguments concerning the lingering economic effects of the chaos of the last years of the Sui to prevent the emperor from embarking on extravagant policies, such as performing the elaborate and costly *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and from undertaking a full-scale policy of imperial military expansion.

By about 630, however, as a result of several years of internal peace and good harvests coupled with sound administrative policies, the situation had markedly improved. An important new measure which gave the population some insurance against natural disasters was the establishment in 628 of prefectural 'relief granaries' (*i-ts'ang*), which stored up grain in anticipation of famine or crop failures.[56] Price regulating granaries (*ch'ang-p'ing ts'ang*) designed to obviate excessive fluctuations of grain prices were also set up in some major cities in 639.[57]

With this general stabilization and improvement of the economy the state grew prosperous, and began to build up large reserves. On the basis of this new prosperity, T'ai-tsung was able to undertake a far more activist and interventionist foreign policy, and to mount campaigns which ranged over much of central Asia and into Korea.

In spite of these campaigns, however, the economy continued to prosper, and low prices remained normal until well into the reign of T'ai-

[55] See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The registration of population in China in the Sui and T'ang periods', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 4.3 (1962) 290 ff.; Denis Twitchett, 'Provincial autonomy and central finance in late T'ang', *AM* (NS), 11.2 (1965) 211–32, esp. p. 213.

[56] *CTS* 49, pp. 2122–3; *THY* 88, pp. 1611–12.

[57] *THY* 88, p. 1612.

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tsung's successor. The comparative economy of government, and the fact that the military establishment was virtually self-supporting through the militia system (*fu-ping* – see above), minimized the effects of the capital being located in a relatively poor and unproductive area. In contrast to later reigns, when the supply of Ch'ang-an became a major logistic problem, only comparatively small quantities of grain, some 200,000 bushels (*shih*) per annum, had to be shipped to Ch'ang-an mostly from the great plain in Ho-nan. Tax grain from southern China, so important in later reigns, was not transported to the capital under T'ai-tsung, but was converted into cloth or cash to reduce the cost of transportation.

POLICIES DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN CENTRAL AUTHORITY

T'ai-tsung's most urgent concern was to ensure the long life of his dynasty and to enable it to escape the fate of those shortlived dynasties which had been the rule since the collapse of the Later Han empire. He concluded that in order to do this, central power, and above all the authority of the imperial house, had to be increased in relation to other rival groups in the empire.

The debate on the establishment of a 'feudal' system

In the latter part of 627, T'ai-tsung asked the counsel of his ministers about ways in which the life of the dynasty might be lengthened. The aged Hsiao Yü suggested the re-establishment of the ancient *feng-chien* system, on the basis of which the three dynasties of high antiquity (Hsia, Shang and Chou) had established their long-lasting regimes.[58]

The *feng-chien* system, as it was conceived by T'ang scholars, was in essence a system of decentralized government, in which authority over specific territories was devolved upon hereditary lords who were enfeoffed as vassals of the ruler. It was the antithesis of the system of prefectures and counties (*chün-hsien*) by means of which central government exercised direct territorial control through centrally appointed career officials.

A lengthy and heated discussion followed Hsiao Yü's proposal. Most of the court advisers were completely opposed to the revival of a 'feudal' system. Some, like Li Pai-yao, vice-president of the Board of Rites, pointed out that the Chou had endured because of fate, not because of its 'feudal' institutions, and that in its later stages it had been extremely weak. Others pointed out the practical consequences: Wei Cheng opposed it on the grounds that such a system would reduce the royal domain and

[58] *THY* 46, p. 824.

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curtail government revenue so drastically that the officials would have no means to subsist; both he and Ma Chou pointed out the dangers of misrule by feudatory lords and the defence problems which might arise.[59]

For the time being the plan was shelved. But the whole idea had clearly made a powerful impression on T'ai-tsung, and *feng-chien* reappeared as a political issue on several occasions during his reign. In 631 an edict ordered the officials to draw up a set of detailed regulations by which members of the imperial house and outstanding officials might be appointed as hereditary protectors of the frontiers.[60] Perhaps because of opposition among all parties at court the proposed system remained in abeyance. In 637, however, the plan was renewed. Twenty-one imperial princes were to be enfeoffed as hereditary governors-general or hereditary prefects and dispatched to various prefectures as 'officers protecting the frontiers' (*fan-han*), although many of the places to which they were assigned were in the north-eastern plain and elsewhere in the interior. Fourteen prominent ministers, including a majority of the most notable court advisers, were also appointed hereditary prefects. It is not at all clear what this involved in practical terms. It was certainly a much attenuated form of the *feng-chien* system, which amounted to little more than establishing a limited number of hereditary offices within the normal structure of the bureaucracy.

Opposition even to this attenuated form of 'feudalism' continued to be vociferous.[61] The great court ministers could hardly leave their duties to go to their 'fiefs', and did not wish to do so. In 639 Chang-sun Wu-chi and Fang Hsüan-ling presented memorials seeking to decline their appointments on the grounds that the Han had replaced the feudal system with centrally-controlled commanderies and there was no point in reverting to the earlier system; that the members of the royal house and those who had played a role in the dynastic founding were not necessarily the most capable of fulfilling these important administrative duties; that their descendants might well prove to be unworthy of such offices, or might succeed when still too young to prevent outsiders from usurping their power.[62]

In the face of this opposition, T'ai-tsung gave in, and issued an edict suspending the hereditary enfeoffment of prefects.[63] But it seems that the enfeoffment of imperial princes continued,[64] and that T'ai-tsung remained attracted to the idea of 'feudal' institutions. At the very end

59 *THY* 46, pp. 824–7.
60 *TCTC* 193, p. 6089.
61 *TCTC* 195, pp. 6145–6; *THY* 47, pp. 829–30.
62 *CTS* 65, pp. 2450–1; *THY* 47, pp. 829–30.
63 *TCTC* 195, p. 6146.
64 See the remonstrance presented by Ch'u Sui-liang in 642; *THY* 47, p. 831.

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of his life, in the *Ti-fan* (*Plan for an emperor*) written in 648 as a sort of political testament for his heir, he again reverted to the question, concluding that if members of the imperial family were not enfeoffed, the royal house would not possess enough land. But this had to be balanced against excessive enfeoffment which would weaken central power.[65]

'Feudalism' was frequently discussed later in the dynasty as an alternative form of political authority, or as a possible cure for the ills of the age, but the actual implementation of territorial enfeoffment, involving the parcelling out of territorial authority rather than the mere granting of nominal titles, was never again seriously contemplated.

The prominent clans

A far more important problem facing T'ai-tsung in his attempts to consolidate his dynasty's authority was the establishment of the royal house's predominance in the face of the great aristocratic clans, in particular the group known as the 'four surnames' (*ssu hsing*). This was a group of clans, mostly from north-eastern China, which had attained pre-eminent social status during the fifth century as a result of the high court ranks their members had occupied over a period of several generations. Afterwards these clans were able to reinforce and perpetuate their privileged position by exercising both political and economic influence at the local level, by their preservation of what they considered the 'true' tradition of literate culture, by their punctilious observance of all the niceties of Confucian ritual observance, and above all by entering into endogamous marriage alliances. Their social pretensions were such that they looked down upon the semi-alien north-western royal houses of the sixth century as social upstarts, and the T'ang royal family came into the same category.[66]

In 632, T'ai-tsung ordered several of his highest officials to compile a general survey of the genealogies of the empire's most prominent clans. During the early years of the dynasty, very few members of the 'four surnames' clans had taken official posts, and their economic position had declined to a point where they were forced to marry outsiders – for a suitable price. Although they still held immense prestige and authority at a local level, where they competed for influence with the central government, T'ai-tsung fully expected that when the clans were ranked according to their political position and social standing, the imperial clan and those of its principal supporters would be found to rank well above the 'four surnames'.

[65] *Ti-fan* 1, pp. 3–8.

[66] On this problem see Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class: new evidence from Tun-huang', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 47–85, and the bibliography on pp. 83–5.

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The compilation was entrusted to some of his senior officials – none of them from the highest aristocracy – and involved careful scrutiny of documentation supporting each clan's claims.

However, when it was completed, and Kao Shih-lien, its chief compiler, presented it to the throne, T'ai-tsung was infuriated to see that the lineage of Kao-tsu's minister Ts'ui Min-kan, a member of one of the 'four surnames' clans of Shan-tung (that is modern Hopei, Honan and Shantung), had been ranked first, while the imperial clan was placed in the third category, a clear indication that during the early T'ang social prestige remained independent of political power. T'ai-tsung therefore rejected the work and ordered a new compilation, in which the ranking of a clan was to be linked directly to the position attained by its members in the T'ang bureaucracy.

This revised version, entitled the *Chen-kuan shih-tsu chih* (*Compendium of clans and lineages of the Chen-kuan period*) was completed and submitted to the throne in 638. It placed the imperial family and the clans of the very highest officials in the first rank; those of the maternal relatives of Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung in the second, and the Ts'ui clan in the third.[67]

This was a deliberate political act; an attempt to deflate the status and social pretensions of the north-eastern elite families, and a public assertion of the pre-eminence of the Li clan and its supporters. However, the 'four surnames' clans seem to have suffered little in prestige. Three of T'ai-tsung's most eminent ministers, Fang Hsüan-ling, Wei Cheng and Li Shih-chi, contracted marriages with members of these families, in spite of the emperor's attempts to reduce their status.[68] Even as late as the ninth century the emperor Wen-tsung lamented the fact that although the Li-T'ang clan had been on the throne for more than two hundred years, it was still less sought after for marriage alliances than some of the old 'four surnames' clans.[69]

The examination system

The T'ang government under T'ai-tsung continued to encourage the scholar class by providing a means of entry to the ranks of officials via the examinations and by the support of scholarship.

After T'ai-tsung's accession the number and frequency of official examinations increased. In almost every year candidates were sent up from the provinces to take the examinations and were personally interviewed by the emperor.[70] T'ai-tsung ordered that clothes and food be furnished to

[67] For more detail see the ch. by Ikeda On in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4; also Takeda Ryūji, 'Jōgan shizokushi no hensan ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu', *Shigaku*, 25.4 (1952) 23–41.

[68] *HTS* 95, p. 3842.

[69] *HTS* 172, pp. 5205–6.

[70] *WHTK* 29, p. 276c; *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 629, p. 1a.

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candidates in both the capital and the provinces, and issued edicts relating to the establishment of definitive curricula for the examinations.

Yet, for all this, the number of examination candidates remained very modest, with an average of just over ten graduates a year. To provide a training for examination candidates, the system of state schools at the capital was placed under the Directorate of the State University (Kuo-tzu chien).[71] This was given control of the curricula taught in the five schools which it controlled. Three of these, the Kuo-tzu hsüeh, T'ai-hsüeh and Ssu-men hsüeh had been founded in Kao-tsu's time. These schools were expanded and provided with extensive new buildings, so that the number of students could be increased to more than 2,000.[72] Two more schools were added under T'ai-tsung; the School for Calligraphy (Shu-hsüeh) founded in 628 and the School of Law (Lü-hsüeh) founded in 632.[73] Because of their specialized instruction, these two schools were opened to the sons of low-ranking officials and commoners, who could not hope to rise to very high ranks.

Yet another special college was also set up, the Hung-wen kuan, which was specially limited to members of the imperial family and the children of the highest ranking officials.[74] The Hung-wen kuan was a continuation of the College of Literary Studies (Wen-hsüeh kuan) which T'ai-tsung had founded during his father's reign, and like its predecessor had the additional function of acting as a private council and secretariat at the disposal of T'ai-tsung. It was thus a direct predecessor of other similar bodies which fulfilled the same functions under later T'ang emperors; the *Pei-men hsüeh-shih* under the empress Wu, the Chi-hsien yüan under Hsüan-tsung and above all the Han-lin academy, whose members became important political advisers from the last decades of the eighth century.[75]

With this expansion of the school system, thousands of scholars and students streamed into Ch'ang-an from the provinces, and lectures on the classics and histories were held everywhere in the capital. Instructors in classical learning were even provided for those young members of the elite who entered government service as members of the emperor's personal guard (*fei-ch'i*), and if they proved capable they too were permitted to sit for the examinations.[76]

Inevitably such activity in this field of education led to the emergence of many conflicting interpretations of the classics, and T'ai-tsung was eventually compelled to order the compilation of orthodox standard

[71] *THY* 66, p. 1157. [72] *THY* 35, p. 633; *TCTC* 195, p. 6153.
[73] *CTS* 3, p. 42; *HTS* 48, pp. 1267–8; Liu Po-chi, *T'ang-tai cheng-chiao shih* (Taipei, 1958), p. 93.
[74] *THY* 64, pp. 1114–15.
[75] On the Han-lin academy see F. A. Bischoff, *Le Forêt des pinceaux* (Paris, 1964).
[76] *TCTC* 195, p. 6153.

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commentaries on the canonical books. T'ai-tsung commissioned the great scholar Yen Shih-ku to establish definitive texts of the canonical books, and in 638 ordered K'ung Ying-ta and other scholars to write detailed sub-commentaries upon them. A first draft of these was completed in 642, but further work was necessary, and revision continued until well into the 650s. These texts and sub-commentaries known as the *Wu-ching cheng-i* have remained authoritative, and provided the foundation for classical Confucian education throughout the T'ang.[77]

Historical scholarship

The production of standard texts and sub-commentaries for the classics was only one of the forms of state-sponsored scholarship. Perhaps an equal achievement was the compilation of Standard Histories for the dynasties preceding the T'ang and the foundation of the system of official historiography.[78] The writing of official history had been sadly neglected for centuries prior to the T'ang, both in northern and southern China. As a basis for legitimizing their new dynasty, the record of the dynasties which preceded the T'ang as holders of heaven's mandate was essential evidence. Moreover, Kao-tsu, and even more T'ai-tsung, were deeply aware of the force of historical models and precedents; historical examples and analogies were the common coin of political discourse at the time.

The task of compiling the histories of the Northern Wei, Liang, Ch'en, Northern Ch'i, Northern Chou and the Sui was first begun in 622, but owing to the court's preoccupation with more urgent matters, coupled with poor direction, the work was discontinued and remained incomplete. In 629 T'ai-tsung set up a new commission with Fang Hsüan-ling in general charge and Wei Cheng as chief editor, which completed the histories of Liang, Ch'en, Ch'i, Chou and Sui in 636. The work on the Northern Wei, for which a draft history had been compiled in the middle of the sixth century, was abandoned. The work continued after 636 however. A new history of the Chin was completed in 644–6. The monographs (*chih*) on topics concerning the dynasties of disunion had not been included in the histories presented in 636, but were finally completed and presented to the throne in 656, under T'ai-tsung's successor.

This work of compilation presented many difficulties. In compiling the new Chin history for instance, the historians had to take into account at least eighteen extant histories of the period. In writing on the more recent

[77] For details on this activity in the field of classical scholarship, see the ch. by D. M. McMullen in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

[78] For details on early T'ang historiography, see *ibid.*

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past, although there were adequate records for the Liang, Ch'en and Northern Ch'i, those for the more important Northern Chou and Sui regimes were in complete disorder. Much of the Sui archives had been destroyed by the rebel Wang Shih-ch'ung in Lo-yang, and more was lost when several boats transporting the Sui Imperial Library and records from Lo-yang to Ch'ang-an capsized in the Huang-ho. T'ai-tsung's historians tried to fill these gaps by the use of private libraries and the records kept by the former imperial families. They personally interviewed members of these families,[79] and collected recollections from other people, including a physician famed for his powers of memory.[80]

This work of historical compilation was undertaken by imperial commissions working with a totally new government organization, the Bureau of Historiography (Shih-kuan), which was established in 629. This office was responsible not only for the compilation of the histories of previous reigns, but also for the on-going compilation of the historical record of the T'ang itself.

The official machinery for state-controlled historiography was to become a permanent feature of the Chinese state until our own century, and the essential procedures for compiling the dynastic record[81] were also established firmly in the early T'ang. It is, however, often forgotten how novel a development this was. Although earlier dynastic histories had been written by officials working under imperial sponsorship and employing state archives, they had been the work of individual scholars. Under T'ai-tsung, history – or rather the compilation of official histories – became a bureaucratic undertaking. The histories became projects for corporate scholarship, undertaken as routine by civil servants working under ministerial direction. Equally novel were the new procedures for the compilation of the dynasty's own record. The T'ang was the first dynasty to compile Veritable Records (*Shih-lu*) of each reign, again largely at the urging of T'ai-tsung, obsessed as he was with the historical image which he himself would leave to posterity.

This new official historiography soon developed an ideal of integrity and independence from imperial interference, and already in T'ai-tsung's own reign there were clashes of will between the emperor and his historians over the content of the record. But official control also gave the state the power to slant the record. For example, we have seen how the official record misrepresented T'ai-tsung's role in the founding of the dynasty and obscured the events leading up to the Hsüan-wu Gate coup.

79 *Wei Cheng-kung chien-lu* 4, pp. 4a–b.
80 *CTS* 191, p. 5096.
81 For details see the ch. on governmental institutions by Denis Twitchett in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

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Literary collections and libraries

In 622 between 80 and 90 per cent of the great Sui Imperial Library from Lo-yang was lost in a disastrous accident on the Huang-ho while it was being transported to Ch'ang-an. Only 14,000 titles, totalling some 90,000 scrolls, remained. Both under Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung serious efforts were made to repair this disastrous loss. In 622 Kao-tsu authorized the government to purchase the libraries of deceased scholars to supplement the collection. By the time of T'ai-tsung's accession a collection of more than 200,000 scrolls was deposited in the Hung-wen kuan, where scholars spent several years classifying them into the four traditional divisions of literature: canonical works, history, philosophy and writings of individuals. Attempts were made to establish definitive texts of rare works, and the search for rare and ancient books continued throughout T'ai-tsung's reign. When later in his reign T'ai-tsung purchased the library of a famous Chin period scholar, literati from all over the empire were encouraged to donate books to the imperial collections.[82]

These literary projects involved a large number of the scholarly elite among the officials. A great many of the ministers who rose to prominence after T'ai-tsung's death had been involved in the compilation of the histories or the canonical commentaries and had served in the offices devoted to literary and scholarly matters. Such projects ensured for the dynasty the support of the literary elite.

Relations with the Buddhist clergy[83]

Perhaps the most powerful single group, outside the official class, was the Buddhist clergy, and T'ai-tsung was forced to confront the threat which they posed to a powerful centralized regime.

T'ai-tsung's personal attitude towards Buddhism appears to have been largely negative, and he never provided the lavish support and patronage that the Buddhists had received from the devout Sui emperors, Wen-ti and Yang-ti. However T'ai-tsung was well aware of the danger of alienating the Buddhist community, particularly before he had consolidated his own regime. Therefore one of his first acts as emperor was to rescind the severe anti-Buddhist measures proposed by his father in the last year of his reign. Beyond this he gave a limited patronage to Buddhism, conducting Buddhist services in the Imperial Palace, and permitting the ordination of several thousand priests and nuns. T'ai-tsung dedicated Buddhist temples to offer prayers for those who had died fighting for the

[82] *CTS* 80, p. 2729.

[83] For further details see the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

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T'ang, and sought divine assistance to protect the state and ensure its prosperity. But these were measures whose ultimate objectives were secular and material. The emperor's interest in the spiritual goals of Buddhism was limited to those areas in which they coincided with state interests.

Even from early in his reign T'ai-tsung gave clear indications that he was determined to control the activities of the Buddhist church. In 627 he acted against a perennial abuse, the practice of illegal ordination as a means of tax evasion: in 629 he ordered that illegally ordained monks were to be executed. Gradually T'ai-tsung's measures against Buddhism became even more sweeping. In at least one case his measures were unprecedented. In 631 he became the first Chinese ruler to forbid monks and nuns to receive homage from their own parents, a practice which offended against the basic *mores* of secular society. Even though he was persuaded to rescind this edict in 633, in the face of pressure from the Buddhists and their influential supporters, this act showed the emperor's concern with the social consequences of Buddhist religious practices. In 637 another edict ordered that Taoist monks and nuns should have precedence over Buddhists in all imperially sponsored ceremonies. Another edict issued in the same year attacked Buddhism as a foreign religion which deluded the credulous masses with tricks and curiosities, and went on to say that the crude doctrines of Buddhism did not compare with the profundity of the native Taoism tradition. A third measure of the same year was the promulgation of the 'Regulations concerning the Taoist and Buddhist clergy' (*Tao-seng ko*), which provided an official system of secular laws controlling the conduct of the clergy, who had previously been controlled only by the religious discipline embodied in the *Vinaya*. In 639 T'ai-tsung ordered the clergy to observe the strict standards of conduct for the clergy laid down in the *Fo I-chiao ching*, which claimed to set forth the Buddha's dying instructions. This severely restricted their participation in secular and political affairs, and supplemented the 'Regulations concerning the Taoist and Buddhist clergy' with religious injunctions which were given the force of law by the emperor.

However, in spite of these formal measures to control the clergy and curb their secular activities, he had no intention of extirpating Buddhism. He continued to order Buddhist ceremonies to celebrate the anniversaries of the deaths of the Sui emperors, both of whom had been devout Buddhists, and in 634 he ordered that a great Ch'ang-an temple, the Hung-fu ssu, be dedicated to the memory of his own mother. He personally took part in services at the temple, and tried to assure the monks that the favour he showed to the Taoists was unavoidable, since the Li royal family claimed to be descended from the Taoist sage Lao-tzu.

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But these gestures of conciliation were superficial, and T'ai-tsung continued to be fundamentally hostile towards both the Buddhist clergy and the Buddhist religion. As late as 646 he denounced Buddhism as a vulgar and futile faith which had misled emperors in the past, and held out false hopes for the people.

The closest relationship T'ai-tsung ever established with a Buddhist monk was with the great pilgrim-traveller Hsüan-tsang (600–64). Hsüan-tsang had left China in 629, and returned in 645 after living for fifteen years in India. On his return Hsüan-tsang became one of the great figures in the history of Chinese Buddhism, undertaking the translation of the major scriptures of the Yōgācara school (known in China as the Fa-hsiang sect) into Chinese. Buddhist sources stress T'ai-tsung's enormous interest in Hsüan-tsang, and suggest that it derived from the emperor's personal devotion.

However, there is no indication that T'ai-tsung was interested in Hsüan-tsang as an exponent of a new doctrine. His interest was in the Buddhist pilgrim as a man with a unique knowledge of the geography, customs, products and politics of India and central Asia. Indeed the emperor tried to persuade Hsüan-tsang to renounce his vows and become a court official. He failed in this, but Hsüan-tsang was persuaded to stay in the Hung-fu ssu temple in Ch'ang-an, where he proceeded with his great translation project, supported by lavish imperial subsidies.

Hsüan-tsang did not see the emperor again for three years. In 649, shortly before T'ai-tsung's death, he accompanied the emperor to his summer residence. T'ai-tsung is said to have regretted not having met Hsüan-tsang earlier so that he could have encouraged the spread of Buddhism. Whether he ever made such a statement is doubtful; if he did it must have been a death-bed conversion, totally at variance with his life-long hostility towards the Buddhist church and Buddhist doctrine.[84]

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Ever since the fall of the Han dynasty, which had briefly controlled territories from northern Korea to the western edge of the Tarim Basin, and south to northern Vietnam, successive dynasties had dreamed of re-establishing the grandeur of its vast empire. The Sui had begun the task of rebuilding the Han dominions after centuries of disunion, only to have its efforts cut short by internal rebellion. For T'ai-tsung, once the

[84] See also S. Weinstein, 'Imperial patronage in the formation of T'ang Buddhism', in Wright and Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang*, pp. 265–306; A. F. Wright, 'T'ang T'ai-tsung and Buddhism', in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, pp. 239–63.

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pacification of China was accomplished, the next stage was to carry on the activist Sui foreign policy by subjugating the states surrounding China.

During the early years of his reign, when the T'ang economy was still weak, T'ai-tsung was persuaded by his advisers to use T'ang military power conservatively. He therefore pursued a policy of *détente* with many of China's neighbours, sometimes forming marriage alliances by offering them the hands of T'ang 'princesses' (who were, in fact, not his own daughters),[85] sometimes subverting their internal unity by diplomatic means. All this, however, soon changed. In 630 the destruction of the qaghanate of the Eastern Turks, the former hegemons of northern Asia, created a great power vacuum on the northern frontier and removed the greatest external threat to the Chinese borders. This new situation, coupled with a substantial improvement in the economy within the empire, gave T'ai-tsung the opportunity to pursue a policy of wide-scale foreign expansion.

The Eastern and Western Turks

By far the most imposing of T'ai-tsung's military achievements was the pacification of the Eastern Turks, which so completely destroyed their forces that the whole balance of power in northern Asia was altered for half-a-century thereafter. T'ai-tsung succeeded in completely reversing the T'ang relationship with the Turks. Kao-tsu, who in his time had acknowledged himself a Turkish vassal, would live to see his son become heavenly qaghan (*t'ien k'o-han*), suzerain of all the Turks.

However, T'ai-tsung's first encounter with the Eastern Turks after his accession was not particularly auspicious. Late in the eighth month of 626, just a few weeks after T'ai-tsung had seized the throne, Liang Shih-tu, the last rebel surviving from the late Sui period, advised the Turks to invade China, doubtless hoping to take advantage of the internal dissension created between the supporters of T'ai-tsung and those of his two murdered brothers, following the Hsüan-wu Gate coup. The Eastern Turkish leader Hsieh-li Qaghan (Illig Qaghan, reign 620–30) and his nephew T'u-li (Tölis Qaghan) thereupon combined their forces and led an army said to number 100,000 men to invade the modern province of Shensi, advancing by way of Ching-chou (about seventy-five miles northwest of Ch'ang-an) to the banks of the Wei River, a little more than ten miles west of the capital. The commander at Ching-chou was Lo I, who had been on good terms with Li Chien-ch'eng, the murdered heir appa-

[85] See Paul Demiéville, *Le Concile de Lhasa* (Paris, 1952), p. 1, n. 2; Kuang P'ing-chang, 'T'ang-tai kung-chu ho-ch'in k'ao', *Shih-hsüeh nien-pao*, 2.2 (1935) 28, n. 19.

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rent, and the fact that the Turks were able to advance so rapidly upon the T'ang capital suggests that he may have put up only a token resistance.[86]

According to the traditional account, at this point T'ai-tsung employed a stratagem to separate Hsieh-li from his main force, surround him with a small band of his men, and convince him to sue for peace. After concluding a treaty, with the traditional sacrifice of a white horse, on the Pien Bridge spanning the Wei River, the Turks supposedly withdrew.

However, there is evidence that in fact T'ai-tsung not only failed to capture the Turkish qaghan but also that he was forced to part with a great deal of treasure to secure a Turkish withdrawal. One source reports that the emperor followed the advice of his general Li Ching to 'empty out the storehouses' to persuade the Turks to retreat, and later in his reign the emperor alluded sadly to the 'shame he had suffered at the Wei River'.[87]

Soon afterwards, however, the power of the Eastern Turks was drastically reduced. In 627 some of their subject peoples, the Hsüeh-yen-t'o, the Pa-yeh-ku and the Hui-ho (Uighurs) revolted against Turkish control. Later in the same year the territories of the Eastern Turks suffered deep snowfalls in which most of their livestock perished, causing a terrible famine. Then, in 628, when T'u-li failed to suppress the revolts of the subject peoples, Hsieh-li angrily imprisoned him and had him flogged. The personal split which arose between the two leaders further eroded Turkish strength. Internal dissension was also aroused by the heavy reliance of the qaghan on Soghdians and other central Asians as administrators, and the subsequent trend for the Turkish court to remain stationary. This provoked a reaction among the more traditional elements of the Turks who saw it as a threat to their traditional nomadic life.

After T'u-li was released from prison, he secretly planned to rebel against the qaghan, and sent a letter to T'ai-tsung requesting permission to come to the T'ang court. In the fourth month of 628, T'u-li was attacked by Hsieh-li and asked for military assistance from the T'ang. T'ai-tsung decided not to intervene, believing that if he waited the Turks would be torn apart by internal strife. He did, however, take the opportunity to settle an old score with Liang Shih-tu, who held territory inside the loop of the Huang-ho in the northern part of modern Shensi, and whom the Turks were no longer in a position to protect. In the spring of 628 a T'ang army invested his camp, and Liang was killed by one of his own subordinates.

[86] See Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien* (Taipei, 1965), p. 257.

[87] See *HTS* 93, p. 3814; *TCTC* 191, pp. 6019–26; Wang T'ang, comp. *T'ang Yü-lin* (Shanghai, 1957), 5, p. 152; Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien*, ch. 8.

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T'ai-tsung further weakened Hsieh-li's power by recognizing the legitimacy of a new leader elected by those tribes which had recently revolted against Eastern Turkish control. This new qaghan, P'i-chia (Bilgä Qaghan) in turn sent tribute to Ch'ang-an, acknowledging T'ang suzerainty. Many other tribes formerly subject to Hsieh-li threw in their lot with the new leader P'i-chia.

By 629 Hsieh-li was reduced to such straits that late in the year he went so far as publicly to proclaim himself a vassal of the T'ang. T'ai-tsung ignored the gesture and, now confident of total victory, sent more than a hundred thousand troops under the command of his generals Li Shih-chi and Li Ching against Hsieh-li. Hsieh-li's camp, at this time located to the south of the Gobi, was taken with a great slaughter of men and live-stock. The qaghan himself at first eluded capture, but was overtaken by T'ang forces early in 630 and sent to Ch'ang-an to live out the remainder of his days as a political hostage.

In the spring of 630 the leaders of the north-western peoples came to court requesting that T'ai-tsung assume the title heavenly qaghan (*t'ien k'o-han*), with the implication of supreme suzerainty and the right to mediate in disputes between them. Although some scholars believe that a formal political system emerged as a result,[88] this is highly dubious. Yet the ceremonies exalting the Heavenly Qaghan in Ch'ang-an were very impressive, and much was made of the title by the Chinese, to whom it symbolized – however ephemeral its practical implications – the complete reversal of their fortunes with the Turks.

A long and acrimonious debate then took place at court over what policy should be adopted towards the remnants of the vanquished Eastern Turks. T'ai-tsung, accepting a policy proposed by Wen Yen-po, the president of the Secretariat, decided that the conquered Eastern Turks should be resettled in Chinese territory to the south of the great loop of the Huang-ho. Here their tribes were to be broken up, and the Turks scattered within various Chinese prefectures and counties, where they were to take up agriculture, and absorb the 'civilizing influences' of Chinese culture, so that eventually they would lose their cultural identity and cease to be a menace to China.

Many prominent courtiers, among them Yen Shih-ku, Wei Cheng and Li Pai-yao, all of them prominent Confucian scholars, objected that the Turks ought not to be brought into China, particularly not into a region close to the capital, since the character of the Turks was such that they could never be assimilated into the Chinese way of life, and they were

[88] See for example Lo Hsiang-lin, 'T'ang-tai T'ien-k'o-han chih-tu k'ao', included in his *T'ang-tai wen-hua shih* (Taipei, 1963), pp. 54–87.

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impervious to the values of Chinese culture. They suggested instead that they be kept in their steppe homeland, but politically fragmented to the point where they would be impotent to pose any military threat to the T'ang.[89]

The emperor's view finally prevailed; it was decided that the Turks would be resettled in Chinese territory, and about a hundred thousand were placed along the Chinese frontier from Ho-pei to Shensi. About ten thousand eventually came to live in Ch'ang-an, and several of their tribal leaders received commissions as generals in the T'ang army.

The eighth-century Turkish inscription of Kocho-Tsaidam eloquently relates the fate suffered by the conquered Turks.[90]

> The sons of the Turkish nobles became slaves to the Chinese people, and their innocent daughters were reduced to serfdom. The nobles, discarding their Turkish titles, accepted those of China, and made submission to the Chinese Qaghan, devoting their labour and their strength to his service for fifty years. For him, both toward the rising sun and westward to the Iron Gates, they launched their expeditions. But to the Chinese Qaghan they surrendered their empire and their institutions.

T'ai-tsung was greatly encouraged by the stroke of good fortune that had enabled him to destroy the Eastern Turkish qaghanate. After establishing firm control over the frontier region in the Ordos and modern Inner Mongolia, he began to employ a similar policy of divide and conquer against the Western Turks. Here he was greatly assisted by the serious internal divisions that had recently destroyed their political unity. During the Sui and early T'ang period, while the Eastern Turks had repeatedly menaced China, the Western Turks had been preoccupied with the west, and had allied themselves with Byzantium to exert pressure upon Persia. Kao-tsu had sought friendly relations with the Western Turks in order to intimidate the Eastern Turkish qaghans by the threat of simultaneous attacks from both east and west. The more the Eastern Turks declined, however, the more the Western Turks had flourished. By the early years of T'ai-tsung's reign, under their chieftain T'ung Yeh-hu (Ton-yabghu Qaghan) the Western Turks had come to control much of the vast region from the Jade Gate (Yü-men) at the western extremity of the Great Wall in modern Kansu, to Sassanid Persia in the west, and from Kashmir in the south to the Altai mountains in the north.

In 630, one of Ton-yabghu's subject tribes revolted and put him to death. This brought about the breakdown of the Western Turkish empire.

[89] See *THY* 73, pp. 1312–14; *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* 9, pp. 284–7; *Wei Cheng-kung chien-lu*, 2, pp. 8b–12b.
[90] René Grousset, *The empire of the steppes* (tr. Naomi Walford; New Brunswick, 1970), pp. 92–3.

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In 634 it was divided along the line of the Issyk-Kul and the Ili River into western and eastern confederations controlled by rival groups of tribes, the Nu-shih-pi and Tu-lu respectively.

T'ai-tsung deftly employed the traditional policy of 'using barbarians to control the barbarians' (*i i chih i*) to maintain discord among the Western Turks, by recognizing in 641 the legitimacy of Sha-po-lo Yeh-hu (Isbara yabghu Qaghan), ruler of the western confederation. In response, Tu-lu Qaghan (reign 638–51), ruler of the eastern portion of the Western Turkish empire, quickly invaded several central Asian oases under his rival's control and soon afterwards engineered his assassination. After reuniting the old qaghanate of the Western Turks, Tu-lu began detaining T'ang envoys and raiding the Chinese border in Kansu.

In 642 several tribes among the Western Turks that were discontented under Tu-lu's regime sent envoys to Ch'ang-an seeking the establishment of another qaghan as their overlord. The emperor seized the opportunity to recognize yet another new qaghan, I-p'i shih-kuei. As a result Tu-lu Qaghan soon lost the support of many of his subject tribes and was forced to flee to Tokhara (T'u-huo-lo). I-p'i she-kuei then sent a tribute mission to the T'ang court and requested a marriage with a T'ang princess to cement his ties with the Chinese court. T'ai-tsung acquiesced, asking in return that as a betrothal gift I-p'i she-kuei cede to China five oases in the Tarim basin, among them Kucha (Ch'iu-tz'u), Khotan (Yü-t'ien) and Kashgar (Su-le) – oases which were probably not the qaghan's to give.[91] In any case, T'ai-tsung had already commenced his conquest of the region by force of arms.

The oases of central Asia

As the Turkish empires were weakened and destroyed, T'ai-tsung was able to establish Chinese suzerainty over the oasis kingdoms, some inhabited by Indo-European-speaking peoples, of the Tarim basin. Nourishing thriving cultures in which influences from Iran, India, Afghanistan and China were intermingled, these oases were important to the T'ang because of the 'Silk Road' which passed through them. It was along this road that merchants from central Asia, Persia and the Eastern Roman empire travelled to China, and control of the route was thus an important objective for T'ang imperial policy.

The first large oasis to fall to the T'ang was that closest to China, the warm and fertile country of Karakhoja (Kao-ch'ang), located near modern Turfan in eastern Sinkiang province. More deeply influenced by Chinese

[91] *CTS* 194B, p. 5185; William Samolin, *East Turkistan to the twelfth century* (The Hague, 1964), p. 59.

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culture than the other oasis-states, since 498 Karakhoja had been ruled by the royal house of Ch'ü, perhaps Chinese or partly Chinese in origin, but in any case highly sinicized by the early seventh century. During the Sui and Kao-tsu's reign Karakhoja had come under the control of the Western Turks, but following the death of Ton-yabghu Qaghan in 630 it had come increasingly under the influence of A-shih-na She-erh, the second son of Ch'u-lo Qaghan of the Eastern Turks. In 630 Ch'ü Wen-t'ai, the king of Karakhoja, visited T'ai-tsung's court together with his queen and was lavishly entertained.

However, some years after returning to his kingdom, Ch'ü Wen-t'ai began to block the silk route from China. This resulted from a further political change in the Tarim region. In 636 A-shih-na She-erh decided to take up service at Ch'ang-an as a T'ang general. From 638 he was replaced as the predominant power in the area of Karakhoja by Tu-lu Qaghan, ruler of the eastern confederation of the Western Turks. It was the support of Tu-lu Qaghan which encouraged the king of Karakhoja to defy the T'ang. Merchants from the west were prevented from proceeding to the T'ang capital with their wares, and tribute gifts from states to the west of Karakhoja were also held up.[92]

As a result of these troubles T'ai-tsung in 638 gave permission to Karashahr (Yen-ch'i), another small oasis-state located south-west of Karakhoja, to open up an alternative southern route across the desert to the Chinese border. Ch'ü Wen-t'ai thereupon allied himself with the Western Turks to attack Karashahr and the other small oasis of Hami (I-wu), which lay east of Karakhoja on the route to Ch'ang-an and which had recently transferred its allegiance from the Western Turks to the T'ang. T'ai-tsung summoned Ch'ü Wen-t'ai to appear personally at the T'ang court as an imperial vassal, but the Karakhoja king ignored the order. In the last month of 638 the emperor appointed Hou Chün-chi as commander of an expeditionary force against Karakhoja. Ch'ü Wen-t'ai at first scoffed at the idea of a T'ang army coming to invade his kingdom across such an expanse of desert. But he had not counted upon the perseverance of Hou Chün-chi, and when he heard that the Chinese troops were close at hand, he is said to have died of fright. The Western Turks, who had promised to assist Karakhoja in case of an attack, sent a relief force, but this turned tail and fled upon the arrival of the T'ang troops. In the eighth month of 640 Ch'ü Wen-t'ai's son, the new Karakhoja king, surrendered his country to Hou Chün-chi.

The emperor then decided to annex Karakhoja as a part of China.[93] Both

[92] See Shimazaki Akira, 'Tō no Kōshōkoku no genin ni tsuite', *Chūō Daigaku Bungakubu kiyō*, 14.4 (1958) 62–83.
[93] *THY* 95, p. 1702.

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Wei Cheng and Ch'u Sui-liang bitterly opposed the extension of direct Chinese control over the oasis kingdom because of its great distance from China, the great number of Chinese troops which would be required to garrison it, and the difficulties that would be encountered in conscripting men for such a posting, and in supplying them. Wei Cheng vehemently denied that China would gain any tangible benefit from incorporating the area under direct rule.[94] But T'ai-tsung ignored the advice of his ministers. Karakhoja itself became a Chinese prefecture, Hsi-chou (the 'western prefecture') and shortly afterwards a protectorate-general with the title 'Pacify the West' (An-hsi *tu-hu-fu*) was established there to administer the surrounding region. The protectorate-general was a combined civil and military administration employing Chinese civil officials backed by a standing army. The An-hsi protectorate-general was the first of several such administrations established under T'ai-tsung and his successor to govern foreign peoples who had recognized Chinese authority.[95] It controlled the region stretching from Tun-huang (Sha-chou) in the far west of Kansu to the borders of Karashahr in the west.

The Indo-European-influenced state of Karashahr, which had been a T'ang tributary state since 632, soon became anxious about the proximity of the new Chinese administration and army in Hsi-chou, less than a hundred miles away. It thus allied itself with the Western Turks and ceased sending tribute to the Chinese court. As a consequence, late in 644 the commander of the An-hsi protectorate-general, Kuo Hsiao-k'o, marched against Karashahr, captured its king, and defeated a Western Turkish army which was sent to rescue him. Karashahr then resumed its tributary relationship with the T'ang court. In 648, when this king was overthrown by a cousin, a T'ang army led by A-shih-na She-erh, the Turkish leader then in the service of the T'ang court, again invaded the country and placed another member of the royal family upon the throne. The latter prudently declared himself a loyal T'ang vassal.

It was not only Karashahr which felt menaced by the increasing Chinese presence in central Asia. To the west lay the oasis of Kucha, which of all the kingdoms of the Tarim basin was most strongly influenced by Indo-European culture. Its king, Su-fa (Swarnatep?), although nominally a vassal of the T'ang, aided Karashahr in its rebellion against Chinese domination in 644 and also ceased to pay tribute to the Chinese court. In 648 A-shih-na She-erh, having dealt with Karashahr, marched on and took the Kuchean capital, placing it under the control of the protector-

[94] *Wei Cheng-kung chien-lu*, 2, pp. 13b–14a.
[95] On the An-hsi protectorate see des Rotours, 'Les grands fonctionnaires des provinces', pp. 31–2.

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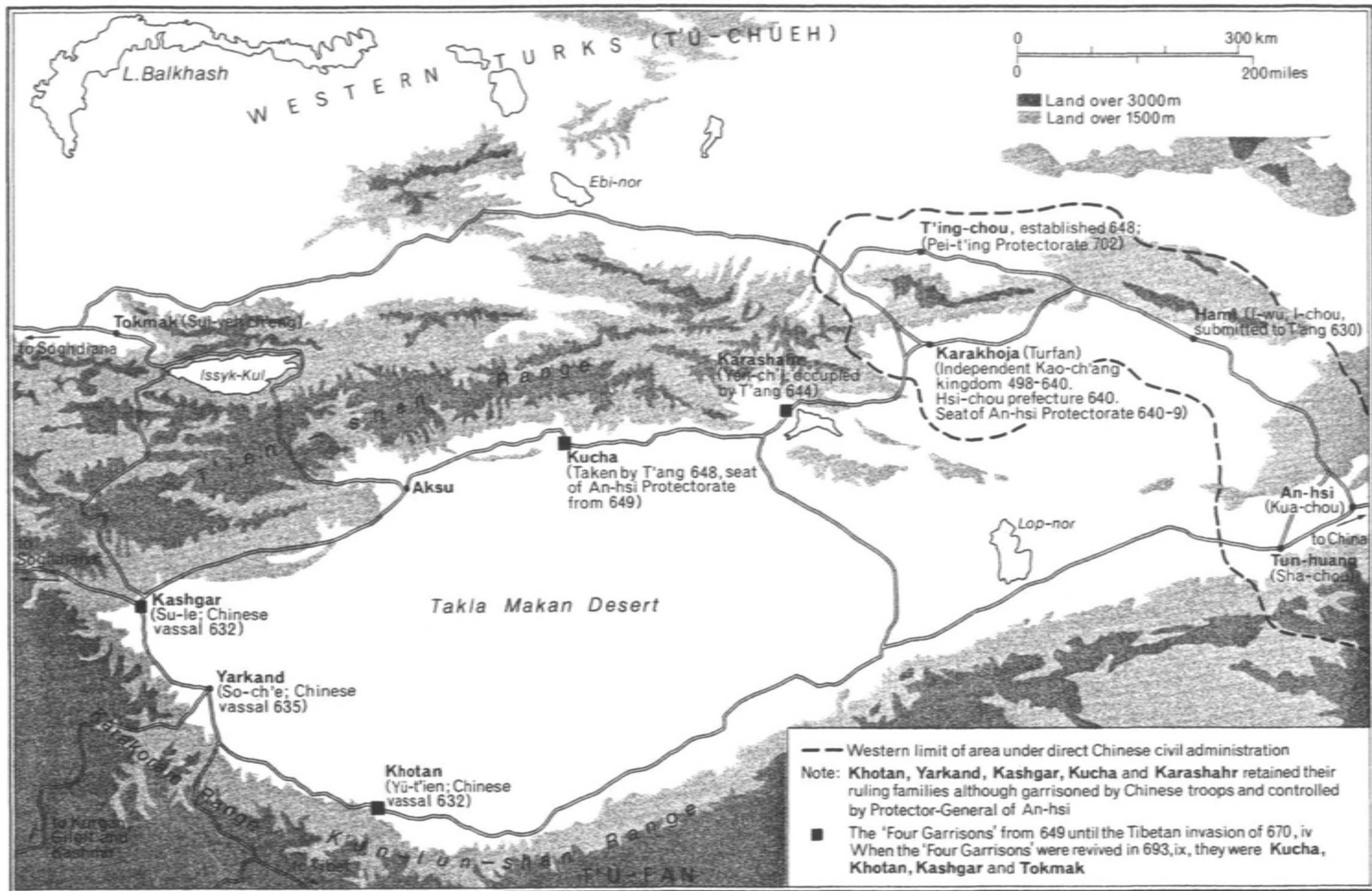

Map 7. T'ai-tsung's advance into central Asia

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general of An-hsi, Kuo Hsiao-k'o. Shortly afterwards, the remnants of the Kuchean forces, allied with Western Turkish tribes, recaptured the city and killed Kuo. But A-shih-na She-erh's army soon regained the capital, and after five more of Kucha's larger cities had fallen to him, the rest surrendered. Eleven thousand of the conquered inhabitants were put to the sword as a reprisal for Kuo Hsiao-k'o's death. The conquest of Karashahr and Kucha was a mortal blow to the Indo-European culture and civilization of central Asia, which was never to recover.[96]

The subjugation of these kingdoms meant that the T'ang now controlled almost all of the Tarim basin, for the three western oasis states had submitted voluntarily to Chinese suzerainty some years before, Kashgar and Khotan in 632, and Yarkand (So-ch'e) in 635. Early in 649 the administrative seat of the An-hsi protectorate-general was moved from Karakhoja westward to Kucha, and the 'Four Garrisons' (*ssu chen*) of Kucha, Kashgar, Khotan and Karashahr were established under its supervision to control the Chinese dominions in the Tarim basin and the area around the Issyk-Kul in what is now the Soviet Kirghiz Republic.[97]

The T'u-yü-hun and the Tibetans

The area around the Kokonor Lake and the sources of the Huang-ho in modern Tsinghai province was the homeland of a Tibetanized Hsien-pi people known as the T'u-yü-hun. Yang-ti had driven them from their homeland in 608, but during the civil strife of the last years of the Sui the T'u-yü-hun had taken advantage of China's weakness by re-occupying their old territories and had begun once again to raid Chinese prefectures along the north-western border. After the rise of the T'ang the T'u-yü-hun qaghan, Fu-yün, had raised troops to assist Kao-tsu against the Kansu 'rebel' Li Kuei, and Kao-tsu in return had allowed Fu-yün's son, Shun, who had been held in China as a hostage by Yang-ti, to return to his people. Thereafter the T'u-yü-hun remained on relatively cordial terms with the new dynasty until 634, when their envoys, after having presented tribute in Ch'ang-an, plundered Chinese territory on their way home. T'ai-tsung summoned the aged Fu-yün Qaghan to appear at court in person. But this summons went unheeded. When, as a result, the marriage of one of the qaghan's sons to a T'ang 'princess' was cancelled, the T'u-yü-hun invaded the Chinese north-western border by way of reprisal.

Late in 634, therefore, T'ai-tsung mounted a large-scale punitive expedi-

[96] See Grousset, *The empire of the steppes*, pp. 100–1.
[97] See Ise Sentaro, *Chūgoku seiiki keiei shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 187–201, 243–6. See also des Rotours, 'Les grands fonctionnaires des provinces', pp. 31–2.

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tion against the T'u-yü-hun led by the generals Li Ching and Hou Chün-chi. Five months later, after a multi-pronged advance westward through hundreds of miles of uninhabited wasteland, the T'ang armies caught up with the T'u-yü-hun near the sources of the Huang-ho north-east of Kokonor, and defeated them in several battles, seizing many members of the T'u-yü-hun nobility and hundreds of thousand head of livestock. Fu-yün Qaghan escaped, however, and fled across the desert towards Khotan. The T'ang forces pursued him, but he eluded capture and was eventually either killed by his own men or committed suicide.

Shun, Fu-yün Qaghan's son by his principal wife, had been passed over for the succession while he had been detained at the Chinese court as a hostage. He now removed the heir who had been appointed in his place, established himself as ruler, and surrendered his country to the T'ang. T'ai-tsung, who believed that Shun's Chinese upbringing would make him easily susceptible to political pressure from the T'ang court, happily bestowed upon him a patent recognizing him as the new qaghan.

However, the political situation among the T'u-yü-hun remained unstable. Shun, who was highly sinicized, failed to gain the support of his people and required the continued support of T'ang troops to bolster his shaky regime. Despite this Chinese aid, Shun was killed by his own subordinates at the end of 635, and for the remainder of T'ai-tsung's reign T'ang forces were repeatedly sent out to T'u-yü-hun territory in futile attempts to stabilize the political situation.[98]

Although the Chinese were clearly not aware of the fact, one of the principal reasons for the instability of the T'u-yü-hun was the increasing political pressure from the expanding confederation of the Tibetans (T'u-fan) who had been absorbing T'u-yü-hun 'vassal' tribes since the 630s.

Until Sui times Tibet seems to have been occupied by numerous fierce and warlike tribes, known to the Chinese as the T'u-po, T'u-lu-po or most commonly as the T'u-fan, who were engaged in constant strife among themselves. However, at the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries the tribes of southern and central Tibet (in the region around Lhasa) were united under a single chieftain, Gnam-ri-srong-btsan, whose son, Srong-btsan-sgam-po (reign 605?–649) succeeded in uniting all of Tibet into a close-knit confederation.

By early T'ang times Tibetan territory extended from the Himalayas in the south to the Nan-shan range, and from the borders of Kashmir to the frontier of Szechwan. During Kao-tsu's time the Tibetans had already

[98] See Gabriella Molè, *The T'u-yü-hun from the Northern Wei to the time of the Five Dynasties* (Rome, 1970).

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begun to exert some pressure on China's north-western frontier, overrunning a border prefecture in Lung-yu province (Kansu) in 623. In 634 they opened diplomatic relations with the T'ang court, sending envoys and tribute. This was the first of a hundred or so similar missions, both official and unofficial, during the course of the dynasty.

A few years later the Tibetan king Srong-btsan-sgam-po, hearing that T'ang 'princesses' had been given in marriage to the rulers of the Eastern Turks and of the T'u-yü-hun, demanded that he be granted a similar honour. T'ai-tsung, unfortunately underestimating both the strength and the aggressiveness of the Tibetans, refused. The Tibetans then attacked the prefectural city of Sung-chou on the western border of Szechwan, which they besieged with a huge force for some days before a T'ang army drove them off with heavy casualties. Although the attack was beaten off, the Chinese realized that they had to contend with a new and formidable neighbour, and when in 641 Srong-btsan-sgam-po repeated his request for a marriage alliance, it was readily conceded.[99]

The marriage alliance was followed by twenty years of peace between the Tibetans and the Chinese, during which period the Tibetans gradually consolidated their hold over what remained the Tibetan culture area, and developed into a powerful state which would remain China's most problematical neighbour until the mid-ninth century. T'ai-tsung's court, in spite of the events of 640–1, was unaware of the scale of this new threat to their western borders.

The Hsüeh-yen-t'o

The Hsüeh-yen-t'o was the most powerful of the fifteen tribes belonging to the T'ieh-le, a Turkish people whose homeland was situated in the region of the Urungu and Tarbagatai rivers in the northern (Zungharia) region of modern Sinkiang province.[100] Early in T'ai-tsung's reign the Hsüeh-yen-t'o and another T'ieh-le tribe, the Uighurs, revolted against their masters, the Eastern Turks, and gathered the remaining T'ieh-le tribes under their joint control. This rebellion, as we have already seen, was a contributory factor in the T'ang conquest of the Eastern Turks.

Following the settlement of the Eastern Turks inside China's northern border, the Hsüeh-yen-t'o occupied the former Eastern Turkish territories from the Ordos to the Orkhon River.

[99] *THY* 97, p. 1730; *TCTC* 196, pp. 6164–5. The Tibetan king not only requested a marriage. He also asked for men who could read and write Chinese, and members of the Tibetan royal family were sent to study in the State University. Early in Kao-tsung's reign the Tibetans also asked for technicians who could teach sericulture, wine-brewing and paper-making, and construct grain mills.

[100] The old identifications of Hsüeh-yen-t'o with Syr Tardush, and of T'ieh-le with Tölös, are now discredited. There is no consensus of opinion on their original Turkish forms.

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In 641 a brother of T'u-li Qaghan made an attempt on the emperor's life, and the Chinese attempted to resettle the Turks in their old nomadic homeland. But the Hsüeh-yen-t'o fiercely resisted their return and drove them back into China. Later T'ai-tsung again moved the Eastern Turks beyond the Great Wall, only to have the Hsüeh-yen-t'o attack them and begin raiding the Chinese border frequently.

The Hsüeh-yen-t'o qaghan was a tyrant, much hated by his subjects. In 645 there was an uprising against him, led by the Uighurs, and T'ai-tsung decided to take the opportunity of launching an offensive that would crush the power not only of the Hsüeh-yen-t'o themselves, but of all the T'ieh-le tribes. Upon the arrival of a large combined force of Chinese, Turkish and other non-Chinese troops, the qaghan fled, and was later killed by Uighur tribesmen. Once the new qaghan of the Hsüeh-yen-t'o declared himself a T'ang vassal, the other T'ieh-le tribes were forced to follow suit. In the autumn of 646 T'ai-tsung journeyed to the west of Ch'ang-an to receive their submission and tribute, and a memorial stele inscribed with a poem he had written to celebrate the occasion was erected to commemorate his triumph.

Koguryŏ

Three times Sui Yang-ti had attempted and failed to conquer the Korean kingdom of Koguryŏ, and in the process had ruined his great dynasty. The cost of the wars was also crippling to Koguryŏ, and the scars of the campaigns were still not yet healed when in 618 the Koguryŏ king, Yŏng-yang wang (reign 590–618) died, and was succeeded by a stepbrother Sung-yu wang (reign 618–42). This transfer of power in Koguryŏ, coming at the same time that a new dynasty was established in China, allowed the two countries to resume friendly relations. In 619 Koguryŏ again recognized Chinese suzerainty and dutifully sent tribute to court. Three years later Sung-yu wang acceded to Kao-tsu's suggestion that the two sides exchange prisoners taken during the Sui campaigns. In all Koguryŏ repatriated about ten thousand Chinese captives.[101] Many Chinese, however, had taken refuge in Korea during the upheavals of the late Sui, and considerable numbers remained in Koguryŏ after the repatriations. During the 620s, moreover, Koguryŏ prudently began the construction of massive fortifications along the western bank of the Liao River to guard against the possibility of renewed Chinese invasions of their territories. This defence line took some ten years to complete.

Both sides had good reason to act cautiously. Kao-tsu was concerned

[101] See *CTS* 199A, p. 5321.

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for most of his reign with internal wars of pacification, China's economy had not yet recovered from the chaos resulting from a decade of civil wars, and the dynasty was not yet in any condition to engage in foreign adventures. On its side Koguryŏ hoped to use a sustained period of peace with China to recover the territories lost to its southern neighbours in the Korean peninsula, Silla and Paekche, while it had been preoccupied with defence against the Sui invasions.

However, as T'ai-tsung grew more confident of T'ang military power, and as the Chinese economy recovered, the memory of Sui Yang-ti's disastrous failures in Koguryŏ gradually became an obsession and a challenge to him. By 641 he openly observed to his court that Koguryŏ had been a part of the Chinese empire under Han Wu-ti, and speculated that if the T'ang were to launch a combined land and sea operation against it, Koguryŏ could once again be conquered.[102] In the same year he appears to have begun practical steps towards this end, by sending Ch'en Ta-te, chief secretary of the Department of Regional Military Organization (Chih-fang pu), the central body charged with collecting intelligence and mapping the frontier regions and with the maintenance of fortifications and defence installations on the frontiers, to reconnoitre the Koguryŏ military situation and defences as a preliminary to a T'ang offensive against them.

An excuse to begin military operations against Koguryŏ presented itself late in 642, when news was received in Ch'ang-an that Yŏn Kae-so-mun, who had been in charge of the construction of the Koguryŏ fortifications along the Liao River, and who was known to take a very hard line on relations with China, had emerged victorious in a factional struggle at the Koguryŏ court, and had staged a coup in which the king, Sung-yu wang (who had been nominally a T'ang vassal) and more than a hundred of his supporters had been massacred. Yŏn Kae-so-mun had placed on the throne a new king, Po-jang wang (reign 642–68), the son of Sung-yu's younger brother Tae-yang wang, and had set himself up as military dictator or Taemangniji. He had begun to pursue a general policy of greater independence from Chinese influence.

However, T'ai-tsung, although presented with a sufficient pretext for intervention, did not act immediately, and reminded his court that the north-eastern plain, the necessary base for any operations against Koguryŏ, was still suffering from the economic dislocation resulting from the civil wars some twenty years before.

Soon, however, events in Korea forced the issue. The tension between the three Korean kingdoms grew more intense, and Koguryŏ became

[102] *TCTC* 196, pp. 6169–70.

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increasingly belligerent towards China. Late in 643 Silla, a professed vassal state of the T'ang, reported that Koguryŏ, in alliance with Paekche, was attacking on several fronts and cutting the route by which Silla's tribute missions travelled to Ch'ang-an. T'ai-tsung failed to halt Koguryŏ's aggression against Silla by diplomatic means; Yŏn Kae-so-mun went so far as to imprison one of the Chinese envoys. The emperor then decided that he would lead in person an expeditionary force against the offending country.

The projected campaign against Koguryŏ was overwhelmingly unpopular among T'ai-tsung's ministers, in whom it provoked memories of Yang-ti's disastrous Korean wars. Chang-sun Wu-chi, the emperor's closest adviser, was vehemently opposed to any expedition, while Ch'u Sui-liang remonstrated violently against the emperor assuming personal command of the army. The only chief minister who appears to have favoured the invasion was Li Shih-chi, T'ai-tsung's most powerful general, who reminded the court that when previously the T'ang had not taken strong steps against their adversaries, they had later regretted it.

In spite of the opposition of his ministers, T'ai-tsung was determined to go ahead with his plan, and in the autumn of 644 began elaborate preparations for his expedition. Large numbers of troops were sent to the north-east, and forces were sent to probe the Koguryŏ defences in Liao-tung. Four hundred ships were built to transport grain to the border areas in the north-east. A few months later T'ai-tsung travelled to Lo-yang, the first stop on his way to the front. There he summoned Cheng Yüan-shou, a former Sui official who had taken part in Yang-ti's attacks on Koguryŏ, and questioned him. Although Cheng warned the emperor of the difficulties which the T'ang would face in provisioning its armies and of Koguryŏ's proven ability to defend its cities, T'ai-tsung remained confident of victory.[103]

From Lo-yang he issued an edict announcing to the empire the moral justification for his punitive expedition against Koguryŏ: Yŏn Kae-so-mun was a regicide and a tyrant, and his attack upon Silla, China's loyal vassal, had to be punished. But in fact other factors were probably far more important in producing his obsession with Koguryŏ. Simple dynastic ambition, to succeed where Yang-ti had failed, and to restore what had once been Chinese territory, played a part. So too did strategic considerations, for there was a risk of Koguryŏ unifying the whole Korean peninsula, and it was in China's interest to keep Korea divided and prevent any alliance with the Malgal of eastern Manchuria or with Japan. Moreover, T'ai-tsung had suffered a severe personal crisis following the succession-

[103] *TCTC* 197, p. 6213.

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dispute of 643 (see below) and perhaps felt the need for personal action to take him away from the court.

In the spring of 645 the emperor had reached the front and the invasion began. A large army led by T'ai-tsung and his great general Li Shih-chi marched on Liao-tung,[104] while a naval force said to number 43,000 men in five hundred ships sailed to attack the Koguryŏ capital P'yŏngyang from the sea, under General Chang Liang. At first all went well. Encouraging progress was made in Liao-tung, crowned by the fall in the fifth month of its principal fortress, Liao-yang (Liao-tung ch'eng), which had held out against all Yang-ti's campaigns. The city was taken after a causeway was constructed by the Chinese across the marshes of the Liao River.[105] But T'ai-tsung seems to have made a strategic blunder in not bypassing less important objectives in Liao-tung to drive deep into the Korean peninsula and seize P'yŏngyang. It may be that T'ai-tsung was depending upon his sea-borne invasion to secure this objective. This seems to have failed, and the Chinese sources remain almost silent about its outcome.

In Liao-tung, T'ai-tsung's army was halted before the fortress city of An-shih, south-west of Liao-yang. After two months of futile attempts to take the city, the emperor, concerned about the imminent onset of the bitter Korean winter, reluctantly ordered a withdrawal. Even so, on their return march the T'ang armies were caught in a terrible blizzard and thousands perished. The whole expedition had ended in disaster.

T'ai-tsung's failure to punish Yŏn Kae-so-mun made the latter even more arrogant towards the Chinese. He began to detain T'ang envoys, and renewed his invasion of Silla. Early in 647 T'ai-tsung once again attacked Koguryŏ. As before the T'ang armies, under Niu Chin-ta and Li Hai-an, made some progress, and even defeated the Koguryŏ army in a large-scale engagement, but again the results were inconclusive.

The emperor was still determined to force an outcome with Koguryŏ. Late in 647 he ordered the construction of a huge armada of ships for a large scale invasion, in Szechwan and the far southern provinces. The sources for the last year of T'ai-tsung's reign eloquently describe the sufferings of the people in these regions, who were heavily burdened with corvée labour and grinding taxes to finance this naval construction. In 648 this even provoked a minor rebellion in Szechwan.[106]

But in the sixth month of 648 T'ai-tsung announced that in the next year he was going to raise a huge army of 300,000 men to crush Koguryŏ completely. Even a fervent death-bed plea by his old friend and adviser,

[104] *TCTC* 197, p. 6214.
[105] *TCTC* 197, p. 6220.
[106] *TCTC* 199, pp. 6261–2.

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the chief minister Fang Hsüan-ling, asking that the costly campaign be called off since there was no adequate justification for it, went unheeded.[107]

When T'ai-tsung died in the following year, still not having launched the decisive campaign against his detested enemy, the bitter taste of his only major defeat still lingered in his mouth.

The disastrous campaigns against Koguryŏ, for all the shadow they cast on T'ai-tsung himself, did little to reduce the growing power of the T'ang in Asia. As the frontiers of the empire expanded and its prestige soared, tribute began to pour into Ch'ang-an from remote peoples like the Ku-li-kan, living far to the north of China, perhaps in central Siberia, and the Kirghiz (Chieh-ku or Hsia-chia-ssu), a Caucasian people with red hair, blue eyes and tall stature living in the area east of the Urals. Embassies arrived as well from countries far to the west of China. In 638 Yazdgard III, the last ruler of the Sassanid dynasty in Persia, sent his son Fīrūz to the T'ang capital, presumably to request Chinese aid against the Arabs, who were then attacking his kingdom. T'ai-tsung refused, and Yazdgard and his dynasty perished. In 643 T'ai-tsung received an embassy from the king of Fu-lin (the Byzantine province of Syria), which is believed to have been sent to China by the Eastern Roman Emperor Constans II. By T'ai-tsung's time Ch'ang-an had become a truly international metropolis. It received diplomats from all over Asia, housed considerable minorities of peoples of many races, while its schools and monasteries provided education for the sons of the royal families of such varied countries as Koguryŏ, Silla, Paekche, Tibet and Karakhoja.[108]

Along with the influx of foreign peoples came foreign goods, foreign entertainments, foreign customs and foreign religions. Buddhism was, of course, by this time so long established in China as to be no longer a foreign religion, but in T'ai-tsung's reign its links with its Indian and central Asian origins were renewed and strengthened with the return in 645 to Ch'ang-an of the most renowned of all Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, Hsüan-tsang. Somewhat earlier, according to a stele erected in Ch'ang-an in 781 and rediscovered only in the seventeenth century, a Nestorian monk named A-lo-pen (perhaps Reuben) had arrived at the T'ang court in 635, and was welcomed by T'ai-tsung. The emperor seems to have been favourably impressed, and ordered the translation into Chinese of the Nestorian Christian texts which the monk had brought with him.

[107] *CTS* 66, pp. 2464–6; *TCTC* 199, p. 6260.
[108] *THY* 35, p. 633.

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THE STRUGGLE OVER THE SUCCESSION

During the first half of his reign, the family life of T'ai-tsung was relatively tranquil, marred only by the death of his wife and devoted confidante, the Wen-te empress (*née* Chang-sun) in 636. Early in the 640s however, as his sons grew to maturity, a bitter struggle over the succession developed between two of the royal princes, a conflict which T'ai-tsung himself unwittingly helped to generate. The rivals were the heir apparent, Li Ch'eng-ch'ien the eldest son of the Wen-te empress, and Li T'ai the Prince of Wei. The Standard Histories of the period list Li T'ai as the fourth son of the Wen-te empress, but other evidence suggests that he may have been older than his 'elder brother', and he may possibly have been a son by another of T'ai-tsung's consorts.[109]

Despite the fact that he was lame, suffering from a serious leg ailment, perhaps gout or clubfoot, Ch'eng-ch'ien had been appointed heir apparent in the tenth month of 626, almost immediately after T'ai-tsung's accession to the throne.[110] The prince apparently was intelligent and capable, and once he came of age his father began assigning routine business to him and leaving him in charge at the capital during his own absence. As he grew older, however, the heir apparent began to behave in ways which seemed both abnormal and scandalous to the Chinese courtiers, and he may well have been mentally unbalanced. He began to reject his Chinese identity and heritage, used the Turkish language, and dressed himself and his entourage in Turkish costume. When officials of the court criticized his wild and scandalous behaviour and his open flouting of Chinese decorum, he made attempts on their lives which, because they were unsuccessful, were concealed at the time.[111]

Even before 639, when Ch'eng-ch'ien's excesses finally became a public scandal, T'ai-tsung had already begun to show a marked preference for Li T'ai, the Prince of Wei, above all his other sons.[112] Li T'ai was clever and charming, and had inherited many of his father's best qualities. The emperor showed him favour in many ways. In 636, when the other imperial princes were made hereditary governors-general and sent out to the provinces, T'ai-tsung made an exception for Li T'ai and permitted him not to take up his post, but instead to establish a College of Literary Studies (Wen-hsüeh kuan) at the capital, similar to the one which he had

[109] See C. P. Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu* (London, 1955), p. 215, n. 9; Matsui Shūichi, 'Sokuten Bukō no yōritsu wo megutte', *Hokudai Shigaku* 9 (1966) 16, n. 48; Ts'en Chung-mien, *T'ang-shih yü-shen* (Peking, 1960), pp. 10–11.

[110] *CTS* 2, p. 31; *HTS* 2, p. 27.

[111] On Ch'eng-ch'ien's misconduct see *CTS* 76, pp. 2648–9; *TCTC* 196, pp. 6189–90.

[112] *TCTC* 194, p. 6119.

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himself set up years earlier in Lo-yang. In 642 Li T'ai opened a very large school in his newly constructed mansion at the capital, and was soon incurring monthly expenditure even greater than that of the heir apparent.[113]

Not unnaturally, Li T'ai took the emperor's increasing favour as a sign that he might himself hope for the succession, and surrounded himself with a group of young and discontented officials who hoped to follow him into power in the event that he was made heir in place of Ch'eng-ch'ien, whose increasingly strange behaviour seemed likely to eliminate him from the succession. This group included Fang I-ai, a son of Fang Hsüan-ling, and Tu Ch'u-k'o, a younger brother of Tu Ju-hui.

Thus, for the first time during T'ai-tsung's reign powerful factional alignments arose at court over the issue of the succession, with one party backing Li Ch'eng-ch'ien, and the other supporting Li T'ai. In an attempt to prevent the polarization of officials into rival parties supporting one or other of his two sons, the emperor announced that if the heir apparent were to be removed for any reason, he would be replaced by Ch'eng-ch'ien's own son, then a mere infant.

In the meantime, T'ai-tsung tried various methods to improve the heir apparent's behaviour, among them assigning the stern and moralistic Wei Cheng to be his tutor early in 643. But there was little hope that Ch'eng-ch'ien could be reformed, and T'ai-tsung finally resolved to free the heir apparent from the evil influence of his close associates. Early in 643 he proceeded to execute three of his intimates, including a singing boy with whom the heir apparent had a homosexual liaison, and two Taoists who had been influencing him with heterodox teachings.

Ch'eng-ch'ien suspected that Li T'ai had informed the emperor about his affair with the boy, and had grown alarmed at the increasing severity of the emperor towards him. He therefore planned to kill Li T'ai and also to remove his father. He was joined in this plot by Tu Ho, the second son of Tu Ju-hui, long one of his intimates, by a disgruntled general Hou Chün-chi who had been involved in misconduct during the campaign against Karakhoja, and by T'ai-tsung's younger half-brother Li Yüan-ch'ang, the Prince of Han, a wild character who had grown weary of the emperor's constant reproaches.

Luckily the failure of an attempted revolt by yet another of the emperor's sons, Li Yu, the Prince of Ch'i, accidentally brought Ch'eng-ch'ien's plot to light before it could be carried out. One of the participants in Li Yu's attempted rising was Ho-kan Ch'eng-chi, the very man the heir apparent had deputed to kill the emperor; to the added shock of the

[113] *TCTC* 196, p. 6174.

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court, Ho-kan Ch'eng-chi revealed the details of the heir apparent's plot. In the fourth month of 643, Ch'eng-ch'ien was degraded to the status of commoner and incarcerated in a frontier district in modern Kweichow, where he died at the end of 644.[114] His supporters fared worse. The Prince of Han was ordered to take his own life, Tu Ho and Hou Chün-chi were beheaded.[115]

Despite the emperor's previous avowal not to remove Ch'eng-ch'ien's heirs from the succession, he was extremely fond of Li T'ai, and with Ch'eng-ch'ien out of the way now announced his intention of nominating T'ai as heir apparent. Li T'ai's followers naturally voiced their strong support, but Chang-sun Wu-chi, the most powerful and influential of T'ai-tsung's elder statesmen, was adamantly opposed to the plan, and proposed instead the appointment of Li Chih, Prince of Chin, then aged nearly fifteen years. The court was divided into three rival camps; the original supporters of Ch'eng-ch'ien, now in disarray, the supporters of Li T'ai, and the supporters of Li Chih, led by Chang-sun Wu-chi and other powerful ministers.[116]

This difficult situation, with the emperor opposed by his most influential advisers, and the threat to political stability which it posed, was, however, quickly resolved. Li T'ai himself began making dark threats against Li Chih on the grounds that he had been on friendly terms with the recently executed Prince of Han. Following the disclosure of this new intrigue the emperor had no choice but to strip Li T'ai of his titles and exile him also from the capital. The strain of these family troubles reduced the emperor to the brink of a breakdown. Complaining that he had been betrayed by three of his sons and a brother, he had to be restrained by his counsellor Ch'u Sui-liang from stabbing himself.

On the succession issue, however, T'ai-tsung was left little choice. Since Li Chih had the solid backing of the most influential ministers, Chang-sun Wu-chi, Ch'u Sui-liang and Fang Hsüan-ling, the emperor formally appointed him heir apparent in the fourth month of 643. At the same time, to ensure that he was kept under close supervision, a very high-powered group of ministers was appointed as his tutors and preceptors, including Chang-sun Wu-chi, Fang Hsüan-ling, the aged and crusty Hsiao Yü and Li Shih-chi, while a very talented group of lesser officials was appointed to serve Li Chih in his heir apparent's administration, so as to unite the whole court behind him.

However, T'ai-tsung remained convinced that the wrong choice had

[114] *CTS* 3, pp. 55, 57; *HTS* 2, pp. 42, 43.
[115] *TCTC* 197, pp. 6193–4.
[116] See Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang Chen-kuan Yung-hui chien tang-cheng shih-shih', *Hsin-ya shu-yüan hsüeh-shu nien-k'an*, 7 (1965) 39–49.

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been forced upon him, and suspected that Li Chih was too weak-willed ever to rule effectively. At the end of 643 he raised the question of replacing him with yet another of his sons Li K'o, Prince of Wu, whose mother was a daughter of Sui Yang-ti.[117] Li K'o was bold and martial like his father, and the emperor was naturally attracted to him. But once again Chang-sun Wu-chi intervened, criticizing the emperor for his fickleness, and maintaining that Li Chih would make an excellent ruler. It seems altogether likely, as Chinese historians have suggested from very early times, that Chang-sun Wu-chi was not disinterested in his sponsorship of Li Chih, but supported him in the hope that he would be enabled to continue to dominate the court in the event of his succession.[118]

The succession therefore remained unchanged, and when T'ai-tsung died in the fifth month of 649 still not yet fifty years old, after suffering a prolonged illness, it was Li Chih who ascended the throne as the third T'ang ruler, Kao-tsung.

T'ai-tsung's last years were a sad ending to a great reign. During the disastrous Liao-tung campaign of 645 which cast the shadow of defeat and failure over his last years, he had contracted some form of incapacitating disease, which exhausted his strength, so that much of the day-to-day business had to be conducted on his behalf by the heir apparent. In a desperate attempt to obtain relief T'ai-tsung, who in his earlier years had repeatedly heaped scorn on earlier rulers who had been obsessed with longevity and elixirs, called in an Indian magician Na-lo-erh-so-p'o-mei.[119] T'ai-tsung dwelt increasingly upon his past achievements, and continued to be concerned about the sort of emperor his son would prove to be. To this end he wrote for him a sort of political testament in four chapters, the *Ti-fan* (*Plan for an emperor*) laying out his ideals for a monarch.

In spite of its ending on a low key, T'ai-tsung's reign was the first high point of the T'ang, and in some ways a high-water mark for all Chinese history. He bequeathed his successor a mighty heritage: a rationalized and smoothly functioning administrative structure, a healthy economy, and a vastly broadened empire. In spite of the shadow cast by his failure in Koguryŏ, there was a degree of national well-being unparalleled since the greatest days of the Han dynasty, a widespread mood of self-confidence, stability and prosperity. Certainly the halcyon days of T'ai-tsung's reign

[117] *CTS* 65, p. 2453; *TCTC* 197, p. 6206.
[118] Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang Chen-kuan Yung-hui chien tang-cheng shih-shih', pp. 46–50; *CTS* 76, p. 2666.
[119] *TCTC* 200, p. 6303; *THY* 82, p. 1522; *CTS* 3, p. 61; cf. Ch'en Tsu-lung, 'On the "Hot-spring inscription" preserved by a rubbing in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris', *TP*, 46 (1958) 376–96.

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must have been recalled with a profound wistfulness by those of his officials who continued to serve in the uncertain and even dangerous years which followed his death.

The prestige and glory of his reign grew with the passage of time. To educated Chinese of later ages, T'ai-tsung's reign represented an ideal combining exemplary civil government with unrivalled military strength, a regime presided over by a forceful and vigorous, yet wise and conscientious emperor who firmly controlled his empire, yet always took careful and patient heed of the counsel of his ministers, themselves men of great standing. His style of government was esteemed not merely because of its success, but because it approached the Confucian ideal of firm rule based upon responsiveness to the advice and opinions of ministers and concern for the welfare of the people, and because it showed a real human empathy and intimate interplay between the ruler and his advisers.

In the dark days of the empress Wu's dominance, when the good and straightforward relations between ruler and ministers were replaced by fear, insecurity, purges and terror, the reign of T'ai-tsung presented an ideal to be restored. In the period after the An Lu-shan rebellion, when a greatly weakened central government was forced to resort to all sorts of expedients merely to survive, when emperors placed the greatest responsibilities in the hands of mere eunuchs or personal servants, the reign of T'ai-tsung appeared by comparison incomparably strong and successful.

In later periods the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, a famous volume embodying T'ai-tsung's discussions with his ministers on the basic and perennial problems of government, compiled by Wu Ching in 705 in the hope that T'ai-tsung's style of government might be restored after half-a-century dominated by the empress Wu, became an essential handbook on imperial rule, ardently studied by emperors seeking insight into the art of government, and by ministers who wished to persuade their sovereign of the folly of acting without ministerial advice. It was read eagerly, too, in Korea and in Japan, and was later translated into Tangut for the rulers of Hsi-hsia, into Khitan for the Liao emperors, into Jurchen for the emperors of Chin, and later into Mongol and Manchu. The image of T'ai-tsung's style of government which it incorporated thus became a potent ideal throughout east Asia.

It is interesting to note, too, that there was a military counterpart to the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, a work called *Li Wei-kung wen-tui*. This work, in its present form very likely a forgery from early Sung times, but containing some genuine elements, records T'ai-tsung's discussions of various

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points of military strategy with his most famous general Li Ching.[120] That such a work should have been cast in the same form as the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, showing T'ai-tsung as equally an exemplar in military matters, underlines the special esteem in which he was held by later generations. In their eyes his reign combined the dual virtues of *wen* and *wu*, civil order and military might, as no reign before or after.

[120] On this work see the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Peter A. Boodberg, 'The art of war in ancient China, a study based upon the dialogues of Li Duke of Wei', Berkeley, 1931.

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CHAPTER 5

KAO-TSUNG (REIGN 649–83) AND THE EMPRESS WU: THE INHERITOR AND THE USURPER

T'ai-tsung's doubts about the ability of his heir apparent, Li Chih, to lead the country effectively proved to be well founded. Chih, T'ai-tsung's ninth son, was the youngest son born to him by the empress Wen-te, *née* Chang-sun. Born on the thirteenth day of the sixth month of 628, he had been enfeoffed as the Prince of Chin in 633, and had been heir apparent since 643. When he ascended the throne before his father's coffin on the first day of the sixth month of 649, he was still not quite twenty-one years old. He is known to history by his posthumous temple-name of Kao-tsung.[1]

In spite of the systematic efforts which were made to prepare him for the throne – the appointment of carefully selected tutors and preceptors and the composition of imperial injunctions to guide his behaviour – he proved to be a well-meaning but ineffectual and indecisive ruler.

At the beginning of his reign the new emperor conscientiously attempted to emulate the style of government which his father had practised so successfully. He diligently practised economy, eschewed the hunt and lavish court entertainments, and sought the frank remonstrances and counsel of his court advisers. But T'ai-tsung's highly personal style of leadership demanded qualities and a sheer force of personality which Kao-tsung did not possess. The emperor's ineffectiveness, at least later in his reign, was in part due to recurrent illness, which brought on incapacitating attacks of dizziness and impaired vision. But in any case, even had he been fit and a strong, decisive and forceful personality, his circumstances were very different from those of his father. Young and inexperienced, he was surrounded at court by a large group of elder statesmen who had for years been entrenched in power under his father. Several of them had been among his preceptors as heir apparent. In the sort of highly personal debates on high policy with the chief ministers, which had become the established pattern of policy making under T'ai-tsung, he was a very junior interloper in a group who had worked together for years in close collaboration. It would have been exceedingly

[1] *THY* 1, p. 3.

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difficult for him to have exercised real dominance over his ministers. As it was, instead of providing leadership and inspiration for his officials, as his father had done, he would simply 'fold his hands and say nothing'.[2]

Shortly after his accession Kao-tsung installed his principal consort, *née* Wang, as his empress. The empress Wang was a member of the extremely powerful Wang clan of T'ai-yüan, one of the very greatest aristocratic clans in China, and was related on her maternal side both to the imperial house, and to another great clan from Shansi, the Liu family. The empress Wang, however, was childless, and, influenced by her uncle Liu Shih, she persuaded the emperor to appoint as heir-apparent Li Chung, Prince of Ch'en (643–64), his eldest son by one of his lower-ranking concubines. The empress hoped to be able to dominate Li Chung because of the relatively low rank of his mother in the palace. Chang-sun Wu-chi was persuaded to agree, and Li Chung was formally appointed heir apparent in the seventh month of 652.[3]

The early years of Kao-tsung's reign were dominated by a group of chief ministers led by three powerful elder statesmen, Chang-sun Wu-chi, Ch'u Sui-liang and Li Shih-chi. Kao-tsung's maternal uncle, Chang-sun Wu-chi, had resigned his post as head of the Department of State Affairs upon the new emperor's succession but retained the status of chief minister. Ch'u Sui-liang filled the office of vice-president of the Department of State Affairs, and also held the status of chief minister. At the time of T'ai-tsung's death Li Shih-chi, in accordance with a plan made by T'ai-tsung before his death, had been sent out to the provinces as a governor-general to test his loyalty to Kao-tsung and to the dynasty. He passed the test faultlessly; when he received the order he immediately set out for his new post without even returning home.[4] Shortly afterwards, he was recalled to court and appointed to the other vice-presidency of the Department of State Affairs. Subsequently he asked to be relieved of the duties of this post, but continued to act as a chief minister.

These three elder statesmen, all loyal servitors of T'ai-tsung, had been strong supporters of Kao-tsung's candidacy in the succession dispute of 643, as had the other chief ministers. Their regime continued the policies enforced under T'ai-tsung, with few signs of innovation.

Kao-tsung had been on the throne for scarcely three years when the court was shocked by the discovery of a plot against the emperor engineered by Fang I-ai, second son of the late minister Fang Hsüan-ling, and a former supporter of T'ai-tsung's son, Li T'ai, in the succession dispute of 643. Fang I-ai was married to the Princess Kao-yang, a daughter of

[2] *THY* 56, p. 961.
[3] *THY* 4, p. 41; *CTS* 86, pp. 2823–5.
[4] *TCTC* 199, p. 6267.

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T'ai-tsung and a proud and demanding woman. After Fang Hsüan-ling's death in mid-648, his eldest son Fang I-chih had been made his sole heir. The Princess Kao-yang had tried unsuccessfully to force I-chih to divide his inheritance with her husband, as would have been the normal custom, and after Kao-tsung ascended the throne she prodded I-ai into repeatedly raising the dispute before the throne. Kao-tsung, angered by his persistence, ordered both brothers into exile in the provinces.

The Princess Kao-yang then provoked Fang I-ai into plotting a rebellion with other malcontents at court, among them Hsüeh Wan-ch'e who was married to one of Kao-tsu's daughters, Li Yüan-ching, whose daughter was married to I-ai's younger brother, and Ch'ai Ling-wu, a son-in-law of T'ai-tsung. The plot was revealed in the twelfth month of 652, when the Princess Kao-yang falsely accused Fang I-chih of committing a crime; in the subsequent investigation, carried out by Chang-sun Wu-chi, her own husband's plot came to light. All the participants in the conspiracy were executed or permitted to commit suicide. Even the unfortunate Fang I-chih was demoted.

Among those implicated with Fang I-ai and executed shortly after was Li K'o, the Prince of Wu, whom Chang-sun Wu-chi had once dissuaded T'ai-tsung from making heir apparent in place of Kao-tsung. Many of the others who were executed had earlier been supporters either of Li Ch'eng-ch'ien or of Li T'ai as claimants for the succession, or had been indirectly linked with them. It seems quite possible that the Fang I-ai affair was not simply a conspiracy against the throne – if indeed there ever was a real plot – but was rather a continuation of the factional stress centred on the succession problem which had arisen in the latter years of T'ai-tsung's reign.[5] The victor, in any case, was Chang-sun Wu-chi, who succeeded in eliminating several political enemies he had made during the days when he so ardently championed Kao-tsung as T'ai-tsung's successor. However, Chang-sun Wu-chi's triumph over his political adversaries was all too short. For he and the timid Kao-tsung were soon to be faced by a far more powerful, adroit and unscrupulous rival at court.

RISE OF THE EMPRESS WU

Casting her shadow over most of Kao-tsung's thirty-four years on the throne, and indeed over the rest of the seventh century, was the beautiful and enticing Wu Chao.

Everything concerning this remarkable woman is surrounded by doubts, for she stood for everything to which the ideals of the Confucian scholar-

[5] Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang Chen-kuan Yung-hui chien tang-cheng shih-shih', *Hsin-ya shu-yüan hsüeh-shu nien-k'an*, 7 (1965) 39–49.

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official class was opposed – feminine interference in public affairs, government by arbitrary personal whim, the deliberate exploitation of factionalism, ruthless personal vendettas, political manipulation in complete disregard of ethics and principles. From the very first the historical record of her reign has been hostile, biased and curiously fragmentary and incomplete. Less is known of the details of political life during her half-century of dominance than of any comparable period of the T'ang.

However, in spite of the venom and hostility of the Confucian historians to this woman who dared to overthrow the Li-T'ang house and had the effrontery to rule like a man, it is nevertheless apparent that she was exceptionally gifted, with a natural genius for politics and brilliantly adept at manipulating the power structure at court. Her phenomenal rise to power resulted from her sharp intelligence, determination and excellent judgment of men, combined with ruthlessness, unscrupulousness and political opportunism. She also displayed a cruelty and vindictiveness towards her enemies and rivals which has few parallels in Chinese history.

T'ang historians, writing after the event and with the benefit of hindsight, recorded various occurrences during the reign of T'ai-tsung which were thought already to presage the havoc Wu Chao would one day wreak at the T'ang court.[6] In the middle of 648 the planet Venus was repeatedly visible during the daytime, an omen interpreted by the court astrologers to mean that a woman would shortly ascend the throne. At the same time a popular saying began to circulate among the common people to the effect that after three generations of the Li-T'ang royal house a woman ruler, the 'Prince of Wu', would replace them. T'ai-tsung's further enquiries addressed to the chief court astrologer revealed that the woman in question had already entered the palace as an imperial relative, and that within thirty years she would be ruler of all China and would kill almost all of the imperial family. T'ai-tsung, in his forthright way, suggested executing all those persons the astrologer suspected, but the latter maintained that heaven-ordained fate could not be changed, and the matter was dropped.

Wu Chao, to whom these prophecies were later linked, had come into the palace about 640, when she was in her early teens, as a low-ranking concubine (*ts'ai-jen*; consort of the fifth rank) of the emperor T'ai-tsung. She was the daughter of Wu Shih-huo, one of the earliest supporters of Kao-tsu at the time of his rebellion at T'ai-yüan fu. Wu Shih-huo was a member of a locally prominent clan in T'ai-yüan, but as the fourth son he had not entered an official career like his brothers, but had been engaged in commerce as a lumber merchant. He also served as a minor

[6] *TCTC* 199, pp. 6259–60; *CTS* 69, pp. 2524; *HTS* 94, p. 3837.

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officer in the Sui militia organization in the area. The future Kao-tsu had frequently visited his home in 617, and had been encouraged by him to rebel against the Sui. Wu Shih-huo proved to be a gifted military strategist, and when Kao-tsu raised his rebellion, he was given a staff position and played an important role in the campaign to take the Sui capital.[7] As a reward for his service, Kao-tsu appointed him president of the Board of Works, a high-ranking post which he held for some four years, and subsequently promoted him to governor-general of two important prefectures. For his services to the dynasty he was given a dukedom, and Kao-tsu showed him exceptional favour by selecting a second wife for him from a collateral line of the Yang, the Sui royal family. Wu Chao was born of this union in about 627.[8]

Much has been made by modern historians of Wu Chao's origins. As we shall see later some have stressed the fact that she was the daughter of a 'merchant', and thus a representative of a 'newly emergent commercial class'. As we have seen, her father in fact came of a traditional scholar-official family of high local standing, his brothers having held office under the Sui, while he himself became a very high-ranking official under Kao-tsu. Others have claimed that she was a representative of the eastern (Shan-tung, i.e. Ho-nan and Ho-pei) regional interest, against the north-western (Kuan-lung) aristocrats who had played such an important role in early T'ang political life. As we have seen, she came in fact from a T'ai-yüan family, from a region whose aristocracy had an identity of its own (it was known in this period as the Tai-pei group) and who tended to be more closely associated with the north-western group than with the great clans of Ho-nan and Ho-pei. Moreover, through her mother she was descended from the Yangs, the Sui imperial house, members *par excellence* of the north-western aristocracy. She herself, as we know from events later in her life, was very conscious of her 'aristocratic' origins.

Kao-tsung had been a child of eight when his mother, the empress Wen-te, had died in 636, and he continued to live in the Inner Palace. It is quite likely that he came into contact with Wu Chao after her entrance into T'ai-tsung's harem, particularly after 646 when T'ai-tsung moved the future Kao-tsung's living quarters next to his own. The traditional sources hint darkly that Kao-tsung and Wu Chao had been improperly intimate even while T'ai-tsung was still alive.[9]

7 Nunome Chōfū, *Zui Tō shi kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1970), p. 307; Li Chiao, 'Pan-lung t'ai pei', *CTW* 249, pp. 7b–8b.

8 *TCTC* 195, pp. 6134–5; *CTW* 249, pp. 1a–17b; *WYYH* 875, pp. 1a ff. On the relations of Wu Chao and Kao-tsung, see R. W. L. Guisso, 'The life and times of the empress Wu Tse-t'ien of the T'ang dynasty', unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, Oxford, 1975.

9 *CTW* 199, pp. 1a–2a.

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Upon T'ai-tsung's death, again according to the traditional accounts, Wu Chao left the imperial harem, and as was the custom shaved her head and entered a Buddhist temple as a nun, where, by tradition, she would normally remain cloistered for the rest of her life. Later, on the anniversary of T'ai-tsung's death, Kao-tsung visited the temple and saw Wu Chao, for whom he conceived a deep passion. Previous to this the emperor had been showing great favour to one of his secondary consorts, Hsiao Shu-fei, who had already borne him a son. The empress Wang had grown extremely jealous of her, and hoping to introduce a rival who would supplant Hsiao in the emperor's affections, ordered Wu Chao to let her hair grow, and persuaded her husband to summon her back into the imperial harem as a secondary concubine (*chao-i*).

The date of these events is not clear. The Sung historian Ssu-ma Kuang dates her return to the palace as 654,[10] but this is certainly wrong since Wu Chao had borne at least one and possibly two sons to Kao-tsung before that date (see below). At least one modern historian has suggested that she never became a nun at all, but that Kao-tsung summoned her into his harem immediately after his father's death, in total contravention of all the rules of propriety.[11] But evidence for the whole story is so suspect that it seems unlikely the truth can ever be established.

Whether Wu Chao became a nun or not, and whatever the precise date of her entry into the palace, it is clear that she bore a son (and possibly two) to Kao-tsung in 652.[12] As her charms first captivated and then completely dominated Kao-tsung, she began to exert an increasingly strong influence over him. The empress Wang, fearing for her own position and realizing that Wu Chao was far more dangerous a rival than Hsiao Shu-fei, turned against her, and together with her erstwhile rival began a campaign of slander against Wu Chao. But unfortunately for her rivals, Wu proved to be far superior in the art of intrigue. The haughty empress had treated many of the other palace ladies with ill-concealed disdain, and since her enthronement had made numerous enemies both inside the palace and at court. Wu Chao cooperated with these enemies, and bribed the concubines to act as her spies and to inform her of all the activities of the empress and Hsiao Shu-fei, so that she was able consistently to outmanoeuvre them. Meanwhile Kao-tsung promoted her in rank within the palace.

However, despite the favour which he showed to Wu Chao, and despite the empress's continuing childlessness, Kao-tsung still had no intention

[10] *TCTC* 199, p. 6284.
[11] Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien* (Taipei, 1965), pp. 313–35.
[12] Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien*, pp. 311–13; Kuo Mo-jo, *Wu Tse-t'ien* (Peking, 1962), p. 123.

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of replacing the empress Wang. This would have been a weighty political decision, for the Wang clan were both powerful and well-connected and the empress had the backing of the most powerful elder statesmen. Wu was therefore forced to contrive a suitable excuse for the emperor to set his principal consort aside. Such an opportunity presented itself late in 654. Wu had recently given birth to a daughter, and the childless empress frequently played with her. One day after the empress had left, Wu secretly smothered the infant. When the emperor arrived Wu pretended to be in good spirits, and went to show his daughter to him, feigning surprise when it was discovered that she was dead. Servants informed the emperor that the empress Wang had just been playing with the dead child, and Kao-tsung was left to draw the obvious conclusion. It is doubtful whether Kao-tsung himself was entirely convinced for the empress Wang's 'crime' was never made public. But whatever the truth of the matter, Wu seems to have achieved her objective; the emperor decided to demote the empress Wang and to elevate Wu to the position of his principal consort, if possible with the acquiescence of his high officials.

He first attempted to win over the most powerful figure at court, his uncle Chang-sun Wu-chi, by promoting three of the latter's sons to office and bestowing many gifts on him. But Chang-sun Wu-chi remained adamant. Meanwhile Wu Chao began to consolidate her position. The empress Wang's uncle and chief political supporter Liu Shih, who since 652 had been one of the presidents of the Secretariat and a chief minister, was demoted in the sixth month of 654 to be president of the Board of Civil Office. In the next year another blow was struck at the empress when her mother – a member of the same Liu clan – was banned from entering the palace on the grounds that she and the empress had been employing magic in an attempt to overcome Wu Chao. Shortly afterwards, in the seventh month of 655, Liu Shih was sent out to be prefect of a minor prefecture in Szechwan, and thus removed from the political scene.[13]

At the same time Li I-fu, a chief secretary in the Secretariat who was on bad terms with Chang-sun Wu-chi, and for whom an order was being processed for demotion to a minor post in exile in Szechwan, took the opportunity of saving himself from exile by shrewdly memorializing the emperor to remove the empress Wang and replace her by Wu Chao. Li I-fu was reprieved, and promoted within the Secretariat, and other supporters of Wu Chao also came out openly in favour of her enthronement. Among them was Hsü Ching-tsung (592–672), president of the Board of Rites.

The elder statesmen Chang-sun Wu-chi and Ch'u Sui-liang remained

[13] *TCTC* 199, pp. 6285, 6288.

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bitterly opposed to any attempt to remove the empress Wang, as did two other officials who had recently reached the highest ranks – the president of the Secretariat, Lai Chi, and the president of the Chancellery, Han Yüan – both of whom had become chief ministers in 653. Another of the men who had been chief ministers since the beginning of Kao-tsung's reign, the vice-president of the Department of State, Yü Chih-ning, offered no opposition. The only senior adviser to encourage the emperor was Li Shih-chi, who took the position that the establishment of an empress was a family concern for the emperor, in which outsiders should not be consulted. The elderly Li Shih-chi, who had been a great general under both Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung, and had been a chief minister since 643, was a man with immense influence among the people and especially the military of the north-eastern plain, and his intervention may well have tipped the balance at court in favour of Wu Chao.[14]

Delighted by this turn of events, Kao-tsung ordered Hsü Ching-tsung to announce his intention to the court with the observation that 'When an old farmer has harvested an extra ten bushels of wheat he wishes to change his wife. How much more when an emperor wishes to establish a new empress! Why should he first seek the permission of others and cause them to recklessly give counsel against it?'[15] To underline his dissatisfaction with the opponents of Wu Chao, the emperor demoted Ch'u Sui-liang to be governor-general of a prefecture in modern Hunan, far removed from the capital.

In the tenth month of 655 an edict was promulgated charging the empress Wang and Hsiao Shu-fei with having plotted to poison the emperor. They were demoted to commoner status, and members of their families were stripped of all rank and titles and banished to the disease-ridden southern province of Ling-nan. On the nineteenth day of the month, Wu Chao was formally enthroned as empress,[16] and on the first day of the next year her position was finally cemented by the appointment of her own son, Li Hung (652–75) as heir apparent in place of Li Chung, who had been established heir at the suggestion of the empress Wang.[17] To proclaim the fact that a major change of dynastic policy had taken place, a new reign-title Hsien-ch'ing ('Manifest felicity') was adopted.

A number of theories have been proposed to explain the division of Kao-tsung's court into pro- and anti-Wu factions. The modern historian Ch'en Yin-k'o believed that the opposing parties represented different

[14] Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Lun Sui-mo T'ang-ch'u suo-wei "Shan-tung hao-chieh" ', *Ling-nan hsüeh-pao*, 12 (1956) 7–8.

[15] *TCTC* 199, p. 6292.

[16] *THY* 3, p. 27; *CTW* 11, p. 25b.

[17] *THY* 4, p. 41; *CTS* 86, pp. 2824, 2828; *TTCLC* 27, p. 93; *TTCLC* 28, p. 98; *WYYH* 443, p. 8a; *CTW* 12, p. 2b.

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regional aristocratic interest groups. According to his theory the Li-T'ang family had, since its rise to prominence in the early sixth century, forged marriage ties with many of the great aristocratic families centred in north-western China (Shensi and Kansu), the so-called 'Kuan-lung bloc', which had formed the nucleus of the ruling class in the north since the Western Wei dynasty. The complex marriage relationships within this 'Kuan-lung bloc' had created a network of loyalties which manifested itself when Kao-tsung attempted to depose a member of this aristocratic group, the empress Wang, and to replace her by an outsider, Wu Chao. Chang-sun Wu-chi, Ch'u Sui-liang, Han Yüan and Lai Chi opposed Wu Chao, according to Ch'en, because they were members of the Kuan-lung bloc. Men like Li Shih-chi, the supporters of Wu Chao, came from different origins. They were mostly from the north-eastern plain, and had in many cases entered the bureaucracy through the examination system rather than by the exercise of the aristocracy's hereditary privilege. These were members of what Ch'en calls the 'Shan-tung bloc'. According to his theory the struggle between the empress Wang and Wu Chao was thus not merely an internal struggle confined to the palace and the court, but reflected a political battle for supremacy between two political elite groups, the Kuan-lung and Shan-tung blocs.[18]

More recently Marxist historians have viewed the conflict over Wu Chao's elevation as empress in terms of a struggle for power between an entrenched aristocratic ruling class and a newly risen landlord class which had emerged after the creation of the *chün-t'ien* land allocation system at the end of the fifth century. By Kao-tsung's time, they maintain, enough land had changed hands, both by means of the *chün-t'ien* system and by circumvention of its provisions, to produce an independent landlord class demanding to gain entrance into the bureaucracy. The only means by which they could do so was the examination system, which was over-crowded with candidates. The Marxists claim that Wu Chao's 'humble origins' led her to oppose the aristocrats and to support the newly risen landlords and merchants in their bid for power. They in turn backed her.[19]

As we have seen above, the evidence about Wu Chao's actual origins throws very serious doubts on these theories, both of which are based on an extremely over-simplified view of the society of the period. Neither the pro- nor the anti-Wu faction was nearly as homogenous as the above theories assume. There was in fact considerable diversity in both the regional origins and social backgrounds of their members. Li I-fu, for

[18] Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Chi T'ang-tai chih Li, Wu, Wei, Yang hun-yin chi-t'uan', *LSYC*, 1 (1954) 35–51, esp. pp. 38–9.

[19] Hu Ju-lei, 'Lun Wu-Chou ti she-hui chi-ch'u', *LSYC*, 1 (1955) 85–96; Yokota Shigeru, 'Bukō seiken seiritsu no zentei', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 14.4 (1956) 25–46.

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example, a supporter of Wu Chao, came not from the north-east or 'Shan-tung', but from Szechwan in the far west. Similarly Lai Chi, a supporter of the empress Wang, was an examination graduate, while Li Shih-chi, a partisan of Wu Chao, was probably from an old-established and pre-eminent official family.[20]

It seems most likely in fact that these regional factors were far less important than purely personal and political alignments. With the exception of Li Shih-chi, Wu Chao's supporters held offices of only moderate rank in Kao-tsung's administration, while the supporters of the empress Wang occupied the chief positions of real power at court. In this respect the struggle over Wu's elevation may be viewed as a struggle between those in power, with a vested interest in preserving the political status quo, and the outsiders who saw in the promotion to empress of Wu Chao a means of advancing their own careers. It is very doubtful indeed that Wu desired to advance the interests of any power bloc, and even less probable that she acted in the interests of any economic class, for it is clear that she thought of herself as a member of the highest aristocracy. Rather it would appear that she took advantage of the dissatisfaction and aspirations of a group of ambitious officials of middle rank to help her gain power, and afterwards rewarded them for their support. As soon as these individuals were no longer of any use to her she was quick to abandon them, and had them disgraced and even executed without any hesitation.

THE EMPRESS WU IN POWER

The newly enthroned empress lost little time in taking her revenge against those who had opposed her elevation. A month after becoming empress she brutally murdered the former empress Wang and the concubine Hsiao Shu-fei by having their arms and legs cut off and leaving them to die in a wine vat. In the spring of 657 she had Ch'u Sui-liang transferred to another provincial post even further from the capital, in modern Kwangsi. Later in the same year she ordered her devoted supporters, Hsü Ching-tsung and Li I-fu, to lay a false accusation against the presidents of the Secretariat and Chancellery, Lai Chi and Han Yüan, who had strongly opposed her appointment, alleging that they had been conspiring with Ch'u Sui-liang in Kwangsi.

The unfortunate Ch'u Sui-liang was transferred yet again, this time to an area far beyond the boundaries of China proper, south-west of modern

[20] Matsui Shūichi, 'Sokuten Bukō no yōritsu o megutte', *Hokudai shigaku*, 11 (1966) 1–6; Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōdai zenki no kizoku', *Rekishi kyōiku* 14.5 (1966) 41–2.

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Hanoi. Sui-liang pleaded with the emperor for compassion, reminding him of his long service both to Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung, and of his championship of Kao-tsung's claim to the succession in 643. But the emperor did not even bother to read his memorial, and Ch'u Sui-liang died in exile in 658. His alleged co-conspirators, Han Yüan and Lai Chi were also demoted to distant provincial posts with the stipulation that they should never be recalled to court. In their place, Hsü Ching-tsung was appointed chief minister in the eighth month of 657, a post which he was to hold until his retirement in 670.

Hsü Ching-tsung (592–672) was not a simple opportunist, like the empress's other chief supporter Li I-fu, although the historians have treated him equally harshly.[21] A southerner from Hang-chou, his father had been a prominent Sui official. Hsü Ching-tsung was a brilliant scholar, one of the tiny handful of men who received the highest (*hsiu-ts'ai*) degree under the Sui, which he briefly served in a minor office. His father was killed by Yang-ti's assassin, Yü-wen Hua-chi, and Ching-tsung took service first with Li Mi, and then with the T'ang, becoming one of the future T'ai-tsung's personal group of scholars. Under T'ai-tsung he held a succession of important posts in the Chancellery and Secretariat, and acted as compiler of the national history. In 645 he became one of the heir apparent's tutors (Lai Chi had been another), and may then have established some measure of personal influence over the future emperor. In 649 he was appointed chief minister, but was soon transferred to a provincial post as the result of scandal.

Hsü Ching-tsung was already sixty-five at the time of his reappointment as chief minister in 657, and soon took over, as the chief supporter of the empress, the role of elder statesman formerly played by Chang-sun Wu-chi. He was immensely learned. He had participated in the compilation of the histories of the preceding dynasties, in the records of the first two reigns of the T'ang, in the compilation of a national list of genealogies (see below), in the great *Wen-ssu po-yao* encyclopaedia, and many other projects. He left a massive collection of his own writings in eighty chapters. He became for the empress a vital source of historical precedent and accumulated administrative experience, in addition to being an efficient administrator.

After his appointment, the ranks of the chief ministers remained very thin. Only Chang-sun Wu-chi and Yü Chih-ning remained of the large group of ministers who had held office continuously since Kao-tsung's succession. Besides the empress's supporters, Hsü Ching-tsung and Li I-fu, there was only one other chief minister, Tu Cheng-lun, an elderly

[21] *CTS* 82; *HTS* 223A. *HTS* classifies him among the 'evil ministers'.

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scholar from a Ho-pei family who, like Hsü Ching-tsung, had been a *hsiu-ts'ai* under the Sui and had a notable career in central government under T'ai-tsung, but then had the misfortune to be made tutor to the heir apparent, Ch'eng-ch'ien. Having quarrelled with T'ai-tsung over the treatment of the heir apparent he had been most unjustly banished to the far south in 642–3. Recalled to Ch'ang-an in 656 he was soon after appointed chief minister and president of the Board of Finance.

The only chief minister remaining of those who had openly opposed the appointment of the empress Wu was Chang-sun Wu-chi. But the empress's power was still not unlimited, and the opposition which survived at court constantly sought means to bring her and her supporters down. The fall from power of one of her main supporters, Li I-fu the president of the Secretariat, late in 658 gave them some encouragement.

Li I-fu (614–66) was a man from an official family in Ho-pei who had been an examination graduate early in T'ai-tsung's reign, and had been steadily promoted to chief secretary of the Secretariat. A skilled writer, he had collaborated with Hsü Ching-tsung on the national history and in the compilation of the Chin history. We have seen how in 656 he circumvented Chang-sun Wu-chi's attempt to have him banished to the provinces by supporting Wu Chao's usurpation. As a result, he had been made a chief minister in the seventh month of 655. However, he proved to be thoroughly corrupt, and relying on what he believed to be the unlimited protection of the empress he soon began to abuse his high office. We are told that he was totally dishonest in his recommendation and selection of officials, that both he and his whole family openly sold offices to those wishing to enter official service, and that he led a life of scandalous sexual licence. In spite of this, however, he continued to receive the support of the emperor, and was made president of the Secretariat in the third month of 657.

However, by the end of 658 his conduct had become so openly scandalous that when in the eleventh month of that year he fell out with his fellow chief minister, Tu Cheng-lun, resulting in a heated dispute between them before the throne, Kao-tsung took the opportunity of dismissing both of them to provincial appointments.

If Chang-sun Wu-chi and his party imagined that this strengthened their position, however, they were soon proved wrong. In the fourth month of 659 the empress finally made her move against him. Two minor officials, Wei Chi-fang and Li Ch'ao, were accused of forming a hostile clique, and during the judicial investigation which followed, supervised by Hsü Ching-tsung, it was alleged that one of the accused had conspired with Chang-sun Wu-chi to rebel against the throne. Hsü suggested to the

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emperor convincing reasons why his uncle should have planned rebellion, and for good measure cited abundant historical precedents for demoting such a powerful and widely venerated member of the court. Kao-tsung, in spite of his initial disbelief in the charges, reluctantly banished Chang-sun Wu-chi to a border region in modern Kweichow province, without even summoning him for questioning.

The opportunity for a thorough purge of the empress's opponents was speedily taken. The other long-term chief minister, Yü Chih-ning, who had refused to comment either way on Kao-tsung's proposal to elevate the new empress, was sent from the capital and appointed to a high-ranking provincial post. In 664, at the age of seventy-six he was allowed to retire, and died the next year. Others were not so lucky. Even officials who had previously been banished to the provinces were not spared. Liu Shih, Han Yüan (who, somewhat embarrassingly, proved to have died some time before) and Chang-sun En, the nephew of Wu-chi, were ordered to be brought back from their banishment for further investigation of accusations of conspiracy, and were killed on the road. Finally Chang-sun Wu-chi's own case was re-opened and he was forced to commit suicide in his place of exile.

With the last of the chief ministers who had served since T'ai-tsung's reign out of the way, Hsü Ching-tsung was left the sole chief minister. Three men known not to be hostile to the empress, Lu Ch'eng-ch'ing, Hsü Yü-shih and Jen Ya-hsiang, were appointed chief ministers in the fifth month of 659. Lu Ch'eng-ch'ing (595–670) was a Ho-pei man with a scholarly background who had served mostly in financial offices and was appointed president of the Board of Finance in place of Tu Cheng-lun. He was sent out to a provincial post in the next year because his Board failed to produce enough revenue, and subsequently held a succession of high posts without ever returning to the centres of power. Hsü Yü-shih (?–679) was the youngest son of Hsü Shao, a childhood friend of Kao-tsu who had been killed during the pacification of the Yangtze valley in the early years of the dynasty. Hsü Yü-shih had passed the *chin-shih* examination in early T'ang times, and had a distinguished career in office. Jen Ya-hsiang seems to have been primarily a military man, who had been president of the Board of War for some time, and continued to hold this office. In the fourth month of 661 he was sent as commander of the Korean campaign, and was killed in action early in 662. These new appointees were joined in the eighth month of 659 by Li I-fu, who was pardoned and recalled from banishment thanks to the intercession of the empress, who still needed his support at court.

One important change in the administration was made at this point.

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Both Ch'u Sui-liang and Yü Chih-ning had been *ex officio* chief ministers as vice-presidents of the Department of State Affairs, the chief executive organ of government. After their dismissal, no successors were appointed, and the Department of State Affairs remained without any chief officials for no less than sixteen years. The executive organs of government were thus denied any direct part in the chief ministers' deliberations on state policy. The group of chief ministers through whom the emperor and empress had to work at court was also kept very small. Whereas under T'ai-tsung there had often been eight or more, there were now five, reduced to four in 660 with Lu Ch'eng-ch'ing's dismissal, and to three in 661 when Jen Ya-hsiang left on the Korean expedition. The three were Hsü Ching-tsung, the corrupt Li I-fu and Hsü Yü-shih. The last named was forced out of office by Li I-fu at the end of 662 for trying to conceal the accidental killing of a man by his son during a hunt, and was replaced by Shang-kuan I (?–664). The latter was the son of a high Sui court official killed in Yang-chou at the end of Yang-ti's reign. Shang-kuan I took refuge by becoming a Buddhist monk, and gained a considerable reputation as a scholar and a writer. Early in T'ai-tsung's reign he was recommended as a candidate for the *chin-shih* examination, and served T'ai-tsung in a succession of scholarly posts, sometimes polishing the emperor's own compositions for him. Under Kao-tsung he was vice-president of the Imperial Library, and built up a great reputation both as a prose writer and as a poet. He was presumably chosen for appointment to the post of chief minister as an ineffectual man of high rank and unblemished reputation.

With these changes, the empress's supporters had established themselves firmly in the positions of power. The emperor had been in poor health for some time. In 657 he had been forced to retire to a summer palace, and to hold court only on alternate days.[22] The empress's position became virtually impregnable after the tenth month of 660, when Kao-tsung apparently suffered a serious stroke, which left him for some time partially paralysed and with seriously impaired vision.[23] Although he recovered, he had several serious relapses. The empress, aided by her shrewdness and sharp political acumen, took easily to administering the empire during his recurrent periods of incapacity. The emperor was in any case too weak-willed a man, even when in good health, to prevent his formidable consort from imposing her will upon both him and his court. By the end of 660 the empress Wu was ruler of the empire in fact if not in name.[24]

[22] *TCTC* 200, p. 6303.
[23] *TCTC* 200, p. 6303.
[24] *TCTC* 200, p. 6322.

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She did not have everything her own way, however. In the years following his recall from banishment her supporter Li I-fu began once again to lead the sort of scandalous and corrupt life which had made him notorious before 658. His corruption and malfeasance reached such a pitch that he became a political liability even for the empress. In 663, when the excesses of his family once more became a subject for discussion before the throne, and Li I-fu tried to brazen things out without even asking the emperor's pardon, he was banished to a pestilential area in southern China where he died three years later. This time the empress, no longer seriously dependent upon his support and her position far more secure than it had been five years before, made no move whatever to rescue him.

The opposition to the empress, which at that time seems to have centred around the demoted former heir apparent, Li Chung – since 656 enfeoffed as the Prince of Liang – appears to have misinterpreted the fall of Li I-fu as evidence that the emperor had finally decided to challenge the power of the empress. They put in motion an audacious plan to get rid of her altogether.

Sometime previously the empress Wu, who throughout her life was deeply influenced by religious and magical beliefs, had become attracted to a Taoist sorcerer who was allowed free access to her in the imperial palace. From early times in China participation by members of an emperor's household or of the court in witchcraft or sorcery had been held in great horror, and considered adequate grounds for the severest punishment. In the T'ang Code it was one of the crimes considered so heinous as to form one of the 'ten abominations', in respect of which none of the legal privileges accorded to men of high status was operative, and which were specifically excluded from the terms of amnesties.[25] Thus when in 664 a eunuch, formerly a member of Li Chung's own household, reported the matter to the throne, it appears that Kao-tsung saw it as a convenient pretext to free himself from his consort's domination.

He summoned one of his chief ministers, Shang-kuan I, the vice-president of the Secretariat (who had formerly been an adviser to Li Chung), to 'discuss' the matter. As Kao-tsung must have anticipated, Shang-kuan I advocated demoting the empress for her offence, and the emperor ordered him to draft an edict implementing the decision. In the meantime, however, the empress had been informed by one of her many palace spies of the moves being made against her and rushed to the emperor's apartments to prevent the matter going any further. The timid Kao-tsung, unable to stand up to his consort face to face, sheepishly claimed that the plan to remove her had been entirely engineered by Shang-kuan I.

[25] Code 1, art. 6, under sect. 5, '*Pu-tao*' (Depravity).

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The denouement to this sad affair was brief and bloody. The ever faithful Hsü Ching-tsung drew up charges that Shang-kuan I, the ex-heir apparent Li Chung and the eunuch who had reported the matter in the first place, were all involved in a conspiracy against the throne. The principals were executed, and once again there was a wholesale purge of all those in government who had had any suspicious links with these enemies of the empress. All of them were demoted or banished to distant regions.

From this time onwards, the empress's political dominance was absolute. It was also public. At the court sessions she always sat next to Kao-tsung, hidden behind a screen, and supervised his handling of the most petty matters. The great Sung historian Ssu-ma Kuang sums it up: 'The great powers of the empire all devolved on the empress. Promotion and demotion, life or death, were settled by her word. The emperor sat with folded hands.'[26] Kao-tsung was almost powerless now that opposition to the empress Wu had been so effectively eliminated.

The regime of the empress Wu was not, however, simply a matter of court intrigues, and adroit political manoeuvring to dispose of those opposed to her. Her dominance of the court also involved the formulation of new policies. One of the first results was the designation late in 657 of Lo-yang as the permanent Eastern Capital.[27] The court had in fact already been transferred to Lo-yang on three separate occasions under T'ai-tsung. In 657, however, it was formally reinstated, not as the temporary residence of the court, but as a second capital. Branches of every ministry and government agency were set up there, and in 662 even an eastern branch of the State University was established here. From this time onwards the whole court would frequently move to the new capital to meet and conduct official business as normal for long periods of time. Although a small caretaker government was always left in the unoccupied capital, not only the entire imperial household and its entourage, but also the entire administration of the central government, was physically uprooted on these occasions.

These transfers from one capital to another were immensely disruptive, and extremely expensive. The vast cortege left a trail of impoverishment in its wake; the places through which they passed en route were usually permitted long periods of tax exemption to make up in some measure for the devastation caused. The court moved to Lo-yang no less than seven times during Kao-tsung's reign, and the court was centred there for some ten of the twenty-six years remaining of his reign after the establishment of the new capital. At the end, in 682, the court was removed to Lo-yang

[26] *TCTC* 201, p. 6343.

[27] *CTW* 12, p. 6b.

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for the last time. After Kao-tsung's death there late in 683, the empress transferred the capital permanently to Lo-yang, where it remained until 701.

It was not only the constant transfer of the court between the two capitals which imposed a great strain on the empire's finances. Lo-yang needed many new palace buildings and public offices to provide the necessary amenities of a great capital. Expensive construction works continued throughout the reign. There must, therefore, have been very compelling reasons for this new and extremely expensive undertaking.

Various explanations have been put forward for the move to Lo-yang. The first was political. Ch'ang-an was the natural focus of the north-western region – a natural political centre of gravity of the civil bureaucracy while the north-western aristocratic group had remained dominant. The designation of a new capital at a place which had been the eastern alternative centre of imperial political power since early in the first millennium BC, near to the eastern plain, was a symbolic affirmation that the apogee of north-western political power was passed. It was also a move designed to please the many officials from the north-east who had risen to high office under Kao-tsung and who were numbered among the empress Wu's most ardent supporters.

The second explanation which has been proposed is a purely economic one. Ch'ang-an was situated in a comparatively poor and unproductive area, subject to severe and prolonged droughts. Supplying it with grain from elsewhere was difficult and extremely costly. The court could be far more easily supplied in Lo-yang, which had direct access to the complex canal system constructed under the Sui.[28]

There is probably some truth in both these theories, but they do not provide a complete answer. Sometimes during the court's removal to Lo-yang the area around Ch'ang-an was prosperous, and on other occasions the new Eastern Capital was itself in the grips of famine. It is probable that a third factor often determined these moves, one emphasized by the traditional historians – the mental and emotional state of the empress. It is said that after her hideous murder of her rivals the empress Wang and Hsiao Shu-fei, the superstitious empress was haunted by their spectres, and found continued residence in Ch'ang-an intolerable.[29]

Her superstition and preoccupation with religion had other effects. Under the influence of a succession of priests, sorcerers and wizards who became her most intimate associates, the empress became obsessed with

[28] Ch'üan Han-sheng, *T'ang Sung ti-kuo yü yün-ho* (Chungking, 1944); Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 84–7.

[29] Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui T'ang shih* (Peking, 1957), pp. 142–4.

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religious ritual, symbolism and nomenclature. She ransacked tradition and created new emblems to lend supernatural authority to her position and to the dynasty which she now virtually controlled. Whereas both Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung had used a single reign-title to designate their regimes, after Wu became empress, Kao-tsung changed his reign title no less than thirteen times. In 662 the names of many of the principal offices and posts in the central bureaucracy were changed to archaic forms, only to revert to their original forms in 670. In 674, for the first time in Chinese history, the emperor and empress took the grandiose title heavenly emperor (*t'ien-huang*) and heavenly empress (*t'ien-hou*), titles which the empress hoped would set apart the reign of her husband and herself from those of all preceding Chinese monarchs.

Another symbolic declaration of the supreme achievement of the reign was the performance of the most profound and weighty of all archaic ceremonials, the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. These sacrifices, performed at the foot and on the summit of T'ai-shan, China's principal holy mountain, in modern Shantung province, were a symbolic announcement to heaven and earth that the emperor's tasks on earth had been brought to a successful conclusion. Because of their profound significance, and the fear of many emperors that undertaking them on insufficient grounds would be an act of hubris, they had been celebrated only six times in all Chinese history, the last time in AD 56.[30] T'ai-tsung had planned three times to carry out the ritual: in 632, when he had been dissuaded by Wei Cheng; in 641, when he had got as far as Lo-yang but was dissuaded from continuing by the appearance of a comet; and in 648, when an untimely flood cancelled the ceremony.[31]

In 659 Hsü Ching-tsung, at the request of the empress, memorialized the emperor suggesting that he perform the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.[32] After a long delay, during which the precise form of the sacrifices, largely forgotten after so many centuries of disuse, was debated and determined, Kao-tsung eventually began the complicated ritual at the foot of the mountain on new year's day 666, ascending T'ai-shan to complete the ceremonies the following morning. Although there was no precedent whatsoever for the participation of women in the ceremonies, the empress, defying all tradition, planned to play a major role in order to lend legitimacy to her status as equal partner with the emperor, and she led a second procession of the imperial consorts and women related to the imperial clan.[33]

[30] E. Chavannes, *Le T'ai shan* (Paris, 1910), pp. 18–20.
[31] *THY* 7, pp. 79–95.
[32] *THY* 7, pp. 95–101; *CTS* 23, pp. 886–7; *TCTC* 200, p. 6316.
[33] *THY* 7, p. 98.

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Later in Kao-tsung's reign the empress encouraged him to perform similar rites on Sung-shan, a holy mountain close to Lo-yang, and on the other holy peaks. The rites on Sung-shan were arranged for the winter of 676, but were cancelled because of a Tibetan invasion. They were scheduled again for the end of 679, but cancelled because of trouble with the Turks. The empress arranged them for yet a third time in 683, but they had to be cancelled because of the emperor's ill health.[34]

Another instance of the empress's infatuation with the ritual and ceremonial of archaic times may be seen in the proposal in 668–9 to revive the ancient practice of constructing a Ming-t'ang ('Hall of Illumination'). The Ming-t'ang, a building consecrated to Shang-ti the supreme deity of heaven, was designed to be used on the most important ceremonial occasions, and as an audience hall. A ceremonial conducted in it would have reflected the emperor's (and of course the empress's) temporal power and harmonious relationship with heaven. But the scholars charged with the discussion of how such an edifice should be constructed failed to reach any agreement, and the project was abandoned. The empress Wu did not succeed in having her Ming-t'ang built until after Kao-tsung's death when she became the supreme ruler.[35]

The empress, however obsessed she was with the dynasty's relations with the supernatural powers, also ensured that its temporal relationships with the ruling class were strengthened in the dynasty's favour.

As we have seen above, an attempt was made under T'ai-tsung to list and classify the prominent clans of the empire in the *Shih-tsu-chih*, completed in 638. Because of its comparatively low social standing, the empress's own clan, the Wu, had been omitted from this list. This was clearly an omission which had to be put right, and in late 659, probably at the direct behest of the emperor, Hsü Ching-tsung presented a memorial drawing attention to this grave shortcoming in the *Shih-tsu-chih*. A revision was therefore ordered, and a new work, the *Hsing-shih lu* (*Record of surnames and clans*) in two hundred chapters was compiled. Kao-tsung himself wrote the preface and decided on the system of ranking which was to be followed. The empress Wu's clan, together with other families of imperial consorts, was predictably placed in the first rank. But the new list introduced important changes. Inclusion was limited to the families of all officials who had achieved the fifth rank under the T'ang. The old dependence on long-term 'family standing' and social acceptability was

[34] *THY* 7, pp. 101–3.
[35] *THY* 12, pp. 283–5.

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abandoned, and the new list represented far more fully than its predecessor the new broadened ruling official class which was then emerging.[36]

At the same time, the government again moved against the socially prestigious 'four surnames' – the great clans of Shan-tung – against whom T'ai-tsung's *Shih-tsu-chih* had been aimed. This move did not contradict the generally favoured position which many north-easterners enjoyed under Kao-tsung. These men, although from the same regions, were mostly from more modest social backgrounds. The social status of the greatest Shan-tung clans had not noticeably declined since T'ai-tsung's attempt to cut down their pretensions by decree. They had continued to enter into endogamous marriage alliances on a grand scale, to demand exorbitant dowries from outsiders seeking to marry with them, and to make outright refusals to requests for marriage. In addition, most of them had moved to the capital where they formed a closed social group within metropolitan society. In 659 the dissolute Li I-fu was refused marriage by one of these clans, and thereupon persuaded Kao-tsung to issue an edict prohibiting intermarriage among the eleven lineages of the seven great clans who formed this charmed circle. This group was not composed entirely of Shan-tung clans, but included others whose pretensions required to be curbed. One of them was the clan of the former empress Wang. At the same time a strict limit was placed on the amount of dowry which was permissible, relating this not to the family's social standing, but to the official rank held by the parties to the marriage.[37] However, the great clans seem easily to have evaded these restrictions, and continued to flourish much as before.

These measures helped the empress to consolidate her position at court. But there was no adequate precedent for the direct control of the government by the consort of an emperor during his lifetime, and there continued to be a groundswell of muted opposition from officials loyal to the T'ang imperial family. While this persisted, the empress's position always remained precarious, and she sought to attract the allegiance of groups whose support would give her prestige and influence; in particular the literati and the Buddhist and Taoist clergy.

In the early years of his reign, Kao-tsung had exerted large-scale patronage towards the literati, by gathering scholars at the capital to undertake a series of massive literary compilations. Several large scale

[36] *THY* 36, pp. 664–5. See also the ch. by Ikeda On in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4; Ikeda On, 'Tōchō shizokushi no ichi kōsatsu', *Hokkaidō daigaku bungakubu kiyō*, 13 (1965) 3–64; Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class: new evidence from Tun-huang', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 47–85.

[37] *THY* 83, pp. 1528–9.

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projects begun under T'ai-tsung were brought to completion: the *Monographs on the five preceding dynasties*, which now form the monographs (*chih*) of the *Sui shu*, had been in progress since 629 and were completed in 656;[38] in the same year Li Yen-shou's private histories of the northern and southern dynasties (*Nan shih* and *Pei shih*), which later became standard official histories, were presented to the throne,[39] thus completing the writing of the official record of the pre-T'ang period which had been first commissioned in 622.[40] Work also continued on the historical record of the T'ang dynasty itself. In 656 Chang-sun Wu-chi and Ling-hu Te-fen completed a record of the reigns of Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung in the form of a regular dynastic history.[41] This work was continued for the first years of Kao-tsung's reign by the indefatigable Hsü Ching-tsung, and presented to the throne in 659.[42]

Another major enterprise which lasted over into the first part of Kao-tsung's reign was the final revision of the standard sub-commentaries on the Confucian canonical books (the *Wu-ching cheng-i*). The bulk of this work had been done in the 640s, but the final revision of the *Book of changes*, *Book of documents*, *Book of odes*, *Record of rites* and the *Spring and autumn annals* with its commentary, the *Tso-chuan*, was approved in 653, and promulgated to the empire. The standard commentaries on the other books were completed a few years later.[43]

As these projects were completed, the emperor sponsored a whole series of new works, particularly during the first years when Hsü Ching-tsung was the senior minister at court. The following is a selection of works presented to the throne under his guidance between 656 and 663: in 656, a discussion of politics and the duties of a ruler written by the emperor with a very detailed commentary, in 130 chapters; in 658, a large illustrated work on the western regions, incorporating material from envoys sent to Ṭukhāristān and Samarqānd, in 60 chapters; in the same year, a vast literary anthology *Wen-kuan tz'u-lin*, in 1,000 chapters; in 661, another very large literary collection entitled *Lei-pi*, in 630 chapters; in the same year, Li Shan's standard commentary on the great literary anthology *Wen-hsüan*, a basic work universally used in literary education; and in 663, yet another massive anthology of choice literary passages, the *Yao-shan yü-ts'ai*, produced by the tutors of the heir apparent Li Hung,

38 *THY* 63, p. 1092. For a brief discussion of these monographs, see E. Balazs, *Le Traité économique du 'Souei-chou'* (Leiden, 1953), pp. 5–7.
39 *THY* 63, p. 1092.
40 *THY* 63, p. 1090.
41 *THY* 63, p. 1092.
42 Hsü Ching-tsung's work contained numerous falsifications of history, relating to the reigns of each of the first three emperors, which were discovered by Kao-tsung upon the presentation of his work to the throne. See *THY* 63, pp. 1093–4.
43 See the ch. by D. M. McMullen in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4, for details.

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in 500 chapters.[44] All this activity went on at the same time as the huge imperially sponsored Buddhist translation project (on which see below).

This lavish imperial patronage of scholarship, both lay and Buddhist, seems to have come to a sudden end in about 665. Around that time the empress began to exercise literary patronage on her own account, and to sponsor her own group of scholars, who were set to work on a series of works designed essentially for her own political purposes. They produced the *Lieh-nü chuan*, a collection of biographies of famous women; the *Ch'en kuei*, the empress's 'model for ministers' – a statement of her (very conventional) views on the proper relations between a ruler and his ministers which was later to become a prescribed text for all examination candidates; another work of a similar type entitled *Pai-liao hsin-chieh* (*New admonitions for the hundred officials*); and a large work on music and ritual entitled *Yüeh shu*.[45]

The private group of scholars employed by the empress in these scholarly projects also fulfilled a more sinister purpose. From the late 660s they began to form a secret secretariat, known as the 'Scholars of the Northern Gate' (*Pei-men hsüeh-shih*) which began to process for the empress memorials addressed to the throne, and to make decisions on the formulation of policy which were properly the functions of the chief ministers.[46]

State patronage was not confined to the scholars. It was exercised also in favour of a group which commanded a far broader social following, the Buddhist and Taoist clergy.[47]

We have already mentioned the use made by the empress of religious symbolism and ceremonial as a means of legitimizing her regime, and we shall revert to her superstitious involvement with a succession of religious advisers, both genuine and spurious. It is worth making the point, however, that both she and Kao-tsung were deeply religious, although their religious convictions were very different.

In the first years of Kao-tsung's reign, the emperor continued the somewhat reluctant patronage of Buddhism established under his father. Under his patronage, and with state support, the great pilgrim Hsüan-tsang undertook an immensely important project of translating into Chinese the mass of Sanskrit scriptures which he had brought back with him from India.

But in spite of this, and other acts of public piety, Kao-tsung was himself indifferent if not hostile to Buddhism. In 655 he issued an edict making

[44] *THY* 36, pp. 656–7. [45] *TCTC* 202, p. 6376.
[46] *THY* 57, p. 977.
[47] See the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4, for details of Kao-tsung's relations with Buddhism.

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Buddhist priests answerable to ordinary law, instead of being tried according to the special *Tao-seng ko* (*Regulations for priests and monks*) promulgated in 637. This move met with such a storm of protest from the clergy, including the venerable Hsüan-tsang for whom Kao-tsung felt deep personal respect, that the emperor was forced to withdraw his edict. Hsüan-tsang also raised the question of the precedence of Taoist priests over the Buddhists, which had been established by T'ai-tsung, but the emperor was unsympathetic. In 657 he also raised the perennial question of whether Buddhist monks should acknowledge the normal hierarchical relationships of society, and do obeisance to their parents and to the throne. In 657 an edict forbade monks to receive homage from their parents or seniors, a compromise arrived at after yet another public outcry. In 662 he asked the court to discuss the broader issue of monks offering reverence to their parents and to the throne, a problem which had defeated both Kao-tsu and T'ai-tsung before him. After violent protests from the clergy, a court debate was held, in which opinion was almost equally divided, and a compromise solution by which monks would do homage to their parents but not to the throne raised such continued protests that the edict was shelved.

Although Kao-tsung's head-on collision with the clergy on this essentially political issue was a failure, he did real and lasting damage to Buddhism in 664 (after the death of Hsüan-tsang) when he discontinued the vast translation project, which was still far from complete. Kao-tsung gradually turned his attention away from Buddhism and began to show a growing devotion to Taoism, which seems to have dated from about 660. After Hsüan-tsang's death several Taoist adepts achieved strong personal influence over the emperor, and were given court positions.

The emperor's support of Taoism took more positive forms than the patronage of individual adepts. After the completion of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in 666, for example, Lao-tzu was granted new and resplendent titles,[48] while the erection was ordered of both Buddhist and (for the first time) also Taoist temples in every prefecture.[49] The Taoists thus acquired what the Buddhists had had for many years, a network of state-sponsored monastic communities. In 675 the emperor ordered the compilation of the first collected version of the Taoist canonical scriptures. In 678, he also placed the Taoist clergy under the control of the Court of Imperial Clan Affairs (Tsung-cheng ssu) to acknowledge formally the mythological identification of the royal house with Lao-tzu.[50] At the

[48] *CTW* 12, p. 13b; *TTCLC* 78, p. 442.
[49] *THY* 48, p. 850; *CTS* 5, p. 90; *Fa-yüan chu-lin* 10, in *TD* 53, p. 1027c.
[50] *THY* 49, p. 859; *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 39, in *TD* 49, p. 369a.

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same time the main Taoist scripture, the *Tao-te ching*, was made a compulsory text for the state examinations, on the same footing as the Confucian canonical works.

Nevertheless, after the abandonment of the translation project in 664, Kao-tsung carefully avoided any step which would have antagonized the immensely powerful and well-organized Buddhist clergy and laity. He held debates in the palace between the proponents of the two faiths, and in 668, following a particularly acrimonious exchange, ordered the destruction of the *Lao-tzu hua-hu ching*, a forged sutra which claimed that the Buddha was in fact the same person as Lao-tzu, and which had been a constant source of irritation.

Meanwhile, the patronage of Buddhism passed into the hands of the empress. She came from a very pious Buddhist family, and was clearly seen as patron and protector by the Buddhists wishing to approach the emperor. She was also a major patron of religious building, and responsible for great numbers of images carved at the great cave temples of Lung-men during her period as empress.

In 674 she succeeded at last in revoking the edict issued by T'ai-tsung giving the Taoists precedence over the Buddhists at all religious ceremonies. Henceforth the two were to be on an equal footing. This was a first, but all-important step towards the final establishment of Buddhism as the state religion in 691, after the empress had achieved supreme power for herself.

All these measures were also important political moves. By them, the emperor and empress established their standing as the patrons of the two religions whose influence extended throughout the empire and at every level of society.

The empress had need of such broad-based support, for after the completion of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in 666, court politics underwent changes which were not altogether in her favour.

About that time the empress went through a crisis involving some members of her own clan who had been appointed to high office at court following her own elevation as empress. By then, feeling secure in their positions and personal influence, they began to deny their dependence upon the empress Wu, and to treat with disrespect her maternal relatives – the still extremely powerful former Sui royal house, the Yangs. In the eighth month of 666 the empress was forced to move against them, and had her two half-brothers and an uncle put to death on fabricated charges of their having poisoned the emperor's current favourite, the lady Wei-kuo, the daughter of her own elder sister who was married to a courtier named Ho-lan Yüeh-shih. Rumour persisted that she had committed the murder herself.[51]

[51] *TCTC* 201, p. 6350.

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After the fall of Shang-kuan I in 664 the only surviving long-term chief minister was Hsü Ching-tsung, who continued to exercise unchallenged authority on the empress's behalf. He was, however, by then an old man of seventy-two, and the top levels of government clearly needed strengthening in the face of the growing financial and military problems facing the dynasty. In 665 a small group of new chief ministers had been appointed, but these had all been dismissed after a year or two, to be replaced by two of Kao-tsung's most successful generals, Chiang K'o and Liu Jen-kuei, who were frequently away from court on military expeditions. In 667, the emperor, feeling the lack of reliable advisers, appointed a new group of strong chief ministers, who restored at least the semblance of normality to the court's proceedings.

These new chief ministers were certainly not representatives of a new element in the ruling class, nor were they puppets subservient to the empress. Yang Hung-wu was the son of a brother of the Sui-period *éminence grise*, Yang Su, and thus related to the empress through her mother. Chao Jen-pen was a prominent official from Shan-chou in western Ho-nan, who had had a distinguished career in the Censorate and Board of Civil Office. Li An-ch'i, whose grandfather and father had held in turn the highest office in the Secretariat under the Sui and the early T'ang, had been an infant prodigy, and had served in a succession of high court offices. He had also been engaged in the various state literary enterprises of the 640s and 650s. He came from a prominent clan in northern Ho-pei. Also from the same province were the last two members of the group, Tai Chih-te (?–679), the nephew and adoptive heir of Tai Chou who had been a notable chief minister under T'ai-tsung; and Chang Wen-chuan (605–77), a protégé of Li Shih-chi and a member of a Ho-pei clan which produced a quite extraordinary crop of high officials in the late seventh century. Although only Chang Wen-chuan among this new group is known to have taken an examination, all of them were distinguished scholars.

Later in 667 Li An-ch'i was sent out to a provincial post, and in the next year Yang Hung-wu, already an elderly man, died. Chao Jen-pen fell out with Hsü Ching-tsung and was dismissed as chief minister. But Tai Chih-te and Chang Wen-chuan remained as chief ministers until their deaths in 679 and 678 respectively, giving a continuity to the administration which it had lacked for some years.

The appointment of this new group of ministers was probably connected with the serious internal problems which the dynasty began to face as the costs of the Korean campaign escalated. In 666 for example, the entire revenues of Ho-pei, China's richest and most populous province,

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were sent to provide for the Korean expeditionary army in Liao-tung.[52] The government's attempt to solve its problems by debasing the currency (see below) proved a disaster. The situation was made still worse by a series of famines and natural disasters in 668, 669 and 670. The emperor was forced to cut back on various extravagant projects, and in 670 the problem had reached such proportions that the empress, in a gesture which undoubtedly was not meant to be taken seriously, offered to resign in order to appease the supernatural powers.[53]

At this time she underwent two more family crises. First, in the ninth month her mother, who had been a very influential ally at court thanks to her noble connections, died.[54] Second, Ho-lan Min-chih, the son of her elder sister who had been murdered in 666, became involved in a serious scandal. The empress had had his surname changed to Wu so that he could succeed to her father's titles after the killing of her half-brothers. Min-chih, a notorious philanderer, had overstepped the bounds by abducting and raping the daughter of Yang Ssu-chien, who had been chosen as the bride for the heir apparent. The empress, as always quick to dispose of embarrassing associates, had him exiled to the far south and killed, and a purge of his known associates followed.[55]

In this same year, 670, the empress lost the support of her oldest and staunchest ally, Hsü Ching-tsung, who retired aged seventy-eight, and died two years later. There appears to have been an almost immediate reaction against him. Some of the court wished to give him a disrespectful posthumous title, ostensibly because of his callous behaviour in banishing his own son to the far south, and in marrying his own daughter to the son of a southern tribal chieftain in exchange for a huge dowry. His biographers also mention his reputation for licentiousness and avarice, and in 673 the national history which he had compiled was ordered to be revised to eliminate the biased judgments and untruths which he had included. The reaction was a natural revulsion against the man who had dominated the T'ang court for fifteen years and who above all had made possible the empress's political supremacy.

However, just when it appeared that the empress's influence might be on the wane, the emperor's health again took a turn for the worse. At the end of 672 the heir apparent was forced to conduct court business in his place, and after a brief improvement in the emperor's health, again had to resume these duties in the eighth month of 673. In 673 the emperor's health was so bad that the aged and eminent Taoist physician Sun Ssu-mo was called in to treat him. Early in the next year 674 his condition was so

[52] *TCTC* 201, p. 6351.
[53] *TCTC* 201, p. 6365.
[54] *TCTC* 201, p. 6365.
[55] *TCTC* 202, p. 6367.

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serious that there was a formal court discussion as to whether the empress should not provisionally take charge of the government.

This move was blocked thanks to the strong opposition of the courtiers and the chief ministers, notably Ho Ch'u-chün and Li I-yen. The court at this time was dominated by a fairly large and stable group of experienced and competent chief ministers: Tai Chih-te, Chang Wen-chuan, Li Ching-hsüan, Ho Ch'u-chün and Liu Jen-kuei who was almost constantly in the field as a general. These ministers began to restore at least the appearance of normality to the processes of government, although the empress continued to influence affairs by means of her personal secretariat.

Late in 674 she made a public bid for wide favour, with a memorial suggesting a twelve point reform programme which made sweeping concessions both towards the common people and towards the members of the bureaucracy. The various recommendations probably expressed pious hopes rather than real policy, but they showed a shrewd appreciation of contemporary problems. The main provisions were as follows:[56]

(1) To encourage agriculture and sericulture and reduce taxes and labour services.
(2) To grant remission of taxes to the metropolitan districts.
(3) To cease military operations, and to transform the empire by the virtue of the Way.
(4) The departments of public works (Chung-shang) in charge of palace buildings were forbidden to indulge in extravagantly fine workmanship.
(5) To reduce wasteful employment of corvée labour.
(6) To increase the opportunities for the expression of opinions to the throne.
(7) To suppress slander.
(8) To ensure that everyone from the princes and dukes down were to study the *Tao-te ching*.
(9) To ensure that even when the father was still alive, mourning was to be observed for the full three-year period in respect of the mother.
(10) All honorific officials who had received their documents of appointment before 674 were not to have their cases re-examined (and could thus retain their titles, however earned).
(11) The salaries of all metropolitan officials of the eighth rank and above were to be increased.
(12) All long-serving officials whose talent was greater than their rank were to be promoted.

[56] *HTS* 76, p. 3477; *CTS* 5, p. 99; *TCTC* 202, p. 6374.

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These proposals were in the main incorporated in an edict and promulgated. Dealing in very general terms with long-term problems, they were calculated to win favour from the officials and the taxpayers. In addition they showed signs both of the empress's interest in improving the standing of women, and of the emperor's own devotion to Taoism. Further concessions were made in 675 with the abolition of some levies which had been raised to pay for the wars in Korea and the north-west.

In 675 another move was made to restore the 'normal' pattern of government, when Tai Chih-te and Liu Jen-kuei were appointed as the vice-presidents of the Department of State Affairs, the main executive ministry which had been without any chief officials since the late 650s. With this move, the executive organs of government regained a voice in the deliberations of high policy by the chief ministers.

The chief ministers themselves were joined in 676 by a new group. Lai Heng was an elder brother of the former chief minister, Lai Chi, a man from Yang-chou. Kao Chih-chou (602–83) was another southerner from southern Kiangsu, who had passed the *chin-shih* examination, and had had a notable official career spent mostly in scholarly office. He had been involved in the great literary compilations of the 650s and had been a tutor to the heir apparent. Li I-yen (d. 688) was also a *chin-shih* graduate, but from a very prominent Ho-pei clan. He had been a protégé of Li Shih-chi in early life and had served mainly in the provinces until about 665 when he was promoted to high central office. An imposing and learned figure, Kao-tsung held him in great respect. He had been one of the chief opponents of the move to make the empress regent in 674. Lastly there was Hsüeh Yüan-ch'ao, member of a prominent clan from southern Shansi. He had been a precocious scholar as a young man, and a favourite of T'ai-tsung who had married him to a minor royal princess. He had been a member of Kao-tsung's household when he was heir apparent and a compiler of the *Chin history*. After Kao-tsung's accession, Hsüeh Yüan-ch'ao served in a succession of prestigious offices in the Chancellery and Secretariat. Apparently destined for the highest office, he was disgraced at the time of Shang-kuan I's execution in 664 and banished to the far south. He was reprieved by an amnesty in 674, and immediately appointed to high central office. He too was a powerful influence on the emperor until he was forced to retire through ill health in mid-683.

These men, all senior officials of unblemished reputation, helped to provide a remarkably stable leadership at court until the 680s. But by then the empress had established her own means of circumventing or influencing court discussion, through her Scholars of the Northern Gate, chief of whom were Liu Wei-chih and Yüan Wan-ch'ing, who acted as her own

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agents and private secretariat, gradually encroaching on many matters that were properly the concern of the chief ministers.

In 675 a major obstacle was removed from the empress's way to power with the sudden death of the heir apparent, Li Hung, who was not only a great favourite of the emperor himself, but universally liked and admired by the court.[57] During the emperor's recent illnesses he had conducted affairs very ably, and shortly before his death he had begun frequently to take the emperor's side against the empress. Almost immediately prior to his death he had a public dispute with her about the unjust treatment of two of the daughters of the murdered Hsiao Shu-fei; they had been immured in the palace for twenty years and left unmarried. It was widely believed at the time that the empress had Li Hung poisoned. After his death the emperor announced to the court that he had been prevented only by illness from abdicating in his favour, and he took the unusual step of giving Li Hung the posthumous title of *hsiao-ching huang-ti*, as though he had actually been monarch.[58]

He was immediately replaced by Li Hsien, Prince of Yung, the emperor's sixth son by the empress Wu, to whom we shall revert shortly.[59]

The empress then began to remove other members of the royal family who posed a potential threat to her. In 675 Li Shang-chin, the emperor's third son by one of his minor consorts, was banished to the wilds of Hu-nan on trumped up charges.[60] In the next year 676, the scholarly Li Su-chieh, the emperor's fourth son by Hsiao Shu-fei, showed signs of trying to influence his father. The empress had already excluded him from attending court since 666 on the false pretext that he was sick, and in 676 he was promptly banished on false accusations of official corruption.[61]

In 677 a very strong group of notable senior officials was appointed to posts in the new heir apparent's entourage, and when in 679 the emperor was once again incapacitated, the heir apparent took charge of court affairs and dealt with matters wisely and promptly, winning great praise. The empress having disposed of Li Hung was now faced with another potential rival.

In the next year she moved against him. Some time before yet another magician and sorcerer named Ming Ch'ung-yen had gained the favour of both the emperor and herself, and had secretly prophesied that the heir apparent was unsuited for the successsion, while the empress's other sons both had the physiognomy of future rulers. In the fifth month of 679

[57] *CTS* 86, p. 2830.

[58] *TCTC* 202, p. 6377; *CTS* 86, pp. 2829–30; Kuo Mo-jo, *Wu Tse-t'ien*, p. 125; Lü Ssu-mien, *Sui T'ang Wu-tai shih* (Shanghai, 1959), vol. 1, p. 137.

[59] *THY* 4, pp. 42–3.

[60] *TCTC* 202, p. 6377.

[61] *TCTC* 202, pp. 6381–2.

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Ming Ch'ung-yen was murdered by thieves who were never apprehended, and the empress believed that Li Hsien had been responsible.[62] She began writing letters reprimanding the heir apparent, and her tame 'Scholars of the Northern Gate' composed two works *Biographies of filial sons* (*Hsiao-tzu chuan*) and *Model of government for an heir apparent* (*Shao-yang cheng-fan*) as admonitions directed against him. Also, rumours began to be circulated around the court and palace that the heir apparent was not really the son of the empress, but of her elder sister the Lady Han-kuo, who had entered the imperial harem with her in the 640s.

Li Hsien was a sensualist who was on terms of unacceptable intimacy with some of his household slaves, and this had already aroused official complaints. The empress then made a formal complaint to the throne, and the emperor appointed three of his highest ministers, Hsüeh Yüan-ch'ao, Kao Chih-chou and the newly-appointed chief minister, P'ei Yen to investigate the allegations. In the course of the inquiry they discovered several hundred suits of armour in the heir apparent's stables, and came to the conclusion that he was planning a coup. The prince's favourite slave also under interrogation accused him of murdering the magician Ming Ch'ung-yen.

The emperor, who was very fond of Li Hsien and clearly dubious about the charges, still wished to pardon him. But the empress imposed her will on him and the heir apparent was reduced to commoner status and sequestered in Ch'ang-an. He was later banished to Szechwan, where he was forced to commit suicide some years later. There was clearly public misgiving about this case, for the armour which had been found was ordered by the empress to be publicly burned in Lo-yang so that the populace and the officials could see the evidence of the prince's guilt.[63]

Various prominent men were also implicated in Li Hsien's fall. One of the chief ministers, Chang Ta-an, was sent in disgrace to banishment in Szechwan. Two more royal princes, Li Wei, Prince of Chiang, and Li Ming, Prince of Ts'ao, were demoted and exiled to the far south-west. Several of the other great ministers had been tutors to Li Hsien. Although they were pardoned and reinstated the accusation undermined their authority.[64]

The Prince of Ying, Li Che, the emperor's seventh son, and his third by the empress Wu, then became heir apparent, on the twenty-third day of the eighth month, 680.[65]

In the following years the situation at court remained relatively stable.

[62] *TCTC* 202, pp. 6390, 6397.
[63] *CTS* 86, pp. 2831–2; *THY* 4, pp. 42–3; *TCTC* 202, p. 6397.
[64] *TCTC* 202, p. 6398.
[65] *THY* 1, p. 4.

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The new heir apparent was a boy of fourteen and unable to play an active political role. By that time the emperor's health was so precarious that he was no longer a threat to the indomitable empress and seems to have been content with his nominal role as sovereign. In 681 Ho Ch'u-chün, who had publicly opposed the empress's appointment as regent in 674, was deftly removed from the rank of chief minister and appointed a tutor to the heir apparent – a post holding perils which must have been self-evident.

The empire was by that time in the grip of a financial crisis, brought on by decades of ruinously expensive wars, and latterly made more acute by a new spate of construction of palaces and public buildings. Prices had risen to unprecedented heights, vast numbers of peasants fled to underdeveloped areas of the empire in an attempt to seek relief from taxation, and year after year reports came in of famine and drought. The court, however, had little idea of how to solve these problems. Apart from the disastrous decision to cut down on the minting of cash – already in short supply – the only positive proposal put forward by the court to solve the dynasty's financial problems was a plan to sell off horse-dung from the imperial stables.[66]

The emperor, when fit enough, occupied himself with such trivialities as sending an expedition to the Yangtze to search for rare species of bamboo. He had also, once again under the influence of the empress, begun preparations for conducting a new series of *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, this time on each of the five holy mountains (*wu yüeh*) in turn. The sacrifices had been scheduled for both 676 and 679, but had to be cancelled because of renewed trouble on the frontiers. The empress then planned the ceremonies for new year 684, to put the final seal of heaven's approval on Kao-tsung's reign.

But late in 683 the emperor's health became so bad that the ceremonies had to be cancelled yet again.[67] The emperor was suffering from dizziness and loss of sight, and may have had yet another stroke. An attending physician prescribed bleeding Kao-tsung. Although the empress opposed this, Kao-tsung insisted, and as a result regained his sight.[68] The empress's detractors have been fond of using this episode to prove that she did not want Kao-tsung to recover, and that she hoped he would die. But by that time her husband was no threat to her supremacy, and there was always a risk that his successor would prove to be independent of her control.

Although Kao-tsung had obtained temporary relief, his condition soon worsened. On the fourth day of the twelfth month, 683, he summoned

[66] *TCTC* 202, pp. 6400–1.
[67] *THY* 7, pp. 101–4.
[68] *TCTC* 203, p. 6415.

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P'ei Yen, the senior chief minister, and gave him his last will, commanding that the heir apparent should ascend the throne in front of his coffin, and that important affairs of state which could not be decided by the young emperor alone should be settled in consultation with the empress Wu.[69] He died the same day.

KAO-TSUNG'S INTERNAL POLICIES

Kao-tsung, who was on the throne longer than his father and grandfather combined, is usually dismissed as a sovereign who initiated very few important institutional policies. However, there was little need for administrative innovations: the basic machinery of government had been established under Kao-tsu, and improved and rationalized by T'ai-tsung. Kao-tsung inherited a stable state with a smoothly functioning set of institutions, and with a system of administration governed by a centralized system of statute law, in which the authority and responsibility of each office was carefully restricted and defined by law. The military and financial systems had been so devised that direct intervention of the central administration was kept to a minimum. Active government policy was kept within strictly drawn limits: the maintenance of order, military matters, and the administration of the land and tax systems. This system of government proved remarkably durable, and remarkably resilient in the absence of strong direction from the top. It survived the strains of Kao-tsung's reign, the empress Wu's usurpation, and the restoration of the T'ang after her fall. It was calculated to continue functioning with the minimum of active direction from the centre.

The basis of this institutional machinery was the system of codified law and administrative regulations which kept the administration functioning smoothly, and this was a continuing concern throughout Kao-tsung's reign.

One of T'ai-tsung's deathbed instructions to his heir was to revise and update the Code and administrative Statutes.[70] This was done, and in 651 a large committee of high-ranking officials led by Chang-sun Wu-chi presented to the throne the newly revised edition of all the categories of codified law – Code, Statutes, Regulations and Ordinances, which the emperor had ordered. The new laws were promulgated throughout the empire by an edict of the ninth month of 651.[71] They were a thoroughgoing revision, and became one of the most important and influential of all T'ang series of laws, called the Yung-hui Code and Statutes. In the

[69] Text in *TTCLC* 11, p. 67.
[70] *TTCLC* 11, p. 67.
[71] *THY* 39, pp. 701–2; *WYYH* 464, pp. 5b–7a; *TTCLC* 82, pp. 470–1.

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next year, Kao-tsung appointed another large commission including several legal experts to produce a detailed official commentary to the penal Code, which could be used in legal education. This commentary, which survives in somewhat modified form as the *T'ang-lü shu-i*, was completed and presented to the throne in the ninth month of 653, and was to remain, with minor revision, the authoritative commentary on penal law for several centuries.[72]

These monumental works having been completed, systematic efforts were made during Kao-tsung's reign to update codified law. Such updating involved the codification into Regulations (*Ko*) of legislation which had originally been issued in edicts, and minor modification of the Ordinances which embodied the detailed rules for the implementation of the law. In 665, after all the titles of offices had been altered, Kao-tsung ordered the chief officers of the Board of Justice to revise the Regulations and Ordinances.[73] Yet another, more far-reaching revision was ordered in 676 and completed in early 677, when not only the Regulations and Ordinances, but also the Statutes – the main body of administrative law, were revised.[74] Yet another revision was carried out shortly after Kao-tsung's death, in 685.[75]

The reign of Kao-tsung was thus certainly not a period when the law was neglected. On the contrary, codified law was carefully revised and updated at roughly twelve-year intervals – more regularly than in any other period during the T'ang.

It was also a period when there was considerable activity by individual legal scholars and commentators. Two officials prominent at the court, Chao Jen-pen (chief minister, 667–70) and Ts'ui Chih-t'i produced private collections of precedents, *Fa-li*, which were commonly used in the law school in the seventh century. Ts'ui Chih-t'i's unofficial work became such a convenient ready-made digest of law that its use in the courts had to be banned in 677.[76]

Another area of government where Kao-tsung's achievement was far greater than his predecessors' was the reorganization of the examination system, and the increasing use made of recruitment by examination during his reign.[77] The numbers of graduates in government, and the number of candidates, began to grow rapidly, and the influence of examinations began to be felt at the top levels of the bureaucracy. Several of Kao-tsung's

[72] *THY* 39, p. 702; *CTS* 50, p. 2141.
[73] *CTS* 50, p. 2142; *THY* 39, p. 702.
[74] *TTCLC* 82, p. 471; *WYYH* 464, pp. 7a–8a; *TLT* 6, p. 18b; *CTS* 50, p. 2142; *THY* 39, p. 702.
[75] *CTS* 50, p. 2143; *THY* 39, p. 702; *WYYH* 464, pp. 8b–9a.
[76] See Denis Twitchett, 'The fragment of the T'ang Ordinances of the Department of Waterways discovered at Tun-huang', *AM* (NS) 6.1 (1956) 25.
[77] *WHTK* 29, p. 276c.

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chief ministers held examination degrees, and a considerable number of officials began to enter the service in this way. However, this trend should not be exaggerated. Graduates remained a minority among officials, a large proportion of whom still entered by hereditary privilege or by the even more common means of transfer from the clerical service. In 656, for example, no less than 1,400 clerical officers qualified for transfer, in a year when only twenty-two men passed the *chin-shih* examination.[78]

It has often been said that the recruitment of men through the examinations was a conscious attempt to increase support for the empress Wu's new regime, by introducing a new social element into the ruling class. But there is little evidence to support this view. Candidates could be entered for the examinations in two ways: either from one of the state schools at the capitals, admission to which was reserved almost exclusively for the sons of the nobility or of high-ranking officials; or by being presented as 'tribute' by their local prefectures. The latter route, the only one by which a man from a lowly-esteemed family could hope to be entered for the examinations, did not produce many successes. In 670, for example, only one out of eleven successful *chin-shih* was a provincial candidate; in 681 one out of fifty-one, and in 682 one out of fifty-five.[79]

Another interesting feature of the alleged deliberate use of the examinations by Kao-tsung and the empress to change the social composition of the bureaucracy, is the fact that the examination system was suspended on several occasions: in 652–3, in 663, 669, 671–2 and 676–9. Throughout the rest of the dynasty, in contrast, the examinations were held annually with very few exceptions. In other words, in the years following the empress Wu's complete dominance of the court in 660 – a period when she is supposed to have been busily recruiting a new ruling elite through the examinations – no examinations *at all* were held in ten years, while in 665 all the candidates – at least for the *chin-shih* – were failed. Only in 670, 673–5 and 682–3 were large numbers of candidates passed. The average number of *chin-shih* passed annually during 660–83 was only eighteen.[80]

The real achievement of Kao-tsung's reign was not this dubious attempt to alter the social balance of the ruling class, but the series of sweeping changes in the examinations themselves. In 651 the *hsiu-ts'ai*, the top-ranking examination under the Sui and the early T'ang, was discontinued. It had never been taken by more than a handful of candidates. In 656 a new specialist examination in mathematics and a special school to train students for it, was added to the existing specialist examinations in law

[78] *CTS* 81, p. 2751; *WHTK* 29, p. 276c.
[79] *T'ang chih-yen* (TSCC edn), 1, p. 8.
[80] *WHTK* 29, p. 276c.

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and 'calligraphy' (in reality philology and palaeography) which had been established under T'ai-tsung. Like them, it was reserved for the sons of low-ranking officials or commoners. However, in 658 all the specialist schools and specialist examinations were discontinued. In 662 they were revived under the control of the government departments which employed their graduates, the law school being placed under the Supreme Court of Justice (Ta-li ssu), the mathematical school under the Imperial Observatory service (T'ai-shih chü) and the school of calligraphy under the Imperial Library (Pi-shu sheng). The schools probably again became part of the State University in 671.[81]

The examinations (*chü*) gave their graduates only the right of entry (*ch'u-shen*) to official service, a right which many more persons acquired in other ways. In 657, for example, it was estimated that there were three times as many qualified persons as there were appointments available for them. To select men for appointment to substantive posts from this pool of qualified persons, a system of selection examinations (*hsüan*) was used. As it existed under T'ai-tsung and early in Kao-tsung's reign this system was extremely haphazard. In 669 P'ei Hsing-chien drew up a detailed set of rules governing the selection examinations, which determined selection for office and for promotion for the rest of the dynasty.[82] The empress is said to have ensured that the objectivity of the selection examinations would be guaranteed by concealing the names of candidates (*hu-ming*), so that their identity and social origins could not affect the issue.

The examinations (*chü*) themselves also underwent a sweeping reform in 681, which again established their pattern for the rest of the dynasty. Until this time the *ming-ching* and *chin-shih* examinations had been very similar. Both had examined candidates on the composition of dissertation essays; only the subject matter (classical scholarship and interpretation for the *ming-ching*, political affairs for the *chin-shih*) had differentiated them. The reform of 681 completely changed both examinations. The *ming-ching* then became an examination demanding close textual knowledge of the canonical books (those since 678 had included the Taoist classic *Tao-te ching* as well as the conventional Confucian canons), and their conventional interpretation. It became basically an examination stressing memory and conformism. The new *chin-shih* also demanded a knowledge, somewhat less detailed, of canonical literature, but required in addition that candidates compose literary pieces including verse in prescribed formal styles, as well as writing dissertations on political or philosophical questions. From this time onwards, the much more difficult *chin-shih* degree began

[81] See R. des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1947), p. 454, n. 8.
[82] *THY* 74, p. 1347.

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to confer far greater prestige than the *ming-ching*, which had previously been the more highly regarded qualification.[83]

Another innovation, which remained comparatively rare under Kao-tsung but which was later to become extremely influential, was the holding in 658 of the first palace examinations, organized at the emperor's own order for specified candidates.[84] In later reigns, such examinations came to be regarded almost as highly as the *chin-shih*.

The all-important system for the examination and selection of officials was thus radically reformed during Kao-tsung's reign. The system as it functioned at the height of T'ang power in the eighth century was essentially a legacy of his reign.

Kao-tsung's policies, the building of a new capital, the constant increase in the size of the bureaucracy, and above all the constant large-scale warfare which continued throughout the reign, placed a constant and growing strain upon the empire's finances.

The main financial problem under Kao-tsung was one which he had inherited from T'ai-tsung's reign. The basic taxation system of head taxes, if it was to operate efficiently, required the detailed registration of all households, so as to establish who was liable to tax. Under the Sui, in 609 over 9,000,000 households had been registered; in T'ai-tsung's reign less than 3,000,000.[85] This sensational decline was not the result of catastrophic loss of life during the civil warfare of late Sui and early T'ang, but of simple failure by the local authorities to register the population in full. Even in the first years of Kao-tsung's reign only 3,800,000 households – certainly far less than half of the actual population – were registered.[86] Considerably more than half of the population was thus unregistered and paying no taxes. Kao-tsung was aware of this problem, as his father had been, but although minor moves were made to improve the registration system in 654 and 677, the basic problem remained.

No changes were made in the taxation system, although it appears that certain parts of the empire were permitted to pay tax in commodities other than grain, so as to reduce the costs of transporting tax grain to the capitals. An attempt was made in 656, and again later, to eliminate the traffic bottleneck caused by the San-men rapids on the Huang-ho, and open up easier transport to Ch'ang-an for the tax grain from the north-eastern plain, but both failed.[87] In 672 the canal to Ch'ang-an along the Wei valley was improved,[88] but the haulage of grain to the principal capital remained costly and laborious.

[83] For details see *Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.
[84] *THY* 76, p. 1386.
[85] *TFYK* 486, p. 11b.
[86] *THY* 85, p. 1557; *TFYK* 486, p. 12a.
[87] *THY* 87, p. 1595; *HTS* 53, p. 1365.
[88] *TT* 10, p. 56c; *TFYK* 497, p. 8a.

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With the increasing costs of government and expanding official expenditure, the economic situation of the country as a whole seemed to have deteriorated. T'ai-tsung's reign had in general been a period of prosperity and low prices, and these continued until the early 660s. Before this, however, it was clear that the supply of officially minted coin was completely inadequate. Counterfeiting on a massive scale became a major problem, especially in the Yangtze valley, where the money economy was most firmly rooted. In 660 the government attempted to buy in counterfeit coin at a discount,[89] but neither this measure, nor the imposition of ever harsher penalties for counterfeiting, succeeded in solving the problem.

The situation reached a crisis point in 666 when the government, in a desperate effort to meet its overwhelming financial commitments, deliberately debased the coinage by minting a new copper coin of much the same metal content as the normal cash, but with a face value ten times greater.[90] Although the disruption of trade which followed was so serious that the new coin had to be withdrawn at the beginning of the next year, this ill-conceived measure seriously unsettled the economy.[91]

The last years of Kao-tsung's reign were also marked by a long succession of bad harvests. In 670 grain was so scarce that wine brewing had to be prohibited.[92] In the late 670s and 680s bad harvests, floods, droughts, plagues of locusts and famines succeeded one another until a crisis point was reached. About 680 the price of grain reached unprecedented levels,[93] and the government, believing that the high prices were the result of too much money in circulation, drastically reduced the minting of new cash, and imposed harsher measures than ever against counterfeiting.[94] Meanwhile, the problem of households fleeing from the place where they were registered, to settle as unregistered and untaxed squatters elsewhere, began to assume serious proportions. Kao-tsung's reign ended in a still unresolved economic and financial crisis.

In spite of this general failure, under Kao-tsung the government did establish measures to control prices which were partially successful and continued in use throughout the T'ang period. Grain was periodically released from the government's central granaries and sold off at low prices; on one occasion, in 679, it was even sold in exchange for counterfeit coin. Much more important, however, was the further development of the price regulating granaries (*ch'ang-p'ing ts'ang*) set up in some major cities in 639. In 655 price regulating offices were set up in the capitals to buy in goods at above current market prices in times of glut, and sell

[89] *CTS* 48, p. 2095; *THY* 89, p. 1623.
[90] *CTS* 48, p. 2095; *THY* 89, p. 1623.
[91] *TTCLC* 112, p. 582.
[92] *TFYK* 504, p. 5b.
[93] *TT* 7, p. 40c; *TCTC* 203, p. 6410.
[94] *CTS* 48, pp. 2095–6; *TLT* 22, p. 29a. See Twitchett, *Financial administration*, p. 290, n. 8.

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them off below market prices in times of shortage, in an attempt to keep price fluctuations within limits. Later, such granaries were set up in every prefecture.[95] The relief granaries (*i-ts'ang*) established under T'ai-tsung were also continued, as an insurance against local famine. After 651 the collection of grain for their stocks was based on the assessment of each household's wealth, rather than as a levy on the acreage of cultivated land, probably because of the insufficient land data included in the registers.[96]

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Whatever the verdict on internal politics during Kao-tsung's reign, this period saw the T'ang rise to a peak of military power and prestige, surpassing even that of T'ai-tsung. For a few brief years the dynasty controlled greater territories than any Chinese empire before or since, and the influence of Ch'ang-an was felt throughout most of central and eastern Asia. However, given the increasingly serious financial difficulties besetting their dynasty at home, Kao-tsung and the empress Wu strained Chinese military capacity beyond reasonable limits in making these conquests, and over-extended their defences. This, coupled with the rise of powerful new states in central and northern Asia, eventually forced a contraction of the Chinese frontiers. By the last years of Kao-tsung's reign, large portions of the T'ang empire had once again been surrendered, in some cases permanently, to the 'barbarians'.

The Western Turks

Largely as a result of T'ai-tsung's shrewd diplomacy, at the time of his death the Western Turks had been seriously weakened by internal strife, and their qaghan, To-lu, had been replaced by I-p'i she-kuei, who was a T'ang vassal. At the time of To-lu's fall from power, one of his subordinates, A-shih-na Ho-lu, fled to China where he was appointed a general in the Chinese army, and made governor-general of a prefecture in Lung-yu (Kansu). As soon as Ho-lu heard of T'ai-tsung's death, however, he rebelled against the T'ang, invaded I-p'i she-kuei's territory to the west, and overthrew him. Proclaiming himself Sha-po-lo Qaghan (reign 651–7) he then went on to reunite the Western Turkish empire under his own rule. Within a short time he was in control of the whole Tarim basin, and of a vast territory stretching beyond the Pamirs to the borders of Persia.

Incessant Turkish incursions across the Chinese border compelled

[95] *TLT* 20, pp. 19b–22a; *CTS* 44, p. 1890; *THY* 88, p. 1612; *TFYK* 502, p. 22b.
[96] *THY* 88, p. 1612.

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Kao-tsung to send an expeditionary force against Sha-po-lo Qaghan. After some inconclusive fighting lasting several years, in 657 the T'ang general, Su Ting-fang, finally broke the Western Turkish military power in a battle fought near the Issyk-Kul. Sha-po-lo fled to Tashkent, whose people turned him over to the Chinese.

Kao-tsung then divided the Western Turks once again into two federations, the Tu-lu and the Nu-shih-pi, and placed rival qaghans, both vassals of the T'ang court, at their heads. The home territory of the Western Turks, in the region of the Ili valley and the Issyk-Kul, was put under the control of two Chinese protectorates-general (*tu-hu fu*) whose territories coincided roughly with the previous eastern and western divisions of the Western Turkish empire. Other foreign people previously under the suzerainty of the Western Turks in western Sinkiang, Russian Turkestan and the valley of the Oxus, were also placed under formal Chinese control in 659 and 661. The T'ang empire then stretched from the China Sea all the way to the borders of Persia, and part of the new territory under Chinese control was named the 'Persian' government-general (Po-ssu *tu-tu fu*). These new territories were, however, so vast, and T'ang forces spread so thinly, that it is not surprising that this further extension of T'ang authority lasted only briefly. At the beginning of 665 both the Tu-lu and the Nu-shih-pi tribal federation rebelled against their pro-T'ang qaghans, and regained their independence from the Chinese.

This western expansion took place in the aftermath of sweeping political changes in Persia. During T'ai-tsung's reign the Sassanid dynasty had been destroyed by the Arab invasion. The Persian king, Yazdgard III had sent a mission to T'ai-tsung in 638 asking for aid in repelling the Arabs. The king's son Prince Fīrūz, who had led the mission, settled in Ch'ang-an where he established a Persian court in exile during Kao-tsung's reign. Kao-tsung allowed him to build a Zoroastrian temple in the capital. According to one account, in 677 Kao-tsung sent a Chinese army to help the prince regain his throne. However, the Chinese force escorted Fīrūz only as far as Kucha, and then turned back. His attempt at a restoration proved a complete failure, and Fīrūz returned to Ch'ang-an where he died. A large Persian minority remained in the Chinese capital

Under Kao-tsung, China first established contact with the Arab conquerors of the Sassanid kingdom. The first Arab embassy, sent by the fourth caliph, 'Uthmān, is said to have presented tribute at the T'ang court in 651.

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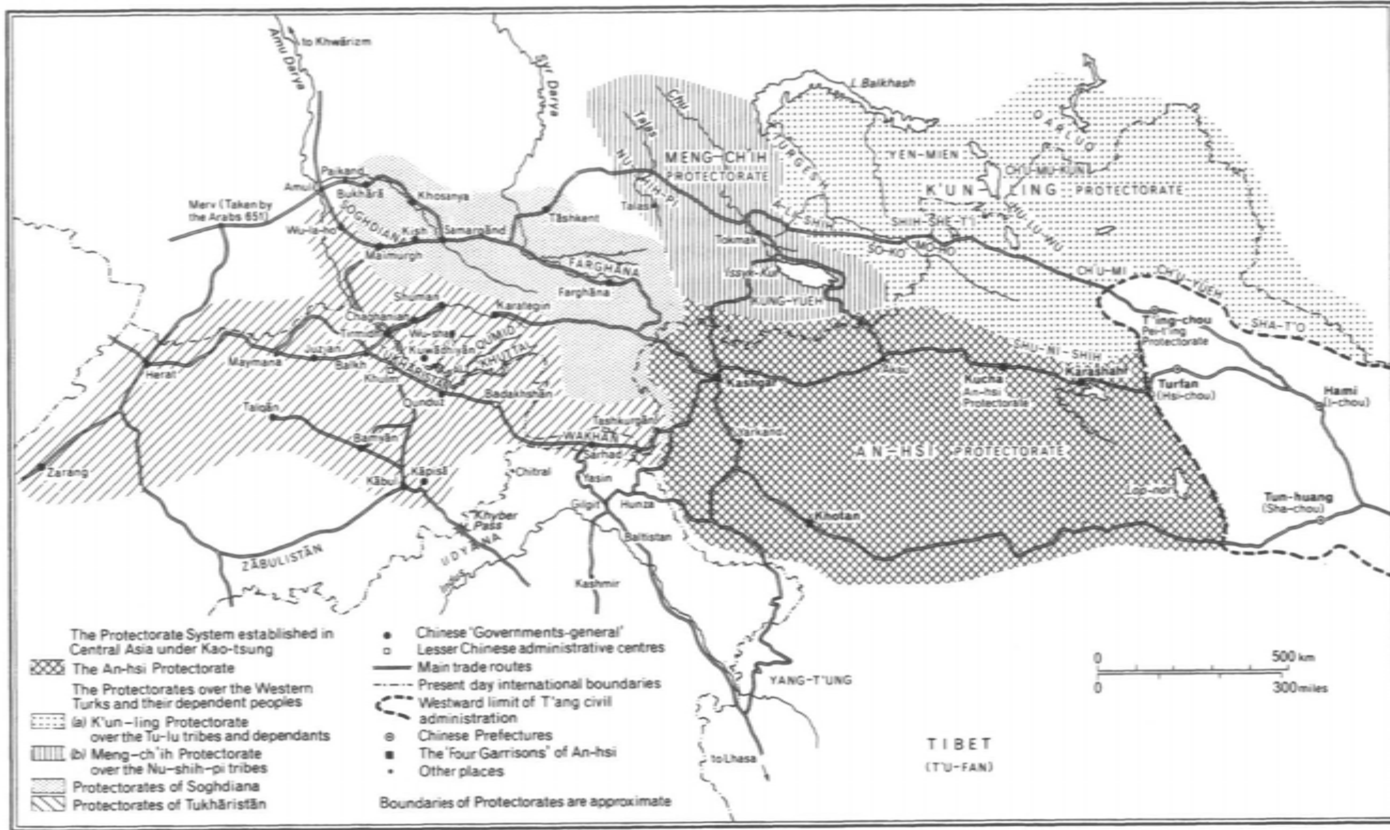

Map 8. Kao-tsung's protectorates in central Asia

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The Korean peninsula

T'ai-tsung had hoped that the great campaign of 649 would lead to the final conquest of Koguryŏ, but it was cancelled at his own command just before his death. This only intensified the aggressive ambitions of Yŏn Kae-so-mun, the dictator of Koguryŏ. In 655 he attacked the Khitan (Ch'i-tan) people in southern Manchuria, who had declared themselves Chinese vassals in 648. In 656 he allied himself with the Paekche kingdom in the south-west of the peninsula to invade northern Silla, seizing more than thirty towns. In the meantime, Silla had attempted to persuade Kao-tsung to join with her in eliminating the power of Koguryŏ. To Kao-tsung this plan must have seemed very attractive, doubly so since Silla was rapidly adopting many elements of Chinese culture, and modelling her institutions on Chinese lines.

The two allies decided to attack the small state of Paekche from two fronts, and then use it as a base for an invasion of Koguryŏ itself. By 660 full preparations had been made, and the Chinese general Su Ting-fang sailed across the Yellow Sea from the Shantung peninsula with a force of troops said to have numbered 100,000, and landed near Sabi, Paekche's capital on the Kum River. Simultaneously, 50,000 troops from Silla smashed Paekche's western defences and laid seige to Sabi. Surrounded on all sides, the King of Paekche fled from his capital, and his son surrendered the city and his country to the T'ang. The Paekche royal family were taken as hostages to Ch'ang-an, and Chinese officials were established throughout the conquered kingdom, backed up by 10,000 Chinese occupation troops.

With Paekche secured as a base, Kao-tsung (or perhaps the empress, who had taken over the government during her husband's recent illness) planned a multi-pronged invasion of Koguryŏ by Chinese forces advancing both from Paekche, and from Liao-tung. An expeditionary force from the north, under Su Ting-fang penetrated deep into Koguryŏ and laid siege to P'yŏngyang. But the Chinese forces in Paekche were tied down by a rebellion and were unable to join in the assault. An attempt by Silla to assist Su Ting-fang arrived too late, and the Chinese army was forced to withdraw. The resistance movement in Paekche, led by a general named Poksin, who temporarily restored the royal house, was not finally subdued until late 663. The rebels were aided by the Japanese, who lost more than four hundred ships in a great naval battle with the T'ang forces at the mouth of the Kum River.

The situation changed in favour of the Chinese with the death in mid-666 of Yŏn Kae-so-mun, which was followed by internal dissension

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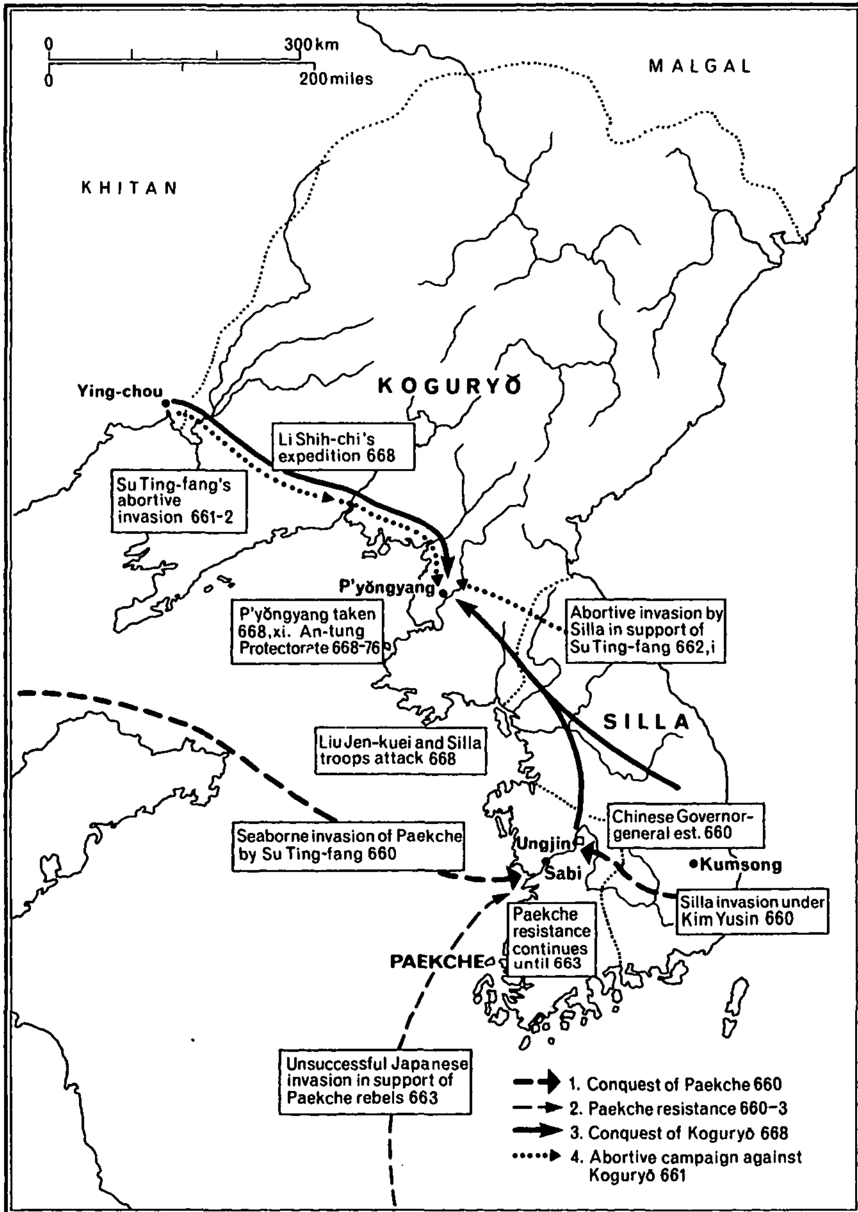

Map 9. Kao-tsung's interventions in Korea

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between his successor and the latter's two brothers. When the new dictator asked for Chinese assistance against his rebellious brothers, the T'ang responded by mounting a massive land and sea campaign against Koguryŏ under the command of the aged Li Shih-chi. A large force from Silla joined in the assault from the south. In the ninth month of 668, as the climax to a series of T'ang victories, Li Shih-chi took the Koguryŏ capital, P'yŏngyang, after a month-long siege, and took back to China with him some 200,000 prisoners, including the Koguryŏ king who was ceremonially presented at the tomb of T'ai-tsung. A Chinese protectorate, with a garrison of 20,000 Chinese troops, was set up at P'yŏngyang to govern the conquered kingdom.

It might seem surprising that the weak Kao-tsung thus succeeded in a massive military venture which had brought disastrous failure both to Sui Yang-ti and to T'ai-tsung. But Kao-tsung enjoyed two advantages denied to his predecessors. The first was the internal disorder in Koguryŏ which followed the death of Yŏn Kae-so-mun, and which seriously weakened her defences. The second was the acquisition of the land base in Paekche which could be supplied by sea, enabling the army to strike quickly at the heart of Koguryŏ and to open a second front. The T'ang army was no longer entirely dependent on the long overland route through Liao-tung, which became a quagmire during the summer rains and suffered from the early onset of its bitterly cold winters.

The T'ang court was, however, unable to enjoy its military triumph for long. In 670 a revolt in Koguryŏ against the occupying forces succeeded in restoring the royal house.[97] Although the revolt was suppressed four years later, resistance to the Chinese occupation continued within Koguryŏ. This was aided by Silla, who was seeking to establish her dominance over the peninsula, and had begun to overrun the former territory of Paekche. In 676 the Chinese were forced to withdraw the seat of their Korean protectorate-general from P'yŏngyang to a more secure location in Liao-tung,[98] and all Chinese officials were recalled from Koguryŏ. In 678 the emperor was dissuaded from mounting a major campaign against Silla, on the grounds that defence against the Tibetans was then far more urgent a matter than control of Korea.[99] Within a few years, Silla had occupied all of Paekche and much of southern Koguryŏ.[100] Meanwhile, the T'ang were increasingly preoccupied with much more serious military matters nearer home. With the bulk of its forces tied

[97] *TCTC* 201, p. 6363.
[98] *TCTC* 202, p. 6379.
[99] *TCTC* 202, p. 6385. For an account of the Korean wars and the subsequent unification of Korea under Silla, see John C. Jamieson, 'The *Samguk Sagi* and the unification wars', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1969.
[100] *THY* 95, p. 1711.

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down in campaigns against the Tibetans in the west, the court was unable to send any more troops to Korea in an attempt to contain the aggressive expansion of its erstwhile ally, and the plan to conquer and administer Korea was abandoned.

The Tibetans

A major development in central Asia was the spectacular expansion of the Tibetans. Beginning under the great king Srong-btsan-sgam-po, this expansion continued unchecked even after his death in 650. Tibetan power pressed in all directions – into the west of the Tibetan plateau, into the borderlands of Yunnan and Szechwan, into Nepal, and northward into the Tarim and the fertile pasturelands of modern Tsinghai province, then occupied by the T'u-yü-hun people. Kao-tsung's court, largely preoccupied with its military problems in Korea during the 660s and 670s, failed for some time to give sufficient attention to this growing threat, with the result that a crucial strategic development was allowed to occur on the western frontier.

In 660 the Tibetans attacked the T'u-yü-hun. In 663 their attacks were renewed, and the Tibetans routed the T'u-yü-hun and drove them from their homeland around the Kokonor. The T'u-yü-hun king had made desperate entreaties for Chinese aid, but these had been refused. Kao-tsung thus stood by while the Tibetans destroyed the only buffer state between Tibet and Chinese territory. With the subjugation of the T'u-yü-hun, the Tibetans gained free access to the borderlands of Kansu, and also to the Tarim basin.

By 670 the Tibetans had begun to encroach upon the various border prefectures which the T'ang had previously set up in the tribal territories on the Szechwan border. Further west they had allied themselves with the Kung-yüeh, one of the tribes of the resurgent Western Turks, and had made great inroads on Chinese territory in the Tarim. In 665 they had joined with the king of Kashgar in attacking Khotan, cutting the southern route through the Tarim basin. In 670, with the aid of the Khotanese king, they struck north, and took Kucha, the seat of the Chinese protector-general of An-hsi, and Karashahr. The Chinese were thus forced to withdraw from most of the Tarim basin west of Turfan, and to abandon the An-hsi protectorate and the 'Four Garrisons' which had controlled the native kingdoms of the Tarim.[101]

Tibetan control of the Tarim basin was, however, none too secure. In 673–5 the kings of Kashgar, Khotan and Karashahr, who had quarrelled with the Tibetans and their Western Turkish allies, reaffirmed their

[101] Ise Sentarō, *Chūgoku seiiki keiei shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 245–6.

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allegiance to the T'ang, and the An-hsi protectorate-general was re-established. Meanwhile, the Chinese had strengthened their hold on the alternative route to the west which ran through Zungharia and the Ili valley north of the T'ien-shan range. This hold they maintained when in 677 the Tibetans again invaded the Tarim, with the assistance of the Western Turkish qaghan. In 679 the Chinese armies defeated the Western Turks, capturing the qaghan, and advanced to take Tokmak, which they made into a fortified base. In the same year the Tibetans were driven from the Tarim kingdoms, and the 'Four Garrisons' (now including Tokmak in place of Karashahr) were once more re-established.

The T'ang were, however, less successful in facing the far more serious Tibetan threat posed against Kansu from the former T'u-yü-hun territories around Kokonor. In 670 a major T'ang campaign led by the general Hsüeh Jen-kuei, and aimed at recouping Chinese losses in this crucial region, ended in disaster, with the loss of almost the entire T'ang expeditionary force. The death of the Tibetan king in 676 led to a succession dispute, and Kao-tsung wished to take advantage of the situation to attack the Tibetans. He was dissuaded, but two years later another major Chinese army numbering 80,000 men was sent under the command of Li Ching-hsüan to attack the Kokonor region. It too came to grief, and the Chinese army was severely mauled by the enemy. The Tibetans continued to raid the borders and to consolidate their hold on the Kokonor region. In 680 they also took An-jung, a strategic fortress in north-western Szechwan, enabling them to establish firm control over the tribal peoples of the Szechwan and Yün-nan border regions.

The T'ang court, by the end of Kao-tsung's reign, were at a loss for any positive policy towards Tibet. The defence of the rugged and inaccessible north-western borders in modern Kansu and Szechwan necessitated the establishment, from 677 onwards, of ever larger permanent armies, whose logistical support, despite the setting up of military colonies (*t'un-t'ien*) to make their troops in part self-sufficient, proved both difficult and expensive. In the meantime Tibetan expansion accelerated at a great pace.[102]

The revival of the Eastern Turks

In 679, almost half a century after the destruction of the Eastern Turkish qaghanate by T'ai-tsung, Turkish tribes rebelled against T'ang control in

[102] *TCTC* 202, p. 6396. The best account of the fall of the T'u-yü-hun is in Gabriella Molè, *The T'u-yü-hun from the Northern Wei to the time of the Five Dynasties* (Rome, 1970). On the internal history of Tibet see Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū* (2 vols., Kyoto, 1958–9); J. Bacot, *Introduction à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris, 1962); R. A. Stein, *Tibetan civilization* (London, 1972), pp. 56–64.

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the region beyond the Great Wall in the north of modern Shansi province. The revolt was put down at the end of 681, after great loss of life on both sides. However, at the end of 682 the remnants of the Eastern Turkish forces were united by Qutlugh Qaghan (A-shih-na Ku-to-lu, the Elteriš Qaghan of the Orkhon inscriptions), a descendant of Hsieh-li. He succeeded in re-establishing the Eastern Turkish state in its old home territories on the upper waters of the Orkhon. Aiding him in his struggle against the Chinese was Tonyuquq (A-shih-te Yüan-chen), a Turk whose family had previously served under the T'ang, and who had received a Chinese education. Under their combined leadership the Eastern Turks proceeded to ravage areas along the border of the modern provinces of Shansi, Shensi and Ning-hsia, throughout the remainder of Kao-tsung's reign. This border warfare was doubly damaging, since the area produced a great proportion of the vast numbers of horses needed by the T'ang cavalry.[103]

When Kao-tsung ordered in his testamentary edict that the empress should be consulted by his heir on important state affairs, he must have been consciously ensuring that the political dominance which the empress Wu had established during his own reign would be continued. Perhaps he had come to the conclusion that China, once again beset by serious troubles on the borders, and by an internal financial crisis, would be better off under her firm if ruthless hand than under a young and inexperienced ruler.

The coronation of the new emperor was delayed for some days, during which the empress, with the aid of P'ei Yen, arranged that she would conduct business through the Chancellery and Secretariat. When the new emperor (known by his posthumous title, Chung-tsung) finally ascended the throne, Wu became empress dowager (*huang t'ai-hou*) with undiminished powers. As we shall see in the next chapter, within months of his succession Chung-tsung had been forced to abdicate, his brother was enthroned in his place, and a palace coup accomplished which reduced him to the status of a puppet. The empress was at last unchallenged ruler of the empire, and the seven decades of rule by the Li-T'ang royal house came to an end.

The empress, rather than her weak-willed and vacillating husband, was the real inheritor of T'ai-tsung's legacy. But later historians were unable to look at Kao-tsung's reign without seeing her dominance of the emperor in the light of her behaviour after his death. She is often pictured as having conducted, in the years between 660 and 683, the same type of ruthless government by terror and intimidation which she exercised in

[103] *TCTC* 202, p. 6388.

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the 680s and 690s. But this was not in fact the case. She actively and openly intervened in politics, by organizing palace coups or court plots, on only four or five occasions during Kao-tsung's life, and then only to establish and later to preserve her position as the power behind the throne. She may have been the real ruler of China, but she had to exercise her power through the emperor and his court. Until his death, Kao-tsung retained considerable personal authority, and he was backed by a powerful element among the highest-ranking court officials who strongly opposed all the empress's attempts to formalize her position. The systematic purges of the bureaucracy were yet to come. During Kao-tsung's lifetime the empress's victims were confined to those who posed a threat to her dominant influence over the emperor – either in the palace, among her own relatives, among the imperial family, or among the court officials. This is not to deny her undoubted power and influence over decisions, or the sheer ruthlessness by which she achieved her ends when necessary. The point is that she achieved her ends by very different means before and after 683.

As we have seen, Kao-tsung's reign was by no means devoid of institutional progress, and was a period of almost unbroken domestic peace, in spite of the vast cost in taxes and manpower of his military adventures and other policies. The population at large gave no sign of being discontented under his regime, and it was only in his last decade that unlimited military expenditure and the necessity of providing the expenses of a swollen and ever-growing bureaucracy finally began to impose a very heavy burden upon the masses. Militarily, the reign saw spectacular successes, but these over-extended the empire's forces, which were finally pushed on to the defensive by the emergence of new foreign rivals. By 683 the empire had even lost some of the border territories conquered by T'ai-tsung and was passing through a major internal crisis.

However, it was not the crisis of the later years of his reign for which traditional historians have attacked Kao-tsung and his domineering consort. The histories are essentially a court record of the central government's activities written by historians who were members of the court, and it was in the conduct of central government at the highest levels that Kao-tsung's reign appeared to them a disastrous turning point. The unity of purpose of T'ai-tsung and his courtiers, the frank and open discussion of issues among the chief ministers, the close personal relationships between ruler and minister which had been the hall-mark of T'ai-tsung's reign, had long since disappeared. They were replaced by a court in which strong leadership was lacking, where discussion was muted, where the atmosphere was one of fear, insecurity, suspicion, mutual slander and

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continual intrigue among the officials. Policy was decided by the empress and her personal entourage, and forced upon the emperor and the court in defiance of the normal forms of government.

Yet even at court all was not totally negative. In the last half of his reign Kao-tsung was served by a remarkably able group of ministers, and some attempt was made to undo the damage which had been done during the years when the empress was climbing to supreme power in 655–64. Until late in the reign the empress's position remained basically insecure, dependent upon her manipulation of the court by indirect means. She was always vulnerable, her position resting on her personal dominance, not on any firm institutional basis. Nevertheless she clearly established herself as a masterly and adroit political figure, and by the end of the reign was so entrenched in her position of power that it was almost inevitable that she should become the overt ruler of China after Kao-tsung's death.

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CHAPTER 6

THE REIGNS OF THE EMPRESS WU, CHUNG-TSUNG AND JUI-TSUNG (684–712)

THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION (684–90)

The fourth T'ang emperor, who ascended the throne as Chung-tsung in the twelfth month of 683, was only the third son of Kao-tsung and the empress Wu. Since his chances for the succession had always seemed remote, he had been prepared neither by upbringing nor by his brief three years as heir apparent for his new dignity, and it was probably for this reason that his father's will had provided for the continuing political influence of the experienced empress Wu. Her intervention, strictly speaking, was to be permitted only 'where matters could not be decided', but she lost no time in showing that an honoured but impotent retirement as empress dowager was far from her mind. The first sign of this was her contravention of the will's provision that Chung-tsung should succeed immediately 'in front of the coffin'; and in delaying the coronation a full week, she revealed both her own ambition, and the fact that she felt certain misgivings about her son's suitability. Too little is known of the character of the new emperor to make judgments on the validity of his mother's suspicions, but it is clear even at this stage of his career, that he had inherited at least one of his father's weaknesses, and had fallen under the domination of his own wife, the empress Wei. Within a month of his accession, he promoted her father, Wei Hsüan-chen, to the rank of chief minister.

The appointment created the first crisis of the new reign. It was unwelcome to the empress Wu, who resented the rivalry of her daughter-in-law, and also to the bureaucrats who had been anticipating a revival of their traditional power with the removal of the empress Wu. Most hostile of all the officials was P'ei Yen, a man from a notable gentry family of Shansi, who had risen through the examination system to become paramount minister as president of the Secretariat. Shortly before Kao-tsung's death, he had successfully asserted his leadership by transferring all ministerial consultations from the Chancellery to his own department, and had seen his prestige further enhanced when he was chosen to receive

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the will of the dying emperor. The entrance into politics of the Wei clan, one of the most extensive and powerful of the Kuan-chung elite, was necessarily inimical to his interests, and he lodged a strong protest against the appointment of the empress's father. The emperor's response to this was singularly ill-considered: 'What is to stop Us from handing over to him the entire Empire? And of what concern to Us is your wretched opinion?'[1] Taken aback at so forceful a rebuke, Yen quickly reported it to the empress Wu, and she chose to take the remark as a literal statement of intent. Summoning the full court, she charged her son with treasonable intent, and calmly read out a Decree of Deposition while the Yü-lin Palace Guard dragged him from the throne. The next day, after a reign of just six weeks, he was replaced by his more compliant 22-year-old brother, Jui-tsung.

The validity of the deposition and also of the Chou dynasty the empress was to found in 690, was not recognized by orthodox historians like Chu Hsi, the great Sung Neo-Confucian whose *Fundamental elements of the comprehensive mirror* (*T'ung-chien kang-mu*) has been the standard historical text in China since the thirteenth century. They regarded Chung-tsung as the legitimate sovereign until his death in 710. In spite of this historical convention, however, there was no doubt in the minds of contemporaries that power was in the hands of the empress Wu alone. In 684, the only question was what further ambitions she harboured.

Nor did the empress seem concerned to allay suspicion. From the beginning, she rejected the former conventions of female control, and after banishing Chung-tsung and his pregnant empress Wei to Fang-chou (Fang-ling) in Hupei, presided openly at the administrative and ceremonial functions of the court, disdaining even to 'hang the curtain'. Upon Wu Ch'eng-ssu, the eldest of her nephews and heir to her father, she conferred the title of Emperor Expectant (*huang-ssu*), and in spite of warnings from ministers like P'ei Yen that she was beginning to resemble the usurping empress Lü of the Han, decided to establish at Lo-yang seven temples to her appropriately-titled ancestors. This action was unprecedented. Arrogating, as it did, a prerogative of the imperial family, it could only confirm apprehension that the empress would not long be content to rule in the name of her puppet son. Together with the Act of Grace of 684, it was the signal for the event which shaped the subsequent era, the rebellion of Li Ching-yeh.

[1] *TCTC* 203, p. 6417; *CTS* 87, p. 2843. The quotation is Chung-tsung's reply when P'ei Yen protested that the office he had conferred on his father-in-law was excessively high.

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Act of Grace, 684

Before passing on to the insurrection, it is useful to examine briefly the text of the Act, for it is typical of many.[2] Throughout the T'ang, documents of the sort were used for the promulgation of important administrative measures, as well as for their original purpose of rewarding merit and pardoning felons on auspicious occasions. Under the empress Wu, they were issued with unusual frequency, for example, on each of the sixteen changes of reign title between 684 and 705. They constitute a useful form of source material, illustrating not only 'the state of the realm', but indicating some of the general policy lines of the empress's government.

The Act begins by transforming the external symbolism of the regime: banners henceforth would be gold with violet trim, and certain officials would wear different robes and insignia. Lo-yang, which the empress had always favoured above Ch'ang-an, was to become the 'Sanctified Capital' (*Shen-tu*), and its palace, the 'Great Beginning' (*T'ai-ch'u*). Reflecting the empress's deep concern with nomenclature, the Act goes on to claim that the titles of some official posts were 'defective', and so must be changed. Of the new names chosen, some harked back to the fabled days of the first Chou dynasty, while others evoked a fairyland of Taoist mythology. Several of the latter, for example the Phoenix Court (Feng-ko, Secretariat), the Luan (a mythical bird) Terrace (Luan-t'ai, Chancellery), and the Terrace of Circumspect Law (Su-cheng t'ai, Censorate), were created at that time and have remained unique in Chinese history. Finally, the mother of the empress Wu was to be canonized as empress dowager, a title whose clear implication was that the empress herself was of imperial birth. It was these measures, so closely akin to those usually preceding a new dynasty, which aroused apprehension and opposition.

A second division of the proclamation praises 'the measureless virtue of the people', and bestowing heavy rewards on the aged, also offers relief to the poor, and pardon to certain categories of criminal. Admitting that taxation, especially in the areas surrounding the two capitals, had become overburdensome, the empress promised amelioration. To demonstrate her thrift, she dismissed numerous palace servants; to show her respect for filial piety, she permitted much-needed garrison troops on the borders to return home to continue their ancestral sacrifices. Provisions like these, the most common feature of the Acts, were particularly lavish under the empress, and are impugned by traditional historians as expediencies 'to win the hearts of the people'. The Marxist school tends to view them rather as instruments of class struggle against the aristocratic and

[2] Full text is in *CTW* 96, pp. 11a–16a; *WYYH* 463, pp. 6b–11a.

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large landlord elements of the population. With the ordinary people of the time, they must have been highly popular.

A final section is that which tries to deal with current problems of government. Rapid territorial expansion in recent years, the empress explained, had caused a decline in the acceptable standards for provincial administration, and outside the capitals corruption was rife. A new branch of the Censorate was to be established to supervise closely the provinces and to make frequent tours of inspection. Another serious abuse was the evasion of taxes and corvée, a problem exacerbated by the administrative confusion following the great increase of population in the recent decades of internal peace. To combat false registration and manipulation of census figures, a close review of administrative units was to be undertaken, and new counties and prefectures created wherever population exceeded the former limits of ten thousand and thirty thousand households respectively. Population growth and redistribution was a major problem in the late seventh century, and though the empress devoted a good deal of attention to it, and at one point attempted to carry out a large-scale re-organization of the provincial (*tao*) system, hostile historiography has denied her credit for this accomplishment.[3] In the Act, she also recognized abuses in the military sphere. Chief among these were falling morale which resulted from the careless distribution of promotions and other rewards, and overlong tours of duty which were transforming the basically defensive and temporary character of the *fu-ping* troops into that of a semi-permanent and professional army. Numerous wealthy persons, moreover, were simply purchasing commissions and never reporting for duty. The empress ordered the officials concerned to punish offences, but seems to have ignored the wider implications of the problem. Lastly, she emphasized the Confucian panacea for solving governmental difficulties – the recruitment to the civil service of 'men of virtue'. All high officials were to recommend one person qualified for bureaucratic appointment. No T'ang ruler had placed such heavy reliance as the empress upon this measure, and coupled with her frequent use of other recruitment methods beyond the examination system, it had resulted in a massive numerical increase of officials. Since 657, criticism had been growing, and in this Act, she was forced to respond with the simple denial that the bureaucracy had become too large.

The list of administrative problems presented in the Act is by no means exhaustive, but is sufficient, perhaps, to illustrate the deterioration of certain institutions of the early T'ang. There were several causes: a long internal peace had fostered both population growth and economic and

[3] *CTS* 94, pp. 2993–4; *HTS* 123, pp. 4367–70.

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commercial development, and an expansionist foreign policy had necessitated new forms of border administration and defence. Other developments, which, like the examination system, were essentially social in their implications, had caused much ferment, especially in the form of 'rising expectations' among those whose lack of lineage in the highly aristocratic milieu of the early T'ang had closed the door to rapid advancement and the highest official positions. In short, the 'legacy' of T'ai-tsung had become outmoded, and the empress Wu was no innovator. The most optimistic historian must admit that she failed to rationalize the system she inherited: but on the other hand, the main policies she pursued – enhancement of the imperial prerogative and the central power, conquest of the 'barbarians', and 'winning the hearts' of the people – all combined to expose the shortcomings of the system. And it was her legacy to Hsüan-tsung, principally in the form of a new and highly competent type of official working in a new context, which made genuine reform possible. At the beginning of her own reign, she had lacked this advantage, and throughout her period of power, was hampered, furthermore, by the biological fact of her womanhood. The severity of Confucian injunctions against female rule meant she could never be accepted in her position,[4] and she soon developed an obsession with security which made her put self-protection and self-glorification before all else. The primary cause of this was the rebellion of Li Ching-yeh.

Reign of terror

The rebel leader was the grandson of Li Chi, conqueror of Korea and an early supporter of the empress. He had died in 669, his accumulated honours assuring his descendants of great prestige and of privileged entry into the civil service, and Ching-yeh had begun his career in the bureaucracy. Recently, however, he had taken up residence in Yang-chou, at the junction of the Yangtze and the Grand Canal.[5] In the brash yet indolent atmosphere of this commercial centre, most of his close companions were, like himself, men of family and repute dismissed for various offences from official posts. All of them naturally sought an opportunity to restore their lost fortunes, and by mid-684, the general uncertainty about the empress's ambitions helped to create the ideal climate for a rising.

The aims of the rebels were ambiguous. Although the ostensible motive

[4] See Yang Lien-sheng, 'Female rulers in imperial China', *HJAS*, 23 (1960–1) 47–61; Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Wu Chao yü Fo-chiao', *CYYY*, 5.2 (1935) 137–48. The latter cites a number of references drawn from the classical tradition.

[5] On Yang-chou during the T'ang see Ch'üan Han-sheng, 'T'ang Sung shih-tai Yang-chou ching-chi ching-k'uang ti fan-jung yü shuai-lo', *CYYY*, 11 (1947) 149–76.

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was the restoration of Chung-tsung, they also produced and placed nominally at their head a man whom they claimed to be (and who closely resembled) his elder brother, the dead Li Hsien. It may well be, therefore, that Ching-yeh had no intention of restoring Chung-tsung, and to mask dynastic ambitions of his own borrowed the deposed ruler's name to gain support. For the same reason he attempted to blacken the empress, and a follower, Lo Pin-wang, composed on his behalf a brilliant polemic[6] which began:

The woman Wu, who has falsely usurped the throne, is by nature obdurate and unyielding, by origin truly obscure. Formerly she was among the lower ranks of T'ai-tsung's servants, and served him by changing his clothes. When she reached mature age, she brought disorder into the heir apparent's palace, while concealing her private relationship with the former emperor. She then plotted to gain favour in the Inner Chambers.... With her mouth concealed behind her sleeve, she skilfully slandered the other women; with crafty flattery and perverse talents she deluded the ruler. She then usurped the pheasant regalia of empress and entrapped our ruler into an incestuous relationship.

And then with a heart like a serpent and a nature like that of a wolf, she favoured evil sycophants while destroying her loyal and good officials. She has killed her own children, butchered her elder brothers, murdered the ruler, poisoned her mother. She is hated by the gods and by men alike; neither heaven nor earth can bear her. Yet she still harbours disastrous intentions, and plans to steal the sacred regalia of the ruler. The beloved sons of the ruler are sequestered in a separate palace, and she has given the most important offices of state to her own alliance of bandits.

He continued with a series of historical allusions describing the baleful effects of women dominating the politics of former regimes, and then made a forceful plea to his fellow officials to join him in rebellion.

I Ching-yeh am a former minister of the imperial T'ang, the eldest son of a noble family. I received the Will of our former emperor. I owe a debt of gratitude for the liberal graciousness of our ruling dynasty....My spirit rises in anger like the wind and clouds; my will is set upon restoring tranquillity to the altars of the soil and grain. Because the whole world has lost hope, and the people of the empire have put their faith in me, I therefore raise the standard of righteous rebellion, in order to purify the empire of baleful omens of disaster....

You, my lords:...Some of you have been entrusted with weighty charges by [the late emperor's] words; others have received the dying command of the late emperor in the audience chamber. His words are still in your ears. How can loyalty have fled your hearts? The earth covering his tomb is not yet dry. Where are his orphan children, not yet grown to maturity? We may yet change misfortune to good fortune, show homage to the dead emperor and serve his living successor. You should one and all arise and devote yourself to acting

[6] *CTS* 190A, pp. 5006–7. The full text of Lo Pin-wang's manifesto is in *CTW* 199, pp. 1a–2a; *WYYH* 646, pp. 11b–12b.

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for the ruler! Do not allow our former emperor's orders to be brought to nothing....I ask you: look at the world at the present time. Which house's empire is it?

The allegations of the manifesto are, of course, highly inaccurate, though they probably reflect a good deal of contemporary belief. Hostile historians have been only too ready to adopt it as a source, and some of the charges have found their way into otherwise reputable histories. Its circulation was both wide and rapid, and the empress is recorded as having seen a copy in the early days of the rebellion. Her reaction was both typical and revealing. What fools her ministers were, she said, to allow a man of such literary talent as its author to languish in provincial obscurity without official appointment! In spite of its skill, however, the manifesto failed to attract much sympathy for the rebel cause, and the insurrection was crushed in less than three months. Part of the reason for its failure was the empress's policy of rewards for those who resisted the rebels and amnesties for those coerced into joining them. More important were Ching-yeh's failings as a commander. On several occasions, a lieutenant urged him to seek support in the Shantung–Hopei area where, he said, were to be found the finest fighting men and the greatest dissatisfaction with the 'dictatorship' of the empress Wu.[7] Recent studies have tended to confirm this strategy, showing that throughout the T'ang, the area in question possessed a traditional antipathy to rule from Ch'ang-an, and that especially in times of economic difficulty and barbarian invasion, this sentiment bordered on separatism. Ching-yeh, however, elected to remain in his Kiangsu base, and here was unable to increase his forces beyond the hundred thousand who had joined him in the first days of the rebellion. When an imperial force three times the size of his own marched against him, the outcome was not long in doubt; and had this been the extent of the rebellion, its consequences would have been far less serious. However, from the empress's point of view, the real danger arose from the rebel's connections at court. In the ninth month of that year, when the rising was at its height, P'ei Yen was arrested and charged with treason.

The indictment at the time was complicity with the rebels and the planned seizure of the empress on a projected trip to the Cave Buddhas of Lung-men, and in the absence of real proof, his guilt or innocence has been the subject of much historical debate.[8] Almost certainly, the empress believed him guilty, and judging by her reaction, the effect was

[7] *TCTC* 203, pp. 6426–7. The strategy was suggested by Wei Ssu-wen, who is otherwise unknown.

[8] *TCTC* 203, pp. 6425–6; the *k'ao-i* to this passage examines the conflicting evidence. Kuo Mo-jo, who made P'ei Yen the villain of his play *Wu Tse-t'ien* (Peking, 1962), discusses the problem in an appendix, *ibid.* pp. 144–5.

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profound. Impatiently brushing aside the traditional defence of Yen's friends who offered to die in his place, with the words, 'We know P'ei Yen rebelled and you have not!' she acted with speed and decision. Yen was degradingly executed in the market-place, and the most prominent of those rash enough to defend him, the 'Terror of the Turks', General Ch'eng Wu-t'ing, was beheaded in the midst of his unprotesting troops. By this time, Ching-yeh had been defeated and murdered by his own subordinates, and the empress's revenge on him took the form of desecrating his grandfather's tomb and stripping the family of all honours. Following this, says one source, she assembled the full court, and reproached it with her own unsparing labours on behalf of the state, and with the gratitude each member owed her for his present position. Raising the example of her three slain enemies, she concluded, 'They were regarded as eminent, yes, but they were inimical to Us and We were able to destroy them. If any of you believe that you surpass these three, then make your move straight away. If not, you must reform your hearts and serve Us, or else become a laughing stock for the entire Empire!'[9] The ministers kowtowed.

Once betrayed, however, the empress was determined to ensure more positively that it should never happen again. For this reason she instituted a horrifying reign of terror which only the most abject of her Marxian apologists have attempted to justify. Its origins are difficult to trace, most sources seeing the beginning at Chung-tsung's deposition when a member of the 'Flying Horsemen' (*fei-ch'i*) hunting attendants received a huge reward for the denunciation of those of his fellows who complained of the loss of their perquisites with the fall of the sport-loving emperor. Although there were signs prior to this of the empress's attempt to surround herself with loyal men by frequent demotions and shifting of posts, this was the first recorded instance of summary execution for opposition outside the court. From the suppression of Li Ching-yeh's rebellion, there rose to power in the Censorate and the Board of Justice certain officials whose biographies appear in the official dynastic history under the special category 'Evil'. Led by Chou Hsing and Lai Chün-ch'en, they set in operation a network of spies and informers, and in a specially-constructed prison extracted 'confessions' from their victims by forgery, torture and other methods later described by Lai in the gruesome handbook, *Classic of entrapment* (*Lo-chih ching*).[10] In early 686, the activities of these evil officials were supplemented by the establishment of officers-in-charge of the urn (kuei), an institution which endured to the

[9] *TCTC* 203, p. 6432. The passage translated is quoted from an early source, the *T'ang t'ung-chi*, in the *k'ao-i*. Ssu-ma Kuang rejects this story.
[10] *TCTC* 203, pp. 6439–40; *CTS* 186A, p. 4838. On Lai and Chou see *CTS* 186A, pp. 4840–2.

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end of the dynasty.[11] For this department, a bronze urn was constructed, and anyone who wished could place a message in one of its four openings. The first was for self-recommendations and schemes to improve agriculture or the people's welfare, the second for criticisms of the government, the third for complaints of injustice, and the fourth for omens, prophecies and secret plots. The original intention, probably, was to compensate for the rigours of the terror and to propagandize the empress's concern for her people. Before long, however, the urn became little more than a repository for anonymous and often false denunciations.

Little can be said in favour of the terror, but on the other hand, centuries of traditional historians may have gone too far in unremitting condemnation.[12] A balanced view might suggest that it was born of well-grounded fear. The empress allowed it to continue even after realizing its evils, because she saw the use of intimidation to one fighting an inflexible tradition against female rule, and because she knew she could control its worst excesses. As an historical phenomenon, the terror had implications which the indignation of chroniclers has led them to ignore.

One result, certainly, was the transformation of the political climate. No minister could thwart the empress without fear of being handed over to the secret police, and consequently, no minister ever gained over her the degree of ascendancy which officials like Wei Cheng held over T'ai-tsung. The latter is known more than once to have withdrawn edicts in deference to ministerial protests. In 688, when Liu Wei-chih refused an edict not ratified by his own department of the Secretariat, the empress was so angered by the ingratitude of 'he to whom We have given employment' that she immediately ordered him to commit suicide, or else be executed.[13] And there are many other instances of this 'style' of rule which traditional historians so love to contrast with 'the good government of Chen-kuan'.[14]

A second series of ramifications of the terror was social. Perhaps because the empress remembered that the common people had refused to support the rebellion, and that it was among the highest officials that she had found her enemies, she directed her reprisals against the latter group.

[11] *THY* 53, pp. 956–9; *TCTC* 203, pp. 6437–8.

[12] The most recent example is in Lin Yutang's historical novel *Lady Wu – A true story* (London, 1957) where the author, in a signed footnote, gives the extraordinary opinion that the empress Wu was a mass murderer comparable with Stalin or Chinggis Khan. Recent Chinese communist historians have gone to the other extreme, excusing Wu's terror as simple self-preservation. See for example Lü Chen-yü, *Shih-lun chi* (Peking, 1962), pp. 174 ff.; and Wu Han, *Teng-hsia chi* (Peking, 1961), pp. 140 ff.

[13] *CTS* 57, p. 2296; *TCTC* 204, p. 6444.

[14] See for example *CTS* 186A (Biographies of evil officials); also Lin Yutang, *Lady Wu*, pp. 134–40.

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One source, speaking of the final purge of 697, says the majority of her victims were 'virtuous scholar-officials and celebrated families of the realm', meaning, in effect, officials above the fifth rank, and especially high officials in the central administration, rather than provincial officials.[15] Because the charge against them was usually sedition, the penalty extended to their families, who were banished or enslaved, and to their property, which was confiscated. Even for less serious charges, their sons were denied admission to the examinations, and recent studies have shown that several hundreds of the proud aristocratic families who comprised the bulk of the upper aristocracy in the early T'ang suffered a serious decline during this period. In spite of amnesties before and after the restoration, some took generations to recover and were weakened permanently in the competition for high office with a lower stratum of society.[16] A quite different social implication resulted from decrees of the 680s, which empowered informers to travel at public expense from every corner of the empire to make denunciations. Thereafter, unprecedented incidents of illiterate commoners rewarded with high posts for informing, and of slaves denouncing their masters, became numerous. Officials warned the empress that these measures 'caused turmoil in the empire' and 'brought disquiet and uncertainty to the lives of the people', and the meaning must also have included the ferment caused by special commissioners combing the provinces for disloyal elements, and by the sad processions of the once-mighty plodding the long road to exile in Ling-nan.[17] For years, the empress disregarded these protests, probably because she was aware of the compensating advantage of these policies. They served as tangible reminders everywhere of the power of the central government, and of its head, herself.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that in the terror, the judicial system survived a very severe test. Injustices did occur, but mainly where the secret police acted upon confessions extracted either by torture or by promises of clemency towards the family of their victim. The empress often presided at trials or reviewed important cases, and when courageous censors like Hsü Yu-kung confronted her with miscarriages of justice, they were almost invariably upheld.[18] It is quite possible that the empress was sincere when, after having executed the last of her secret police in 697, she expressed regret that she had allowed herself to be misled by her former chief ministers into imposing unduly harsh punishments.[19]

[15] *TCTC* 206, pp. 6512–13; *CTS* 57, p. 7b; *CTS* 186A, p. 4849.

[16] Among the victims were members of the T'ai-yüan Wang clan, the Li clan of Lung-hsi, the Yü-wen and the celebrated genealogist Lu Ching-ch'un.

[17] Hamaguchi Shigekuni, *Tō ōchō no sennin seido* (Kyōto, 1966) pp. 218–44.

[18] *CTS* 85, pp. 2817–20; *HTS* 113, pp. 4188–92; *TT* 169, pp. 894c–897b; *TFYK* 616, pp. 1a–8b, and 617, pp. 13a–16a.

[19] *TCTC* 206, p. 6523.

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The initiation of the terror is sometimes taken as the definitive sign of the empress's intention to usurp the throne. On the other hand, there are indications in the following years that she would have been content to continue ruling in the name of Jui-tsung, thereby sparing herself at least a part of history's opprobrium. One of these is that in 685, she took her first lover, a burly pedlar of cosmetics (and aphrodisiacs), introduced by her daughter, the T'ai-p'ing Princess. The affair rapidly became a public scandal, and in order that his uncastrated presence might be tolerated in the palace, she had him ordained, and audaciously installed him as abbot of China's most prestigious monastery, the Pai-ma ssu. The new monk, known to history as Hsüeh Huai-i, was soon lording it over the capital with his band of ruffians, insulting officials and assaulting Taoists; and the empress, who had remained faithful to her invalid husband while he was alive, seemed to have fallen into a state of infatuation. More and more she spent time with him alone, and was at pains constantly to excuse his 'eccentricities' to irate ministers. In early 686, she offered to return full power to Jui-tsung, but, says the history, the latter 'perceived her insincerity and declined'. Probably she was insincere, but it is a fact that from that time, she was never to devote the same degree of attention to the tedious details of day-to-day administration. The monk was to enjoy her favour for almost a decade, and in return, he served her in such varied capacities as general against the Turks, and more capably, as chief architect, in 688, of that garish jewel of all T'ang buildings, the Ming-t'ang.[20]

Administrative reform

It should not be concluded, however, that the empress became neglectful because of her *affaire* with the monk. If her style of rule in this most unsettled period of her career became more personal and her pleasures became more open, her vigilance in administration was little relaxed. Several campaigns were mounted against the escalating border threat of the Turks and Tibetans, and the An-pei protectorate reorganized.[21] In the civil realm, she again revised the Code and Statutes in 685,[22] deputed censors to supervise the growing economic activity of monks in the capitals, and throughout the period created new administrative units to cope with demographic shift and growth, especially in Chiang-nan. The bureaucracy was greatly expanded. Reflecting the empress's concern that no man of talent be overlooked, special 'decree examinations' supple-

[20] On the Ming-t'ang see C. P. Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu* (London, 1956), pp. 131–2. The documentation on its development under the T'ang is in *THY* 11–12, pp. 271–300.

[21] *THY* 73, pp. 1309, 1315; *TCTC* 203, p. 6435.

[22] *THY* 39, p. 702; *CTS* 50, p. 2143.

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mented the regular ones in qualifying more men for service each year, and gentry and commoners alike were permitted to recommend themselves.[23] New posts were created both in the capitals and the provinces: market commissioners, registrars and correctors of the ruler's oversights. The personnel of the six boards was increased, and for a time, the quality of administration improved. At the same time, the empress's interest in literature was demonstrated by the huge literary compilations issued under her name. She is said to have helped plan a new translation of the sacred book of her favoured Buddhist sect, the Hua-yen, and later to have participated in the editorial work, when she installed the learned Khotanese monk, Siksānānda, at Lo-yang.[24] In this period, the four capital libraries were, for the first time, required to submit an annual catalogue of holdings.[25]

The empress also showed awareness of growing economic difficulties, though her solutions were piecemeal and largely ineffective. Ever since the commercial dislocation caused by the failure of a new coinage in 666, prices in China had been rising, and by Kao-tsung's death, the cost of rice was almost a hundred times that of the prosperous 630s. Furthermore, a series of bad harvests, coupled with the growing costs of defence and civil service expansion, and with the spread of tax evasion, was placing ever-greater strain upon the government. By 677–8 fiscal problems had reached almost crisis proportions. Precedents for dealing with such a situation were not lacking, nor was ministerial advice, but the empress preferred to rely upon expedients. In 684, when the government could not pay the full salaries of the lower bureaucracy, she provided it instead with extra servants.[26] The year 687, in which most of north China was prostrate with famine, saw in the remote southern province of Ling-nan an instance of armed resistance to the collection of increased taxes.[27] Suppression was swift and efficient, but the source of the grievance ignored. It is probably true to say that the greatest of the empress's failures was her lack of economic policies.

In spite of her numerous administrative activities in these years, the empress devoted her major efforts to the search for support and security. One aspect of this was the system of delation: another was the frequent issue of measures designed to win popularity. Three times there were Acts of Grace although the full text of only one, the last, in 689, has

[23] *TFYK* 639, p. 20a; *TT* 15, p. 83a; *THY* 75, p. 1376; *THY* 76, p. 1390; *WHTK* 29, p. 272a.
[24] See Kamata Shigeo, ***Chūgoku Kegon shisōshi no kenkyū*** (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 107–49. Although Kamata is concerned mainly with her attitude to the Hua-yen sect he provides much information on her relations to Buddhism in general.
[25] *THY* 35, pp. 643–4.
[26] *THY* 91, p. 1652.
[27] *TCTC* 204, p. 6445.

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remained extant.[28] In view of the fiscal problems of the time, it seems extravagantly generous. Rewards of wine, silk, cattle and grain were conferred throughout the empire on the poor, the filial and those families who had lost a son in battle. Tax debts were remitted to coax back to the land peasants who had fled from registration; and in those areas which had suffered from the Turkish campaign of the Hsin-p'ing army, and in those milked for the construction of the Ming-t'ang, there was to be a year's tax exemption. Local officials were to curb the growing ostentation of the unpopular merchant class, and to protect from land-grabbers those families weakened by the absence of a son in military service. And while she engaged in the blatant 'winning of hearts', the empress also embarked upon the creation of an imperial aura about herself. Temples, palaces and public works arose everywhere in Lo-yang, and at the centre, the court and entourage of the empress became more and more sumptuous. The T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an soon paled in comparison. The empress herself appeared frequently in public, leading magnificent ceremonies, and attempting to associate herself in the public mind with glory and with the golden Chou dynasty whose ritual she frequently evoked. The culminating step in this process was to take place in 689, in the most brilliant celebration China had ever seen – the veneration of the *pao-t'u*.[29]

The *pao-t'u* was a white stone, bearing the prophecy, 'A Sage Mother shall come to Rule Mankind; and her Imperium shall bring Eternal Prosperity'. It was discovered in the Lo River in 688, and all sources agree that it was fabricated by the empress's nephew, Wu Ch'eng-ssu, the most persistent advocate of her usurpation. Not even consistently hostile historians like Ssu-ma Kuang suggest that the empress herself had any part in it, and it is entirely possible that the combination of her vanity and her oft-demonstrated credulity in (favourable) omens convinced her that the prophecy referred to herself. It was undoubtedly an important factor, perhaps the decisive one, in her decision to usurp the throne, for her actions from the time of its discovery allow no other interpretation. Leading the entire court to the Altar of Heaven, she declared the Lo River sacred, prohibiting fishing there, and she took for herself the title, 'Sage Mother, Sovereign Divine'. The term 'sovereign' (*huang*), free of sexual connotation, was a significant choice. Then, she began planning a lavish ceremony at which she would formally venerate the omen and change the reign title to 'Eternal Prosperity' to accord with the prophecy. She planned to combine these celebrations with the opening of the newly-

[28] *CTW* 96, pp. 16a–22b; *WYYH* 463, pp. 1b–6b.

[29] See *TCTC* 204, pp. 6448–9. The empress regarded this omen so highly that she officially entitled it T'ien-shou sheng-t'u ('Heaven bestowed holy stone'), and adopted 'Heaven bestowed' as the first reign title of her new dynasty.

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completed Ming-t'ang, and decreed that all prominent people in the empire, without exception, should assemble in Lo-yang for the festivities. This, of course, included the collateral members of the imperial Li family, most of whom were serving as prefects in widely scattered parts of the country.

For the T'ang princes, the invitation was not a welcome one. In the last years, they had been driven more and more from any meaningful role in politics, and lived, as one source puts it, 'without an inch of land to call their own'. Well informed of events at the capital, and clearly aware of the danger of their position as barriers to the empress's ambition, the princes were probably plotting counter-moves even before receiving the summons to the capital.[30] They were precipitated into action, however, by warnings that the empress was preparing a death-trap. Realizing that mass refusal to attend the ceremony could also condemn them, they decided upon rebellion. The moving spirit in the rising was Li Chuan, grand-uncle of Jui-tsung, and prefect of T'ung-chou in Szechwan. He forged edicts and sent secret messengers to his relatives in every direction, working against time and difficulties of communication to coordinate the insurrection. His plans, however, were ruined by an over-hasty levy of troops in Po-chou in Ho-pei, where Li Ch'ung, a nephew of Kao-tsung, was prefect. This area, as we have noted, possessed a strong warlike tradition and separatist tendencies, and so was probably the most fertile area for a venture of this sort, yet Ch'ung could raise no more than five thousand men.[31] Even these were less than enthusiastic, and melted away at the first set-back. Before the main body of imperial troops arrived on the scene, the rebellion there was over and Ch'ung dead, the victim of his own subordinates. In Yü-chou, near Lo-yang, the prefect was Li Chen, father of Ch'ung and brother-in-law of the empress. Realizing that his son's action had doomed him, he felt he could only rebel in his turn, and using every means at his disposal, managed to recruit a few thousand men. These also fled before the loyalist army, and with the defeat and suicide of Li Chen, the so-called Princes' rebellion came to a swift end.[32]

This rising constituted the last internal resistance to the empress Wu, and though it was scarcely a genuine threat, punishments, horrifying in their disproportion, continued well into 691. Until that time, the Li family, guilty and innocent alike, was systematically decimated. Only a few children, exiles in the far south, survived. Traditional historians are

[30] *CTS* 76, p. 2661.

[31] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955), pp. 75–81 reviews the special conditions in Ho-pei in the early T'ang, with full references.

[32] *TCTC* 204, pp. 6449–52. This account can be supplemented by the details given in the various biographies of the princes in *CTS* 64, pp. 2431–2; *CTS* 76, pp. 2661 ff. On the aftermath of the rebellion see *TCTC* 204, p. 6457.

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unanimous in condemning the empress's brutality, but grudgingly admit that in crushing the rebellion she had the support of the country.

The most prestigious members of the Li family, using edicts they claimed were from the legitimate ruler, could raise no significant enthusiasm for their cause. Even Ssu-ma Kuang, who is otherwise invariably critical of the empress, states specifically that of the five hundred members of Chen's group who bore official rank, all but one had been coerced into joining![33]

The empress's success in quelling the rising must have been, for her, additional confirmation of heaven's favour. In the twelfth month of 688, she presided in imperial regalia over her delayed ceremony, which the sources describe as the 'most magnificent of the entire T'ang era'. In it, the sacrifices to her father were those appropriate to the founder of a dynasty, and the ritual, predictably, was that of the ancient Chou. For years, the empress had been associating herself with this most-admired of dynasties, imitating its official titles, its architecture, its ceremonial and calendar. Just as the Li family had claimed Lao-tzu as its progenitor, she had taken as her first ancestor, the celebrated duke Wu of Chou. It seems likely, therefore, that she chose to call her own dynasty 'Chou', not because her father had been awarded (posthumously) the fiefdom of Chou, but rather for reasons of association. Ambitious rulers before her, and not only usurpers like Wang Mang, had used the same tactic. Her aim was the re-creation, at least symbolically, of that absolute perfection which history taught had been achieved in the first Chou.[34]

Two further steps paved the way to usurpation. The first, in what may be seen as an implicit comparison of the empress Wu with the legendary inventor of Chinese script, was the promulgation of a number of new characters which were to be substituted for the older forms of such common words as 'day' and 'month'. In the Act creating the new forms, the empress reviewed how, in the long history of the writing system, the characters had become so complicated that many existed which even scholars could not understand. Consequently, she had created, as the start of a continuing reform, twelve new characters which preserved the origin of the words, and also illustrated the real meaning. An example was the new character for her own given name 'Chao', whose component

[33] *TCTC* 204, p. 6451.

[34] The usual reason given for the choice of 'Chou' as her dynastic name is that it was the name of the first of the fiefdoms posthumously granted to the empress's father. Several reasons make this unlikely, and I am indebted to Tanigawa Michio, 'Shū-Zui kakumei no keii ni tsuite: *Shūri* kokkano higeki', *Kodai bunka*, 18.5 (1967) 89–94, which first suggested this alternative explanation and demonstrated the precedents. See R. W. L. Guisso, 'The legitimation of Wu Tse-t'ien', unpublished paper prepared for the Conference on Legitimation in Chinese History, Asilomar, June 1975.

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parts pictured the heavenly bodies illuminating the void below. It was a symbol, she said, which 'would make all men come [to submit] to Us, and facilitate good government'.[35] Evidence from Tun-huang, from contemporary epigraphy, and even from Japan, shows that these characters enjoyed wide currency in the Chinese world, and were, from time to time, supplemented. Their fabrication, much criticized by historians, reflects the empress's abiding interest in symbolism, and may also be regarded as an act of propaganda, though one restricted by necessity to the literate classes. For the vast majority of the people, a different sort of persuasion was required, and the answer was found in Buddhism.

It is only recently that historical scholarship has come to realize how deeply the beliefs and practices of Mahāyāna Buddhism permeated the lives of the ordinary people of the T'ang. Conveniently, there existed at that time two translations of a minor sutra called *Mahāmegha*, or 'Great Cloud' (*Ta-yün*).[36] This sutra contained a prophecy of the imminent reincarnation of Maitreya as a female deity, monarch of all the world. In one version which has come down to us, the glittering promise of her era is described: 'Harvests will be bountiful, joy without limit. The people will flourish, free of desolation and illness, of worry, fear, and disaster... the rulers of neighbouring lands will all come to offer allegiance.... At that time all her subjects will give their allegiance to this woman as the successor to the imperial throne. Once she has taken the Right Way, the world will be awed into submission.'[37] According to most sources, the monk-lover of the empress, Hsüeh Huai-i, discovered the text, provided suitable annotation, and demonstrated that the long-awaited reincarnation was none other than his patron![38] The empress professed surprise, but was naturally gratified, and immediately took steps to promulgate the teaching. In a staggering act of patronage to the Buddhist clergy, she founded state-maintained Great Cloud Temples (Ta-yün ssu) in every prefecture of the empire, some of them new foundations, others existing temples which were brought under imperial patronage. The nine eminent

[35] The new characters are fully discussed in Tokiwa Daijō, 'Bu-Shū shinji no ichi kenkyū', *THGH* (Tokyo), 6 (1936) 5–42. For a more succinct account see Naitō Kenkichi, 'Tonkō hakken Tō shokusei kokon kyūko ritsu dankan', in *Ishibama sensei koki kinen Tōyōgaku ronsō* (Osaka, 1958), pp. 339–42.

[36] On the 'Great Cloud Sutra' see the definitive study of Yabuki Keiki, *Sangaikyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1927), pp. 685–761. On the temples see Tsukamoto Zenryū, *Nisshi Bukkyō kōshōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1944), pp. 25–31. A very detailed study with complete translations of all the relevant texts is in Antonio Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology in China at the end of the seventh century* (Naples, 1977). See also R. W. L. Guisso, 'The legitimation of Wu Tse-t'ien', unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Legitimation in Chinese History, Asilomar, June 1975.

[37] *Ta-feng-teng wu-hsiang ching* 6, in *TD* 12, p. 1107a.

[38] On the many discrepancies among the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist accounts of this incident, see the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

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monks who compiled the commentary were ennobled as dukes of counties and given the insignia of high-ranking officials, and over a thousand monks were ordained. The empress later incorporated the words 'Maitreya the Peerless' into her title.[39]

Preparations were now complete. In the eighth month of 690, the empress refused *pro forma* three successive petitions, one bearing more than sixty thousand names, which requested her to ascend the throne. When, however, she was informed that her symbol, the phoenix, had been seen above the palace, and that a flock of vermilion birds had been fluttering about the throne room, she realized that heaven could no longer be denied. Jui-tsung abdicated, and with imposing pomp, the empress Wu became 'Holy and Divine Emperor' of the Chou dynasty. For the first and only time in history, a woman was emperor of China.

THE CHOU DYNASTY (690–705)

The Chou dynasty was not regarded by contemporaries as a sharp break in T'ang continuity. In the proclamation of the T'ang restoration in 705, Chung-tsung spoke of the empress Wu in the following terms: 'brilliant, virtuous, and wise, she responded to the needs of the times. She employed the splendid policies of the first beginnings, so as to formulate a grand plan based on the Supreme Unity.'[40] He went on, in the same document, to contend that nothing had really changed, that she had renewed the basic policies of the T'ang and that she had simply been acting for the Li family in fostering education, building schools and temples, choosing officials on the basis of talent alone, sponsoring numerous literary and historical compilations, and restoring to grace the victims of evil officials who had temporarily deceived her. That such praise should come from one whom the empress had for so long deprived of his heritage is striking in itself, but more than that, it represents the 'official line' on the usurpation. Only in this century, and more particularly since the hypothesis of Ch'en Yin-k'o that the Chou dynasty represented not merely a political change but a highly significant social revolution, have historians begun to alter the traditional view.[41] Current Chinese scholarship sees the empress as champion of the exploited masses against aristocratic and landlord elements in T'ang society, while in Japan, historians have sought recently to define a 'newly-rising' class whose support the empress tried to

[39] *CTS* 6, p. 121; *CTS* 183, p. 4742.
[40] *CTW* 17, p. 10b.
[41] Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao* (Shanghai, 1946), p. 14; reprinted in *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun chi* (Taipei, 1971), pp. 120 ff.

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substitute for that of the implacably traditionalist aristocracy.[42] Until major problems concerned with the nature of T'ang sources are overcome, however, such statements about social classes and related subjects are necessarily inconclusive.

After the failure of the Princes' rebellion, the change-over to the Chou was smooth and unopposed. The empress rapidly arranged the administrative details of her new dynasty, and settled into her capital, Lo-yang. As early as the 660s, she and Kao-tsung had recognized in an edict the advantages in communications and supply which Lo-yang enjoyed over Ch'ang-an, and the gradual shift of China's economic centre to the south and east had since accentuated these advantages.[43] The empress must have been aware also of the usefulness of dissociating herself from the T'ang capital and the loyalist clans who had been drawn there by their official posts, when she chose Lo-yang. As an extra measure of insurance, she is said to have moved there a hundred thousand households from the area around Ch'ang-an in Kuan-chung to fill up the city.[44] To the new capital came also such talented officials as Hsü Yu-kung, Ti Jen-chieh and Li Chao-te, because, as a rare passage of praise in the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* explains, '[the Empress] was brilliantly perceptive and skilled in forming decisions, so that all the most brilliant and wise men of her time strove to enter her service'.[45] Partly because of the influence of these officials, and partly because 'the minds of the people were made up [in her favour]', the empress set out almost immediately to moderate the terror.[46] In 691, the secret service chief, Chou Hsing, was invited by his more notorious deputy, Lai Chün-ch'en, either to confess to complicity in a recent plot, or else to step into one of his own cauldrons.[47] His 'confession' extracted, he was murdered on the road to exile by the family of a former victim, and the next year, no fewer than 850 of his minions were tried, sentenced and disappeared from the scene. The empress had shown she could dispose of the evil officials as nonchalantly as she had supported them, but typically, she retained the services of Lai Chün-ch'en and the remnants of his spy network.

And it was not long before they were put to use, not by the empress, but by the eldest of her nephews, Wu Ch'eng-ssu, who had been designated

[42] A recent dispute among Chinese historians, in which there is disagreement among Wu Tse, Yüan Ying-kuang and Ch'i Ch'eng-chün, is discussed in Tonami Mamoru, 'Zui no bōetsu to Tōsho no shokujitsuhō', *THGH* (Kyōto), 37 (1966) 154-6.

[43] This problem is discussed in detail in Ch'üan Han-sheng, *T'ang Sung ti-kuo yü yün-ho* (Shanghai, 1946).

[44] *TFYK* 486, p. 33b.

[45] *TCTC* 205, p. 6478.

[46] *TCTC* 205, p. 6485.

[47] *TCTC* 204, p. 6472; Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu*, pp. 137-8.

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heir to her father.[48] Together with his more devious cousin, Wu San-ssu, he had appeared at the capital in about 670, and had remained inconspicuous until the death of Kao-tsung. From that time, he had become the most persistent of those urging usurpation, plainly seeing himself as his aunt's successor. The influence of the Wu family grew rapidly, and in the early years of the new dynasty, with some members of the clan awarded high posts in the civil and military hierarchy, and all of them granted princely ranks and fiefs of maintenance,[49] they were entrenched in a most powerful position. In 691, in spite of the fact that Jui-tsung retained the title of Emperor Expectant (*huang-ssu*), Wu Ch'eng-ssu was sufficiently confident to sponsor a petition to have himself declared heir apparent.

The whole court was plunged into controversy. The empress appeared surprised at her nephew's request, and sought widely for opinion at court. Some were courageous enough to speak against Ch'eng-ssu; most of them suffered exile or even death at the hands of his henchman, Lai Chün-ch'en. The most important defender of the interests of the T'ang royal family was Li Chao-te, another of the 'new' type of official who had risen from the minor gentry through the examination system, and a man so uncompromising that he once had beaten to death an official whose embroidered robes contravened the sumptuary regulations.[50] In 692, he succeeded in convincing the empress of the dangers of permitting her family too much power, and within the week, she divested three of them, including Ch'eng-ssu, of all political functions. When her nephew burst angrily into her presence to protest and to slander Chao-te, he was calmly informed, 'Since I employed Chao-te, I have for the first time been able to sleep soundly at night. He has exerted himself greatly on Our behalf. So do not speak of it!'[51] This ended the matter, but only temporarily. If the empress were hostile to her family on this occasion, she showed quite a different attitude at other times, allowing them to second her at public ceremonies, and placing them at the head of her grand armies. To forestall the assumption that Jui-tsung was designated to succeed her, she took care to punish those who associated too closely with him, and in 693, wantonly murdered his two favourite consorts. One of these was the mother of the future Hsüan-tsung.

[48] *CTS* 183, pp. 4727–9. The empress had exiled her half-brothers and their sons in 665–6, at which time her sister's son, Ho-lan Min-chih, was made the formal heir to her father's fief. After his disgrace and death in 670, Ch'eng-ssu, son of her half-brother Wu Yüan-shuang, was summoned from exile in Ling-nan to take his place and continue the family cult for her father.

[49] See *CTS* 183, p. 4729; *THY* 90, pp. 1639–40.

[50] *TCTC* 205, p. 6491. The incident was the more remarkable since his victim, Hou Ssu-chih, was a close associate of Lai Chün-ch'en.

[51] *TCTC* 205, pp. 6483–4.

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Two explanations are possible for this conduct. One is that the empress was genuinely torn between the claims of her own clan and those of her sons. In the end, it seems to have been the arguments of Ti Jen-chieh centring on the mother–son bond and on the ancestral sacrifices she would one day require, which tipped the balance in favour of her elder son. The second possibility, however, is just as likely. She delayed her decision until 698 because the succession question was a valuable tool to balance and divide ministerial interest groups.

If this is so, it may be regarded as just one aspect of the political virtuosity the empress showed throughout her reign. Her major aim was the expansion of the imperial prerogative vis-à-vis her chief ministers, or *tsai-hsiang*, and she was highly successful. *Tsai-hsiang* was a status conferred from the beginning of the dynasty upon the heads of the three central ministries. Gradually it had come to be granted with other high posts, so the number could vary from three to about fifteen.[52] The scope of their functions, 'to aid the Son of Heaven, to direct all the officials, and to administer all government business', made the *tsai-hsiang* the most important of officials.[53] Already by the mid-seventh century, there were signs of strong group-consciousness, initiative and a willingness to contravene imperial power – characteristics clearly evident in the controversy surrounding the deposition of Kao-tsung's first empress. T'ai-tsung did little to oppose this trend, often seeming to regard his position only as *primus inter pares*, and Confucian historians have since had little but praise for 'the good government of Chen-kuan'. The scorn these same historians have for the empress Wu is as much a result of the authoritarianism she employed to reverse the trend to greater ministerial power, as the fact that she was a woman and a usurper. Her half-a-century of rule brought about a new relationship between emperor and *tsai-hsiang*, and it is a measure of her skill that she did it almost imperceptibly, generally employing methods which lay within the traditional framework.

The power of appointment and dismissal, for example, was an unquestioned imperial prerogative, and the empress used it with single-minded purpose. In the twenty-three-year reign of T'ai-tsung, twenty-one *tsai-hsiang* were appointed, serving an average of seven years each. In the period 684–705, sixty-six men were appointed, and the average length of service was only two years. Few under the age of sixty were appointed, and posts were shifted with unprecedented frequency. Even Ti Jen-chieh, the only minister to enjoy the empress's full trust, held no fewer than seven

[52] See R. des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1947), pp. 4 ff.
[53] An exhaustive study of the institution of *tsai-hsiang* is Chou Tao-chi, *Han-T'ang tsai-hsiang chih-tu* (Taipei, 1963).

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different posts in his three years as *tsai-hsiang*. Provisional appointments and lengthy commissions outside the capital became more frequent than ever before; and the natural overlap of departmental function gave the empress a chance to foster rivalry and dissension within the group. Often, she placed brilliant men like Ti Jen-chieh and Li Chao-te in parallel posts with pedestrian members of her own family and Taoist magicians. And when Lai Chün-ch'en was finally executed in 697, she permitted a trumped-up charge to send his arch-enemy, Li Chao-te, to the same block. An astounding 80 per cent of the empress Wu's *tsai-hsiang* was removed involuntarily from positions of high honour, sometimes to exile or death, sometimes simply to a lower post. The corresponding figure for T'ai-tsung is 33 per cent. Under her, uncertainty was always present in the highest circles of the bureaucracy, and it is interesting that one of the earliest literary efforts of the noted historian, Liu Chih-chi, was a *fu* of 696, warning those who would strive for high office of the dangers. He entitled it *Think it over* (*Ssu-chen fu*).

Other traditional control methods were directed to the same end. The empress developed an elaborate system of special rewards designed as reminders that distinction was earned not merely by passing an exam or gaining high office, but by pleasing the ruler while in office. She is sometimes praised, as by the prolific Ch'ing historian, Chao I, for her receptivity to ministerial remonstrance and criticism.[54] On examination, however, it becomes clear that she always distinguished between criticism of herself and attempts to limit the imperial prerogative. Li Chao-te once ridiculed the white stone she venerated as a favourable omen because she valued its 'loyal heart'. When he observed, 'I suppose, then, that all other stones have disloyal hearts?' she joined in the general laughter.[55] On another occasion, a favourite official, Chi Hsü, persisted in raising the matter of the succession though it was well-known she regarded it as a 'household matter'. She told him how T'ai-tsung once spoke to her of a new horse he was unable to break. Looking coldly at Chi, she said, 'I told him I could do it if he would give me an iron whip and an iron mace; and if these failed...' she paused, 'a dagger to cut its throat.' The trembling minister withdrew.[56]

There were times when the empress simply excluded the *tsai-hsiang* from her counsel, preferring to rely upon her favourites, her daughter, T'ai-p'ing and, most notably, a group of non-official advisers popularly known as the 'Scholars of the Northern Gate'. This body, the predecessors

[54] See Chao I, *Nien-erh shih cha-chi*, edn of Tu Wei-yün (Taipei, 1974), 19, pp. 415–17.
[55] *TCTC* 205, p. 6484; *CTS* 87, p. 2855.
[56] *TCTC* 206, p. 6544.

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of the later Han-lin academy, not only prepared most of the literary works issued under the empress's name, but also helped determine policy. When the *tsai-hsiang* balked at her extravagant plan for the Ming-t'ang, the empress simply bypassed them in favour of the scholars. The paradox of the empress's rule was the existence of a developing, expanding bureaucracy which simultaneously was being weakened and restricted at the top. In her, advancing officialdom met its match, and this may be the reason why only one minister wept at her deposition.

The early years of the Chou were relatively calm, and the relaxation of the terror brought a chance to deal with some of the old problems. On the borders, the Turkish, Tibetan and south-western Man tribes were suffering from a period of internecine strife, and between 690 and 694, more than 350,000 'barbarians' came to seek refuge in China. Two talented generals, Wang Hsiao-chieh and T'ang Hsiu-ching, persuaded the empress that the time was ripe to recover the 'Four Garrisons', lost in 678. In the tenth month of 692, they crushed a Tibetan army in the west, and re-established the An-hsi protectorate at Kucha.[57] At court, though, the empress showed little awareness of serious administrative problems, and busied herself with literary compilation, the creation of new posts to fill and overfill, and her Buddhism. To her title, she added 'Maitreya the Peerless, Golden Wheel'; she reversed the T'ang precedence of Taoism over Buddhism, and even forbade the butchering of animals. Her patronage of the Indian religion in this period shows the influence of her monk-lover, whose tastes seem to have run to orgiastic and sometimes bloody rites sponsored in the temple complex around the Ming-t'ang.[58] These were called 'no barrier' assemblies from the free mingling of social classes present, but do not seem to have survived the monk's death. After this the empress returned to the patronage of the Hua-yen and Chan sects, the latter of which now grew rapidly in popularity.[59]

Her patronage extended also to the examination system. The empress had always favoured this over the various privileged means of entry into officialdom, and in 689 had initiated the personal examination of candidates by the ruler.[60] The empress clearly saw that the system could serve the interests of the ruler, for in 693 she replaced the compulsory text in the curriculum, *Tao-te ching*, with a 'classic' of her own composition, the

[57] *TCTC* 211, pp. 6487–8. On the An-hsi protectorate-general see Otani Masanao, 'Ansei no shichin no kenchi to sono idō ni tsuite', in *Shiratori Hakase kanreki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1925), and Ise Sentarō, *Chūgoku seiiki keiei shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1955), pp. 190–204, *passim*.

[58] These rites are described in Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu*, pp. 133–4.

[59] See Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku Kegon shisōshi no kenkyū*, p. 122; S. Weinstein, 'Imperial patronage in the formation of T'ang Buddhism' in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 297–306.

[60] *WHTK* 29, p. 272a.

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Rules for officials (*Ch'en-kuei*), which had been compiled some years earlier. This document was modelled on the *Plan for an emperor* (*Ti-fan*) of T'ai-tsung. It incorporated the empress's political philosophy, and was largely composed of carefully selected quotations from the Confucian and Taoist classics, grouped under ten headings, such as 'Utmost loyalty', 'Benefit of the people', etc.[61] The preface at least was written by the empress herself, and the body of the text comprises a highly structured view of imperial policy, constantly repeating such maxims as 'Although the father–son relationship is extremely close, it still cannot compare with the ruler and minister forming part of the same organism', 'the subject's relationship to his prince is like the four limbs supporting the head, or the ears and eyes serving the mind'. It constantly stresses loyalty, and the primacy of the claims of state over the individual. Until 705, every examination candidate was required to memorize this work. Finally, in 695, the empress abolished the *hu-ming* principle of anonymity that she had herself introduced into the selection examination procedure. The reasons for this are unclear, but it is possible that the measure was connected with certain problems which arose in that year, since allowing scope for favouritism and corruption was an expedient means of stemming criticism. And there was a good deal to criticize. For some time, the empress's relations with the monk had been cooling, partly as a result of his increasingly insane actions, and partly because she had found a satisfactory substitute in her Confucian physician. The monk was a passionate man, and after being openly snubbed at the new year's celebration in 695, he set fire to the Ming-t'ang. The blaze was spectacular, the destruction complete; and though the empress publicly blamed careless workmen, she knew who was responsible, and was determined to act. Rejecting an open trial which would prejudice her decision to re-build, and might also include some embarrassing testimony, she adopted a plan of the T'ai-p'ing Princess. The monk was lured into the palace and secretly murdered. With his death, the attitude of the empress towards Buddhism seems to have changed. She dropped 'Maitreya the Peerless' from her title, ended the ban on the slaughter of animals, and began to use Confucian terms like heaven (*t'ien*) in her reign titles, and in her palaces and new buildings like the reconstructed Ming-t'ang. The spirit of these constructions, however, was anything but Confucian. Money, according to the histories, was 'poured out like sand', and censors warned constantly of the exhaustion of the people and the treasury. There is no way to estimate precisely whether the empress's extravagance was so ruinous as the histories would have us believe.

[61] The *Ch'en kuei* is found in vol. 893 of TSCC.

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Although the empire was still prosperous, and the people paid their taxes, usually without protest, the later years of the empress Wu saw growing concern over financial matters and some first attempts to face the increasingly serious economic and financial problems confronting the dynasty. In 695 Li Chiao presented a memorial drawing attention to the growing numbers of vagrant households which for a variety of reasons had fled from their place of registration and settled elsewhere as unregistered squatters. He suggested that such persons be given a time limit within which to give themselves to the authorities. They were to be offered the alternative of return to their original home, or registration in the place where they were settled, but in either case were to become regular registered taxpayers. The new policy was to be imposed not simply by the local officials, but supervised by censors sent out to the provinces from the central administration. The empress approved this plan, and censors were actually appointed. But the scheme was obstructed by some court ministers, and was finally shelved. It must, however, have been revived at the beginning of the eighth century, for there are documents from Tun-huang and Turfan connected with the implementation of such a policy by special commissioners charged with re-registering vagrant households (*kua fou-t'ao shih*). These documents date from a period (702–3) when Li Chiao was again becoming a dominant figure at court.[62]

During the first years of the eighth century some attention was also given to the problems arising from the growing importance of commerce. The currency problem was clearly worsening. In the mid-690s, counterfeiting was widespread, and the government was so short of metal that farm implements had to be melted down to build a new obelisk at the capital. In 701–4 the use of some forms of counterfeit coin was permitted as a measure to deal with the chronic shortage of currency. In 703 an attempt was made to institute taxes upon merchants and trade, but it was defeated by the traditionalist element at court.[63] The two factors which were to constitute a really serious drain on the exchequer – the emoluments of a rapidly expanding bureaucracy and the cost of defence, had not yet reached serious proportions.

From 695 onwards, however, the latter began to be a major problem. The preceding year had seen the first border raids of a new qaghan of the Northern Turks, Qapaghan (in Chinese, Mo-ch'o), who was to plague

[62] See T'ang Ch'ang-ju, 'Kuan yü Wu Tse-t'ien t'ung-chih mo-nien ti fou-t'ao-hu', *LSYC*, 6 (1961) 90–5; Naitō Kenkichi, 'Sai-iki hakken Tōdai Man-monjo no kenkyū', *Saiiki bunka kenkyū*, 3 (1960), reprinted in his *Chūgoku hōseishi kōshō* (Tokyo, 1963), pp. 223–345.

[63] See Denis Twitchett, 'A Confucian's view of the taxation of commerce: Ts'ui Jung's memorial of 703', *BSOAS*, 36.2 (1973) 429–45.

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China for years, pillaging, asking to submit, rebelling, seeking marriage alliances.[64] In the initial stages of his career, he seemed amenable to appeasement, and in 695 was bought off with the grant of a Chinese ducal title, while the empress turned her attention to the more serious immediate threat from the Tibetans. Tibet had continued its territorial expansion since the 660s, but with the accession of an infant king (*btsampo*) in 676 real authority had fallen into the hands of ministers (*blon*) belonging to a clan called mGar, over whom the ruler had little control.[65] In the autumn of 695 the most powerful of these ministers, mGar Khri-'bring led an army into China, and the next spring, at a spot less than two hundred miles from Ch'ang-an, defeated a huge Chinese army led by Wang Hsiao-chieh and Lou Shih-te. The empress immediately demoted the two generals, but was prevented from further retaliation by the great Khitan rebellion which broke out that summer.

This rebellion was totally unexpected, since the Khitan had remained quiescent since their incorporation by T'ai-tsung into the Sung-mo protectorate-general in 648.[66] Here they had enjoyed much self-government, and two of them, Li Chin-chung and Sun Wan-jung, had risen to very high posts. They were not, however, always fortunate in the Chinese officials over them, and at this time, the Chinese protector-general was a hard and arrogant man. During a recent famine in the area, he had given no relief supplies and had 'treated the Khitan chieftains like slaves'.[67] Their response was rebellion, and within a week, the two leaders had tens of thousands under arms. Official response was swift. Twenty-eight generals with an unspecified force were sent against them, but in the first major battle, near present-day Peking, the imperial troops suffered near annihilation. The defeat was a shock, and its magnitude created a desperate situation. The next month, an edict made the offer of amnesty and heavy rewards to convicts and private slaves who would enrol in the army, an offer so extraordinary that one of her officials gasped at this as 'damaging the fundamental structure of the state'. That same month, while the Khitan fortified the area around modern Peking, the Turks drove into Liang-chou, in modern Kansu, and the Tibetans, still occupying Lung-yu, took advantage of the situation to demand the withdrawal of Chinese troops from the 'Four Garrisons'.

The empress Wu is seldom given credit for her foreign policy, but in

[64] On Qapaghan see René Giraud, *L'Empire des Turcs Célestes; les règnes d'Elterich Qapghan et Bilgä (680–734)* (Paris, 1960), esp. pp. 49 ff.; René Grousset, *L'Empire des steppes* (Paris, 1948), pp. 155–8. See also the English translation of the latter, *The empire of the steppes*, tr Naomi Walford (New Brunswick, 1970), pp. 107–10.

[65] See *TCTC* 206, p. 6539.

[66] *CTS* 199B, p. 5350.

[67] *TCTC* 205, p. 6505.

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this crisis she showed a calm and decision that wholly admirable. Convinced by Kuo Yüan-chen of the growing unpopularity of the mGar family among the Tibetans, she temporized, sending envoys to parley about a marriage alliance and an exchange of territory, while their real mission was to foment dissension. Qapaghan, because he was secure in his position, required different treatment, and it was his ambition which provided the key. The Turk must have been well-acquainted with the politics of the Chinese court, for he had offered previously to attack the Khitan if the empress would give him her daughter T'ai-p'ing in marriage and adopt him as her son. Now, the empress promised to consider these terms, and meanwhile sent him patents to confirm him as qaghan and make him an imperial general. Regarding these distinctions as a mark of favour, Qapaghan took advantage of the death of Li Chin-chung to attack the Khitan base and carry off the families and supplies of the absent leaders. This had the unintended effect of stimulating the Khitan advance southward into China, and in the same month, their newly-combined forces reached the borders of Ying-chou where they halted for the winter. 'All of Ho-pei,' says the history, 'was convulsed',[68] but even so, the people refused to respond to the Khitan call to join them in a crusade to depose the empress.

The year 697 opened gloomily. Qapaghan had become impatient, and began once more to plunder Chinese border prefectures. At the same time, a well-connected prefect called Liu Ssu-li was seduced by a fortune-teller's prophecies of grandeur, and formed a conspiracy to seize the throne. He recruited a number of capital officials, but before they could act, word leaked out. The empress, preoccupied with the Khitan threat, was in no mood to be tolerant, and unleashed the ubiquitous Lai Chün-ch'en on the plotters. Lai had been awaiting just such a chance, and expanding the affair out of all proportion, involved the innocent with the guilty. The victims totalled '36 men, all eminent officials of the Empire... their families were executed, and more than 1,000 persons, convicted of complicity, were exiled'.[69] The atmosphere at court was again one of suspicion and dread.

A new dimension was added about this time by the appearance of two very important figures, the half-brothers Chang I-chih and Chang Ch'ang-tsung. These beautiful youths, 'painted and powdered, their robes of rich brocade',[70] had sky-rocketed to favour through a sexual liaison with the T'ai-p'ing Princess, and, reputedly, with the empress herself.[71]

[68] *TCTC* 205, p. 6510.

[69] *TCTC* 206, p. 6513.

[70] *CTS* 78, p. 7b.

[71] For biographical accounts of the Chang brothers, see *CTS* 78, pp. 2706–8; *HTS* 104, pp. 4014–16.

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Although the latter was about seventy, she was so skilled with cosmetics, say the sources, that 'she concealed her age, and even her closest attendants could not tell'. Her natural vigour and the aphrodisiacs which were probably responsible for the new teeth and eyebrows she grew about this time lent credibility to the court rumours about the nature of the relationship.[72] The influence of the Changs rapidly surpassed all bounds; posts and honours were showered upon their family, and even the scions of the Wu clan, it was said, 'contended to hold the bridle of their horses'.[73] In early 697, the Chou court presented the odd spectacle of Lai and the Changs both intimidating the other officials for their own ends, the empress pondering the gilding of nine ceremonial tripods which had already used up 870 tons of bronze, and the Khitan, meanwhile, marching unopposed into the area of modern Peking.

The court was jolted into reality at this juncture by new demands from Qapaghan: cession of the Shan-yü protectorate, and the return of all Turks previously settled in six prefectures within the empire. In the great debate which ensued at court, the empress inclined at first to the 'hard line' of Li Chiao and T'ien Kuei-tao, but the Khitan menace forced her to the side of the appeasers.[74] To Qapaghan she reluctantly sent massive bribes and the promise of an imperial marriage, hoping to satisfy him at least temporarily. As summer approached, she sent two more huge armies, one 200,000 strong, against the Khitan, and then the tide turned. Very few Chinese had joined the rebels, and the Khitan leader had alienated Qapaghan by a diplomatic blunder and again lost his base to the Turks. This news reached the rebel forces just as they had engaged the Chinese in battle, and when the non-Khitan tribesmen mutinied, the demoralized army collapsed. Those who escaped slaughter in the rout fled to refuge with the Tibetans. At enormous cost in men and money, and in the devastation of much of Ho-pei, the Khitan rebellion was finally quelled.

Once again, the empress's success brought a softening of the political climate. Lai Chün-ch'en was the first to go, and his downfall was of his own making. Drunk with power, he had brought conspiracy charges simultaneously against members of both imperial families, the Li and the Wu. The T'ai-p'ing Princess, whose shrewdness was almost a match for her mother's, led the accused in a countersuit, and so well was it managed, that the empress was forced, finally, to agree to Lai's execution. The whole capital celebrated his death, and even as the mob tore his corpse limb from

[72] *TCTC* 205, p. 6487; *TCTC* 206, p. 6539. The precise nature of the relationship between the empress and the Chang brothers is not made fully explicit in contemporary sources. However, a memorial from Chu Ching-tse cited in *CTS* 78, pp. 2706–7 makes it clear that the relationship was an open scandal.

[73] *CTS* 78, p. 2706; *TCTC* 206, p. 6514.

[74] *TCTC* 206, p. 6516.

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limb, officials began reporting his various injustices. The empress was convinced at last, and before all, admitted she had been duped, humbly promising the end of the terror. This time she meant it, and the great ministers, led by Ti Jen-chieh and Chi Hsü, were swift to act, immediately raising the delicate matter of the succession. In the third month of 698, Chung-tsung and his empress Wei were summoned from their exile to Lo-yang. The empress had decided the empire would once again become the heritage of the Li family.

This decision was a profound disappointment to the Wu interests. Wu Ch'eng-ssu soon died, it was said, of chagrin, but not before he witnessed the ignominious sight of his son Yen-hsiu, sent out to marry the daughter of Qapaghan. Orthodox officials protested in horror – 'Never since ancient times has there been a case of an imperial prince being married to a barbarian woman!' said the most outspoken of them. This critic, Chang Chien-chih, was demoted to a distant frontier area, returning only in 704, to take the lead in the restoration coup. Sending her grand-nephew to the Turks turned out to be a serious miscalculation on the empress's part. The canny Qapaghan had by then realized she had no intention of granting his major requests, and used the arrival of the prince as an excuse to gain them by force. Bombarding the court with contemptuous missives, he complained at the poor quality of the bribes, and scoffed at the idea of marriage with the Wu clan which he considered to be inferior to his own. He concluded, 'The Li family, which always treated us with favour, has been wiped out, and I hear that only two sons remain alive. I now lead my troops to restore them!'[75] In the autumn of 698, he invaded China, following a route just to the west of the Khitan, through exhausted Ho-pei. The empress managed to rouse the empire for yet another great effort, recruiting a tripartite force estimated at 450,000. When even this proved insufficient to pin down the mobile barbarians, the only solution seemed more men. This time the people balked. Successive levies yielded only a total of 1,000 men, and the empress was at last forced to play her trump card. With impressive fanfare, Chung-tsung was declared heir apparent, and commander-in-chief of the Ho-pei armies. The sources, probably exaggerating, say that 50,000 men responded immediately to the announcement, and late in the ninth month of that year, Ti Jen-chieh was able to lead a force of 100,000 into the field. With their arrival, Qapaghan retired, and with his huge army of 400,000 busied himself extending his power over the steppe north of the Wall. Ssu-ma Kuang remarks sadly, 'the barbarians of the northwest all joined him, and great was the contempt they showed for the Middle Kingdom.'[76] Within a

[75] *TCTC* 207, pp. 6530–1. [76] *TCTC* 206, p. 6535.

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decade he controlled all Inner Asia from the borders of Manchuria to the valley of the Ili.

It had been a narrow escape, but apart from establishing special permanent armies in Ho-pei and Ho-nan the empress took no steps to prevent a recurrence. There were several reasons for this; most notably the unanimity of the court in urging the end of costly expeditions and an interventionist foreign policy, and in supporting Ti Jen-chieh's policy of 'using barbarians to control barbarians'. Secondly, the empress, after a serious illness in early 699, seemed content to rest on her laurels and enjoy her pleasures. Finally, the threat to the borders began to recede rapidly. That summer, the young king (*btsampo*) of the Tibetans finally asserted his royal power, struck at the mGar clan and their supporters and defeated them, executing thousands. Although weakened by this civil strife the Tibetans mounted a great offensive against China in the next year. It proved a disaster, and general T'ang Hsiu-ching destroyed their army, beating them in six great battles. The empress then put Kuo Yüan-chen in charge of the strategic centre of Liang-chou in Lung-yu province, where a decade of capable administration under him and his successor T'ang Hsiu-ching extended and fortified Chinese territory, won the respect of the Tibetans, and brought great prosperity to the area. In 702, the Tibetans resumed their tribute payments to China and requested a marriage alliance. Shortly afterwards, internal troubles with Tibet's vassal peoples, the death of the young king and the accession of a seven-year-old ruler insured a further period of peace.

Little was heard in China of Qapaghan, who was occupied with establishing his control over the Western Turks, until the spring of 702 when he led a large force by the traditional Turkish invasion route to the environs of the Northern Capital (Pei-tu, i.e., T'ai-yüan). While a counterattack was being organized he again withdrew, and the next summer requested the marriage of his daughter to a son of the heir apparent. This, of course, was refused, but there are indications that some sort of marriage was arranged, perhaps to a minor princess. In 703 the Chinese were forced once again to reorganize the An-hsi protectorate after the loss of Tokmak (Sui-yeh) to the Western Turks. But Qapaghan himself, after a final great victory over the Chinese at Ming-sha (near modern Chung-wei in southern Ninghsia), caused no more trouble in China. He remained continually embroiled with risings among his subject tribes until his death in 716 during an expedition against the northern Bayirku people.

The last years of the Chou court were dominated by the Chang brothers, and by the attempts of the bureaucracy to topple them. Especially after the death of Ti Jen-chieh in 700, the empress was so besotted with her

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two lovers that she refused them nothing. Patronage and corruption, which previously had been quite rare, then became widespread, and the popularity of the empress declined in direct proportion. In 699, she had legitimized the Changs' position by creating for them a new office called the 'Stork Institute' (K'ung-ho fu) – the stork being the usual means of conveyance for Taoist fairies. Although its ostensible purpose was the provision of skilled drafting of documents and literary compilation, and some well-known scholars had been recruited to it, it soon degenerated into something like a male harem, if a memorial from Chu Ching-tse is to be believed.[77] By mid-700, it had become a scandal of carousing, gambling, drinking, unnatural vice and fantastic pantomimes, a rich mine of source material for the more imaginative novelists of later centuries. The empress, in spite of declining health, was often present, though more and more she sought less strenuous recreation at her new San-yang Palace about sixty miles outside the capital.

She made no move to curb her favourites, even as complaints poured in about their selling of posts, their ostentatious life style, and their disastrous political interventions. Abhorred by the entire bureaucracy, the Changs also managed to alienate both the Wu and the Li families; the former, by advocating the Li succession, the latter, by denouncing two children of Chung-tsung, his elder daughter and his only son by the empress Wei, whose criticism of the Changs cost them their lives. But it also cost the Changs their only chance to survive their protectress. Alliance with one of the paramount families could perhaps have saved them; instead, they foolishly isolated themselves.

Shortly after this domestic tragedy, in the winter of 701, the empress returned to Ch'ang-an where she was to remain for two years. No source tells why; perhaps it was for reasons of health. More likely, it was a symbolic move intended to demonstrate that the empire would return soon to the T'ang. From here, she issued proclamations ending the jeopardy of all those involved in rebellious movements against herself, and restoring the political rights of families deprived by the criminal conviction of one member. A final motive for the move may have been the relief of pressures building up against her favourites at Lo-yang. In this, she failed.

The arch-enemy of the Changs was an outspoken elder statesman called Wei Yüan-chung, who had suffered numerous imprisonments and banishments in his eventful career. He had several times attacked the Changs,

[77] *TCTC* 206, pp. 6538, 6546–7; *CTS* 78, pp. 2706–7. The name may have derived from the empress's belief that Chang Ch'ang-tsung was the reincarnation of Wang Tzu-chin (or Wang Tzu-chiao), a mythical Taoist immortal who was said to have ascended to heaven riding on a white stork.

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through their servants, through a younger brother, and finally, through direct complaints to the empress, and had accompanied the court to Ch'ang-an. The Changs were rightly suspicious of his intentions, and when their protectress fell seriously ill in mid-703, decided to strike first at him.[78] They falsely charged him with advocating the empress's abdication, and in the ninth month of that year there opened the most famous trial of the T'ang period. The whole court strove to prove Wei's innocence, but only when Chang Yüeh, who was later to become one of Hsüan-tsung's most eminent ministers, changed his mind about perjuring himself, were the charges shown to be absolutely false.

To her discredit, however, the empress decided to override justice and save the face of her favourites, by banishing both Wei and Chang Yüeh to the south. This act, so uncharacteristic of her, probably determined her fate. High officials now saw the extent of the Chang power, and realized the need to destroy them lest their own fate be sealed by a real or a forged deathbed edict. Some went further. If the unworthy favourites who monopolized the empress's love could not be brought down, the empress herself must fall. Early in the tenth month, the court returned to Lo-yang.

Here, in a last display of energy, the empress regained some of her ebbing popularity by abandoning the construction of an expensive Buddha, by cashiering a number of corrupt officials, and by a belated attempt to raise the level of provincial administration after a serious protest in Ling-nan. Nothing she did, however, could obscure the issue of the Changs. She was very often unwell, and they alone had access to her chambers, rudely turning away the frustrated ministers. In the autumn, Chang Ch'ang-tsung was implicated in a bribery charge brought against some lesser members of his family, and in spite of his clear guilt, received only a light fine. Again the court was shocked, and partly to conciliate them, the empress promoted to *tsai-hsiang* the popular and capable T'ang loyalist, Chang Chien-chih. Now eighty years old, he had spent much of his long career in semi-disgrace outside the capital, and had for some time been plotting the downfall of the empress. Only his closest confidants knew that his plans were already well-advanced, and most officials continued to direct their attacks against the Changs, trying to destroy them by legal means. In the twelfth month of 704, they brought charges of high treason against Ch'ang-tsung, and when even the empress's 'rigged' tribunal failed to acquit him, she resorted to an extraordinary pardon. The opposition then realized that force was the only remaining option.

[78] The basic account of Wei Yüan-chung's trial is in *TCTC* 207, pp. 6563 ff. This is translated by Fitzgerald, *The empress Wu*, pp. 174–7. Further details are contained in the biographies of the participants.

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Late in the first month of 705, they acted. The main conspirators, Chang Chien-chih, Ts'ui Hsüan-wei, Ching Hui, Huan Yen-fan, and Yüan Shu-chi, coaxed the reluctant Chung-tsung from his residence, and with five hundred of the Yü-lin Palace Guards[79] entered the Hsüan-wu Gate. In the courtyard, they met the Chang brothers, and executed them there. But before they could enter the palace, a dishevelled and wrathful empress blocked their way. Rapidly comprehending the situation, she addressed her trembling son and the other plotters in terms of contempt. Then, her half a century of power at an end, she returned to bed.

CHUNG-TSUNG AND JUI-TSUNG (705–12)

The first decade of the T'ang restoration was, from almost every point of view, a depressing one. The thorough-going reform called for by the corruption and the general neglect of the administration in the last years of the Chou simply did not occur. Instead, these years saw little but a fierce power-struggle played out against a worsening financial and administrative situation. With the exception of those seeking an object lesson in misrule, traditional historians have been universally unattracted by the period.

Attempts have been made recently, however, to demonstrate a greater degree of historical significance. One such study distinguishes three groups contending with the emperor for power.[80] These were the favoured ministers, the imperial family, and the emperor's relatives by marriage (*wai-ch'i*). From the accession of Chung-tsung, the latter two were particularly active, and their attempts at self-aggrandizement and the building of factions was so opposed to governmental tradition in the preceding century, that their activities threw the administration into chaos. In their scramble for power, they established personal staffs (*fu*), sold supernumerary posts and clerical ordinations, and greatly increased the 'fief households' and revenues they controlled. Their actions resulted in the compromising of a hitherto respected literati class who were forced into nepotism and sycophantic self-advancement, and gave impetus to the rise of the *shu* or commoner class, who could buy their way into

[79] This force, which dated from the early years of the dynasty, had been named the Yü-lin Guard in 622; see *TLT* 25, p. 20b; des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, pp. 556, 833–5. Its members usually had some personal connection with the emperor, and from their social exclusiveness the guards seem to have developed a degree of political awareness. Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao*, pp. 39ff. (reprint pp. 143 ff.) suggests reasons why they were a deciding factor in every coup until the reign of Hsüan-tsung.

[80] See Tanigawa Michio, 'Bu-Gō chō matsunen yori Gen-Sō chō shonen ni itaru seisō ni tsuite', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 14.4 (1956) 54–60.

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officialdom instead of undergoing the lengthy examination process. Merchants and landlords were the greatest beneficiaries.

The nature of the sources renders this type of analysis highly provisional, but a brief chronology of the period will at least show the source of the deductions.

At the restoration, the two dominant figures were Chung-tsung's empress Wei, and her lover, the cadet nephew of the deposed empress, Wu San-ssu. The empress was a lewd and ambitious woman whose total ascendancy over her husband was the result, according to one source, of his gratitude for the support she offered during his exile; he is said to have promised her complete authority in the event of his restoration.[81] By becoming her lover, the unscrupulous Wu San-ssu had survived his aunt's downfall, and had further strengthened his position in the new order by employing the same talent with the *éminence grise* of the regime, Shang-kuan Wan-erh. Wan-erh was the grand-daughter of Shang-kuan I, the poet-official whose part in the 664 plot to dethrone the empress Wu had resulted not only in his own execution, but the enslavement of his entire family. Wan-erh had thus begun life as a palace slave, but by sheer talent had risen to a kind of private secretaryship to the empress Wu, and from about 698 had drafted many of her official documents. Recommended to the new rulers by both her experience and her acumen, she was nominally installed as a Consort of the Second Grade, though her functions were advisory and secretarial. The final member of this faction was the 21-year-old An-lo Princess. Because she had been born on the road to Fang-chou, and because she was the only surviving child of the empress Wei, Chung-tsung absolutely doted on her. In 705, she was married to San-ssu's son, Wu Ch'ung-hsün.

It was an important alliance, cementing the connection between the two greatest families in the empire, and even more significant, advancing San-ssu's pet scheme. Ambitious for supreme power in his own right, he had conceived the audacious plan of ruling initially through his daughter-in-law, and immediately after the marriage, he began promoting her appointment as heir apparent! Never before had such a suggestion been made, and the court was stupefied. In spite of the recent tradition of female rule, Wei Yüan-chung, 'that pig-headed Shantung farmer' as the petulant princess called him,[82] mustered ample support to block the plan, temporarily securing the position of the present heir, Li Ch'ung-chün, who was the emperor's second son by a concubine. This set-back to his plans did not deter San-ssu, but it taught him that strong ministers could still be a danger. To forestall any further opposition, he decided upon

[81] *CTS* 51, pp. 2171–2; *TCTC* 208, pp. 6584–5.
[82] *TCTC* 208, p. 6608, *k'ao-i*.

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intimidation of the entire bureaucracy; and to accomplish this, he struck hard at the most prestigious of the officials – the five leaders of the restoration coup. They were the natural targets not only because they were both *tsai-hsiang* and national heroes, but also because they had already tried to curtail the corruption and excessive enfeoffments of the Wu family. Working through the empress, San-ssu first had all five elevated to the exalted but powerless rank of prince (*wang*) in 705, and by the end of the year, pretexts had been found to disgrace and to banish them all far from the capital. It must have brought a smile to the lips of the old empress Wu to see her nephew so quickly supreme, and turning to the re-enactment of some of her former measures. She died, graciously pardoning her enemies and renouncing the title of emperor, in the eleventh month of 705. Her posthumous name, Tse-t'ien, means 'Emulator of heaven'.

San-ssu continued to press his intrigues. The only figures remaining at court who could match his own prestige were the ex-emperor Jui-tsung, and his sister, the T'ai-p'ing Princess. Both seemed content to remain aloof from politics, and in order to guarantee their continued non-interference, San-ssu rewarded each of them with the enormous revenues of ten thousand households.[83] Under the T'ang system, the recipient of such a *shih-feng* enfeoffment received two thirds of the revenue himself, while the central government received only one third.[84] Throughout the period, San-ssu and his friends and successors were to award themselves huge grants, so that by the accession of Hsüan-tsung, a large proportion of state revenues, especially in the wealthy areas of Ho-nan–Ho-pei, was in private hands.[85] The majority of the grants were illegal in that they almost invariably exceeded statutory limits, and in this case, though the legal limit for a princess was three hundred households,[86] no protest was made. Two months later, T'ai-p'ing and six other princesses were permitted to establish personal staffs (*fu*), on the same scale as those of 'Princes of the Blood'.[87] By selling these posts to the highest bidder, the women not only increased their own wealth, but also built up bodies of officials loyal chiefly to them. San-ssu used similar methods, appointing over two

[83] *HTS* 83, p. 3651. *THY* 90, p. 1638.

[84] See Niida Noboru, 'Tōdai no hōshaku oyobi shokuhō-sei', *THGH* (Tokyo), 10.1 (1939) 1–64.

[85] See *HTS* 118, p. 4264; *WYYH* 609, pp. 8b–9a. This problem, and its relation to other current abuses such as the employment of large numbers of supernumerary officials, is succinctly discussed in Tonami Mamoru, 'Zui no bōetsu to Tōsho no shokujitsuhō', 165–78.

[86] *THY* 5, p. 51; *HTS* 83, p. 3650.

[87] A princess was entitled only to an administration to manage the revenues of her fief of maintenance. A royal prince not only had a much larger fief administration, but a group of preceptors, a large household administration, and large bodyguards and palace guards. See des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaries*, pp. 629–45.

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thousand supernumerary officials (*yüan-wai*) in early 706; according to one source, in addition a thousand eunuchs were appointed to office above the seventh rank.[88] The exact nature of these supernumerary officials remains unclear, but among orthodox officials, their appointment was highly unpopular. A letter to Wei Yüan-chung from a provincial colleague about this time includes it in a list of 'Ten Abuses', and warns that the present government was well advanced on the road to disaster, by virtue of its bribery and corruption in the selection system, its eunuchs and incompetent officials, its failure to prevent the princesses from establishing their own staffs of officials, and its inability to curb the extravagance of the nobility.[89] Wei was too disillusioned and too intimidated to mention the letter to anyone.

The court returned in the winter of 706 to Ch'ang-an where San-ssu and the empress Wei intensified their efforts to have the An-lo Princess made heir apparent. The incumbent of that unlucky position was Li Ch'ung-chün, the third son of Chung-tsung by another of his consorts. The empress Wei and her supporters hated him and treated him with disrespect. Needless to say he became more and more uneasy, and in the autumn of 707, he decided to act. Enlisting the aid of the experienced general Li To-tso and three hundred of the Yü-lin Palace Guard, he marched on the Wu mansion and killed San-ssu and his son, the husband of the An-lo Princess. He turned then to the palace, but was less successful there. Chung-tsung, with his wife and daughter, had managed to barricade himself in the tower of the Hsüan-wu Gate, and with the arrival of the conspirators he showed a rare flash of courage. Appealing dramatically to the soldiers, he persuaded them to turn on their leaders. Li To-tso was killed immediately; the ex-heir apparent reached the Turkish border before being slain.

The political climate was very little changed by the failure of the coup and the death of San-ssu, except that the refinement of his touch disappeared from the intrigues of his faction. The entire court was scandalized when the widowed An-lo almost immediately began an unseemly and incestuous affair with the recently-returned Wu Yen-hsiu. The princess, it seems, was fascinated by the 'barbaric' appearance and customs he affected after his sojourn with Qapaghan and the Northern Turks. Their marriage in 708 was so lavish in ceremonial that most officials assumed the succession had been decided in An-lo's favour, and either retired into secret opposition or competed to flatter her. The administration was in

[88] *TCTC* 208, p. 6601. The exact nature of these *yüan-wai* appointments is still something of a problem. Tonami Mamoru, 'Zui no bōetsu to Tōsho no shokujitsuhō', pp. 172 ff., has a discussion of the various issues.

[89] *TCTC* 208, p. 6601. The letter is from an otherwise unknown official, Yüan Ch'u-k'o.

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turmoil, and beneath the surface, a further source of tension had appeared as a result of An-lo's clumsy attempt to slander Jui-tsung and the T'ai-p'ing Princess. In 707, they easily cleared themselves, but An-lo had foolishly destroyed a keystone of San-ssu's policy, non-alienation of the T'ai-p'ing Princess.

From 707 to 710, an uneasy truce prevailed. The empress Wei and her daughter enjoyed the spoils of power; the former with a succession of lovers, and the latter joined with a coterie of like-minded women, enriching herself by the sale of ordination certificates and so-called *hsieh-feng* posts.[90] For thirty thousand cash, persons of any social rank could be ordained to the Buddhist clergy, and for ten times the price, could become an official on the staff of one of the princesses. Demand was great, since the privileges of both posts included exemption from corvée labour and the main taxes, providing wealthy merchants and landlords with a golden opportunity for advancement. The princesses and their friends made themselves thoroughly unpopular by seizing land around the capital, and competing in the construction of luxurious villas. They diverted streams, disrupted agriculture, and took children of the poor for slaves. Shang-kuan Wan-erh was conspicuous, the first woman to preside over the selection of examination candidates. Predictably, those she favoured were, like Ts'ui Shih, more distinguished for literary than administrative ability. She also founded a new academy of literature and sponsored extravagant soirées where gold and silk were awarded as prizes for composition,[91] and with the rest of the court, lavished money on Buddhist foundations. One upright official, Wei Ssu-li, remonstrated that although the people were exhausted and the granaries empty, new temples were forever appearing, and the cost of smaller ones was some thirty thousand or fifty thousand cash, while the larger ones ran into millions.[92] His protests, and others in the same vein, were all ignored. The expansion of the bureaucracy, even without the sale of posts, must have been phenomenal. The sources make no real estimate, saying only that 'tens of thousands' passed through the selection examinations at the two capitals. One official, memorializing in disgust at the vast numbers of supernumerary officials appointed, complained that 'there is not enough gold and silver for their seals of office, nor silk to provide gifts for them'.[93]

[90] These, and the other abuses which follow in the text are described in *TCTC* 209, pp. 6623–5. The patents of appointment for the *hsieh-feng* posts did not, it appears, pass through the Chancellery and Secretariat; see *TCTC* 209, p. 6625. On the patronage of Buddhist foundations see Jacques Gernet, *Les Aspects économiques du Bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du ve au xe siècle* (Saigon, 1956), p. 281.

[91] *TCTC* 209, p. 6622.

[92] *CTS* 88, p. 2870. The full text of this memorial, presented in the spring of 709, is in *CTW* 236, pp. 6b–8b.

[93] *TCTC* 209, p. 6624; *CTS* 101, p. 3155.

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And so widespread was corruption in official circles, that when one courageous minister dismissed 1,400 men who held irregular patents of appointment, he was ostracized by his colleagues. Normal sources of governmental authority had to share power with the numerous contending political factions, while the crush of officials holding regular and extra-ordinary appointments alike reached scandalous proportions.[94] And yet some men waited years for posts to which bribery, outright purchase, or occasionally, talent, had entitled them.

Political life seemed to have reached its nadir, but there was more to come. The T'ai-p'ing Princess had never forgiven the treachery of the Wei faction in trying to eliminate her, and had steadily been building personal support, while simultaneously extending her influence over her brother, Jui-tsung. From about mid-709, she also began to arouse the suspicions of her other brother, the emperor, about the misbehaviour of his wife and daughter, and by early 710, he was showing his displeasure openly. The empress began to fear for her position, and in the sixth month, the emperor suddenly died; the victim, say the historians, of a poison administered by his wife or daughter in his favourite cakes.[95] There is no real evidence for the charge, but it is a fact that the empress concealed his death until she had appointed her own relatives to the key military posts, and secured the throne for Chung-tsung's last remaining son, Ch'ung-mao, a youth of fifteen. He was to rule for two weeks.

The success of the coup which deposed him is usually ascribed to Li Lung-chi, the future Hsüan-tsung, for reasons analogous to those which give T'ai-tsung credit for foundation of the T'ang.[96] And like his grandfather, Hsüan-tsung took a personal hand in the history of his period, ensuring that no source contradicted this official interpretation. But the facts suggest something different. On the night of the twentieth day of the sixth month, Lung-chi and a few followers, including T'ai-p'ing's son, once more won over the Palace Guards at the Hsüan-wu Gate, beheaded the Wei leaders, and forced their way into the palace. Inside, the empress Wei was slain as she fled, An-lo while still applying her make-up, and the versatile Wan-erh as she tried to change sides. It was a smooth operation, one which required both money and influence. The 25-year-old Lung-chi had neither; he held the post of vice-president of the Court of Imperial Insignia, and as the third son of Jui-tsung by a concubine, was without prospects. Clearly, the coup was engineered by the T'ai-p'ing Princess; and if there were any doubts, they were dispelled two days later. Haughtily interrupting an imperial audience, she dragged

[94] *TCTC* 209, p. 6633.
[95] *TCTC* 209, pp. 6641–2; *CTS* 51, p. 2174.
[96] See ch. 3 by H. J. Wechsler above.

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the young emperor from his throne and summoned Jui-tsung. With what was probably genuine reluctance, he again took up the sceptre relegating the real power to the daughter of the empress Wu. No one dared protest.

For a time, it seemed T'ai-p'ing would follow her mother's example of usurpation. Her minions were insinuated into the highest of state offices, and Jui-tsung refused even to consider any measure she had not first approved. 'Whatever she wished, the Emperor granted. From the chief ministers down, appointment and dismissal hung on one word from her... The most powerful people in the land flocked to her doorway as if it was the marketplace.'[97]

In only one matter did T'ai-p'ing fail. Expecting her weak brother to have a long reign, she took no part in the designation of his heir. The choice was between his eldest and legitimate son, Li Ch'eng-ch'i, and Li Lung-chi, whose merit in leading the coup had made him a candidate. Jui-tsung hesitated, but was spared a difficult decision by the unselfishness of his eldest son who added his voice to that of certain ministers already urging Lung-chi. In the sixth month of 710 the future Hsüan-tsung became heir apparent. There is no record that T'ai-p'ing opposed the appointment, but within a few months, she had mounted a vicious campaign of slander against him. The reasons for her hostility are not clear, and it may be that he simply showed too much capacity. Almost from his accession, the independent members of the upper bureaucracy seemed to have gained confidence. The staffs of the princesses had been abolished, and prestigious T'ang loyalists like T'ang Hsiu-ching and Chang Jen-yüan had won back control of the key military offices. Sung Ching and Yao Yüan-chih, two of the most admired figures of their time, were tackling the Augean Stables of the examination system with such success that 'all were agreed in believing that the atmosphere of the Chen-kuan and Yung-hui period (627–56) had been revived'.[98] Jui-tsung supported their efforts as they dismissed thousands of the *hsieh-feng* officials, and reduced by 80 per cent the number who passed through the examinations. The heir apparent himself remained unobtrusive, but his popularity grew, and in direct proportion, the attacks of T'ai-p'ing. His growing body of supporters urged him to act against her, and though he was too aware of the extent of her power to move rashly, the ardour of his friends almost ruined him. Sung Ching and Yao Yüan-chih, acting on their own initiative, convinced the emperor he could end the familial strife by sending T'ai-p'ing away from the capital. Reluctantly, he agreed to a temporary exile, and she took up residence in nearby P'u-chou. Her influence was little diminished, however, and the heir apparent, knowing she blamed

[97] *TCTC* 209, p. 6651.

[98] *TCTC* 209, p. 6652.

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him for her banishment, lived in constant fear of retaliation. In an attempt to mollify her, he asked to have his allies, Sung and Yao, demoted to the provinces. She immediately seized the chance to replace them with her own men, and the results are given succinct expression in the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*. The *hsieh-feng* posts were restored, and 'the administration fell into disorder. Once again it was just like the Ching-lung (707–10) period.'[99] In the late spring of 711, Lung-chi, who had already tried to resign his office, capitulated completely, and begged that his aunt be recalled to the capital. She consented to come, and in a few months, five of the seven *tsai-hsiang* were her men.

Jui-tsung was not blind to these developments, and became increasingly disillusioned. Throughout 712 his failure to control the situation preyed upon his mind until, in mid-summer, heaven intervened with a blazing comet. The emperor suspected the meaning, and when his interpretation was verified by the court astrologers, he announced his resolution to abdicate in favour of his son. This time, T'ai-p'ing protested strongly, but in vain. She managed to force a compromise by which Jui-tsung became 'Retired Emperor' (*t'ai-shang-huang*), retaining control of high appointments and capital punishments, but in the eighth month of that year the emperor Hsüan-tsung ascended the throne.

Now it was T'ai-p'ing's turn to be uneasy. She was still extremely powerful, controlling the majority of both civil and military officials,[100] but she could hardly expect to maintain this favourable balance indefinitely under the new emperor. Her supporters constantly urged her to take action against him. At last, throwing aside the patience and caution which had served her so well, she resorted to poison. Hsüan-tsung, however, was well-guarded, and escaped, but he was well aware that it was T'ai-p'ing alone who was responsible. Reconciliation, never more than remote, was now impossible.

In the summer of 713, she was driven to attempt an armed coup. Her plans were laid with customary care, and had she been a man, able to carry them out in person, might have succeeded. Instead, she had to rely on others, and through one of them the emperor was warned. Early in the seventh month, just one day before the conspiracy was to take place, he calmly seized the ringleaders, and had them beheaded before the Audience Hall. Three days later, the princess herself was permitted a dignified suicide at her mansion. Her death may suitably be seen as the end of an era. Never again would so many women, for so long, influence the political life of the Chinese state.

[99] *TCTC* 210, p. 6664.

[100] *TCTC* 210, p. 6682.

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THE PERIOD IN RETROSPECT

The attitude of traditional historiography in China to the period 684–705 is represented most succinctly by the Sung historian, Yüan Shu, who describes it as 'the calamity of the empresses Wu and Wei'.[101] Some of the reasons for this interpretation are suggested in the preceding survey, and few modern historians would disagree that it is apposite in the era of the empress Wei. As a description of the reign of the empress Wu, however, it is less than just.

In the first place, it ignores the significance of her accomplishments prior to the usurpation. The empress Wu came to power in a China where two or three generations was the normal dynastic life-span, and by applying and extending the instruments of control and centralization, she succeeded in forging a viable and long-lasting unity. For most of her life, she respected the prestige of legitimate succession, and her seizure of the throne, in terms of bloodshed and destruction, was one of the least violent of all dynastic change-overs. Arguably, it saved the country from something worse.

Secondly, Yüan Shu's viewpoint is heavily biased. Like that of almost all traditional historians, it suffers from its total identity with the views and values of the scholar-official.[102] To him, history was didactic, and his aim was to convince future rulers that the authoritarianism of the empress vis-à-vis her ministers was 'calamitous'. There is little real evidence, however, that until the last years of her reign, the administration suffered from her style of rule. The particular *esprit de corps* of T'ai-tsung's bureaucracy was destroyed, but even this criticism is subject to qualification. The upper ranks of officialdom were harshly curbed, and restricted in their prerogatives; but in the lower ranks, there was a far wider range than ever before of social and regional background among the officials, and a greater scope for upward mobility. Throughout the T'ang period, the examinations provided only about 10 per cent of the entire bureaucracy, but it would be wrong to underestimate their importance on that basis alone. The prestige, especially of the *chin-shih* examination, was great, and possession of a degree was rapidly becoming a standard qualification for the highest posts.[103] One index of this is the fact that the proportion of degree-holding *tsai-hsiang* rose steadily, from 7 per cent under Kao-tsu, to

[101] See Yüan Shu, *T'ung-chien chi-shih pen-mo* (Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu edn), 178.

[102] For a lucid discussion of this problem see E. Balazs, 'L'Histoire comme guide de la pratique bureaucratique', in W. G. Beaseley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds. *Historians of China and Japan* (London, 1961), pp. 78–94; this is translated in A. F. Wright, ed. *Chinese civilization and bureaucracy* (New Haven, 1964), pp. 129–49.

[103] See Ch'en Teng-yüan, *Kuo-shih chiu-wen* (Peking, 1958), pp. 117 ff.; Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui T'ang shih* (Peking, 1957), pp. 181 ff. on the prestige of the various examinations.

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23 per cent under T'ai-tsung, to 35 per cent under Kao-tsung and the empress Wu, to 40 per cent in the Chou dynasty. In addition, the examination system served as an important symbol. To all those eligible, and especially to the lower aristocracy who provided the bulk of the successful candidates, it meant the key to upward social and economic mobility.[104] To the higher aristocracy, it was the most important means of preserving their status. It was a spur to the bureaucratization and urbanization of both groups, and important, consequently, in the dilution of their former local, centrifugal characteristics. Finally, the examinations were a stimulus to literature and to education generally. Far more candidates prepared for the examinations than passed, and far more became qualified for office than were ever employed. In the years 686–9, a contemporary, Wei Hsüan-t'ung, estimated that one-tenth of those qualified for office were successful in gaining a post.[105] This left a large pool of unemployed candidates to be used in education and administration at the local level.

The numerous non-Confucian aspects of the empress Wu's reign have also contributed to her bad name in history. Classical Confucian philosophy contains many injunctions against female participation in politics, and as many against usurpation. The empress is condemned not only on these grounds, but also on the basis of her fondness for Buddhism, her attempts to raise the status of women by such measures as extending the mourning period for a mother to equal that of a father, and for sending a male 'bride' to the Turks. Equally non-Confucian was her expansionist foreign policy. Few contemporary remonstrances on the subject of her military adventures fail to include classical admonitions against exhausting the treasury and the people, or to blame the campaigns for such problems as that of the so-called 'fugitive households'. There is an element of truth in this, but also a degree of exaggeration. Recent studies suggest that the problem of families fleeing their registration to escape taxes and corvée was confined to a few marginal areas under the empress Wu, not becoming widespread in the interior of China until succeeding reigns.[106] Furthermore, the cost of the campaigns must be measured against the less-apparent long-term benefits. The stimulation of the domestic economy, technical and artistic interchange, growth of trade, and the channelling outwards of surplus energy, are only a few.

Finally, it must be borne in mind that the assessments of traditional historians give little weight to the condition of the masses. Under the

[104] By no means all of the 'new' officials, even those appointed to the most esteemed and responsible 'pure' offices at court were of a superior moral character; see *THY* 67, p. 1181.

[105] *TT* 17, p. 94b.

[106] See, for example, Nakagawa Manabu, 'Tō-Sō no kyakko ni kansuru shokenkyū', *TYGH*, 46.2 (1963) 97–110.

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empress Wu, the areas of the countryside relatively free from the burden of the *fu-ping* system and removed from the invasion routes, were both peaceful and prosperous.[107] The absence of any serious agrarian disturbance and of support for the two rebellious movements, suggests that the life of the peasantry was of a higher order than hostile historians often assert. Anong the people, the empress may even have been popular. A stele, probably of the tenth century, recently unearthed in Szechwan, bears the words, 'in time of [natural] disaster, flood, or drought, those of the soldiers and the people who pray here, at this temple of the Celestial Empress [Wu], cannot but be answered.' And there can be few rulers of China whose birthday, like that of the empress Wu, has been commemorated to the present day by an annual agricultural festival![108]

On the debit side, the last years of the empress Wu were marked by serious deterioration. Her rule was so highly personal that when she lost her grip, cracks began to appear at once in the administrative structure. Not only did she ignore them, but she failed to provide, with her accustomed ruthlessness, for what should follow her. Her deposition left a vacuum with several incapable contenders seeking to fill it, and in the ensuing conflict within the ruling group, decline was accelerated. The conflict was not restricted to the emperor and the factions formed around the members of his family and those of the *wai-ch'i* but existed also within the bureaucracy.

Throughout the reign of the empress Wu, the aristocracy had successfully preserved its social prestige by such devices as the exclusivity of its marriage circle, and had also been fighting a rearguard action against the growing bureaucratic encroachment of 'new' men rising through the examinations. By maintaining a high degree of control in the Board of Civil Office (Li-pu) and the Chancellery (Men-hsia), they had kept themselves well-placed for the expected aristocratic revival at the T'ang restoration.[109] The empress Wu had been opposed to this group, patronizing instead the lower, local elite, and aiding many of them to reach the highest posts. It seems paradoxical, therefore, that it was mainly these recipients of her favour who opposed her at the end, and led in her deposition. There were several reasons, and one of the most important was the existence of the bureaucratic conflict mentioned above. They were

[107] On the distribution of *fu-ping* militia units, see Kikuchi Hideo, 'Tō setsushōfu no bumpu mondai ni kansuru ichi kaishaku', *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 27.2 (1968) 1–37. Pulleyblank, *Background*, has a map showing their distribution. In general, central and southern China, and parts of the eastern plain were free of the burden of militias.

[108] Both of these indications of the empress's popularity are cited by Kuo Mo-jo, *Wu Tse-t'ien*, pp. 135–7, 154–5. Kuo is attempting, not very convincingly, to demonstrate that the empress was born in Szechwan, and probably a few years later than the traditional date.

[109] See Tsukiyama Chisaburō, *Tōdai seiji seido no kenkyū* (Osaka, 1967), pp. 78 ff.

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themselves being challenged by the 'evil' officials of the empress and those who entered the bureaucracy by irregular means in her last years. The increase in the number of *yüan-wai* and *hsieh-feng* officials, and the polarization into bureaucratic factions caused by the rise of women in the succeeding two reigns, aggravated an already severe problem. The fall of the empress Wei and the T'ai-p'ing Princess, and the reform of the abuses they had sanctioned, won for Hsüan-tsung the support of a reunited officialdom. He was to use it well.

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CHAPTER 7

HSÜAN-TSUNG (REIGN 712–56)

The emperor Hsüan-tsung, longest-reigning of all the T'ang monarchs, was an immensely capable ruler, who restored his dynasty to a new peak of power after decades of usurpation, weakened authority and corruption.[1] To the Chinese living through the troubled and disturbed decades which followed his abdication, his reign represented a golden age of departed glories, an era of good government, peace and prosperity, equally successful at home and abroad. Yet his reign ended in tragedy, and in disasters largely resulting from his own actions and policies which almost destroyed the dynasty. To the historians who wrote the record of his reign in the late 750s he was a tragic hero, whose reign had begun in splendour, but who had later been led astray by ambition and hubris into overstraining his empire's administration and resources, and who then completed its ruin by withdrawal from active participation in its government.[2]

All were agreed, however, that he was a ruler out of the ordinary, who left his indelible print upon the history of his times. He was, moreover, a man of many parts, a skilled musician, a poet, a good calligrapher, patron of many artists and writers. He was also deeply versed in Taoist philosophy, of which he became a major patron, and – in spite of his early measures against the Buddhist establishment – later became deeply involved in Esoteric Buddhism. As a person he seems to have enjoyed deep friendship with his brothers and family members, and even the formal records of his reign portray a man of great personal warmth,

[1] Throughout this chapter I have been constantly indebted to the work of two scholars. First to the late Ch'en Yin-k'o, who in his various studies of T'ang politics, now available in a collected edition of his works previous to 1948 *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun chi* (Taipei, 1971), and in a more complete collection *Ch'en Yin-k'o hsien-sheng lun-wen chi* (2 vols., Hong Kong, 1974), laid the foundations of all modern work on the period and its institutions. Second to Edwin G. Pulleyblank, whose *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955) remains after twenty years the best account of detailed political history for any period of the T'ang. In the latter half of the chapter I have drawn constantly upon this. For the middle period of the reign I have also found useful Penelope A. Herbert, 'The life and works of Chang Chiu-ling', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1973 (hereafter called Herbert, 'Chang Chiu-ling'.)

[2] Denis Twitchett, 'Liu Fang, a forgotten T'ang historian', unpublished paper presented to the Yale Seminar on Chinese and Comparative Historiography, 1970.

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close attachment to his advisers, directness and passion. Within a generation of his death a wealth of semi-fictional tales and folk-lore had gathered about his name, while the story of his ill-starred and disastrous passion for his consort Yang Kuei-fei became one of the great tragic themes of Chinese literature, the subject of innumerable poems, novels and dramas.

He was not, however, born with any expectation of ever ascending the T'ang throne.[3] Born in 685 at Lo-yang, Li Lung-chi was the third son of Jui-tsung, the nominal emperor who was merely the figurehead of a court dominated and conducted by the formidable empress Wu. His mother, the Lady Tou, a member of a clan with immense power at the T'ang court during the seventh century was Jui-tsung's secondary consort. As was normal, Li Lung-chi was enfeoffed as Prince of Ch'u in 687, and he became something of a favourite with the empress Wu on account of his forthright character. But his situation soon changed for the worse. The outbreak of a rebellion led by some of the princes of the Li royal clan in 688 led to a series of purges directed against the imperial family. In 690 the empress Wu induced her puppet emperor Jui-tsung to abdicate in her favour, and assumed the throne as monarch of her own dynasty of Chou.

Jui-tsung and his children were sequestered in the palace in virtual imprisonment. Early in 693 two high officials who had privately visited the deposed emperor were publicly executed for their temerity,[4] and at the end of the same year Jui-tsung's principal consort the empress Liu and Li Lung-chi's mother the Lady Tou, both members of extremely influential families, were summarily executed by the empress Wu on a trumped-up charge of consulting fortune tellers and plotting her assassination by black magic.[5] Li Lung-chi and his royal brothers were reduced in rank, and suffered harsh treatment. Li Shou-li, the oldest surviving grandson of Kao-tsung who shared their imprisonment, still suffered the effects of his repeated beatings half a century later.[6]

In 698 the empress Wu finally decided that after her death the throne should revert to the Li family. Chung-tsung, the former emperor who had been deposed to make way for Jui-tsung after a reign of less than two months in 684, was appointed heir apparent, and Jui-tsung and his children – now further removed than ever from the succession – were released from their incarceration. At first they were granted a royal

[3] On Hsüan-tsung's early life and accession to the throne see Howard S. Levy, 'How a prince became emperor: the accession of Hsüan-tsung (713–755)', *Sinologica*, 6 (1958) 101–21. The main source for his early years is *CTS* 8, pp. 165–71.

[4] *CTS* 6, p. 123; *TCTC* 205, p. 6490; *CTS* 186A, pp. 4839–40. These accounts differ in dating and in detail.

[5] *CTS* 51, p. 2176; *TCTC* 205, p. 6488.

[6] *CTS* 86, p. 2833.

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residence in Lo-yang, and then in 701 removed to a great mansion in the Hsing-ch'ing ward in the east of Ch'ang-an. During the first years of the eighth century Li Lung-chi served in posts in the imperial guards and later in the department of the imperial household.

In 705 the aged empress Wu was finally deposed, and Chung-tsung succeeded. Li Lung-chi was appointed vice-president of the Court of Imperial Insignia, an office which controlled the arsenals of the capital city. He retained this post, which must have given him considerable influence with the military establishment in Ch'ang-an, after his appointment in 708 as vice-prefect (*pieh-chia*) of Lu-chou, an important strategic prefecture in south-eastern Shansi. The political situation under Chung-tsung was extremely tense and unstable. The emperor had come to power by a coup; there had been an unsuccessful uprising in 707 led by the heir apparent, Chung-tsung's third son Li Ch'ung-chün; political authority had again fallen into the hands of the imperial womenfolk, the empress Wei and her daughter the Princess An-lo, under whom corruption, nepotism and favouritism burgeoned. The administration was neglected and disaffection was rife.

In 710 Li Lung-chi and his fellow princes were summoned to the capital to participate in the grand sacrifice in the southern suburb, which was to be the occasion of an Act of Grace embracing the whole empire. By this time he seems to have begun attracting an entourage of scholars and officials with a view to taking an active part in politics. Some of his following, both in the capital and in Lu-chou, began to see in him a possible future emperor.[7]

His opportunity came far sooner than he can have anticipated. In the sixth month of 710 the empress Wei, fearing that her position was threatened, poisoned Chung-tsung and forged a testamentary edict appointing to the throne his fourth and youngest son Li Ch'ung-mao. The empress Wei was to preside over the court as empress dowager. To ensure her position fifty thousand troops were ordered to be mobilized for the defence of the capital under the command of her elder brother Wei Wen, while some of her staunchest supporters were sent to take control of the vital provinces of Kuan-chung, Ho-pei and Ho-nan.[8]

During Chung-tsung's lifetime the main opposition to the empress Wei had come from the former emperor Jui-tsung and his formidable sister the Princess T'ai-p'ing, daughter of the empress Wu. The empress Wei now attempted to win over Jui-tsung to her cause by appointing him a chief minister. He was, in any case, a lethargic and unambitious man,

[7] *CTS* 8, pp. 165–6.
[8] *CTS* 7, p. 150; *CTS* 51, p. 2174; *TCTC* 209, pp. 6441–2.

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unlikely to act on his own initiative. The Princess T'ai-p'ing, however, had inherited the forceful character of her mother, and now arranged a plot from knowledge of which Jui-tsung was deliberately excluded, in case it might fail. The coup was organized by Li Lung-chi, aided by the Princess T'ai-p'ing's son Hsüeh Ch'ung-chien, by a Buddhist monk P'u-jun, an obscure official called Liu Yu-ch'iu, who was marshal of the strategic county of Ch'ao-i outside the capital, and three middle-ranking officers of the guards. On the night of the twentieth day of the sixth month of 710, only sixteen days after the empress had enthroned her child as emperor, Li Lung-chi and his guards officers led a detachment from the Northern Palace Army into the palace through the Imperial Park, whose director Chung Shao-ching joined in with a detachment of his own workmen. Bursting in through the Hsüan-wu Gate the troops executed the empress Wei, the Princess An-lo and the principal members of the Wei clique. Others were executed in the following days. Once the coup was a *fait accompli* Jui-tsung was informed, and on the next day was formally enthroned.[9]

Li Lung-chi was given a new princely title and appointed a chief minister, together with his fellow conspirators Liu Yu-ch'iu and Chung Shao-ching. The court now began the task of a political settlement. Perhaps the most important feature of this was the establishment of an heir apparent, and on the twenty-seventh day of the sixth month Li Lung-chi was formally appointed, largely because of his leadership of the coup. His elder brother Li Ch'eng-ch'i, who would have been the natural legitimate heir, renounced his own claim in Li Lung-chi's favour.[10]

Jui-tsung proved to be an ineffectual sovereign, presiding indecisively over a court whose dominant figures were the heir apparent and the Princess T'ai-p'ing. The emperor deferred to each of them, constantly asking his ministers whether they had been consulted before he himself was willing to take any decision. The princess, who had hoped to dominate the court as her mother had done, soon realized that the heir apparent was a powerful rival, and constantly attempted to undermine his influence.

However, for the first months of the new reign the heir apparent remained the more powerful. In the middle of the seventh month of 710 the remaining chief ministers of Chung-tsung, with the exception of Wei An-shih and Su Kuei, were dismissed and sent out to provincial posts, together with the ministers who had been appointed by the empress Wei after her coup.[11] They were replaced by a new group, two of whom,

[9] *CTS* 8, pp. 166–7; *HTS* 5, p. 116; *TCTC* 209, pp. 6643–8.
[10] *CTS* 95, p. 3010; *TCTC* 209, p. 6650.
[11] *TCTC* 209, p. 6652; *CTS* 7, pp. 154–5; *HTS* 5, p. 117.

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Hsüeh Chi[12] and Ts'ui Jih-yung,[13] were dismissed after a short while because of their constant public disagreements at court. The other two, who became the active leaders of the court were Yao Yüan-chih (whose name was later changed to Yao Ch'ung, by which he is normally known) and Sung Ching, who were to become the dominant ministers during the first years of Hsüan-tsung's reign.

Yao Ch'ung[14] (651–721) had entered official life through a palace examination in 677, and had served in a series of military posts. He gained the notice of the empress Wu for his actions during the Khitan invasions of Ho-pei, and was appointed vice-president of the Board of War and then made a chief minister in 698. He remained chief minister until the empress's fall from power in 705, apart from a brief period in 704 when he had been made the head of the former Jui-tsung's princely household administration. Having been a party to the coup which removed the Chang brothers, Yao bitterly regretted the deposition of the empress, whom he had served loyally for so long. He had spent Chung-tsung's reign in various provincial appointments.

Sung Ching[15] (663–737) had had a characteristic career for a successful Confucian scholar-official. Son of a minor official from Ho-pei, he passed the *chin-shih* examination in 679 or 680 at the very early age of sixteen, and won a reputation as a fine scholar and writer. His career led him through the Censorate to become one of the chief secretaries in the Secretariat. He became known for his unflinching rectitude, and the empress Wu thought very highly of his abilities. In the last years of her reign he became vice-president of the Censorate, and was involved in the attempts to impeach the Chang brothers, who in return attempted to have him assassinated. At the beginning of Chung-tsung's reign the emperor favoured him, and he became vice-president of the Chancellery, but he then fell foul of Wu San-ssu and was transferred to various important posts in the provinces.

Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching were thus complementary figures, the one a pragmatic statesman adept at dealing with practical affairs, the other a man of strict principle and integrity, with a real quality of moral leadership. Jui-tsung's court was in need of both qualities, and the two ministers began a reformist programme by attacking one of the most serious abuses of the previous reign, and abrogating all the improper appointments to

[12] Biographies in *CTS* 73, pp. 2591–2; *HTS* 98, pp. 2893–4.
[13] Biographies in *CTS* 99, pp. 3087–9; *HTS* 121, pp. 4329–31.
[14] Biographies in *CTS* 96, pp. 3021–9; *HTS* 124, pp. 4381–8; epitaph by Chang Yüeh, *CTW* 230, pp. 8a–11a; *WYYH* 884, pp. 1a–3a.
[15] Biographies in *CTS* 96, pp. 3029–36; *HTS* 124, pp. 4389–94; epitaph by Yen Chen-ch'ing, *CTW* 343, pp. 1a–8a; supplementary inscription *CTW* 338, pp. 22b–24a.

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office which had been made by the empress Wei and the Princess An-lo. This caused an uproar, for several thousand officials, many of whom had paid in hard cash for their promotion, found themselves deprived of their posts. At the selection examinations at the end of the year, in which Sung Ching presided over the selection of civil officials and Yao Ch'ung over military appointments, their intention of purging the bureaucracy of its unworthy members became still more evident when of a total of more than ten thousand men eligible for appointment, all but two thousand were rejected.

During their regime, Jui-tsung's position on the throne was still not entirely secure, and in the eighth month he had to suppress a rising in Lo-yang led by Li Ch'ung-fu, the Prince of Ch'iao, second son of Chung-tsung, who had himself been planning a rebellion against the empress Wei at the time of Li Lung-chi's successful coup. His rising attracted few supporters and was quelled effortlessly, but he had had a good claim to the succession as Chung-tsung's legitimate heir.[16] The incident underlined the vulnerability of the imperial clan to succession disputes.

This insecurity was deliberately fostered by the Princess T'ai-p'ing, who now began pressing the claims of the heir apparent's brother Li Ch'eng-ch'i. It was fortunate that the royal princes were extremely fond of one another, for after Jui-tsung's restoration the heir apparent's four brothers had all been appointed to the command of various palace guards, which had been involved in almost every coup during the T'ang, and were thus in a position to effect a change in the succession by force. Early in 711 Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching, who realized that Li Ch'eng-ch'i as Jui-tsung's eldest son, and Li Shou-li, the oldest surviving grandson of Kao-tsung, both had a better claim to the succession than the heir apparent, memorialized the throne asking that they should be sent out to provincial posts to bring the princess's intrigues to an end, that two other princes should be made commanders in the heir apparent's own bodyguard, and that the princess and her husband should be sent away from the court to the Eastern Capital. The emperor agreed to transfer the royal princes from their posts in the guards, but refused to banish his sister to Lo-yang.[17] An even more extreme measure was now suggested. The emperor, always a credulous and superstitious man, was alarmed by a fortune-teller's warning of an imminent armed coup, and asked his ministers what steps he should take to forestall it. Chang Yüeh, supported by Yao Ch'ung, suggested that he should install the heir apparent as regent. On the second day of the second month this was done; the heir apparent was given power

[16] *TCTC* 209, p. 6653, and 210, pp. 6654–5; *CTS* 86, pp. 2835–7; *HTS* 81, pp. 3594–5.
[17] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6662–3.

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to decide all appointments of officials up to the sixth rank and all punishments up to hard labour.[18]

The Princess T'ai-p'ing was now forced to act. Two officials – one of them from the heir apparent's own household – were induced to protest against the abolition of the posts granted irregularly by the empress Wei and the Princess An-lo, on the grounds that this cast a public slur on the errors of the former emperor, and to draw attention to the unrest which this had aroused. The princess added her own voice to their plea, and Jui-tsung, weak-willed as ever, gave way. On the ninth day Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching were dismissed and sent out to provincial posts. Their attempt at reform and the heir apparent's dominance at court were over.[19]

For most of 711 the court was dominated by Wei An-shih[20] (651–714), a member of the same noble clan as the empress Wei, who had graduated as a *ming-ching*, and had become chief minister under the empress Wu in 700, remaining in office until the end of her reign. Apart from a brief dismissal following Chung-tsung's accession he had continued as chief minister until 706. He had then fallen out of favour, but was again made president of the Chancellery in the eighth month of 709. He had survived in office through the empress Wei's coup, and had been retired to become the heir apparent's second guardian towards the end of 710. He resisted staunchly all the Princess T'ai-p'ing's attempts to win him over to her support.

The second chief minister during these months was Li Jih-chih[21] (?–715) a *chin-shih* graduate from the Lo-yang area, who had spent much of his career in legal offices, winning a reputation for fairness and humanity during the worst days of the empress Wu's purges. He had been vice-president of the Chancellery at the end of Chung-tsung's reign, and was created chief minister by the empress Wei. He retained that position through 710, for most of the time as concurrent president of the Censorate.

Three *ad hominem* chief ministers also served under them; Chang Yüeh[22] (667–730) was a graduate of a palace examination in 689 who came from a family of minor officials from Lo-yang. He had served in various court posts under the empress Wu, rising to chief secretary of the Secretariat, when he became involved in the cause célèbre brought by the Chang brothers against Wei Yüan-chung. Having refused to perjure himself

[18] *CTS* 7, p. 156, and 8, p. 168; *TCTC* 210, p. 6663.
[19] *CTS* 7, p. 156; *TCTC* 210, pp. 6663–5.
[20] Biographies in *CTS* 92, pp. 2955–8; *HTS* 122, pp. 4349–51.
[21] Biographies in *CTS* 188, pp. 4926–7; *HTS* 116, p. 4241.
[22] Biographies in *CTS* 97, pp. 3049–57; *HTS* 125, pp. 4404–11: funerary inscription by Chang Chiu-ling; *CTW* 292, pp. 13b–16a.

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against Wei, he was exiled to Ling-nan. Recalled to court by Chung-tsung he rose to be vice-president of the Board of War concurrently serving as a scholar in the Hsiu-wen kuan, the academy of literary experts maintained under the Chancellery as draftsmen and editors of state documents. Kuo Yüan-chen[23] (656–713) was a native of Ho-pei, who graduated as a *chin-shih* at eighteen after studying at the T'ai-hsüeh where two other future chief ministers, Hsüeh Chi and Chao Yen-chao, were his classmates. He got into serious trouble in his first post, but the empress Wu was struck by his fine presence and ability, and employed him as an ambassador to Tibet. After this he had served as a governor on the Tibetan border and in central Asia, where he won a great reputation. He had been recalled after Jui-tsung's accession, and employed in defence preparations against the Turks. His appointment followed the practice under the empress Wu and Chung-tsung of including one senior military commander among their chief ministers. The last of the three was a very different person. Tou Huai-chen[24] (?–713) was the son of a chief minister, Tou Te-hsüan (served 663–6), and came from one of the most noble of all clans. Entering service by hereditary privilege he spent all of the empress Wu's reign as a provincial official, gaining a good reputation as an administrator. In 705 he was called to court and appointed president of the Censorate. He became notorious both as a sycophant and as the favourite of the Princess An-lo. At the fall of the empress Wei's clique he was exiled to the provinces, but was soon recalled as director of the Imperial Household Services. He now became a devoted sycophant of the Princess T'ai-p'ing, and after his appointment as chief minister went directly from court to her residence each day, to tell her what had been discussed and to discover what she wished done.

This ministry, with the exception of Wei An-shih, acted generally in the interests of the princess, and the reform of the bureaucracy effected by Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching was speedily undone, in spite of protests from the court. Manoeuvres continued around the heir apparent and Li Ch'eng-ch'i, whose daughter was created a princess in preparation for a dynastic marriage with the Eastern Turkish qaghan, Qapaghan. In the fourth month, Jui-tsung announced to his highest-ranking officials that he wished to abdicate in favour of the heir apparent, but one of the Princess T'ai-p'ing's partisans persuaded him that this would be premature. However, an edict was issued which formalized the heir apparent's participation in the discussion of all the highest affairs of state.

[23] Biographies in *CTS* 97, pp. 3042–9; *HTS* 122, pp. 4360–6. *Account of conduct* (*Hsing-chuang*) by Chang Yüeh, *CTW* 233, pp. 1a–7b.

[24] Biographies in *CTS* 183, pp. 4724–5; *HTS* 109, p. 4100.

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The heir apparent, none the less, remained under great pressure from his opponents, and in the fifth month even offered to resign his position in favour of Li Ch'eng-ch'i, and asked Jui-tsung to summon the Princess T'ai-p'ing back to Ch'ang-an.

Both the emperor and the princess were much concerned with religious matters at this time. The princess was devoted to a Buddhist monk Hui-fan who took advantage of her patronage to steal and misappropriate property on a great scale. When the president of the Censorate denounced Hui-fan, the princess had him demoted to a prefectural post.[25] At the same time the emperor's two sisters, Princess Chin-hsien and Princess Yü-chen (who like their brother were devout Taoists), became Taoist priestesses, and the emperor began building for them two lavish temples in the north-west of Ch'ang-an close to the imperial harem. Wei Chih-ku a grand counsellor and Li I, vice-president of the Secretariat, protested at the destruction of housing and the enormous waste of labour involved, and all the ministers opposed the plan with the exception of the empress's minion Tou Huai-chen, who personally directed the workmen's labours. But Jui-tsung persisted and carried the works to completion.[26]

The only positive policy carried through at this period was a reform of provincial government, the empire being divided into fifteen provinces for civil inspecting commissioners instead of ten. A plan was also put forward to introduce a new level of local administration by making all prefectures (*chou*) subordinate to a governor-general (*tu-tu*) of which twenty-four were established throughout the empire. These reforms however were defeated on the grounds that the new governors-general would have a dangerous degree of authority, and be impossible for the court to control.[27]

By the ninth month of 711 even the emperor had become aware of the deficiencies of his ministers. He called them together and upbraided them for the state of the empire, stricken by flood and drought, with its storehouses exhausted, and the swollen bureaucracy again growing daily, and then removed them all from their positions as chief ministers. They were, however, all given important posts in the central administration.

Four new chief ministers were appointed. The new president of the Chancellery was Liu Yu-ch'iu, who had been one of the conspirators in the plot which overthrew the empress Wei. He had already had a brief term as chief minister together with Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching, and had since been president first of the Board of Finance, and then of the Board

[25] *TCTC* 210, p. 6665; *CTS* 7, p. 157; *HTS* 5, p. 118.
[26] *HTS* 83, pp. 3656–7; *TCTC* 210, p. 6665; *CTS* 98, pp. 3061–3; *CTW* 237, pp. 12b–14a; *THY* 50, pp. 871–5.
[27] *TCTC* 210, p. 6666; *THY* 68, pp. 1192–6; *HTS* 49B, p. 1311; *CTS* 38, p. 1385.

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of Civil Office where he had been responsible for the new wave of improper and unsuitable appointments. His colleagues were Wei Chih-ku, Lu Hsiang-hsien and Ts'ui Shih, and these were joined in the new year, after Jui-tsung had established a new reign-title to signify the change of regime, by Ts'en Hsi and Tou Huai-chen who was presumably reappointed on the Princess T'ai-p'ing's insistence, to act as her agent.

Wei Chih-ku[28] (647–715) came from Ho-pei and had graduated as a *chin-shih* about 686. He had risen through court offices to become vice-president of the Chancellery under the empress Wu early in the eighth century, and was then employed as vice-president of the Court of Imperial Insignia (in which the future Hsüan-tsung was serving) and concurrently an officer in Jui-tsung's princely household. He had thus been connected with both the emperor and the heir apparent earlier in his career. At the beginning of Chung-tsung's reign he was vice-president of the Board of Civil Office, where he acquired a high reputation for the calibre of the men he recommended for office. In 706 he retired to mourn his mother, and was subsequently posted to a prefectural appointment. In 711 he had become grand counsellor and had bitterly attacked Jui-tsung's construction of temples for his sisters in two trenchant memorials which drew attention to the many pressing problems of the time, particularly the financial plight of the empire. Jui-tsung had taken no heed of his attacks on temple construction, but after appointing him a chief minister he was made concurrently president of the Board of Finance, and also president of the heir apparent's Personal Secretariat (*tso shu-tzu*). He remained steadfastly the heir apparent's supporter in an administration packed with his opponents.

Lu Hsiang-hsien[29] (665–736) was a member of a prominent southern clan from Su-chou, whose father had served the empress Wu as chief minister from 663 to 665. He had entered the service through a palace examination under the empress Wu and followed an elite career in court offices, rising to be vice-president of the Secretariat towards the end of Chung-tsung's reign. Ts'ui Shih[30] (671–713) came from a prominent family of Ho-pei and was the grandson of Ts'ui Jen-shih, a prominent official at T'ai-tsung's court, and briefly a chief minister in 648. A *chin-shih* graduate in 699 he had earned a high reputation as a writer when a young man, and early in Chung-tsung's reign rose to be under-secretary of the Department of Meritorious Services. He then became involved in the plot by Huan Yen-fan, Chang Chien-chih and other ministers to dispose of Wu San-ssu. Ts'ui Shih, however, betrayed the plotters to their intended

[28] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3061–4; *HTS* 126, p. 4413.
[29] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3064–9; *HTS* 116, pp. 4236–7.
[30] Biographies in *CTS* 74, pp. 2622–4; *HTS* 99, pp. 3921–3.

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victim, and once they had been banished from the capital in 706 arranged for their murder by his cousin Chou Li-chen. Ts'ui Shih now became the scandalous lover of Shang-kuan Wan-erh, the empress's female secretary, and throughout the remainder of Chung-tsung's reign was closely associated with her and the Princess An-lo. Through their influence he rose to become vice-president of the Secretariat and of the Board of Civil Office, and he, together with his colleague Cheng Yin, openly took bribes and made the appointments system a scandal. Eventually he was impeached and banished for his offences, but was almost immediately recalled to the capital as assistant of the Left in the Department of State. After the empress Wei achieved power he was appointed chief minister, but he was dismissed after Jui-tsung ascended the throne. He now became an adherent of the Princess T'ai-p'ing, and his appointment as chief minister in spite of his unsavoury background was her doing. He now secretly informed the princess of all government matters.

The two ministers added in the first month of 712 were the equally despicable Tou Huai-chen, and Ts'en Hsi.[31] The latter was a grandson of Ts'en Wen-pen, a prominent minister under T'ai-tsung. From a clan based in south-western Ho-nan, he was a *chin-shih* graduate who had reached the post of chief secretary in the Secretariat by the end of the empress Wu's reign. Under Chung-tsung he had served in the Board of Civil Office, in which hotbed of corruption he made a name for his utter integrity. The empress Wei had appointed him a chief minister, but on Jui-tsung's coming to the throne he was sent out as a prefect and later made president of the Board of Finance.

The Princess T'ai-p'ing was now in a powerful political position, but the general situation at court was deteriorating. Foreign problems threatened. Liu Yu-ch'iu disastrously replaced Hsüeh No, the general who had maintained peace on the north-eastern frontier for twenty years, with a new governor who immediately became embroiled in an unnecessary campaign against the Khitan and Hsi which ended in defeat and his own death. A rebellion broke out among the aborigines of Szechwan. The dynastic marriage alliance with the Turkish qaghan failed to materialize. The emperor, whose reluctance to rule had been growing steadily more apparent, finally decided to abdicate in favour of the heir apparent, his mind made up by the appearance of an inauspicious comet in the seventh month of 712.

Although the Princess T'ai-p'ing attempted to dissuade him, and the heir apparent tried to make him reconsider, the decision was irrevocable. His son, Hsüan-tsung, duly succeeded to the throne on the third day of

[31] Biographies in *CTS* 70, p. 2540; *HTS* 102, pp. 3967–8.

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the eighth month with all the due formality of a new reign title, Hsien-t'ien, the enthronement of his consort *née* Wang as empress, and a grand Act of Grace. However, despite Jui-tsung's formal abdication, the Princess T'ai-p'ing induced him to retain power in a most unusual way. Although Hsüan-tsung was now emperor and was to hold court daily, Jui-tsung remained Retired Emperor (*t'ai-shang-huang*), himself holding court every fifth day and retaining the authority to make all appointments to the highest offices of the third rank and above, and to judge the most serious criminal and administrative matters.[32]

The situation between the new emperor and the Princess T'ai-p'ing was now serious. Most of the ministers were her adherents. Liu Yu-ch'iu, with Hsüan-tsung's approval now plotted with one of the generals of the Palace Guards to asssassinate the princess. The plot, however, leaked out and Liu Yu-ch'iu was arrested and banished to Ling-nan, where Ts'ui Shih, who had been on bad terms with him in spite of Liu having saved his life in 710, attempted to have him murdered.[33]

In the first month of 713 the military situation in the north-east flared up again, and arrangements were made for Hsüan-tsung in person to direct operations on the frontier, where very large forces had been assembled. In the end, however, he did not go, perhaps because the political situation at court made it impossible for him to leave.[34] His position was still further weakened in the same month with the appointment of Hsiao Chih-chung as a chief minister. Hsiao Chih-chung[35] (?–713) was descended from a distinguished official family from south-eastern Shantung, and had served with distinction at court under the empress Wu. Under Chung-tsung he enjoyed special favour because his family and that of the empress Wei were closely linked by marriage. After serving as vice-president of the Board of Civil Office he became a chief minister in 707, remaining in that position until the fall of the empress Wei's regime in 710, when he had escaped punishment largely thanks to the intercession of the Princess T'ai-p'ing. He now, to the surprise of his friends, became a powerful partisan of the princess.

The princess was now able to manipulate important affairs and influence major appointments through her brother the Retired Emperor, and had the support of most of the great ministers and a large proportion of the court. In the sixth month of 713 she, Tou Huai-chen, Ts'en Hsi, Ts'ui Shih, Hsiao Chih-chung, Hsüeh Chi the former chief minister who was now an official in Hsüan-tsung's household, the vice-governor of the

[32] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6673–4; *CTS* 8, pp. 168–70.
[33] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6676–7; *CTS* 97, p. 3041.
[34] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6696–7.
[35] *HTS* 5, p. 120; *CTS* 92, p. 2971. Biographies in *CTS* 92, pp. 2968–71; *HTS* 122, pp. 4371–4.

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capital, several generals of the Palace Guards and her favourite monk Hui-fan hatched a plot to poison Hsüan-tsung and openly take power. However, other officials, alarmed at her growing influence, persuaded Hsüan-tsung that he must now take decisive action. When Wei Chih-ku revealed that the princess was planning a rebellion, Hsüan-tsung with his two younger brothers Li Fan and Li Yeh and a group of close associates decided to strike first and kill the plotters. On the ninth day of the eighth month a group of three hundred carefully-chosen troops led by Wang Mao-chung, a general who had formerly been Hsüan-tsung's personal slave, arrested the conspirators. Hsiao Chih-chung, Ts'en Hsi and the lesser conspirators were executed on the spot. Tou Huai-chen killed himself. Hsüeh Chi and Ts'ui Shih were ordered to commit suicide. The princess escaped to a monastery, but gave herself up three days later and was permitted to commit suicide. All her sons were executed except Hsüeh Ch'ung-chien who had tried to counsel her against her plot on several occasions. The confiscation of the immense wealth and property she had accumulated during her years of influence took years to complete.[36] On the next day, the fourth day of the seventh month of 713, Jui-tsung formally divested himself of his remaining powers.[37]

Hsüan-tsung was now ruler in fact as well as in name. He was still only twenty-eight years old, and the three years of vicious political intrigue and constant struggle which he had experienced since he led the coup against the empress Wei form a prologue indivisible from the political history of his reign and had a lasting effect upon his conduct of the empire's affairs.

THE EARLY REIGN (713–20): YAO CH'UNG AND SUNG CHING

With the death of the Princess T'ai-p'ing all but one of the chief ministers, Wei Chih-ku, were either executed or forced to commit suicide. In their place Hsüan-tsung appointed Kuo Yüan-chen who had been one of the active conspirators, and Chang Yüeh, one of the ministers who had encouraged him to undertake the coup. In the ninth month Liu Yu-ch'iu became a fourth chief minister. This ministry, however, was shortlived. In the tenth month the emperor ordered large scale military manoeuvres, which did not go according to plan. Kuo Yüan-chen was held responsible and banished to Ling-nan, escaping summary execution only because of the intercession of Chang Yüeh and Liu Yu-ch'iu.[38]

[36] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6681–6; *CTS* 8, p. 169; *HTS* 83, pp. 3651–2.
[37] The abdication edict is in *CTS* 8, pp. 169–70.
[38] *CTS* 97, p. 3048; *CTS* 96, p. 3023; *TCTC* 210, p. 6687.

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Hsüan-tsung now summoned Yao Ch'ung, leader of the attempted reforms of 710, who proposed an extensive programme of reforms (to which we shall return below), and appointed him as chief minister and as president of the Board of War in place of the luckless Kuo Yüan-chen. Chang Yüeh had been on bad terms with Yao, and opposed his appointment. To avoid inevitable discord the emperor therefore dismissed him and sent him out to a provincial post at the end of 713, and also removed Liu Yu-ch'iu to a sinecure post. They were replaced by Lu Huai-shen[39] (?–716) the vice-president of the Chancellery and a member of one of the greatest clans of Ho-pei, who had graduated as a *chin-shih* and served as a censor under both the empress Wu and Chung-tsung. Yao Ch'ung had little opinion of the talents of the aged Wei Chih-ku, sole survivor of the preceding regime, and in the fifth month of 714 managed to have him relieved of his position and transferred to the Board of Works.[40]

There were now only two chief ministers, of whom Yao Ch'ung was indisputably the dominant figure.[41] Lu Huai-shen was completely overshadowed by him. This set a new pattern, which was to last throughout Hsüan-tsung's reign, of employing a very small group of chief ministers, usually only two or three men, one of whom was predominant in formulating policy. The chief ministers usually remained in office for some years, and the constant changes and insecurity of tenure which had characterized recent decades became a thing of the past. Yao Ch'ung and Lu Huai-shen remained in power until the end of 716, when Lu fell sick and died. He was briefly replaced by Yüan Ch'ien-yao[42] (?–731), a *chin-shih* graduate from Ho-pei distantly descended from the royal family of the Toba Wei, who had been a censor under Chung-tsung and since 710 had served in important provincial posts. In 713 he had been recommended to Hsüan-tsung by his favourite Chiang Chiao, and held a high office in the Department of State Affairs. However, almost immediately Yao Ch'ung himself fell ill and was forced to retire in the twelfth month of 716.[43] He remained a powerful influence at court until his death in 721, and the emperor often turned to him for advice, but he played no further active role in policy-making.[44]

He recommended as his successor Sung Ching, who had been his colleague as chief minister in 710, and was currently governor-general of Kuang-chou. Sung was a man who could be depended upon to pursue

[39] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3064–9; *HTS* 126, pp. 4415–18.
[40] *CTS* 98, p. 3064; *TCTC* 211, p. 6700.
[41] *CTS* 96, p. 3025; *CTS* 98, p. 3068.
[42] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3070–2; *HTS* 127, pp. 4450–1.
[43] *CTS* 96, p. 3025. Sung Ching was also named in Lu Huai-shen's testamentary memorial, *CTS* 98, p. 3068.
[44] *TCTC* 212, p. 6739.

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much the same sort of policies, and in the last days of 716 Yao Ch'ung and Yüan Ch'ien-yao were replaced as chief ministers by Sung Ching and Su T'ing[45] (670–727) the vice-president of the Chancellery. The latter was the son of Su Kuei, who had been a chief minister under Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung. He had passed both the *chin-shih* and a palace examination and was well-known as a fine writer and scholar. He had been a censor under the empress Wu and later a chief secretary in both the Chancellery and Secretariat. Hsüan-tsung had employed him in a succession of important court posts, and entrusted him with the drafting and composition of state documents. Sung Ching, like Yao Ch'ung before him, was the dominant minister. A decisive determined man of strong principles, he formulated policy, while Su T'ing had the skill and experience needed in putting his plans into the most effective form. They remained in office until 720, and their dismissal marked the end of the first phase of Hsüan-tsung's reign.[46]

Although these early years were very different from the unstable period of Jui-tsung's reign, and the first year under Hsüan-tsung when there had been frequent changes of ministers and sharp factional divisions, they nevertheless showed a strong continuity in terms of personnel. From 710 to 720 every chief minister of any consequence was an examination graduate, usually from the *chin-shih* or a palace examination. Most of them came from well-established official families, but not from the highest-ranking aristocratic clans; many of them were from the Lo-yang region – the centre of political power under the empress Wu, or from Ho-pei or Ho-nan. All had served their apprenticeship in office under the empress Wu, most of them in court offices and particularly in the Censorate. The only occasion when an outsider was appointed was immediately after the coup in 710, when Chung Shao-ching, one of the conspirators was made chief minister. But he was removed in a matter of days when his fellow ministers protested that he was unfit for his office, having begun his career in a clerical post.

They were mostly excellent scholars, and good administrators. Only Ts'ui Shih and Tou Huai-chen were seriously tainted by the corruption of the court under Chung-tsung. Most of Jui-tsung's ministers were estimable if limited men, who could accomplish little in a court where the emperor had little authority and offered no leadership, where they themselves had only insecure tenure in office, and where politics were subject to constant interference by imperial relatives and favourites. Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching were men of precisely the same sort of experience and

[45] *CTS* 96, pp. 3025–6; *HTS* 124, pp. 4385–6.
[46] Biographies in *CTS* 88, pp. 2880–2; *HTS* 125, pp. 4399–403.

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background, who had the good fortune to hold power under a strong and decisive emperor who was willing to allow them far greater authority and scope for action. The higher echelons of the bureaucracy in the early reign of Hsüan-tsung reflect great credit upon the empress Wu as an excellent judge of men, and show that her examination system had identified a gifted elite within the official service. It was through these men that Hsüan-tsung now undertook a series of major reforms.

Government policies (714–20)

At the end of 713 Yao Ch'ung had been serving as prefect of T'ung-chou, the important prefecture immediately east of Ch'ang-an. When the grand military exercises were ordered that autumn, all the prefects serving within three hundred *li* were expected to attend, by custom, and the emperor specially summoned Yao Ch'ung. The emperor and Yao Ch'ung hunted together on horseback and afterwards discussed politics. The emperor then asked Yao whether he would serve as his chief minister. Yao answered that he must decline unless the emperor was willing to assent to a ten-point programme of reforms. This programme stated that the emperor should: restore government by humanity rather than rely on the deterrent power of harsh laws; refrain from military adventures; apply the law in all its rigour to everyone alike, including those closest to him; prevent eunuchs from taking any part in politics; prohibit the levying of excessive taxes in the hope of achieving the emperor's favour; prohibit the appointment of imperial kinsmen to posts in the central government; restore the personal authority of the emperor which had been diminished by too intimate relationships with his ministers; allow ministers free-spoken remonstration without fear of arbitrary punishment; suspend the construction of Buddhist and Taoist temples; and eliminate the excessive political power of the consort families. The emperor agreed, and Yao accepted appointment.[47]

The major political problems which Hsüan-tsung faced after 714 had already emerged clearly during the previous reign, and Yao Ch'ung's points had been anticipated by many other memorials during the past decade, but he was now able to put them forcibly before Hsüan-tsung when, for the first time, the emperor was in a strong enough personal position to contemplate such a sweeping programme of change. Not every point could be acted upon immediately, but in general the policies followed during the years from 714–20 sprang from his proposals.

[47] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6688–90; *HTS* 124, p. 4383. For Yao Ch'ung's ten-point reform proposal see *CTW* 206, pp. 14a–b.

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These suggested institutional reforms were designed to produce a more healthy relationship between a powerful emperor and his court, which was vital if his regime was to enjoy the support of the most talented statesmen. The regime of the empress Wu, especially during the late 680s and early 690s, had introduced into court politics a new degree of arbitrary decision, insecurity of office, and fear. This had been followed by the equally arbitrary and unstable court politics of Chung-tsung's time when the situation had deteriorated still further as a result of rampant corruption and nepotism. There was now a general feeling of disenchantment, a desire for change, and a nostalgia for the better days of T'ai-tsung's court. This desire for a 'restoration' of the T'ang and a moral regeneration of its policies, is a constant theme in memorials of the period and prompted Wu Ching, an official historian frustrated in his task of compiling the record of the empress Wu's reign by the continual interference of politicians, to turn to the composition of the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, a somewhat idealized account of T'ai-tsung's actions as emperor which became a celebrated utopian model of ideal government.[48] There is little doubt that Wu Ching wrote it not so much as a simple celebration of T'ai-tsung's virtues as a monarch, but as a model for the restoration of a regime in which imperial authority was to be unchallenged, but in which emperor and ministers would work together in harmony, frank openness and mutual trust.

In this respect the reforms of 714–20 closely followed Yao Ch'ung's suggestions. Imperial authority and administrative stability were restored. The *esprit de corps* of the demoralized bureaucracy was rebuilt, and extensive institutional changes were put in hand.

The reform of central government

One of the major causes of instability at court under Hsüan-tsung's predecessors had been the great number of chief ministers, and the very short tenure which many of them enjoyed in office. Under the early T'ang the chief ministers had been of two categories. The presidents of the Chancellery and Secretariat and the vice-presidents of the Department of State Sffairs, were chief ministers *ex officio*, six persons in all if all the established posts were filled. In addition other high ranking ministers, and occasionally prominent generals in time of war, might be appointed chief ministers *ad hominem*. Under Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung there were

[48] On *Chen-kuan cheng-yao* see Harada Taneshige, *Jōgan seiyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1965); Winston G. Lewis, 'The *Chen-kuan cheng-yao:* a source for the study of early T'ang government', unpublished M.A. thesis, Hong Kong University, 1962.

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great numbers of such appointments, many of them lasting for only a few months. During the empress Wei's brief regime there were no fewer than seventeen chief ministers serving simultaneously, a quite unwieldy number for the effective conduct of business.

Already under Jui-tsung the first steps were taken to reduce the number. By the end of 710 it was reduced to six, and at times during Jui-tsung's reign it fell to four. After Hsüan-tsung assumed full power at the end of 713, the number was soon cut further from four to two persons, only one of whom held *ex officio* office.

This reduction in numbers was accompanied by an important formal change. During the last quarter of the seventh century the standing of the Department of State Affairs, the chief organ of the central executive, had steadily declined. By the end of the empress Wu's regime it had become customary to appoint its vice-presidents to one or other of the titles held by an *ad hominem* chief minister. In 711 this rule was formalized, and henceforth the vice-presidents were no longer chief ministers unless specially designated. At the end of 713 this rule was reaffirmed, and the vice-presidents were now entitled deputy chief ministers (*ch'eng-hsiang*).[49]

Moreover, it became common to leave unfilled some of the high offices whose incumbents were *ex officio* chief ministers. There were, for example, no vice-presidents of the Department of State Affairs from 714 to 724, while from 714 to 720, presidents of both the Chancellery and the Secretariat were never in office simultaneously, so that only the predominant chief minister held his office *ex officio*, his colleague serving as vice-president of the other ministry.

This situation led to a gradual coalescence of the functions of the Chancellery and Secretariat. These gradually became a coordinated organization responsible both for the formulation and drafting of policy, and for the scrutiny and review of legislation. It also served as the secretariat for the very small group of chief ministers responsible with the emperor for major policy decisions. In short, there was a steady concentration of authority around the chief ministers, and particularly around the senior figure among them.

Another important measure, enacted at Sung Ching's suggestion in the tenth month of 717, attempted to restore the open and public conduct of official court business. Under the empress Wu many matters had been settled in private, and the censors in particular had been given great

[49] *TCTC* 210, p. 6692; *THY* 57, p. 990; *CTS* 8, p. 172; *HTS* 46, p. 1185. On the changes in the system of chief ministers see Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang-shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Hong Kong, 1969), pp. 1–101, which was first published in 1952; Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang-tai san-sheng-chi chih fa-chan yen-chiu', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao* 3.1 (1960) 19–120; Chou Tao-chi, *Han-T'ang tsai-hsiang chih-tu* (Taipei, 1964).

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freedom to make secret impeachments, without the presence of the court diarists to preserve a record. This was now banned, and all business apart from matters which were by their nature secret was to be conducted in open court and recorded by the diarists.[50]

A further important change came with the reorganization of the Censorate. Since 684 the Censorate, the body responsible for the efficient conduct of administration, had been divided into two sections, one with responsibility for the personnel of central government, the other for officials serving in provincial posts. This reflected the growing tendency towards a division within the bureaucracy between an elite stream serving almost exclusively at the capital – which included many who had entered through the exams – and a second stream which served, often for very long periods of duty, in the provinces. In 713 this division was ended, and the Censorate reorganized as a single office, as under the early T'ang. The reorganization of the Censorate signalled the beginning of a systematic attempt to reunify the bureaucracy.[51]

The selection of officials

Any attempt to restore the efficiency and morale of the bureaucracy had to deal with the problem of selection for office.[52] There were in fact two closely interrelated problems. The more immediate one was the undoing of the damage done by the corrupt appointment during Chung-tsung's reign of great numbers of supernumerary officials. Apart from the fact that many of these men were unsuitable for high office, their appointment, mostly to high-ranking positions at the capital, had swollen the bureaucracy of central government, placing a huge financial strain on the authorities who had to provide their salaries. These additional appointments also affected the other, and perhaps more serious problem, the great and growing gap between the metropolitan and provincial bureaucratic service, and the consequent threat to the principle, established since Sui times, of a single, interchangeable body of officials who could be posted to any position of appropriate rank either at the capital or in the provinces. Under the empress Wu the increasing favour shown to successful examination candidates had led to the growth of a regular career pattern for promising young men which, after appointment as a county marshal, usually in the metropolitan area, kept them continually in office at court. It is surprising, looking at the careers of the chief ministers under Jui-tsung,

50 *TCTC* 211, pp. 6728–9.
51 *TCTC* 203, p. 6421; *THY* 60, p. 1041; *HTS* 48, p. 1237; *TLT* 13, p. 3a.
52 See Penelope A. Herbert, 'Civil service selection in China in the latter half of the seventh century', *Papers on Far Eastern History* (Canberra), 13 (1976) 1–40.

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to see how little provincial service most of them had experienced. Provincial posts, on the other hand, although well-paid and highly ranked, were avoided by the cream of the bureaucracy and filled by seniority from among those who had risen from the clerical service, or by men who had failed or disgraced themselves in the ministries at the capital, or by those in temporary political eclipse.

Even in the best times, promising young men would systematically refuse appointments to provincial posts. With the advent of the empress Wei it became possible to gain a metropolitan post, albeit a supernumerary one, far more easily, and the staffing of the local administrations suffered still further. There had been continuous complaints about this problem since the 690s, and in 709 Wei Ssu-li had suggested, unsuccessfully, that no man should be appointed to a high position in the central ministries until he had served as a prefect or county magistrate.

We have seen how Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching had attempted to attack the problem of supernumerary posts in 710, only to have their policies reversed in the next year. After 714 Yao Ch'ung began to tackle the larger problem of selecting adequately talented recruits for provincial posts. Almost immediately after his appointment as chief minister, at the beginning of 714, an edict ordered that it should become a permanent rule to select talented officials from the capital to serve in the provinces as prefects and governors-general, and that prefects and governors-general with good records in administration should be posted to the capital.

Yao Ch'ung was pressed on this point by a talented young commissioner, Chang Chiu-ling.[53] The latter was a *chin-shih* graduate of 702 from the remote southern city of Shao-chou north of Canton, who had only gained a post thanks to the patronage of Chang Yüeh, and had subsequently taken two palace examinations, one in 707, and another conducted by Hsüan-tsung himself, in 712 during which he had raised the crucial problem of selection in his answers. Chang raised the matter again in a very circumstantial memorial to the emperor in the fifth month of 715, laying special stress on selection for provincial posts, especially those posts far distant from the capital, and urging that men should not be left in one post for excessively long periods.[54]

In the sixth month of 715 the emperor issued another edict again

[53] Biographies in *CTS* 99, pp. 3097–100; *HTS* 126, pp. 4424–30. These are translated, together with Hsü Hao's epitaph *CTW* 440, pp. 13a–18a and the tomb inscription discovered in 1960, in Herbert, 'Chang Chiu-ling'.

[54] The letter is in *WYYH* 670, pp. 1a–2a; *Ch'ü-chiang chi* (Ssu-pu Ts'ung-kan edn), 16 pp. 9b–11a; Yao's reply *WYYH* 689, pp. 1a–b; *Ch'ü-chiang chi* 16, pp. 11a–12a. The memorial of 715 is in *Ch'ü-chiang chi* 16, pp. 5a–9b; *WYYH* 676, pp. 1a–5a.

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ordering the interchange of metropolitan and provincial officials and a more thorough system of annual assessment of provincial officials by the provincial inspecting commissioners (*an-ch'a shih*), to be confirmed by the Boards of Civil Office and of Finance. Men with good assessments were to be eligible for appointment to the capital, while no man was to be appointed to an official post in central government before having served in the provinces as a prefect or magistrate.[55]

But in spite of these edicts and the emperor's determination to improve the quality of those in provincial posts, the officials themselves remained reluctant to serve outside the capital. Early in 716, after complaints about the results of the latest selection examinations, Hsüan-tsung summoned all those who had been newly appointed as county magistrates – the standard among whom had been notoriously poor – to the palace where he examined them personally on their plans for administration. Their answers were so unsatisfactory that forty-five were sent home to study, and the officials who had been in charge of the selection of civil officials for some years were themselves sent out to the provinces as prefects, in spite of their excellent reputations.[56] Chang Chiu-ling, who had been so deeply involved in these reforms, seems to have offended Yao Ch'ung, perhaps because he was a protégé of Chang Yüeh, who was on bad terms with the chief minister. In spite of the reforms which had been carried through partly at his instigation, Chang Chiu-ling retired, apparently out of frustration, to his home province late in 716.

Selection of suitable officials was not the only problem facing provincial government. The court at this time was also clearly aware of the need for some level of administrative organization between the central government and the prefecture, which could not only help assess the conduct of local officials but also supervise their conduct of administration. Early in the dynasty, China had been divided into ten 'circuits' (*tao*) to which censors were despatched periodically to inspect local government. In 706 these censors were replaced by inspecting commissioners. In 711 an attempt had been made to reorganize the empire into fifteen circuits, and to interpose a new permanent level of local administrative division above the prefecture. This had, however, failed, and in 714 inspecting commissioners (now entitled *an-ch'a ts'ai-fang ch'u-chih shih*) were again appointed to each of the old ten circuits.[57] However, in 716, in spite of the

[55] *THY* 75, p. 1360; *THY* 81, p. 1501; *TFYK* 635, pp. 226–36; cf. an earlier order from 714 *TCTC* 211, p. 6694.

[56] *TCTC* 211, p. 6716; *HTS* 45, p. 1176.

[57] On the commissioners of 706, see *THY* 77, p. 1415; *HTS* 49B, p. 1311; *TT* 32, p. 184c; *TTCLC* 103, pp. 524–5. The reform of 711, see *TCTC* 210, p. 6666. The reappointment of commissioners in 714, see *TCTC* 211, p. 6697.

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emperor's drive to up-grade local administration and the role which had been assigned to them in the selection process, the inspecting commissioners were abolished.

The re-codification of law

The reforms of government undertaken in the period to 720 consisted almost entirely of restoring and enforcing the norms of administration laid down in the seventh century before the empress Wu had established her dominance. These had been embodied in a complex corpus of codified law, the Code (*Lü*), Statutes (*Ling*), Regulations (*Ko*) and Ordinances (*Shih*) which had been regularly revised and re-promulgated until 685. After that date the empress did not have any further revisions made, although collections of '*Permanently applicable edicts subsequent to the regulations*' (*Ko-hou ch'ang-hsing ch'ih*) were compiled, embodying legislation amending the codified law. A thorough revision of all codified law was carried out in 705 after the fall of the empress Wu, under T'ang Hsiu-ching, Wei An-shih and Su Kuei. After Jui-tsung's accession in 710 a new revision was ordered, and a commission of compilers appointed which included an unusually large number of legal specialists. This new edition of codified law was completed in the second month of 712 and promulgated.[58]

At the end of 713 Yao Ch'ung and Lu Huai-shen headed a commission appointed to revise the Statutes, Regulations and Ordinances – that is the sections of codified law relevant to administrative matters. This was completed in the third month of 715 and promulgated. It was later known as the *First K'ai-yüan Statutes* (*K'ai yüan ch'ien-ling*).

With the advent of Sung Ching and Su T'ing as chief ministers, yet another revision was ordered, this time including the penal Code. Some of the same legal specialists who had assisted Yao Ch'ung also took part, and the compilation was completed in 719, presented to the throne in the third month and promulgated. It is usually known as the *Later K'ai-yüan Statutes* (*K'ai-yüan hou-ling*) and is of great historical importance, since a large part of it was incorporated in the *T'ang liu-tien*, which provides much of our detailed knowledge of T'ang administrative law.[59]

The decade 710–19 was thus an important period in the formulation of centrally codified administrative law designed to bring China once more

[58] *THY* 39, p. 702; *CTS* 50, p. 2149; *TT* 165, p. 871b; *TFYK* 612, pp. 10a–11a. On the compilations of codified law during the reign, see the introduction to Niida Noboru, *Tōryō shūi* (Tokyo, 1933), pp. 17 ff.; Shiga Shūzō, 'Kan Tō kan no hōten ni tsuite ni san no kōshō', *Tōhogaku*, 17 (1958) 27–43.

[59] *THY* 39, p. 703; *TLT* 6, p. 18b; *CTS* 50, pp. 2138, 2149–50; *HTS* 56, p. 1413; *TT* 165, p. 871b; *TFYK* 612, pp. 12a–b.

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under a carefully drawn-up system of uniform administrative rules and uniform practice, as was essential for the restoration of a strongly centralized empire.

Financial problems

One recurrent refrain in all the memorials outlining the empire's ills which survive from the latter part of Chung-tsung's reign and from Jui-tsung's time, is that of the state's inadequate financial resources, failing revenues and lack of accumulated reserves. In the last days of the empress Wu an attempt had been made to re-register the population. New forms of tax, the household levy (*hu-shui*) and land levy (*ti-shui*) had begun to provide sizeable supplementary revenues, and there had been open discussion of levying taxation from trade and the merchant community.[60] However, in general no close attention had been given to overall financial policy.

The empire's financial problems had been considerably eased when the empress had moved her capital to Lo-yang. The Eastern Capital was close to the rich grain-producing plains of eastern China, and could be supplied far more easily and cheaply than Ch'ang-an. The empress's own return to Ch'ang-an during the period 701–3 was dictated by political pressures, as was the permanent removal of the capital to Ch'ang-an under Chung-tsung, whose empress Wei had her political base in Kuan-chung. This transfer of the government to the north-west renewed the vast logistic problem of supplying a metropolis comprising nearly a million people, situated in a province which was comparatively poor in resources and which had a harsh and unpredictable climate, and a declining population, a very large proportion of which formed households whose members served in the militia forces and were thus in varying degrees tax exempt.[61]

The problem of transporting supplies to Ch'ang-an was a difficult one. Although Sui Yang-ti's canal systems had provided an excellent transport network in the eastern plain, connecting the Yangtze to the Huai and the Huang-ho, and the Huang-ho with the area near modern Tientsin, the transport of grain and other goods up the Huang-ho and Wei River to Ch'ang-an was impeded by the silt-laden channel of the Huang-ho and above all by the great rapids at San-men. During Kao-tsung's reign, attempts had been made to build a road around these rapids, and to build a tow-path for trackers along the cliffs so that boats could be hauled up through the rapids, but neither scheme was a success. Although the canal

[60] See Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 28–31; Denis Twitchett 'A Confucian's view of the taxation of commerce; Ts'ui Jung's memorial of 703', *BSOAS*, 36.2 (1973) 429; T'ang Ch'ang-ju, 'Kuan yü Wu Tse-t'ien t'ung-chih mo-nien ti fou-t'ao hu', *LSYC*, 6 (1961) 90–5.

[61] See Ch'üan Han-sheng, *T'ang Sung ti-kuo yü yün-ho* (Chungking, 1944).

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parallel to the Wei River which gave access to the dock at Ch'ang-an was dredged and improved in 672, transport from Lo-yang to Ch'ang-an remained difficult and costly.[62] Even during the peak in the early years of Kao-tsung's reign it seems that only about 200,000 bushels of tax grain were shipped to Ch'ang-an each year,[63] and after 657 famine conditions in Kuan-chung had regularly resulted in the transfer of the court to Lo-yang, an immensely costly undertaking.

The empress Wu's permanent establishment of the court in Lo-yang led to further neglect of the transport system, and even to the deterioration of the main canal system serving the great plain. By the time of Hsüan-tsung's accession, the great dam and sluice gates at the junction of the canal with the Huang-ho had fallen into disrepair and were impassable.

Meanwhile, the reign of Chung-tsung had been marked by repeated famine. In 705 there was a great flood affecting seventeen prefectures in Ho-pei, and flooding in the Wei valley. In 706 there was a terrible drought lasting through the winter until the early summer of 707, and consequent famine in Kuan-chung, Ho-pei and Ho-nan. There were further serious famines in 708 and 709 in which year grain had to be carted overland to Ch'ang-an from the great plain and from the Huai and Yangtze regions.[64]

Early in Chung-tsung's reign Li Chiao and Sung Chih-wen had urged him to remove the capital permanently to Lo-yang, and now the ministers renewed their pleas, but the empress Wei used her influence with the emperor to prevent it. An attempt by Ts'ui Shih to open an alternative route to the south across the mountains through Shang-chou was a disastrous and costly fiasco.[65]

Chung-tsung's death did nothing to solve the problem. The new regime under Jui-tsung and Hsüan-tsung was still too unstable to leave Ch'ang-an, and the round of natural disasters continued. In 711 there was a great earthquake in the Fen River valley in Ho-tung, with many killed. In 712 there was a long drought in spring and another in early summer. The winter of 712–13 saw a serious famine in the Wei River valley and the metropolitan district of Ch'ang-an. There was another serious drought in 714.

In 713 Hsüan-tsung decided to move the capital to Lo-yang, but the political crisis between himself and the Princess T'ai-p'ing made it impossible to leave.[66] However, something was at last done to improve the

[62] *TT* 10, p. 56c; *TFYK* 497, p. 8a; *TFYK* 498, p. 15b.
[63] *HTS* 53, p. 1365.
[64] See *CTS* 37; *HTS* 35, 36, *passim* for information on natural disasters.
[65] *CTS* 74, p. 2623.
[66] *TFYK* 113, pp. 18a–20a; *TTCLC* 79, p. 451.

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transport system. Li Chieh, prefect of Shan-chou, was appointed commissioner for land and water transport (*shui-lu chuan-yün shih*) and ordered to reorganize the transport of grain between Lo-yang and Shan-chou above the San-men rapids by overland haulage. This was done so successfully that eventually it was possible to transport a million *shih* of grain annually, five times as much as in Kao-tsung's time. In 714 Li Chieh also rebuilt the sluices at the junction of the Pien Canal and the Huang-ho, thus restoring through traffic from the south to Lo-yang.[67]

In spite of Li Chieh's achievements, the problems of supplying Ch'ang-an continued to be severe, in part because of the growing military establishment in Kuan-chung and the north-west, in part because of continuing crop failures and shortages in the metropolitan area, which was struck by a destructive hurricane in 714, again followed by a severe drought.

The toll of natural disasters was not, however, confined to Kuan-chung. The great plain, which produced much of the state's revenue, was also very badly hit during the first years of Hsüan-tsung's reign. In 715 there were major spring floods in Ho-nan and Ho-pei followed in the summer by a plague of locusts. An even more serious plague of locusts affected the eastern plains in 716 consuming the entire crop over a wide area. Ho-nan was also badly affected by floods. There was serious flooding in the valley of the river Lo in 716 and 717. In 717 much of central Ho-nan was inundated, destroying great areas under crops and inundating the city of Kung-hsien on the Pien Canal. These floods and natural disasters in Ho-nan and Ho-pei were especially serious, since these were the most densely peopled and productive regions of China, upon the revenues of which the government depended most heavily.

At the beginning of 717 the inevitable happened, and Hsüan-tsung was forced to move the court to Lo-yang. As usual this was difficult, costly and long-drawn out; the imperial cortege took twenty-four days to reach Lo-yang where the court remained until the winter of 718. During the next twenty years Hsüan-tsung spent nine years in all in Lo-yang, and the court was uprooted, at great expense and with considerable dislocation of government business, no less than ten times. These moves grew more and more costly as the size and complexity of the administration grew, and must have been a serious drain on the state's resources.[68]

[67] *TT* 10, p. 57c; *THY* 87, pp. 1595–601; *TFYK* 497, p. 8b; *CTS* 100, p. 3111.

[68] *CTS* 96, pp. 3023–4; *TCTC* 211, pp. 6726–7; *TTCLC* 79, p. 452. Detailed sources on the changes of capital are given in Ch'üan Han-sheng, *T'ang Sung ti-kuo yü yün-ho*, pp. 25–31.

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Table 7. *Location of Hsüan-tsung's court*

Until 717, i, 10	Ch'ang-an
717, ii, 3 until 718, xi, 1	Lo-yang
718, xi, 1 until 722, i, 15	Ch'ang-an
722, ii, 7 until 723, i, 3	Lo-yang
Progress to T'ai-yüan 723, i, 3 until iii, 5	
723, iii, 5 until 724, xi, 14	Ch'ang-an
724, xi, 22 until 727, ix, 22	Lo-yang
Progress to T'ai-shan 725, x, 11 until xii, 20	
727, x, 11 until 731, x, 21	Ch'ang-an
731, xi until 732, x, 12	Lo-yang
Progress to T'ai-yüan 732, x, 12 until xii, 2	
732, xii, 2 until 734, i, 6	Ch'ang-an
734, i, 16 until 736, x, 2	Lo-yang
After 736, x, 21	Ch'ang-an

Famine relief

The government took serious measures to combat famine. In the ninth month 714 an edict ordered the extension throughout the country of the system of 'price-regulating granaries (*ch'ang-p'ing ts'ang*) which had operated in the capitals since 655. These granaries bought in grain in times of glut at a price higher than the regular market price, and sold off their stocks in times of famine at prices lower than those prevailing, as a device to alleviate the hardships caused to the farmers by excessive fluctuations of prices. In 719 a further edict ordered the establishment of such granaries throughout the northern provinces, as well as in the major cities of the Yangtze valley and Szechwan. Specified sums were allocated to each prefecture for use as capital.

At the same time the old-established system of relief granaries (*i-ts'ang*) by which prefectures were expected to maintain grain stocks, collected through a land levy (*ti-shui*) was reformed. It had become the practice to misappropriate this grain and send it to the capital as ordinary revenue. In 716 this practice was prohibited, and the grain was ordered to be used only for relief of famine.

This was a most important development. By the last years of Hsüan-tsung's reign there were enormous grain reserves built up in the relief granaries, especially in the provinces of Kuan-nei, Ho-tung, Ho-pei and Ho-nan, which were most prone to famine. These stocks cushioned the impact of the natural disasters of the 730s and 740s to a considerable degree.[69]

[69] *CTS* 49, p. 2124; *THY* 88, pp. 1612–13; *TFYK* 502, pp. 22b–24b. Twitchett, *Financial administration*, p. 193 gives the extent of these reserves.

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Taxation

The financial problems of Hsüan-tsung's early years were not due solely to the difficulty of transporting revenue collected in grain and cloth to the capital. There continued to be a chronic shortage of revenue. The major basic problem, the inadequate registration of the population, and the consequent omission from the tax-registers of a very large proportion of potential taxpayers, had become serious in the 690s, and had only been partially alleviated by the empress Wu's somewhat desultory effort at a re-registration. In 711 Han Yüan (not the same man as the chief minister under Kao-tsung) had raised this matter again,[70] but nothing was done during the first years of Hsüan-tsung's reign, and indeed little could be done until local administration had been made more effective.

Almost as important a form of lost revenues were the vast numbers of wealthy households whose taxes, although duly paid, were earmarked as income for the fiefs of maintenance (*shih-shih-feng*) of the nobility, both the members of the imperial family and the many families of officials who had been granted noble titles and fiefs under the empress Wu and the empress Wei. The precise extent of this problem is hard to quantify, but in 709 Wei Ssu-li presented a memorial which estimated that more than 600,000 adult taxpayers (perhaps 8 per cent of the total at that time) were assigned to the holders of fiefs, and that the fiefs received more tax silk than the Court of Treasury. Another estimate of the same year gave a figure of 140 noble families enjoying fiefs of maintenance, and drawing revenues from fifty-four prefectures, in which the richest households were always selected for the duty.[71] These fief households were particularly a problem in the wealthiest parts of Ho-nan. Designation as a 'fief household' was commonly considered worse than conscription into the army, since they were often deliberately excluded from any remittance or reduction of taxes which might be granted in time of dearth. In some areas this led to gross inequalities, and to many designated families absconding, thus worsening the problem of unregistered population.[72]

Hsüan-tsung could do little about this immediately since fiefs of maintenance were inherited together with the noble title, and could not be extinguished at the stroke of a pen. He did however abandon the indiscriminate granting of noble titles, and kept the fiefs of maintenance

[70] *THY* 85, pp. 1561–2; *HTS* 112, pp. 4165–6.
[71] Wei Ssu-li's memorial *CTW* 236, p. 6b; *CTS* 88, p. 2871; *TCTC* 209, p. 6634; *THY* 90, pp. 1642–4. This also cites Sung Wu-kuang's memorial, *CTW* 268, pp. 22a–23a.
[72] On the problem of fiefs see Niida Noboru, 'Tōdai no hōshaku oyobi shokuhō-sei', *THGH* (Tokyo), 10.1 (1939) 1–64; Tonami Mamoru, 'Zui no bōetsu to Tōsho no shokujitsuhō', *THGH* (Kyoto), 37 (1966) 153–82.

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as small as possible, often to only a token number of households far below that laid down in the Statutes. However the system remained in force, and Hsüan-tsung's own fertility resulted in fifty-nine children, each of whom had to be granted a noble title, a household administration and a fief, placing a huge additional burden on the empire's finances.

The emperor during these early years was also at some pains to demonstrate publicly that he was eschewing luxury and unnecessary expenditure. In the seventh month of 714 strict sumptuary laws were issued, forbidding the weaving of brocade and the wearing of embroidered clothes, pearl or jade ornaments. Even the imperial consorts were included in this edict, and the state manufactories for fine brocades (Chih-chin fang) which had made goods for the palace, were shut down. Later in the same month, to scotch a rumour which was circulating that Hsüan-tsung was selecting girls to fill the imperial harem, he returned to their families large numbers of palace women who were unemployed.[73]

One supplementary form of taxation which began to be exploited at this time was salt. In 710 and again in 713 commissioners were appointed to administer the salt pools in south-eastern Shansi. But this was purely a local expedient.[74]

The currency

A major problem since the seventh century had been a totally inadequate supply of officially minted coin. The government had cut down on minting from about 679, and throughout the empress Wu's reign there was an epidemic of large-scale counterfeiting in central and southern China, in which even one future chief minister was involved. The imposition of the death penalty for coining in 682 did little to halt the problem, and during 701–4 the government was forced to permit the open use of the better sorts of counterfeit coin in order to supply the minimum needs of commerce. In 705 the death penalty was replaced by the confiscation of the property of offenders. In 713 an imperial counsellor complained that the quality of coin current in the capital was debased to such an extent that its standard was too low to use elsewhere. But the demand for money had grown so great, and so exceeded the supply of official cash that the government was forced to allow the circulation of counterfeit so as not to bring trade to a standstill.

With the rise to political dominance of Sung Ching, an attempt was finally made in 717 to deal with the problem and to enforce the former strict ban on counterfeit. The death penalty was re-imposed, and in 718 the ban was promulgated in an edict and a censor, Hsiao Yin-chih, was

[73] *TCTC* 211, pp. 6702–4. [74] *THY* 88, p. 1608.

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sent to the Huai and Yangtze valleys – the worst centres of coining – to attempt to collect and destroy illicit coin. Both the ban and Hsiao's mission were failures, resulting in wild price fluctuations, the temporary halting of commerce, popular resentment and Sung Ching's fall from power. In the end the prohibition had to be relaxed. The problem remained unsolved.[75]

The measures against Buddhism

On the death of the empress Wei, Buddhism had enjoyed a long period of unparalleled patronage both from the state and from the aristocracy, and had grown immensely powerful and immensely wealthy. In 711 Hsin T'i-p'i memorialized Jui-tsung drawing attention to the vast wealth of the Buddhist church, and the ways in which wealthy men were able to evade tax and other obligations by becoming ordained as priests or novices. Jui-tsung, like his sisters, was a devout Taoist who had already given the Taoist religion precedence over Buddhism[76] and was much influenced by a series of Taoist adepts. He consequently ordered an investigation into the lands and watermills owned by Buddhist monasteries, ordering that any lands illegally acquired were to be confiscated by the state.[77] In 712 he also ordered the demolition of monasteries which had not received official recognition.[78]

After his accession, Hsüan-tsung too quickly acted against the Buddhists, encouraged by Yao Ch'ung who had previously gained notoriety for acting against monasteries when serving in Ho-pei.[79] In 713 an edict banned the foundation by the great families of private temples or 'merit cloisters' (*kung-te yüan*) which had been a means of evading taxation and various forms of service.[80] In the fifth month of 714, after Yao Ch'ung had drawn Hsüan-tsung's attention to the flagrant abuse of illegal ordinations for the same purpose, a large-scale investigation of the Buddhist clergy was undertaken, which resulted in more than thirty thousand monks and nuns being returned to lay life. The next month a ban was imposed on the building of new monasteries, and strict controls placed upon new building for existing temples.[81]

Hsüan-tsung did not only attack the material foundation of the Buddhist communities. He also attempted to limit the activities of monks to the temples and to prohibit public preaching, a measure which may have been connected with the various groups of religious rebels against whom edicts

75 See Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 74–6.
76 *CTW* 18, p. 9b–10a.
77 *CTW* 19, p. 3b.
78 *Fo-tsu t'ung-chi* 40, in *TD* 49, p. 373a.
79 *CTS* 96, p. 3022.
80 *THY* 50, p. 878.
81 *THY* 47, pp. 826–7; *CTW* 26, p. 17b; *TCTC* 211, p. 6696.

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were promulgated in the early years of the century.[82] He also attempted the time-honoured device of making monks offer obeisance to their parents – in other words to acknowledge that they had not cut themselves off entirely from normal social relationships and obligations towards the sources of authority. In this he was no more successful than had been his predecessors.[83] The success of his other anti-Buddhist measures is difficult to assess. Certainly Hsüan-tsung was still unsatisfied, since new measures were imposed in the 720s, which will be dealt with later.

Military reorganization 710–20

The major events in China's foreign relations during Hsüan-tsung's reign are described fully below, and it is necessary here only to give sufficient detail to explain the background to the considerable changes in defence policy. At the beginning of Jui-tsung's reign the T'ang faced several quite distinct problems on their frontiers.

In the far west, the decision taken by the empress Wu in 692 to maintain firm Chinese control over the kingdom-states of the Tarim basin and over Zungharia had left the Chinese with a considerable military commitment. In the Tarim basin the Four Garrisons of An-hsi, with their headquarters at Kucha, provided a 'protective' force quartered in the major cities, which retained their native rulers. These forces defended the area against pressures from the Tibetans in the south, the western Turks and particularly their predominant tribal federation, the Turgesh, in the north, and against the potential threat from the west posed by Arab expansion into Transoxiana. The main object of this military presence was to control the trade routes through the Tarim to central Asia, to Kashmir, northern India and through modern Afghanistan to Iran.

Further north, Chinese armies and military detachments were strung out along the route leading along the northern flank of the T'ien-shan range through the Ili valley and Farghāna to central Asia. Chinese garrison armies were also established in the oases of Hami and Turfan, which had been conquered under T'ai-tsung and incorporated under normal Chinese civil administration. In these areas there were some Chinese settlers – many of them criminals or families who had been forcibly deported to the area, but a very large proportion of the population remained non-

[82] *CTW* 26, p. 10a; *CTW* 30, pp. 10a–11a; *CTW* 29, p. 5b. On sectarian risings in Ho-pei in 715 see *HTS* 5, p. 124; *CTS* 8, p. 175; *TCTC* 211, pp. 6710–11; *TTCLC* 113, p. 588. These mention sectarians wearing white and with long hair. The fragment of the *Regulations of the Board of Finance* from Tun-huang (S.1344) cites similar edicts from 674, 695 and 702. These suggest that some of the sectarians were highly educated.

[83] *CTS* 8, p. 172. For further details on policies towards Buddhism see the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

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Chinese. This area, centred on the protectorate of Pei-t'ing, near modern Urumchi, had to be defended against the Turgesh to the west, the Kirghiz to the north and the Turks in the north-east.

The existence of these western garrison forces, which totalled about fifty thousand men early in the eighth century, meant that the Chinese had, at all costs, to keep firm control of the route through the oases of north-western Kansu by which they were supplied. Here the T'ang faced their most powerful and aggressive enemies, the Tibetans. During the second half of the seventh century the Tibetan kingdom had conquered and slowly absorbed the former territories of the T'u-yü-hun peoples in modern Tsinghai province. From this region of rich pasturelands they were able to exert direct pressure on the whole arc of the Chinese frontier from Tun-huang in western Kansu to Szechwan. Against this threat the Chinese had gradually established permanent defensive armies and smaller detachments since the 670s, supported by military colonies to make the forces at least partly self-supporting in this area of difficult communications. Direct Tibetan aggression had ended after a disastrous defeat in 700–2, following which internal revolts and the accession of a child to the Tibetan throne had for a time forced the Tibetans to concentrate on their own internal affairs. From 707 to 710 there were long-drawn out negotiations for a peace settlement with China which ended in a dynastic marriage just before Jui-tsung's accession. The Tibetans were able to extract very favourable terms from the Chinese court, and part of the settlement involved the transfer to Tibet of the territories on the upper course of the Huang-ho, known as the 'Nine Bends', which was crucial to the Chinese defence system built up under the empress Wu. From this area the Tibetans could pose a direct threat to the metropolitan region around Ch'ang-an, and its loss greatly weakened the Chinese strategic position.

In 714 the Tibetans asked for a solemn peace treaty, to which Hsüan-tsung agreed. No sooner had the treaty been concluded, however, than the Tibetans attacked the Lan-chou area in force, causing great devastation. Although the Tibetans were decisively defeated late in 714, and the Chinese thereafter were able to keep control of the frontier and again build up their defences, their cynical treachery left Hsüan-tsung with a rooted distrust and hatred for the Tibetans, and led him to resist making any further peace settlement for many years.[84]

Along the northern frontier of Kuan-chung and Ho-tung provinces,

[84] On Tibetan relations see P. Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* (Paris, 1961), which translates the chapters on Tibet from *CTS* 196A–B; *HTS* 216A–B. The best critical study is in Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū* (2 vols., Kyoto, 1960–1) which correlates the Chinese sources with the Tibetan annals edited and translated in J. Bacot, F. W. Thomas and Ch. Toussaint, *Documents de Touen-houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris, 1940).

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the T'ang faced their nomadic enemy of longest standing, the Eastern Turks. In the years after the accession of Qapaghan Qaghan in 691, the Turks had again grown into a formidable power, by the early eighth century exerting hegemony over the entire steppe zone from the borders of Manchuria to Farghāna in the west. They had repeatedly raided the Chinese border under the empress Wu, but after a disastrous defeat at their hands in 705 the Chinese had erected a costly and very heavily manned defensive system of permanent armies and fortresses along the northern course of the Huang-ho which had effectively deterred any further large-scale invasion. At the same time Qapaghan's 'empire', which was largely based on his personal dominance, was increasingly challenged by his vassal peoples in the west and north, and at Jui-tsung's accession he was preoccupied with campaigns in the far west. From 711 he was continually in negotiation with the Chinese court to conclude a dynastic marriage in order to bolster up his declining authority among his subject peoples, and although in 714 he attacked the Chinese western outposts of Pei-t'ing, he never seriously threatened the border of China itself. His death in 716 further weakened the Turks, many of whose vassal tribes submitted to China. Much of the subsequent trouble on the northern border came not from the Turks themselves, but from various groups of Turkish and other nomadic peoples who had been settled in Chinese territory in northern Kuan-chung and Ho-tung (modern Shensi and Shansi provinces), and the powerful garrison forces in this region had the responsibility for dealing with outbreaks among them as well as for raids from the steppe.[85]

In the north-east the two nomadic peoples living in the borderlands of modern Ho-pei and Liaotung provinces, the Turkish Hsi and the proto-Mongol Khitan, had emerged as a powerful threat in the period 696–7, when they had driven the Chinese from southern Manchuria and invaded Ho-pei. After they were driven back, with the aid of the Turks, they had become Turkish vassals, as had the newly emergent state of Chen (later Parhae, in Chinese Po-hai) formed by the remnants of Koguryŏ in southern Manchuria. They were kept in check for many years by Hsüeh No, the governor-general of Yu-chou (modern Peking). After he was transferred in 711, the new governor foolishly attempted an offensive against them, which sparked off a period of serious hostilities.[86] However, by 714 both

[85] On the Turks, see the exhaustive collection of sources in Ts'en Chung-mien, *T'u-chüeh chi-shih* (2 vols., Peking, 1958); Liu Mau-tsai *Die Chinesischen Nachtrichten zur Geschichte der Ost-Türken (T'u-küe)* (2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1958) translates the principal sources. An account drawn largely from Turkish sources is René Giraud, *L'Empire des Turcs Célestes; les règnes d'Elterich, Qapghan et Bilgä (680–734)*, (Paris, 1960).

[86] *TCTC* 210, pp. 6672–3. Hsüeh No had driven off a Hsi invasion in 710, *TCTC* 210, p. 6659.

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the Hsi and Khitan decided, in view of Qapaghan's clearly waning power, to accept vassal status under the T'ang. In 717 the Chinese position in the north-east was firmly re-established with the restoration of a Chinese administration at Ying-chou in modern Liaotung and the quartering there, in 719, of a powerful army.[87]

The period was thus a comparatively peaceful and successful one for Chinese defensive policy, partly because of the weakened condition of the most aggressive neighbouring powers, partly because of the permanent frontier defences created under the empress Wu and Chung-tsung, and partly because the T'ang court generally pursued a conciliatory foreign policy of diplomacy and marriage alliances. Both Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching constantly urged caution in foreign relations upon Hsüan-tsung, who perhaps needed restraint, since after the Tibetan invasion in 714 he planned to lead in person a massive punitive expedition against them, and was prevented only by the victories of his frontier commanders. In 717 Sung Ching even opposed the extension of Chinese administration into Liaotung, on the grounds that it was an unnecessary commitment.

However, although the Chinese did not pursue any aggressive expansionist policies during this decade, they steadily continued building up the defences along the vulnerable northern and north-western frontier. By 722 the armies had increased to a total size estimated by Chang Yüeh at more than 600,000.[88] The areas which were most heavily reinforced during the early years of Hsüan-tsung were Lung-yu (southern Kansu), Ho-tung, and the north-east. These were the areas where there was a foreign threat to crucial provinces within the Chinese frontier.

More important, however, than the simple build-up of frontier defence forces were the changes made in their control and deployment. In all zones of the frontier, in spite of their very different strategic situations, the Chinese faced one common factor. Their potential enemies, Tibetans, Turks, Khitan and Hsi alike were highly mobile nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples whose aims were not the permanent conquest of Chinese territory, but quick raids on the frontier districts to steal grain and other booty, capture people as slaves, and above all to drive off cattle and horses. Only the Tibetans, and even then only to a very limited degree, attempted the permanent conquest of Chinese border territory.

Such warfare, usually very limited in duration, demanded above all flexibility of command, and the possibility of rapid response. It also demanded quite large frontier garrisons, for all these peoples were capable of fielding armies of skilled horsemen and archers running well

[87] *CTS* 39, p. 1521; *CTS* 185B, p. 4814; *HTS* 39, p. 1023.
[88] *CTS* 97, p. 3053; *TCTC* 212, p. 6753.

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into five figures. To meet this sort of challenge, the T'ang military system, as established early in the dynasty, was quite inadequate and inappropriate. The whole military organization was highly centralized. Numerous small garrisons (*chen* or *shu*) of a few hundred men had been set up on the frontier, under the control of local administrations. But in the case of anything more than a very minor local clash, the central government had to raise an expeditionary field army (*hsing-chün*). Such armies were formed partly by mobilizing troops from the militias (*fu-ping*) attached to the various guards, partly by conscription on a wider scale. A commander-in-chief and his staff also had to be appointed for the duration of the campaign, usually from among the generals of the Palace Guards at the capital, but sometimes from among the regular officials, many of whom freely interchanged military and civil posts. This whole *ad hoc* organization inevitably took some time to organize. Everything had to be extemporized; mobilization, training, transport of troops to the front, their provisions and equipment. It had proved adequate enough when a deliberately planned counter-strike or a major punitive expedition was required. But the system was far too slow and cumbersome to provide a quick defensive response to raids by swift and mobile enemies with very limited objectives. By the time such an army could reach the frontier, the enemy had usually long since withdrawn deep into his own territory.

Under Kao-tsung and the empress Wu the defences had been strengthened by the establishment of large permanent armies stationed on the frontier. These were manned partly by militia troops on long assignments, but increasingly by long-service troops (*chien-erh*) some of whom, particularly among the cavalry, were non-Chinese. These permanent armies were first established in the north-west on the Tibetan frontier and in central Asia, and from the 690s along the northern borders of Ho-tung and Ho-pei. But even the largest and best-trained of these armies were too small to withstand a major attack unaided.

With the accession of Jui-tsung the frontier defences were at last provided not only with adequate forces, but also with a coordinated command structure, which could deploy these forces quickly in case of an attack, without the long delays inherent in the established system of waiting for the appointment of a regional commander and the mobilization of a field army by the central government. Beginning in 710–11 it gradually became the practice to appoint permanent military governors (*chieh-tu shih*) to the command of the defence zones which had traditionally been assigned to regional commanders (*tsung-kuan*) of expeditionary armies. The system was not set up at once throughout the frontier areas, but evolved gradually during the next decade. But by the early 720s the

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Table 8. *Frontier commands under Hsüan-tsung*

Command	Headquarters	Date*	Strategic objective
P'ing-lu	Ying-chou	719†	Control of southern Manchuria. Defence against Khitan, Hsi.
Fan-yang	Yu-chou	714	Defence of Ho-pei against Khitan, Hsi and Turks.
Ho-tung	T'ai-yüan	Before 723	Defence of Ho-tung against Turks, Hsi and Khitan. Control of Turks, etc. settled within province.
Shuo-fang	Ling-wu	713 or 721	Defence of Kuan-chung against Turks. Control of tribal peoples settled in Ordos region.
Lung-yu	Shan-chou	714	Defence of western Kuan-chung against Tibetans.
Ho-hsi	Liang-chou	711	Defence of Kansu Corridor against Tibetans and Turks. Maintenance of routes to central Asia.
Chien-nan	Ch'eng-tu	717 or 719	Defence of Szechwan border against Tibetans. Control of minor border peoples.
Pei-t'ing	T'ing-chou	727 or 733	Control of routes to central Asia against Turks, Kirghiz, Turgesh.
An-hsi	Kucha	718	Control of Tarim oases.

* The dates given for the foundation of the different commands vary widely, and it is often difficult to decide whether a given date refers to the title of military governor, or to the formal establishment of the command organization.

† P'ing-lu, although a separate command, was under the general control of Fan-yang until 742.

northern and western frontiers had been organized into a series of nine major command zones. These were as shown in table 8 and map 10.

In each of these 'commands' the military governor had a large staff and a large headquarters army (usually called his defence army, *ching-lüeh chün*) under his direct command, and also had complete military jurisdiction over military matters in a specified number of border prefectures, with command over all the separate armies, garrisons and detachments in the region. The total manpower at a governor's disposal was very large, ranging from twenty thousand to more than ninety thousand troops. The support of such numbers of men raised vast logistic problems, which were made more serious by the sheer difficulty of transporting rations and supplies to the frontier areas. These logistic problems were the responsibility of provisioning commissioners *chih-tu shih*, who were given the disposal of large central government funds to procure grain and to clothe and equip the troops. Many of the armies depended heavily on

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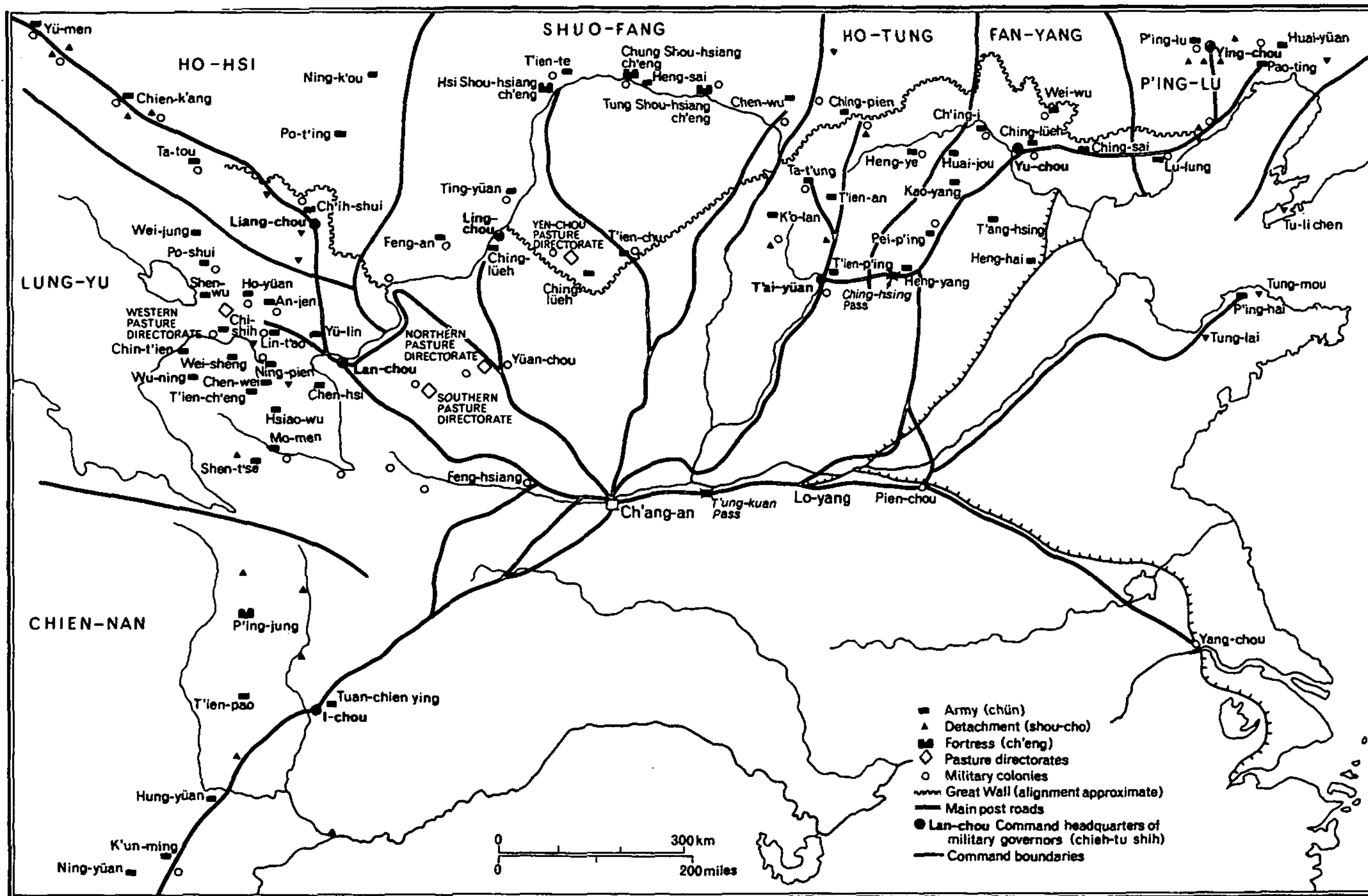

Map 10. The military establishment under Hsüan-tsung

Based in part on Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955), map 2. This map does not show the far western commands of Pei-t'ing and An-hsi, or the western extremity of Ho-hsi. The sources on the military organization of Chien-nan are so confused and contradictory that it has proved impossible to map in detail.

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local military colonies (*t'un-t'ien*), farmed by the troops themselves. These lands were administered and managed by commissioners for state lands (*ying-t'ien shih*). At first these posts were held by separate officials, but from the early 720s they were held concurrently by the military governors, who were given extra specialist staff to deal with these logistic and financial problems. After 729 the governors of Fan-yang, whose forces were partly supplied by sea, also held special responsibility for sea transport, while the governors of Shuo-fang controlled river transport on the upper Huang-ho, which linked their various armies, and also local salt production.

These were not the only non-military roles that the military governors accumulated. The military governors of Shuo-fang acted concurrently as civil inspecting commissioners (*ts'ai-fang shih*) for Kuan-nei province in 734 and again in 746, and thus exercised some control over civilian administration in an area much more extensive than their actual frontier command. The military governors of Chien-nan (Szechwan) even bore the concurrent title of civil inspecting commissioner of the neighbouring province of Western Shan-nan from 737 onwards. The formal incorporation of the military governors' commands into the administrative system was recognized in 725, when the military governors were granted the use of 'wooden tallies' giving them formal authority to undertake major financial transactions, and to exercise individual command over large military forces. The governors were sometimes accompanied by an 'army supervisor' (*chien-chün*), usually a censor, but after 737 sometimes a eunuch, to report on the governor's actions, and protect the court's interests. But generally the governors were allowed great freedom of action, choice of their subordinate staff, and were not unduly hampered by the detailed administrative practices of civil government.

The organization of the frontier commands grew up piecemeal during the early years of Hsüan-tsung's reign, and was by no means uniform. At least until 732 field armies continued to be mobilized, and commanders-in-chief appointed to them, side by side with the new permanent commands. A fixed establishment of armies, smaller units and numbers of troops and fixed financial allocations for their support were not finally set up until 737 (this is discussed below).

During the early years, until the mid 730s or even later, most of the military governors, except those in the western commands, were civilian officials of high rank, holding high concurrent posts, and expecting to be transferred after their tour of duty to posts in central government. All the first five governors of Fan-yang, for example, served as chief minister at one time in their careers. Many such officials, in spite of their civilian status, might have spent almost their entire careers in military posts and

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were almost as much professional commanders as many of the generals. But their ambitions remained centred on high office in central government. They were also normally appointed for comparatively short periods of duty, seldom spending longer than four years in one command before they returned to civil office. These extremely powerful military forces were thus firmly maintained under the control of the court.

The only exceptions were the commands of An-hsi and Pei-t'ing in central Asia, and Ho-hsi and Lung-yu on the Tibetan border, where the risk of border warfare was continuous. Here civilian officials were very rarely entrusted with command, and professional soldiers were the norm. These generals normally held their commands for longer periods than their civilian counterparts. They were usually transferred from one western command to another as the need arose, and rarely employed in civil office. Their subordinate officers too were almost all professional soldiers, and from these emerged a cadre of experienced and battle hardened commanders who spent their entire careers in frontier posts, and were to be found by the 730s serving in all the commands along the northern frontier.

For the time being the new system proved a most valuable improvement to the defensive system, and did much to protect China during the first vital years of consolidation under Hsüan-tsung. It did, however, concentrate overwhelming military power in the hands of a very few men. So long as imperial authority remained unchallenged, and they remained loyal servants of the dynasty, all was well. But they remained a potent source of danger. Perhaps Hsüan-tsung had this in mind when, in 716 and again in 729 he appointed royal princes as nominal military governors. The royal princes remained at the capital, and their duties were conducted by deputies (*fu ta-shih*) with all the powers of a full governor. The actual conduct of administration remained unchanged; but these formal appointments symbolized the fact that the military governors were to remain the servants of the throne, not semi-independent satraps.[89]

Hsüan-tsung and the imperial family

Perhaps the greatest problem that had faced Hsüan-tsung at the beginning of his reign was that of ending the undue interference in court politics by members of the imperial clan, the palace women, and members of the

[89] The classical study of the reorganization of the military system was that of Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Fuhei-seido yori shinhei-sei e', first published in 1930 and reprinted in his *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū*, vol. 1 (1966) pp. 3–81. There is extensive subsequent literature. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan*, pp. 61–74 gives a succinct summary of earlier work. The excellent chapter by Kikuchi Hideo, 'Fuhei seido no tenkai', in *Iwanami kōza: Sekai Rekishi*, 5 (1970) 407–39 gives a more up-to-date account of the state of the field.

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consort families. He had ascended the throne after more than half a century during which the authority of the emperor, apparently so secure under T'ai-tsung, had been compromised and eroded away. Three successive emperors had fallen completely under the dominance of their empresses or female relatives, and had allowed the political process to be disrupted by constant palace intrigues and by the intervention of personal favourites and members of consort families. Every preceding reign had been marred by bitter succession disputes, which sometimes divided the court deeply, and in no case had the prince originally designated heir apparent actually ascended the throne.

It was essential that no imperial consort should ever again be allowed to dominate politics. Whenever this had occurred it had led not only to an irretrievable loss of imperial authority, but to general political instability. This was inevitable, for the royal womenfolk had no accepted political role, and they could only influence affairs by the exercise of clandestine and indirect influence and pressure.

All sorts of external influences could be exerted indirectly on the emperor through the women of his household, who enjoyed access to his presence in his leisure time, free of the rigid protocol of court. All the high-ranking consorts came from great aristocratic families, and their close relatives were often deeply involved in court politics. The relatives by marriage of the emperor's children, sons and daughters alike, also came from similar backgrounds, and the imperial family was thus enmeshed in a complex web of marriage alliances with the great aristocratic families of the metropolitan area. Although the palace women lived in seclusion in their own section of the palace, guarded and administered by eunuchs, this seclusion was very lax compared with later times. Upper-class women in T'ang times enjoyed a great degree of independence, and there is no doubt that the palace ladies remained closely in touch with their own relatives and with society outside the palace. Such links were also a potential danger.

Two other groups enjoyed easy access to the members of the imperial harem. First were the eunuchs, who also enjoyed the privileged position as the emperor's household servants, but at the beginning of the eighth century they remained comparatively powerless apart from exceptional individuals like the emperor's favourite eunuch Kao Li-shih,[90] who had taken an important part in the coup against the empress Wei. Second were the Buddhist and Taoist clergy. The palace ladies were traditionally pious, and were lavish patrons of Buddhist and Taoist temples and individual monks, several of whom gained great influence at court in this way.

[90] Biographies in *CTS* 184, pp. 4757–9; *HTS* 207, pp. 5858–61.

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Hsüan-tsung's empress *née* Wang[91] was a member of the prominent Wang clan of T'ai-yüan. Her father Wang Jen-chiao (651–719) had been a minor guards officer and was promoted to high-ranking but unimportant offices after Hsüan-tsung became heir apparent because of his kinship with his consort. The empress's twin brother, Wang Shou-i, was one of the conspirators when Hsüan-tsung overthrew the Princess T'ai-p'ing and her clique. The emperor had known him well in his own days in obscurity and later he was married to Jui-tsung's seventh daughter, the Princess Ch'ing-yang. In spite of the very close links between the two families, and the particular obligation which Hsüan-tsung had towards Wang Shou-i, the Wangs were never given any office of consequence. Wang Shou-i served as vice-president of the Imperial Household Department and later as second protector of the heir apparent. Both father and son were ennobled as dukes and amassed huge fortunes, but were carefully kept from any position of influence.[92]

The empress was barren. Since it was imperative to settle the succession as soon as possible, at the beginning of 715 Hsüan-tsung's second son Li Ying, Prince of Ying, was appointed heir apparent.[93] Ying was born of the emperor's secondary consort Chao Li-fei. For some reason the eldest son, Li Tsung born of the consort Liu Hua-fei was passed over. It seems likely that the choice was made because the consort Chao who was a highly skilled singer and dancer had been a special favourite of the emperor since his days in Lu-chou in 708–9.

There still remained the emperor's brothers and his uncle Li Shou-li, whose claims to the succession had been promoted by the Princess T'ai-p'ing during Jui-tsung's reign.

We have already seen how Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching in 711 had tried to solve this problem by forbidding the royal princes to hold commands in the guards, which would have given them the military power to attempt a coup. A similar ban was placed on the consorts of royal princesses. Subsequently all Hsüan-tsung's brothers and Li Shou-li were appointed prefects or governors-general of important prefectures, usually in the vicinity of Ch'ang-an, while holding very high ceremonial offices with no real power at court. This measure was formalized in 714 when it was arranged that two of the princes should attend court every three months in rotation.[94]

The object in removing them from the capital was not so much to prevent them from attempting a coup themselves, but more importantly

[91] Biographies in *CTS* 51, p. 2177; *HTS* 76, p. 3490.

[92] *CTS* 183, p. 4745.

[93] *THY* 4, p. 43; *CTS* 8, p. 174; *TCTC* 211, p. 6707; *CTS* 107, p. 3258.

[94] *TCTC* 211, p. 6703.

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to prevent their being manipulated by hostile factions at court seeking a royal figurehead. They were placed in command of very important prefectures; Li Ch'eng-i for example was prefect of Yu-chou (Peking) at a crucial moment in its defence against the Khitan. But it is doubtful how far the royal princes actually participated in the administration of the prefectures. Li Shou-li, at least, left all business in the hands of his deputies while he spent his time in hunting, drinking, music and practical jokes.[95]

Whatever the unfortunate results of this policy on the government of some of the empire's most important regions, it did keep the princes away from court intrigue. Fortunately Hsüan-tsung was on excellent terms with his brothers. In 714 he had the mansion which they had shared in Ch'ang-an enlarged and converted into a detached palace for himself (the Southern or Hsing-ch'ing palace), presenting each of the brothers with his own mansion nearby, so that they could easily visit one another. The princes were an accomplished family, devoted to literature, music and scholarship as well as to the upper-class sports so dear to the T'ang nobility, and shared many of the emperor's tastes.[96]

Closest to the emperor was Li Ch'eng-ch'i, who shared his devotion to music and dramatic entertainment and frequently feasted, hunted, played polo or attended cock-fights with him. Ch'eng-ch'i had a deep interest in politics, and had special permission to present his own annual record of events to the official historiographers every year. This was a serious work, amounting to several hundred pages each year, but it was nevertheless tacitly understood that he would never attempt to discuss current political affairs with the emperor, or to form any political affiliations.[97] The intimacy between the brothers was a warm personal one, but it did not mean that the princes shared in any way in Hsüan-tsung's power.

The imperial family was meanwhile increasing at a staggering speed. Hsüan-tsung had fifty-nine children, many of them born before his coming to the throne. The next generation was even more numerous. There is no record of the children of his thirty daughters, who naturally counted among the families of their consorts. The genealogies of the imperial clan in the *Hsin T'ang shu* list the sons of twenty of his twenty-nine sons, giving a total of ninety-four grandsons. But these were only a small fraction of the total, for the most part those who were either enfeoffed or reached high office. We know that his fourth son had fifty-five children, the sixth son fifty-eight and the twentieth thirty-six children. Of these grandsons thirty-four were created Princes of Commanderies and twenty-four Dukes of States, and if these had all received the full fief to which the

[95] *CTS* 86, p. 2833; *CTS* 8, p. 173 says they were to devolve their duties on their deputies.
[96] *CTS* 95, p. 3011.
[97] Biography in *CTS* 95, pp. 3009–13.

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Statutes of 719 entitled them, their revenues alone would have swallowed up the taxes of almost a quarter of a million households. They certainly did not receive this full allowance, often being granted only a token fief, but it is clear that the support and maintenance of the princes became a huge burden. After 726 the emperor set up a special residence for the princes in the extreme north-east corner of the city. This special compound for royal princes was known as the Residence of the Ten Princes (Shih-wang chai), after those of his sons who were first settled there. The residence later overflowed into the imperial park to the north, and some time after 737 a further series of residences for the emperor's grandchildren, the Court of the Hundred Grandsons (Pai-sun yüan), was built in the same area.[98]

After this the royal children grew up in the palace, but upon receiving their first noble title, instead of being given a residence outside the palace, as previously, they were allotted a court of their own in this compound, where they settled with their families, under central supervision and provisioned by the palace. This placed still further restrictions on the members of the royal family, and made it easy for the emperor to keep a check on their activities. As a sign of their decreased status the old custom that each imperial prince founded a new branch (*fang*) of the royal clan, with its own ritual observances, was also brought to an end.[99]

THE MIDDLE REIGN (720–36)

In the first month of 720 Sung Ching and Su T'ing fell from power. Sung Ching had aroused widespread resentment by the high-handed way in which he had instructed the Censorate to handle a large backlog of cases. This scandal was even satirized by the emperor's entertainers, and the emperor himself felt Sung Ching to have been seriously in the wrong. The immediate cause of his dismissal, however, was not this scandal but the disastrous failure of the measures to limit counterfeiting in the Huai and Yangtze region, and the harsh and inhuman way in which these had been enforced by his agent, the censor Hsiao Yin-chih. This caused such resentment that the emperor dismissed both Sung Ching and Su T'ing as chief ministers and disgraced Hsiao Yin-chih. Both Sung Chng and Su T'ing remained at court, the former with the highest possible titular rank, the latter as president of the Board of Rites. Shortly afterwards Su T'ing was sent as military governor and civil inspector of Chien-nan (Szechwan) where he had a distinguished record in a notoriously difficult post. Sung Ching remained at court and was treated as an elder statesman. He was

98 *CTS* 107, pp. 3271–2. 99 *HTS* 70B, p. 2147.

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left in charge of Ch'ang-an as the emperor's viceroy (*liu-shou*) in 722, and again in 724–5 during the court's absence in Lo-yang.[100]

With the passing from power of Sung Ching, and the death shortly afterwards of Yao Ch'ung, there came the end of an era, which was characterized by Liu Fang, the author of the official history of the period, as follows:

Yao Ch'ung, Sung Ching and Su T'ing were all great ministers who were outspoken and unflinching. The provinces were governed purely and peacefully. At court there were clearly established principles. The inferiors had nothing which they craved for. When the barbarians came to plunder they were simply driven away, and that was all. When the common people grew abundantly rich they were simply taxed, and that was all.[101]

It was an era of consolidation, imperial authority wisely exercised, of restraint, and above all an era without costly and ambitious foreign adventures – as Po Chü-i put it in a satirical poem early in the ninth century:

Have you not heard, sir, how Sung Ching,
Chief Minister of the K'ai-yüan period,
Never rewarded victories on the frontier,
To avoid excessive use of force.

To writers of the later T'ang period, this had been the high point of Hsüan-tsung's reign, if not of the whole dynasty. Yet in many respects the following decade and more saw a continuation and further development of many of the policies of Yao Ch'ung and Sung Ching's time.

The new chief ministers appointed in the first month of 720 were Yüan Ch'ien-yao, who had served very briefly as Yao Ch'ung's fellow chief minister just before his resignation, and Chang Chia-chen (666–729).[102] The latter was descended from an ancient family from the Peking region, whose ancestors had settled during the Sui in P'u-chou, in south-western Ho-tung (modern Shansi). He had graduated in the *ming-ching* examination around 686, but had committed some offence in his first office and was dismissed. Much later, early in the eighth century he was recommended as an informal assistant to the censor sent to inspect Ho-tung circuit, who employed him to draft memorials and recommended him to the empress Wu. The empress was greatly impressed by him and made him a censor. After serving in the Board of War and the Secretariat he held important provincial governor-generalships and under Hsüan-tsung was administrator in chief of T'ai-yüan, where he gained a reputation for strict adminis-

[100] *CTS* 96, p. 3034.
[101] Liu Fang, 'Shih-huo lun', *WYYH* 747, pp. 10b–12a; *CTW* 372, pp. 5b–7b. Cf. the 'Historian's comment' to the Basic Annals of Hsüan-tsung *CTS* 9, pp. 235–7, also certainly by Liu Fang.
[102] Biographies in *CTS* 99, pp. 3090–3; *HTS* 127, pp. 4441–4.

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tration. He had also established a large army of 30,000 men at T'ai-yüan (the T'ien-ping Army) in 717, to supervise the many Turks who had surrendered to the T'ang after the death of Qapaghan and were settled in the north of Ho-tung, of which province he was made military governor (*chieh-tu shih*).

Although neither of the new chief ministers was of the stature of Yao Ch'ung or Sung Ching, both gained a reputation for conscientious devotion to their duties and for sound administration. In the ninth month of 721, a few days after the death of his old adversary Yao Ch'ung, Chang Yüeh was appointed as a third *ad hominem* chief minister and as president of the Board of War. Since his dismissal as chief minister in 713, Chang Yüeh had served with distinction in a series of important provincial posts, finally succeeding Chang Chia-chen as military governor of the T'ien-ping army in T'ai-yüan.[103]

For the time being Chang Yüeh remained for the most part involved in military affairs. From the fourth month of 722 until the fourth month of 723 he held the all-important post of grand military governor of Shuo-fang, the command controlling the borders of Kuan-chung immediately to the north of Ch'ang-an, where, late in 722, he was engaged in military operations against the rebellious Turks who had risen in the Ordos region in the previous year, supported by the Tanguts, and had now revolted again. Chang Yüeh put down the rising, and had the 50,000 remaining non-Chinese living in the Ordos region inside the Chinese frontier resettled far in the interior in the borderlands between modern Hupeh and Honan provinces.[104]

With the border problem settled, Chang Yüeh proposed drastic cuts in the frontier garrison armies, which he claimed now numbered more than 600,000 men. He proposed that 200,000 of these should be returned to civilian life as peasants. The emperor, although dubious, was persuaded by Chang Yüeh's argument that the frontier generals were trying to keep up their huge armies in their own self-interest, and agreed to his plan. At the same time Chang Yüeh also set in motion a scheme to replace the old system of guards units manned by militia troops on short terms of duty. He asked to recruit tough and warlike troops, called the Mounted Archers (K'uo-ch'i) who were given exemption from all special duties and assigned to the various guards and to the Northern Palace Armies, so as to strengthen the capital's defences.[105]

Early in 723 Chang Yüeh and Chang Chia-chen quarrelled seriously. Many years previously Chia-chen had been Chang Yüeh's subordinate in

[103] *CTS* 97, p. 3058. [104] *CTS* 97, p. 3053; *TCTC* 212, pp. 6746, 6752.
[105] *CTS* 97, p. 3053; *TCTC* 212, p. 6753.

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the Board of War, but now as senior chief minister refused to show him any deference. Chang Yüeh was resentful, and when Chia-chen's brother was found guilty of malfeasance and Chia-chen himself refused to present himself to the emperor for punishment as a sign of contrition, he was dismissed as chief minister and sent out as a prefect, full of resentment at his former colleagues. Chang Yüeh took his place as president of the Secretariat.[106]

The man chosen to replace Chang Chia-chen was Wang Chün.[107] This appointment, as in Chang Yüeh's case seems to have been a deliberate move to include an experienced and powerful military leader among the chief ministers. Like Chang Yüeh, Wang Chün was appointed president of the Board of War and *ad hominem* chief minister, and a month later was appointed military governor of Shuo-fang and sent to take up his duties on the frontier and to inspect the military establishment of Ho-hsi, Lung-yu, Ho-tung and Ho-pei, as well as his own command. He took no part in court affairs, and in the twelfth month of 723 was degraded to become a prefect in the Yangtze valley, on a charge of forming a faction and of nepotism.[108]

From the dismissal of Chang Chia-chen until the beginning of 726 the court was completely controlled by Chang Yüeh. This was the last ministry during which politics were still dominated by ministers who had already reached high office under the empress Wu, and who continued many of the policies which she had begun. All Hsüan-tsung's chief ministers up to this time had been examination graduates, mostly from the Lo-yang area or from the north-east.

During these years the centralizing policies which had been introduced under Yao Ch'ung were continued, while the power and authority of the chief ministers were firmly established by two important reforms effected by Chang Yüeh. At the end of 722 it was ordered that the chief ministers were to enjoy as a fief of maintenance the revenues from three hundred households.[109] This for the first time provided them with an income additional to that which they enjoyed as a result of their substantive office and recognized the fact that the post of chief minister was no longer a part-time consultative appointment, as in the past, when the chief minister was expected to complete his duties before noon, and spend the rest of the day working in his ministry. In the next year this new situation was institutionalized. The former meeting place of the chief ministers, the Hall for Administrative Affairs (Cheng-shih t'ang) was transformed into a

106 *TCTC* 212, p. 6755.
107 Biographies in *CTS* 93, pp. 2985–90; *HTS* 111, pp. 4153–7.
108 *TCTC* 212, pp. 6755–7.
109 *THY* 90, p. 1644; *TCTC* 212, p. 6753; *HTS* 127, p. 4450.

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regular chief ministers' office, the Secretariat-Chancellery (Chung-shu Men-hsia), in the name of which the policy suggestions of the chief ministers were regularly presented to the throne. The chief ministers' office was also, for the first time, provided with its own secretariat, organized in five chambers (*wu fang*) each responsible for a specific area of administrative responsibility; the bureaucracy, political affairs, military, financial and judicial affairs.[110]

The duties of the Chancellery and Secretariat, the demarcation between which had become increasingly blurred for many years, now tended to become more and more intertwined. Many of the duties of drafting and review, formerly carried out by their own secretaries, were now taken over by secretaries from the various academies, in particular by those from the Chi-hsien yüan attached to the Secretariat.[111] This had been founded in 718, and was reformed and renamed in 725 when it was placed under the control of Chang Yüeh. Its personnel were gifted officials holding other concurrent offices, who were at the disposal of the chief ministers, and of the emperor, as draftsmen and scholarly advisers.[112]

These developments were of great importance. They provided the chief ministers – and when there was only one powerful chief minister, the emperor's chief adviser – with the personal backing necessary for the effective control of affairs. They also provided a means by which the emperor himself could avoid the delays and obstruction of the regular organs of the bureaucracy by employing scholars from the academies to draft documents and formulate policy. Although at first the Chi-hsien yüan scholars (who were under the administration, albeit a loose one, of the Secretariat) were most commonly employed in this way, other imperial personal secretaries were drawn from among the Han-lin academicians in attendance (*Han-lin kung-feng*), who were attached personally to the emperor. After 738 these were replaced by the Academy of Scholars (Hsüeh-shih yüan), who began to draft more and more of the emperor's edicts. These developments laid the foundation for important changes in the conduct of government affairs later in the dynasty.

Another policy of the earlier years which continued and was strengthened under Yüan Ch'ien-yao and Chang Yüeh was the attempt to place more talented officials in local government positions, and to ensure that ministers in central government had had experience of administration in the provinces. Because Yüan himself felt so strongly about this, after appointment as chief minister in 720 he asked that two of his three sons

[110] See *TCTC* 212, p. 6758. See studies cited in n. 49 of this ch.

[111] On the Chi-hsien yüan see Ikeda On, 'Sei Tō no Shuken'in , *Hokkaidō daigaku Bungakubu kiyō*, 19.2 (1971) 45–98.

[112] *TCTC* 212, pp. 6755–6.

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who held appointments at the capital should be reassigned to provincial posts.[113] This rule was extended to the families of all military and civil officials serving at the capital, many of whose relatives were sent to serve in the provinces.

In the fifth month of 720 the civil inspecting commissioners for the circuits (*an-ch'a shih*) whose activities had been suspended in 717 were re-established. In 721, each of the highest-ranking officials in the capital and all the prefects were ordered to scrutinize the conduct in office of one county magistrate, and to recommend whether he deserved to be rewarded or penalized.[114] In 722 measures were taken to ensure the more regular payment of the salaries of provincial officials, while the additional allowances for attendants paid to high-ranking metropolitan officials were cut. Moreover, the emperor himself, during the progresses which took place during these years, summoned local officials and sometimes degraded them for their failings.[115]

Early in 725 the emperor selected eleven prominent officials from the capital, including Yüan Ch'ien-yao's nephew, the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, for appointment as prefects. Their appointment was accompanied by a grand banquet and entertainment for all the officials of the court. Even in these very public circumstances, one of the chosen examples was unwilling to go, to the great annoyance of Hsüan-tsung, who degraded him. The attractions of a career at court continued to outweigh the needs of the provinces for good administrators.[116]

Problems with the imperial family

There were now clear signs that the political equilibrium established at the beginning of the reign was becoming unsteady. The first sign that the emperor was determined to impose his will more firmly came in his relations with his own family. In the tenth month of 720 Li Fan, the fourth of the royal brothers, was involved in a curious incident. Li Fan was well-known as a devoted scholar, calligrapher, antiquary and bibliophile, and was the patron of many scholars with whom he was on terms of complete familiarity. He was now involved, with his brother-in-law P'ei Hsü-chi, the consort of Jui-tsung's youngest daughter the Princess Huo-kuo, in charges that they had been improperly consulting prophetic books – usually a polite euphemism for hatching a palace plot to replace the emperor. P'ei was divorced from his royal wife and banished to a distant place in Ling-nan. At the same time two of Li Fan's close literary associates

[113] *HTS* 127, p. 4450; *TCTC* 212, p. 6740.
[114] *TCTC* 212, pp. 6740, 6745.
[115] *THY* 91, p. 1653; *TCTC* 212, p. 6755.
[116] *TCTC* 212, p. 6763.

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were demoted to minor provincial posts for breaking the emperor's recent prohibition against the royal princes, consorts of princesses and the members of their families establishing close social contacts with any but their closest kin. Moreover, all fortune tellers were banned from visiting the homes of officials.[117]

Li Fan himself was not punished in any way and remained on good terms with the emperor until his death in 726. But during 720 and 721 the royal princes who had been serving in provincial posts for the last decade were all recalled to the capital, where the eldest brother, Li Ch'eng-ch'i, was made president of the Board of Imperial Sacrifices, Li Ch'eng-i was given the extremely prestigious honorary post of *ssu-t'u*, and the younger brothers appointments in the heir apparent's household. It may be that the princes' lack of devotion to their duties in their prefectures, about which Yüan Ch'ien-yao had complained in 716, was partly to blame. But it is more likely that the emperor felt that they, like his own sons, should be kept at the capital under his eye.

In 725 Li Yeh, his other younger brother, was implicated in a very similar incident involving Huang-fu Hsün the director of the Household Services of the Palace, and his own brother-in-law Wei Pin, an important official in the household of the heir apparent, who was married to another of his sisters. They too were accused of improperly having recourse to fortune tellers. The consequences this time were more serious. Wei Pin, perhaps because he was the chief offender, perhaps because his close involvement with the heir apparent made him a potentially very dangerous person to be involved in a palace plot, was flogged to death, while Huang-fu Hsün was banished to Ling-nan. However, once again the royal prince Li Yeh and his wife went scot-free. Li Yeh continued to serve as the second guardian of the heir apparent, and died, full of honours, in 734.[118]

Even more serious than these problems with his brothers was the position of the empress. During the early years of his reign the emperor had two particular favourities among the palace ladies of high rank, the Lady Yang and the Lady Wu. The Lady Yang was a great grand-daughter of Yang Shih-ta, minister under the Sui, whose family had also produced the empress Wu's mother. She had entered the emperor's harem in 710, and bore him a son (who later became the emperor Su-tsung) and a daughter. She was closely associated with Chang Yüeh, to whose son her daughter was married. However, some time soon after Hsüan-tsung came to the throne she died.[119] Hsüan-tsung later became particularly en-

[117] *TCTC* 212, p. 6751; *CTS* 95, pp. 3016–17.
[118] *CTS* 95, pp. 3018–19; *TCTC* 212, pp. 6741–2. [119] *CTS* 52, p. 2184.

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amoured of yet another of his secondary consorts, the Lady Wu who bore him four sons and three daughters. The Lady Wu was the daughter of Wu Yu-chih, a close relative of the empress Wu, and her mother was also from the ubiquitous Yang clan.[120]

One of the empress Wang's staunch supporters had been Chiang Chiao, the emperor's close and intimate favourite during the first decade of his reign who was also related by marriage to Yüan Ch'ien-yao. In 722 relations between the emperor and the childless and increasingly neglected empress Wang became strained. The emperor secretly discussed with Chiang Chiao removing her on the grounds of her childlessness, but Chiang leaked this out to the empress. The empress's younger sister was married to a minor member of the imperial clan, who reported Chiang's indiscretion. Hsüan-tsung had him flogged and exiled; he died upon the road.[121]

The empress, now with more reason to fear for her position than ever, grew desperate to produce a son, and thus ensure her position at court, although the emperor had still not finally decided to replace her. However, her brother Wang Shou-i now arranged for a monk to perform magical ceremonies and write an amulet for her to ensure that she had a child. When this was discovered in the seventh month of 724 the empress Wang was degraded to commoner status. Wang Shou-i was exiled, divorced from his royal wife, and ordered to commit suicide. The former empress was not, however, otherwise punished, but allowed to live in separate quarters in the palace, where she died in the tenth month. She was much liked by the other palace ladies, and the emperor himself regretted having degraded her, as he later repented of his punishment of Chiang Chiao.[122]

The former chief minister Chang Chia-chen, who had fallen foul of Chang Yüeh and was now serving as president of the Board of Finance, was also implicated with Wang Shou-i, and sent out as a prefect in Chekiang. It is possible that the degradation of the empress Wang was politically motivated, and it has been claimed that Chang Yüeh, who had a long and close association with the Wu family, had been supporting the Lady Wu against the empress, but this is largely conjectural. What is certain is that the emperor did not appoint the Lady Wu as empress, but only as *hui-fei* (favoured Consort of the first rank), although members of her family were accorded the sort of honours and promotion appropriate to the

120 See Howard S. Levy, 'Wu Hui-fei, a favoured consort of T'ang Hsuan-tsung', *TP*, 46 (1958) 49–80.

121 *TCTC* 212, p. 6751; *CTS* 59, pp. 2334–7; *HTS* 91, pp. 3793–4.

122 *TCTC* 212, pp. 6751, 6761; *CTS* 51, p. 2177. See Yu Ta-kang, 'Liang T'ang shu Hsüan-tsung Yüan-hsien-huang-hou Yang shih chuan k'ao-i chien lun Chang Yen-kung shih-chi', *CYYY*, 6 (1931) 93–101.

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family of an empress. Later in 726 he wished to confer the title of empress upon her, but when he announced his intention there were protests that this would be unwise because of her membership of a family which had been the enemies of the T'ang, and also because since she was not the mother of the heir apparent, and yet had sons of her own, this might place the succession in jeopardy – a prediction which proved accurate enough. The emperor never created her empress in her lifetime, although she remained unquestionably his premier consort.

Revival of the Kuan-chung aristocracy

Perhaps the most serious political change in these early 720s was the re-emergence of the old aristocratic clans of Kuan-chung as an active force in politics. The first clear instance of this came with the rise of Yü-wen Jung, which is dealt with below, and the emergence on the political scene of Li Lin-fu. The challenge of the aristocrats to the old guard of examination-selected easterners who had served their apprenticeship under the empress Wu, was sharply to polarize politics during the next decade, although the lines between the rival groups were by no means as clear cut as has sometimes been suggested.

Quite apart from the re-emergence of the aristocrats on the national scene in the 720s, there were other signs that the old idea of a closely delimited aristocracy was enjoying a revival. In the early years of the century, genealogy, which had been so important a preoccupation during the time of T'ai-tsung, had undergone a revival, and throughout Hsüan-tsung's reign attracted many scholars – including several of the most noted official historians. It was one of these, Liu Chung, who suggested, during Chung-tsung's reign, the compilation of a new officially sponsored compendium of the genealogies of the empire's most prominent families. It is significant that he suggested that this should be based not on the *Hsing-shih lu* of 659, which had taken official service under the T'ang as the basis for inclusion, but on the *Chen-kuan shih-tsu chih* of 638, which had paid more attention to traditional social status. Although allowance was to be made for changes in the standing of families over the past century, it seems likely that the new work was designed to be a reaffirmation of the social status of the old-established clans in the face of the political challenge posed by men of lesser origins recruited by the empress Wu.

Unlike the earlier compilations, this new work was entrusted to the official historiographers, including Liu Ch'ung whose family had a long tradition of genealogical expertise, and Liu Chih-chi. It was completed and presented to the throne in 713 and ran to no less than two hundred

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chapters. It was clearly taken seriously, since in 714 its authors were ordered to correct and update it, and it was then promulgated to the whole empire. It was again supplemented, between 723 and 726, by the notable historian Wei Shu, who produced a twenty-chapter supplement entitled *K'ai-yüan p'u*. It is not clear just what it was meant to accomplish in practical terms. Liu Ch'ung's memorial suggesting the undertaking implies that it should differentiate the scholar-official from commoner lineages, but it is nowhere stated in any T'ang source that this distinction should have any official sanction. However, there is a persistent tradition preserved in a number of Chinese genealogical works from the sixteenth century onwards that in 717 an edict was promulgated defining the pre-eminent status of twenty-six great families, and forbidding marriages between their members and outsiders. The growth of the genealogical studies continued throughout Hsüan-tsung's reign, and in 749 when the aristocracy had been in the ascendant for more than a decade Li Lin-fu had promulgated a list of the empire's pre-eminent families the *T'ien-hsia chün-wang hsing-shih tsu-p'u*, which seems to have stated that intermarriage was to be restricted to within this group.[123]

The government thus seems to have given support to the social claims of the older aristocratic clans from the early years of Hsüan-tsung's reign, and there was a steady increase of members of the older Kuan-chung aristocracy among the holders of high office after the 720s, whose recruitment must of course date back to the beginning of the reign.

Another source of aristocratic political influence was undoubtedly the complicated network of royal marriage relationships. Almost all of the royal princes about whose marriages we have information were married into a small number of prominent clans from the Kuan-chung and southern Ho-tung areas. Some families were constantly in demand as royal consorts. For example, the unfortunate P'ei Hsü-chi, the consort of Jui-tsung's ninth daughter who was exiled after involvement in the scandal with Li Fan in 720, had a brother who was himself a royal consort and whose son was also married into the imperial clan. Both the son and grandson of yet another brother were also selected as consorts. His second cousin P'ei Sun became the second husband of the Princess Hsüeh-kuo (seventh daughter of Jui-tsung) after her consort Wang Shou-i was executed following the degradation of his sister the empress Wang in 724, and his grandson also became the consort of one of Hsüan-tsung's younger daughters.

[123] See Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class, new evidence from Tun-huang', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 47–85, and the secondary literature cited there.

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Great numbers of consorts were also produced by the Yang, Tou and Hsüeh clans, and by the Sui imperial family, one branch of which alone produced consorts in three successive generations. Another example of the web of imperial marriages is the family of Wei Chien who rose to prominence in the 740s. One of his sisters was married to Li Yeh (Hsüan-tsung's youngest brother), another to the heir apparent Li Ying, while he himself was married to a daughter of the emperor's favourite, Chiang Chiao.

It is noticeable that these families from which consorts were repeatedly chosen also produced many members who held court offices either in the emperor's household, the heir apparent's administration, or the ministries providing services for the emperor. But there is no question of intermarriage with only a tiny court elite centred on service to the palace; imperial family connections had much broader political implications. No less than nineteen of the thirty-two recorded husbands of Hsüan-tsung's daughters are known to have been related to T'ang chief ministers. Three of Hsüan-tsung's daughters were married to sons of his own chief ministers, Yüan Ch'ien-yao, Chang Yüeh and Hsiao Sung. The marriage with Chang Yüeh's son, who later became a great favourite of Hsüan-tsung, shows that such alliances were not exclusively made with the great aristocratic clans, since Chang Yüeh's clan was an obscure one, which the genealogists of the 750s refused to recognize. In the same way, marriages were arranged late in his reign between imperial princesses and members of the relatively obscure family of Hsüan-tsung's favourite consort, Yang Kuei-fei.

The rise of Yü-wen Jung

The traditional historians saw the early twenties of the eighth century as a turning point in Hsüan-tsung's reign: spurred on by the successes of his armies to ambitions of foreign conquest and abandoning his earlier frugality and restraint, he now came under the influence of a series of ministers who gained favour by producing financial policies which enabled him to pursue his aims. Yü-wen Jung[124] was the first of these, and the historians berate him mercilessly.

However, there is no doubt that when Yü-wen Jung came upon the scene in 721, the court was confronted with inescapable financial problems which had little to do with Hsüan-tsung's grandiose ambitions. For decades there had been complaints that the household registers, which listed those of the population liable for the principal *tsu-yung-tiao* taxes together with their holdings of land under the *chün-t'ien* land allocation, had fallen into a serious state of neglect. This was partly because the regular re-registra-

[124] Biographies in *CTS* 105, pp. 3217–22; *HTS* 134, pp. 4557–9.

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tion of families and the revision of their entries had not been systematically carried out; partly because the initial imposition of the whole tax and land system had been imperfect in many parts of China; but most of all because of the growing problem of vagrant households – people who had left their native place to avoid tax and labour service and settled in other areas where they remained unregistered, and hence untaxed. At the same time there was considerable growth in the numbers of great estates, many of them built up by the officials recruited from comparatively low-ranking families who needed landed property to stabilize their economic position. Chang Chia-chen's biography, for instance, tells us that he was notable among the high court officials for *not* acquiring extensive lands and real estate. Not only the parvenus, but also members of the most ancient families took advantage of the opportunities offered by the times. Lu Ts'ung-yüan, for example, member of an ancient north-eastern family who served in very high offices during the 720s, including that of president of the Board of Justice, was notorious for accumulating vast land-holdings, and was eventually refused appointment as chief minister because of his reputation for this.

In 721 Yü-wen Jung first proposed a general registration of all vagrant unregistered households. At this time Jung (who was descended from the royal family of the Northern Chou and had entered official life by hereditary privilege, not by examination) was serving as a censor, thanks to the patronage of Yüan Ch'ien-yao. After some discussion at court, an edict was issued which gave unregistered settlers a hundred days in which to give themselves up to the authorities, and either return to their native place, or submit to re-registration in the place where they were living. Those who failed to do so were to be rounded up and transported to the frontier. This measure seems not to have been seriously enforced, and met with some opposition. In 723 Yü-wen Jung designed a new scheme under which unregistered settlers who gave themselves up to the authorities were to receive six years' tax exemption on payment of a special 'light tax', and the squatters were thus enabled to regularize their position on very favourable terms. To enforce the measure, Yü-wen Jung was given a special appointment as commissioner for encouraging agriculture (*ch'üan-nung shih*) and provided with a staff of specially talented executive officers (*p'an-kuan*) who were made supernumerary censors and sent out to every part of the empire to superintend the scheme's enforcement.

The scheme was a resounding success, and was even popular with the unregistered families themselves. In 724 additional executive officers were added to Jung's staff, and eventually no less than 800,000 unregistered households and a corresponding amount of unregistered land was

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brought back onto the registers. The importance of the measure is clear; these families represented about 12 per cent of the total population of 7,069,565 households registered in 726. It also greatly pleased the emperor; in 725 Yü-wen Jung was promoted to vice-president of the Board of Finance, and began to play an important role at court.[125]

However, the scheme raised a great deal of opposition; memorials were submitted by Huang-fu Ching and Yang Hsiang-ju objecting that it would bring hardship on the people and would encourage local officials to exaggerate the numbers of re-registered squatters to assure themselves favour at court. But Yü-wen Jung had the strong backing of Yüan Ch'ien-yao and Lu Chien the chief secretary of the Secretariat, and the objectors were disgraced. Even after the scheme had been put into operation protests continued until the emperor was forced to hold a special court discussion on the subject, at which further objections were raised.

It is difficult to see why the scheme – which was after all only a general enforcement of a system which had been in use for more than two centuries and was enshrined in detail in the statute law so carefully revised earlier in Hsüan-tsung's reign – should have raised such a furore. The reaction was partly economic: the officials who should have imposed the system were the chief beneficiaries of its neglect, which allowed them to buy up lands and recruit displaced families to work them. It was also certainly in part political: Yü-wen Jung was an aristocrat, not a member of the predominant graduate bureaucrat group who had controlled the court since the empress Wu's time. He was also proposing a rational institutional solution to the court's major financial problem, rather than the approach through moral suasion and formal ritual policies so strongly advocated by Chang Yüeh. At this time, too, tension was beginning to arise between Chang Yüeh and his fellow chief minister Yüan Ch'ien-yao who was, as we have seen, Jung's supporter. But above all, it seems that the real objection may not have been so much to re-registration itself as to the irregular institutional methods used to enforce it, the special appointment of Jung as a commissioner with his own staff of assistants who were able to act independently of the regular bureaucratic hierarchy through which such a reform might have been carried out. This type of irregular organization was not new – special commissioners had been employed locally to reform the transport system and to organize salt production earlier in the reign – but Yü-wen Jung's reform was a major

[125] On Yü-wen Jung's schemes see Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 30–2, 49–50, 178–82; Suzuki Shun, 'Ubun Yō no kakko ni tsuite', *Wada Hakase Kanreki Kinen Tōyōshi Ronsō* (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 329–44; Tonami Mamoru, 'Tō no ritsuryō taisei to Ubun Yū no kakko', *Tōhō gakuhō* (Kyoto), 41 (1970) 263–88.

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policy imposed on a national scale, and underlined the threat of such special powers to the established organs of bureaucracy.

The success of Yü-wen Jung's scheme enabled Hsüan-tsung to continue to finance his state through the accepted orthodox means of the regular land and head taxes (*tsu-yung-tiao*) and to shelve plans for the revival of the salt and iron monopoly once imposed under the Han which had been made following a memorial from the commissioner Liu T'ung in 721. In that same year Chiang Shih-tu had set up military colonies to exploit the salt pools in southern Ho-tung, while Su T'ing who had been sent as governor of Szechwan was also ordered to exploit the salt wells of the province as a source of revenue. The adoption of such policies on a national scale would have been far more of a threat to the administrative status quo, than Yü-wen Jung's registration policy.[126]

The feng-shan sacrifices and Chang Yüeh's downfall

Chang Yüeh had encouraged Hsüan-tsung to revive a number of ritual observances which symbolized the restoration of dynastic power. In the second month of 722 the emperor was forced to transfer the court once again to Lo-yang. On his return to Ch'ang-an, Chang Yüeh persuaded the emperor to make a long detour through Lu-chou, where Hsüan-tsung had served as a local official, and T'ai-yüan, whence Kao-tsu had set out to found the dynasty, and finally to Fen-yin where he was to celebrate the sacrifices at the shrine of the earth deity (*hou-t'u*) which had been instituted by Wu-ti under the Han, but long discontinued. This having been accomplished the emperor confirmed Chang Yüeh's status by appointing him president of the Secretariat and thus a senior chief minister.[127]

In the eleventh month of the same year Hsüan-tsung celebrated the great sacrificial ceremony at the southern suburban altar of Ch'ang-an, and some alterations were made to the imperial ancestral cult, again at Chang Yüeh's suggestion. Both of these major ritual acts were accompanied by general Acts of Grace, and the suburban sacrifice was also marked by a *p'u*, a general public bacchanalia, lasting three days in provincial centres and five days in the capital.[128]

In the eleventh month of 724 the court, led by Chang Yüeh, requested that the emperor would undertake the most awesome and significant of all state rites, the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices on Mount T'ai in Shan-tung, most

[126] *CTS* 48, pp. 2106–7; *THY* 88, p. 1603; *TFYK* 493, pp. 14a–b; *TT* 10, pp. 59a–b.
[127] *THY* 10A, p. 213.
[128] *THY* 8, pp. 105–8; *CTS* 8, p. 186; *HTS* 5, p. 130.

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holy of all China's sacred peaks. Although this suggestion was opposed by Yüan Ch'ien-yao, a difference of opinion which gradually led to an open split between the two chief ministers, the emperor agreed and announced that the ceremony would be performed in the eleventh month of the next year, and Chang Yüeh was ordered to draw up the appropriate ritual. To insure against the possibility that the Turks might take the opportunity of the emperor's absence from the capital to invade the border while the court was in Shan-tung, it agreed to ask them and other border peoples to send their representatives to participate.

The court had moved to Lo-yang once more late in 724. The emperor and his enormous retinue of officials, relatives, foreign leaders and countless attendants set out for T'ai-shan in the tenth month of 725 and arrived after almost a month on the road.

The imperial cortege stretched for miles along the road and wherever they halted laid waste the countryside for miles around. After accomplishing the sacrifices they visited the nearby home and shrine of Confucius, where further sacrifices were made, and then progressed back to Lo-yang, taking a different, more southerly route than that by which they had come, since no place, however wealthy, could bear the expense of two halts by the court within a few weeks.[129]

The sacrifices had been a great success, and were a triumph for Chang Yüeh, who was ordered to compose a commemorative ode to be inscribed on the mountain, and at the beginning of 726 began the compilation of a new code of ritual. But events connected with the rites led to his downfall. As we have seen, he had already quarrelled with Yüan Ch'ien-yao over the celebration of the sacrifices. He had also opposed Yü-wen Jung over the imposition of his re-registration of population in the provinces. During the sacrifices he had caused offence to many of the court by giving the best assignments to his own adherents, and by distributing real promotions to the civil officials taking part, but only honorific ranks to the military men. Chang Yüeh had been urged to caution by his protégé Chang Chiu-ling who was the secretary under him in the Secretariat. But he was obdurate, and his appointments aroused widespread resentment.

At the beginning of 726 Chang Yüeh objected to the emperor's choice of Ts'ui Yin-fu (?–736), a north-eastern aristocrat who had entered office by hereditary privilege, to be president of the Censorate on the grounds that he considered him lacking in literary skills. Chang Yüeh put forward as his own candidate Ts'ui Jih-chih with whom he had been on good terms for many years, and suggested that Yin-fu was more suitable for a military post. The emperor, however, rebuffed Chang Yüeh; Ts'ui Yin-fu

[129] *THY* 8, pp. 108–18; *CTS* 23, pp. 891–904; *CTS* 8, pp. 188–9.

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was made president of the Censorate, and Chang's friend Ts'ui Jih-chih was appointed a general in the guards.[130]

Chang Yüeh now faced a Censorate whose president and one vice-president, Yü-wen Jung, were his open enemies. A second vice-president was Li Lin-fu[131] (?–752), a distant member of the imperial clan who also had not passed an examination and had entered official life by service in the guards. He had received his post in the Censorate on the recommendation of Yü-wen Jung. The control of the Censorate by a hostile faction was a very serious matter, for they alone had the power to impeach freely any minister, no matter how exalted. Chang Chiu-ling urged Chang Yüeh to take some measures in his own defence, but he apparently felt secure; 'What can those rats do to me?' he replied.

He continued to oppose Yü-wen Jung and his colleagues. At the very end of 725 the emperor acceded to Yü-wen Jung's suggestion to reform the selection procedures, making a large board of examiners responsible for appointments in place of the three senior officials of the Board of Civil Office. This presumably was a temporary measure to prevent Chang Yüeh from making any more arbitrary appointments, for the old system was restored next year after his fall. Chang Yüeh countered his enemies by simply suppressing their memorials.

In the fourth month of 726 Chang Yüeh was impeached by Ts'ui Yin-fu, Yü-wen Jung and Li Lin-fu on a variety of charges: taking bribes, consulting astrologers, extravagance and arbitrary use of authority in pursuit of his private interests. An investigation was ordered under a committee of the empire's highest judicial officials led by his fellow chief minister Yüan Ch'ien-yao, who had also recently been on bad terms with him. It seems that the charges were proven, but the emperor, persuaded by his faithful eunuch aide Kao Li-shih, decided that in view of his past great services to the state Chang Yüeh should only lose his position as chief minister, retaining all his substantive offices.[132]

In his place was appointed Li Yüan-hung[133] (?–733), descendant of a north-western aristocratic family and the son of Li Tao-kuang who had been a chief minister under the empress Wu from 696 to 698. He had entered official service by hereditary privilege, and was the first chief minister without a degree appointed under Hsüan-tsung. He had made his name during Hsüan-tsung's first year on the throne by standing up to the Princess T'ai-p'ing and Tou Huai-chen when they had tried to take possession of water-mills belonging to a Buddhist monastery. He later

130 *TCTC* 213, p. 6771; *CTC* 185B, pp. 4821–2; *HTS* 130, pp. 4497–8.
131 Biographies in *CTS* 106, pp. 3235–41; *HTS* 223A, pp. 6343–9.
132 *CTS* 97, pp. 3054–5; *TCTC* 213, pp. 6771–2.
133 Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3073–5; *HTS* 126, pp. 4418–20.

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gained a reputation as a good administrator, particularly skilled in financial and economic matters. In 725 he had been appointed vice-president of the Board of Finance, in place of Yang Ch'ang, who had protested against Yü-wen Jung's policies, and would have been made president but for the opposition of Chang Yüeh. It is clear that he was a supporter of Yü-wen Jung, and an advocate of similar rational financial policies. After his appointment he made detailed memorials on contemporary problems, which were warmly commended by Hsüan-tsung.

For the moment Yüan Ch'ien-yao and Li Yüan-hung were firmly in control at court, Yü-wen Jung and his allies controlled the Censorate, and the re-registration policy was in the course of completion.

In the ninth month, Tu Hsien[134] (? before 680–740) was appointed as a third chief minister. Although Tu Hsien was a *ming-ching* graduate from a scholar-official family in Ho-nan, his career, after a normal beginning in the Supreme Court of Justice and the Censorate, had been spent since 716 in the far west, where he had successfully defended the An-hsi protectorate (Kucha) against the Turgesh and the rebellious ruler of Khotan, and established a great reputation among the tribes. He thus came to the chief ministership, much as Chang Yüeh and Wang Chün had done before him, as a man with great military experience – something which both Yüan Ch'ien-yao and Li Yüan-hung completely lacked.

Chang Yüeh, meanwhile, continued to be influential at court, consulted by Hsüan-tsung on all major issues, and Yü-wen Jung and Ts'ui Yin-fu went in constant fear that he would return to power. In 726 the emperor's plan to appoint Wu Hui-fei empress was successfully opposed on the grounds that her supporter Chang Yüeh would claim credit for her elevation and thus return to power. Yü-wen and Ts'ui returned to the attack at the beginning of 727, denouncing him repeatedly. The emperor, apparently having lost patience with both parties in this constant conflict at court, ordered Chang Yüeh to retire from office; Ts'ui Yin-fu was sent home to care for his aged mother, and Yü-wen Jung appointed to a prefecture in Ho-pei, where he was put in charge of flood control and land reclamation schemes.[135]

After his retirement Chang Yüeh was engaged in directing the compilation of a new ritual code, to replace those produced in the seventh century. Assisted by a large team of ritual experts, led by Hsü Chien, who had been associated with him in formulating the ceremonial for the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, Chang Yüeh continued this work until his death. Responsibility for its completion was then passed to Hsiao Sung, and the

[134] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3075–7; *HTS* 126, pp. 4420–2.
[135] *TCTC* 212, pp. 6772, 6777; *HTS* 125, p. 4409.

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enormous work, in 150 chapters, was completed in 732 under the name *K'ai-yüan li*.[136]

Although one source of discord was removed, the court was still disturbed by constant disagreements between Tu Hsien and Li Yüan-hung. In the second month of 728 Chang Yüeh, although formally retired, was given an appointment in the Chi-hsien yüan academy, where he was engaged in writing the official history of the period. Hsüan-tsung began, once again to consult him through his eunuch envoys on every important issue.[137] In the eleventh month of 728 another *ad hominem* chief minister was appointed, Hsiao Sung[138] (*c*. 669–749). A descendant of the royal house of Liang, he too had entered service by hereditary privilege and had little learning and few literary attainments but he had been very highly thought of by Yao Ch'ung and eventually became assistant of the left in the Department of State Affairs, and then president of the Board of War. In 726 he had been appointed military governor of Shuo-fang, and had successfully organized defences against serious Tibetan incursions in the north-west.

In the fifth month of 729 the emperor, tired of the constant disagreements between Tu Hsien and Li Yüan-hung, dismissed them both and made them prefects, and also dismissed Yüan Ch'ien-yao, who remained at court only as the left vice-president of the Department of State Affairs, but no longer with the standing of chief minister. Hsiao Sung became president of the Chancellery – a post which had remained vacant since Chang Yüeh's retirement – and thus became senior chief minister. Yü-wen Jung, who had been brought back to the capital as vice-president of the Board of Finance, was now promoted vice-president of the Chancellery and *ad hominem* chief minister, while P'ei Kuang-t'ing[139] (676–733) was made vice-president of the Secretariat, and also *ad hominem* chief minister. P'ei Kuang-t'ing came from a notable Kuan-chung clan and was married to a daughter of Wu San-ssu; his father and grandfather were both renowned generals, and he himself had passed the *ming-ching* examination in 705–6. He had served in successive posts in the Board of War and also in the Court for Diplomatic Relations (Hung-lu ssu), and had suggested the participation of representatives of the Turks and other foreign nations at the *feng-shan* sacrifices. Although he was an examination graduate as well as an aristocrat, it is clear from his later policies on selection that he

[136] On the compilation of the *K'ai-yüan li* see the editorial note by Ikeda On to the edn *Dai Tō Kaigenrei* (Tokyo, 1972), pp. 822–3.

[137] *TCTC* 213, p. 6782.

[138] Biographies in *CTS* 99, pp. 3093–5; *HTS* 101, pp. 3949–52.

[139] Biographies in *CTS* 84, pp. 2806–8; *HTS* 108, pp. 4089–91; epitaph by Chang Chiu-ling, *Ch'ü-chiang chi*, 19, p. 3a.

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was opposed to the accelerated promotion of a graduate elite within the bureaucracy.[140]

The new ministry was thus entirely composed of aristocrats, for the first time in Hsüan-tsung's reign, and the eclipse of the dominant group of the early years of the reign, signalled by the fall of Chang Yüeh three years before, was now completed. Yü-wen Jung was the most powerful of the three chief ministers. He had long enjoyed the emperor's special esteem, and his financial skills were greatly needed now that Li Yüan-hung had been removed.

The court had been engaged in continual warfare for several years, especially with the Tibetans, and military costs had soared. Moreover, a spate of natural disasters had struck the empire. In 726 there were terrible floods in the eastern plain, with many people drowned, especially in Ho-nan and southern Ho-pei. Even more extensive floods hit Ho-pei in the autumn of 727 destroying the harvest before it could be gathered in many places. Serious droughts also occurred in 726, 727 and 728. This period of seriously unsettled climatic conditions continued until about 736. These disasters did not affect the capital region, usually so vulnerable to drought-famines, but the richest revenue-producing areas of the eastern plain. In the early winter of 727 the court was forced to leave Lo-yang after disastrous flooding in the east, and return to Ch'ang-an.[141]

Although Yü-wen Jung's position appeared secure, he was resented by the officials, who had felt threatened by his employment of personal assistants rather than regularly appointed functionaries to put his schemes into effect. He was however, supremely confident that he could soon settle the empire's problems, and appointed some excellent men. The aged Sung Ching was placed in charge of the Department of State Affairs partly perhaps to placate the literati, and his protégé P'ei Yao-ch'ing (about whom see below) became vice-president of the Board of Finance. However, Jung, who had risen to power largely through the emperor's personal favour, now fell foul of another royal favourite, and fatally overreached himself. This new favourite was Li I, Prince of Hsin-an, a great-grandson of T'ai-tsung.[142] He had served with distinction in important prefectural posts early in Hsüan-tsung's reign and then for a time retired, but in 727 had been appointed to the all-important military command of military governor of Shuo-fang, in succession to Hsiao Sung, a post which he was to retain until 735 during which period he won important victories over the Tibetans and later the Khitan. Yü-wen

[140] *HTS* 108, p. 4090.
[141] *CTS* 8, p. 191. On the disasters of 726-8 see *CTS* 37, *HTS* 35, 36, *passim*.
[142] Biographies in *CTS* 76, pp. 2651-3.

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Jung feared both his great military power and his growing influence with the emperor, and may also have feared that he would strengthen Hsiao Sung's political position to his own disadvantage. Therefore, as he had done before in the case of Chang Yüeh, he arranged for one of the censors, Li Yin, to impeach him. But the censor warned the prince, who immediately informed Hsüan-tsung. When Li Yin eventually presented his impeachment the emperor rejected it in a fury. Instead of the prince being arraigned, Jung was dismissed to become prefect of Ju-chou in Ho-nan. He had been chief minister for only a hundred days.[143]

Having dismissed him in the heat of anger, however, the emperor now realized that he had no minister able to conduct the financial affairs of the empire. He then summoned P'ei Kuang-t'ing and the other ministers and asked them what measures they proposed now that he had dismissed Jung. The remaining chief ministers were lost for an answer, but realizing that Yü-wen Jung, even in his provincial post, remained a threat to their authority, hastily denounced him for forming a personal faction, and because his son had allegedly taken bribes. He was again demoted to a minor position in Ling-nan but even there his enemies hounded him. After a year or more the Court of Agriculture accused him of massive peculation while holding a prefectural office in 727. Deprived of office he was exiled to a remote area in modern Kwangsi. He fell sick and died on the road.[144]

The ministry of Hsiao Sung and P'ei Kuang-t'ing (729–33)

With Yü-wen Jung safely disposed of, Hsiao Sung and P'ei Kuang-t'ing remained firmly in control of the court, although they were not harmonious. In 730 P'ei Kuang-t'ing introduced a measure to reform the system of selection examinations (*hsüan*). The complex rules then in force had been introduced by his own father P'ei Hsing-chien in 669. But for many years individual talent – in particular literary talent – had been the main consideration in making appointments to important posts, neglecting seniority and long service. Moreover, the officials of the Board of Civil Office had expended much time in making the crucial appointments to higher metropolitan offices, while neglecting the far more numerous and equally important appointments to minor and provincial posts. P'ei Kuang-t'ing now introduced a system of appointment by seniority (*hsün-tzu ko*) for all offices, and also ordered that clerical appointments to offices 'outside the current' (*liu-wai kuan*) should come under careful

[143] *CTS* 105, p. 3221; *TCTC* 213, pp. 6787–8.
[144] *TCTC* 213, pp. 6787–8; *CTS* 105, pp. 3221–2.

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scrutiny by the central authorities.[145] These measures seem to have been in part a continuation of the attempts made since 713 to bring the provincial officials under the same close control as those in the central government. It also gave advantage to the very numerous men in routine posts who had themselves risen from the clerical service. But the measure also attacked the privileged position within the selection process of the elite stream of examination entrants. Among these it caused a furore, and their most senior spokesman, the retired Sung Ching, spoke out forcibly against the new measures. But the protests were in vain; the measure was enforced, and the position of the examination graduates was further weakened.

In 731 the emperor's own personal entourage also began to pose problems. Hsüan-tsung was much influenced not only by his favourites among the outer court officials, but also by various confidants. We have already seen how the most prominent of these, Chiang Chiao, had been ruined in 722. Latterly the emperor had showered rewards and favours upon a man of a very different type, Wang Mao-chung.[146] Unlike Chiang, who had been a member of a prominent family, Wang Mao-chung was a professional soldier of very humble origins. Of Korean descent, his family had been enslaved after Kao-tsung's expeditions in the seventh century, and Mao-chung himself became Hsüan-tsung's personal slave while he was still a minor prince. Having assisted in the coup against the Princess T'ai-p'ing, he was given rich rewards, the highest possible nominal office, and a succession of appointments in the Palace Guards. In the late 720s he was most successful in building up the supply of cavalry mounts for the army. In 729 he married a daughter of another prominent general in the guards. Several of the courtiers protested against this, as giving Mao-chung far too much power over the palace guards and the Northern Palace Armies (Pei-chün), but the emperor paid no heed. In 730 he became very intimate with a group of generals from the Northern Palace Armies, who took advantage of his personal influence with the emperor to indulge in all sorts of illegal activities. Mao-chung himself now demanded that he be made president of the Board of War. The emperor refused, much to Mao-chung's resentment.

Mao-chung had, meanwhile, fallen foul of another group intimately connected with Hsüan-tsung, the eunuchs. One of the latter, Kao Li-shih now took the opportunity of reminding Hsüan-tsung of the threat posed by Wang Mao-chung and his fellow generals, who between them

145 See R. des Rotours, *Le Traité des examens* (Paris, 1932), pp. 262–5; *THY* 74, p. 1348; *TFYK* 630, p. 6b; *TCTC* 213, p. 6789.

146 Biographies in *CTS* 106, pp. 3252–5; *HTS* 121, pp. 4335–6.

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controlled the most powerful military force in the capital, the Northern Palace Armies. Hsüan-tsung now acted; at the beginning of 731 Wang Mao-chung, his sons, and several of his fellow generals were degraded to minor provincial posts in the border provinces, and shortly after Mao-chung himself was ordered to commit suicide.[147]

This action seems to have broken the power of the Northern Palace Armies, which had played so important a political role during the earlier years of the reign. It also led to a growth in the power and influence of the eunuchs, who were increasingly employed as the emperor's confidential agents. But their most important representative Kao Li-shih remained a loyal and trusted servant of the emperor for nearly half-a-century,[148] and under Hsüan-tsung there was no question of their becoming a significant force in politics, as happened in later reigns.

P'ei Yao-ch'ing: reform of transport and agricultural colonies

In 730 a new proponent of major economic policies, P'ei Yao-ch'ing[149] (681–743), appeared upon the scene at court. A member of an old-established north-western clan, he had been an infant prodigy and passed a special examination for talented boys held under the empress Wu. He was a member of Jui-tsung's princely household during Chung-tsung's reign, and later served with distinction in various provincial posts. In 729, on the recommendation of Yü-wen Jung, he had been appointed vice-president of the Board of Finance, but appears not to have taken up the post because of Jung's subsequent disgrace. In 730, when prefect of Hsüan-chou (in modern southern Anhwei) he sent in a lengthy memorial suggesting a reform of the system of transportation of grain to Ch'ang-an, by which the route to the capital would be divided into a number of stages, so as to avoid the necessity of tax boats from distant prefectures making the whole long voyage to the capital.[150] The emperor took no action on this proposal, but in 731 the court was once again forced to move to Lo-yang for a year, and it was becoming clear that a permanent solution to the problem of supplying Ch'ang-an was becoming vitally necessary.

In 730 P'ei also sent in a proposal to solve the problem of 'vagrant' households which had only been partially solved by Yü-wen Jung's re-registration, by settling such families in communities on vacant or

[147] *TCTC* 213, pp. 6792–3; *CTS* 106, pp. 3253–5; *CTS* 190B, p. 5037; *HTS* 121, p. 4336.
[148] On the honours accorded to Kao Li-shih and his family see *TCTC* 213, pp. 6793–4.
[149] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3079–83; *HTS* 127, pp. 4452–4.
[150] *TT* 10, pp. 56c–57a; *TFYK* 498, pp. 16a–17a; *CTS* 49, pp. 2114–15 tr from Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 183–4.

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unexploited lands where they would be organized in agricultural colonies (*ying-t'ien*) on the model of the military colonies so common on the frontiers. These colonies were to be established either in the area where the vagrant households lived, or if there was no land locally available, the vagrants were to be transported to areas with lands awaiting exploitation. This scheme, like the proposed reform of transport, was not acted upon.[151] However, both of these policies advocated by P'ei Yao-ch'ing were to come to fruition a few years later.

Meanwhile Hsiao Sung and P'ei Kuang-t'ing continued in power until the latter's death in 733. Hsiao Sung, whose son was married to a royal princess, recommended as P'ei's replacement Wang Ch'iu, himself the consort of one of Chung-tsung's daughters and a member of another distinguished Kuan-chung family. Wang Ch'iu, however, although he had been on friendly terms with Hsiao Sung declined the post and suggested that Han Hsiu should be appointed in his place. Han Hsiu[152] (673–740), like Wang Ch'iu, was both a member of a prominent north-western aristocratic family, and an examination graduate with a literary reputation. In the late 720s he had been responsible for drafting imperial edicts, and had risen to be assistant of the right in the Department of State Affairs.

Han Hsiu almost immediately proved to be aggressive and assertive at court. Always insistent on points of principle and morality, he stood up firmly to Hsüan-tsung, demanding the dismissal of one of his favourite officers in the guards and constantly clashing with the more easy-going Hsiao Sung. The emperor valued him for his selfless integrity, but the constant quarrels between the two ministers at court eventually forced him to put an end to a generally unhappy situation. In the tenth month of 733, after Han Hsiu had been in office only seven months, both chief ministers were dismissed; Han Hsiu to become president of the Board of Works, and Hsiao Sung to become vice-president of the Department of State Affairs.[153]

Their ministry achieved nothing spectacular, although it did see, in the sixth month of 733, a relaxation of the rigid application of the rules for the selection of officials imposed by P'ei Kuang-t'ing. His principle of selection by seniority and service was permitted to be overlooked by the Board of Civil Office as the circumstances might warrant, and the central

[151] *THY* 85, pp. 1563–4; *TFYK* 495, pp. 20a–21a. Elsewhere this scheme is attributed, wrongly, to Yü-wen Jung. See Penelope A. Herbert, 'Agricultural colonies in China in the early eighth century', *Papers on Far Eastern History* (Canberra), 11 (1975) 37–77. This issue is discussed on pp. 68–71.

[152] Biographies in *CTS* 98, pp. 3077–9; *HTS* 126, pp. 4432–3.

[153] *TCTC* 213, p. 6803.

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control over provincial clerical appointments was also relaxed. However, since promotion by seniority was advantageous to all but the elite stream among the bureaucrats, his system continued to be used widely and very large numbers continued to be promoted from the clerical service into full official ranks.

The year 733 also saw the final retirement from court of Sung Ching, who since ceasing to be chief minister had continued to exert a powerful influence upon Hsüan-tsung, and to give his support to the examination elite in the metropolitan bureaucracy.[154] Since Chang Yüeh had also died in 730, this meant the end of the last remaining influence at court of the old guard of scholar-officials who had already reached high rank under the empress Wu.

The 'compromise ministry': P'ei Yao-ch'ing, Chang Chiu-ling and Li Lin-fu

In place of Han Hsiu and Hsiao Sung, the emperor appointed as his chief ministers P'ei Yao-ch'ing and Chang Chiu-ling, who became vice-presidents of the Chancellery and Secretariat, and *ad personem* chief ministers. P'ei Yao-ch'ing had recently renewed his proposals to reform the transport system and was probably appointed so that he could put them into effect. This was now an urgent matter. Only weeks after the appointment of the new ministers the court was once again forced to move to Lo-yang, and P'ei Yao-ch'ing was now allowed to implement his schemes as we shall see below. P'ei was both an aristocrat and a practical exponent of financial policies who had been recommended by Yü-wen Jung, although his own record as a graduate was impeccable. The new chief minister, Chang Chiu-ling was the arch-representative of the opposite interests. A man from an obscure official family from the backward province of Ling-nan in the far south, he was an examination candidate who had owed his advancement largely to the friendship and patronage of Chang Yüeh. After the latter's fall from power in 726 he had served in prefectural posts, but in 731 Hsüan-tsung had given him a post in the Imperial Library at the same time making use of his great literary talents by means of an appointment to the Chi-hsien yüan academy. Here Chang had written diplomatic correspondence and drafted many important edicts. In the fifth month of 733 after P'ei Kuang-t'ing's death he had been made provisional vice-president of the Secretariat.

In the fifth month of 734, Chang Chiu-ling and P'ei Yao-ch'ing were promoted to be presidents of the Secretariat and Chancellery, and thus

[154] *CTS* 8, p. 200.

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full chief ministers. At the same time a third man was added to the ministry, Li Lin-fu. Li Lin-fu was a distant relative of the imperial family, and a nephew of the emperor's personal confidant, Chiang Chiao, who had entered the bureaucracy by hereditary privilege. He was on bad terms with the scholarly elite; Yuan Ch'ien-yao, for example had a low opinion of him as a young man, and the historians make a great deal of his shortcomings as a scholar. Nevertheless he had held various 'pure' offices normally reserved for scholarly men, deputy director of the Imperial University, vice-president of the Censorate and later vice-president of the Boards of Justice and Civil Office, where he won a reputation as a supremely efficient administrator.

Li Lin-fu had served as vice-president of the Board of Civil Office under P'ei Kuang-t'ing while the latter was enforcing his controversial methods of selecting men for office, and had been transferred to the Secretariat immediately after P'ei's death, when these measures were suspended. He had thus been closely associated with two ministers, Yü-wen Jung and P'ei Kuang-t'ing who were widely considered to be the enemies of the literary elite.

There is, however, no real evidence either that Chang Chiu-ling and Li Lin-fu were on bad terms before the latter became chief minister, or that Chang actively opposed his promotion. Some later historians claim that this was the case, and also attribute Li's selection as chief minister to the influence of the emperor's favourite consort, Wu Hui-fei, and claim that Li had been involved in an adulterous liaison with P'ei Kuang-t'ing's wife, who was her second cousin. These allegations, however, may well be fabrications; all the historians of the period are very hostile to Li Lin-fu, and are most anxious to show him in the worst possible light.[155]

Whether or not Chang Chiu-ling and Li Lin-fu were enemies before 734, their ministry soon developed into a bitter personal struggle. Their colleague P'ei Yao-ch'ing sometimes supported one and sometimes the other, but was in any case much preoccupied with the complex reform of the grain transport system. Both Li Lin-fu and Chang Chiu-ling enjoyed the emperor's highest regard; Li as a skilled administrator and institutional expert, Chang as the successor to Chang Yüeh in the role of moral counsellor and source of orthodox ritual and political wisdom. Li Lin-fu was an adept political manipulator, skilled in intrigue and in handling people; Chang Chiu-ling was a notoriously difficult colleague, unyielding, intransigent, obstructive, obsessed with minor points of principle, narrow-minded and violent in his prejudices. In particular he was pas-

[155] On the complex court politics of these years see Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 54-9; Herbert, 'Chang Chiu-ling', pp. 165-90.

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sionately committed to the idea that literary values and scholarship were essential for a high office, and openly despised those who did not share his own literary background. His most bitter scorn was reserved for the military.

With two such disparate chief ministers trouble was inevitable, and their opposition was made the more severe since it epitomized the protracted struggle which had been intensifying since the early 720s between the literary elite recruited through the examinations and the older aristocratic elements and technical specialists in the bureaucracy. We shall see later how bitterly they disagreed. What is more surprising is the great number of important and valuable reforms which were carried out during their ministry.

P'ei Yao-ch'ing and the reform of grain transport

When P'ei Yao-ch'ing and Chang Chiu-ling became chief ministers late in 733 the region around Ch'ang-an was in the grip of a famine caused by continuous rains which had damaged the harvest. The early 730s seem to have been a period of very severe natural disasters; widespread floods had occurred in 730, 731 and 732. Earlier in 733 high officials had had to be sent to the provinces to institute famine relief measures. Almost immediately after P'ei and Chang came to power, at the beginning of 734, the court had to be removed to Lo-yang, and ministers had to be sent out to the ravaged prefectures of southern Ho-pei to distribute relief and seed grain for the coming year.

P'ei Yao-ch'ing was now given a free hand to put into effect the measures for improving grain supplies for the capital that he had suggested in 730. Appointed commissioner for transport from the Chiang-Huai region and Ho-nan (*Chiang-Huai Ho-nan chuan-yün tu-shih*), he was given complete authority over the transport of grain from the point where it reached the Huang-ho, overriding the authority of all local officials. He was made head of a permanent commission with two deputy commissioners and a large staff, who directly controlled a complex organization of transit granaries, fleets of barges and carts for land haulage. He was thus, as Yü-wen Jung had been, head of an organization outside the normal bureaucratic apparatus, and, unlike Yü-wen, head of a huge permanent organization with many personnel.

Under his reform, the responsibility for transport from the junction of the canal with the Huang-ho to the granaries of the capital, was taken out of the hands of the local authorities of the prefectures from which the tax grain had been collected. This reduced the time spent in transporting

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taxes by local tax boats, and cut down on the costs of transporting tax grain to the local authorities. Grain was now unloaded into a huge new granary complex at Ho-yin, where the Pien Canal joined the Huang-ho, from which it was shipped in stages to Ch'ang-an by water along the Huang-ho and Wei River. At the end of each stage the grain was placed in a transhipment granary where it could be stored until conditions were right for the next stage of the journey. Large grain stocks were built up at Ho-yin, at Pei-chou in the northern plain, and at Lo-yang. But the traffic for the supply of Ch'ang-an no longer went overland from Lo-yang to Shan-chou on the Huang-ho above the San-men rapids. It went directly up the river, with a short land haulage around the rapids, a mere five miles compared with eighty miles on the old route. (See map 2.)

The new system was very successful and was further improved in the following decade. The prefectural authorities were relieved of the unpredictable expenses and waste of manpower involved in the old system; greatly increased quantities of grain – at least twice as much as had been possible under the old regime – were transferred annually to the granaries of Ch'ang-an, and the overall expenses of transport were drastically reduced.[156]

These improvements in transport fortunately coincided with a series of abundant harvests in Kuan-chung, where in 737 there was such a glut of grain that edicts were issued allowing the local people to pay all their taxes in grain, and authorizing the authorities to buy up grain by 'harmonious procurement', that is by purchasing at above the market price as a relief measure. In 737 transport of grain to Ch'ang-an was temporarily suspended, but the system remained in being and provided adequately for the needs of the capital for the rest of Hsüan-tsung's reign. When the court returned to Ch'ang-an late in 736, in these new conditions of abundance, it did so permanently. Lo-yang remained the Eastern Capital, but it was never again to be the seat of government.

State 'colonies' and land reclamation

As we have seen above, P'ei Yao-ch'ing had earlier advocated the establishment of agricultural colonies under state management as a means of settling the many remaining 'vagrant' households and of reclaiming land for cultivation. Late in 734 Chang Chiu-ling was sent to south-western Ho-nan where he set up a number of large-scale agricultural colonies in

[156] On his reform of the transport system see Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 87–9; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 34–5. P'ei Yao-ch'ing's detailed memorial, *THY* 87, p. 1587; *TT* 10, pp. 57a–b; *TFYK* 498, pp. 17a–18b; *CTS* 98, pp. 3080–1 is translated in Pulleyblank, pp. 185–7.

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the valleys of the northern tributaries of the Huai River, which were to be devoted to the production of paddy rice. Several large reclamation schemes had already been carried out in this area earlier in the century, but Chang seems to have envisaged a development on a very grand scale. The use of centrally managed 'agricultural colonies' was presumably dictated by large-scale drainage and irrigation works being required which were too large to be undertaken, as was normal, by the local authorities. Chang Chiu-ling, like P'ei Yao-ch'ing, was made a special commissioner (*Ho-nan k'ai tao-t'ien shih*) to supervise this scheme, which was not covered by any established organ of government. Chang's colonies proved to be both unprofitable and troublesome to manage, and after his fall from power in 737 they had to be abandoned, the lands divided up and given to the peasants as their own land-holdings.[157] However, the scheme did succeed in irrigating and bringing into cultivation a large area of fertile rice fields in a region where the population was rising especially rapidly and from which the grain surplus could easily be transferred to the capital cities.

Chang Chiu-ling and the currency

After Sung Ching's disastrous attempt to deal with the problem of counterfeiting in 718–20, the currency situation had deteriorated still further. In 732 the government attempted to remedy the problems caused by the severe shortage of coin by ordering that all large sums were to be paid in a mixture of cash and commodities.[158] In the third month of 734 Chang Chiu-ling suggested that the emperor should abandon the state monopoly of manufacturing coinage, and permit anyone freely to manufacture coin. This radical suggestion provoked a storm of opposition. Li Lin-fu, P'ei Yao-ch'ing and the latter's deputy Hsiao Chiung sent in a trenchant memorial stressing that the control of the coinage was one of the emperor's most important sources of authority and control of the economy which should not on any pretext be abandoned. Other long and carefully reasoned memorials from Ts'ui Mien and Liu Chih, made the same point, and argued that such a measure would simply lead to the proliferation of bad coin. Chang Chiu-ling was forced to abandon the plan.[159] It was later resuscitated by Li I, Prince of Hsin-an, but again met such strong opposition that it was immediately dropped.[160]

[157] See Herbert, 'Agricultural colonies', pp. 71–5.
[158] *TT* 9, pp. 15a–b; *TFYK* 501, p. 4a.
[159] *THY* 89, pp. 1625–6; *TFYK* 501, pp. 4a–5b; *CTS* 48, pp. 3097–9; *HTS* 54, p. 1385. On this policy and the ensuing debate see Penelope A. Herbert, 'A debate in T'ang China on the state monopoly on casting coin', *T'oung pao*, 62.4–5 (1977) 253–92.
[160] *HTS* 54, pp. 1385–6.

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Rationalization of the financial system

Li Lin-fu, as chief minister, also held the concurrent title of president of the Board of Finance from late 735 until the seventh month of 736. During this time, he turned his attention to the incredibly complicated and time-consuming procedures by which the taxes due, numbers of troops to be conscripted, labour services, military expenses and miscellaneous expenditures of every individual prefecture and government department had to be calculated and assessed afresh each year. The paper-work involved was immense – Li Lin-fu claimed it occupied half-a-million sheets of paper annually – and the complications of the system resulted in many abuses, and in the people being unsure of their actual obligations.

Early in 736 Li Lin-fu discussed this problem with the delegates sent to court from the prefectures (*ch'ao-chi shih*) and with the recently appointed civil inspecting commissioners (*ts'ai-fang shih*) to the provinces, and requested a thorough revision of the whole system of taxation and provision of local expenditures. A regular system of rules, apparently incorporating tax quotas for each prefecture, was to be worked out and embodied in a five-chapter compilation of Permanently Applicable Directives (*Ch'ang-hsing chih-fu*). After this the Board of Finance – in effect its Department of Public Revenue – had only to issue orders annually authorizing the sums which were to be expended by each local authority.[161]

The details of the reform are unknown – they must have varied greatly from one area to another – but it is clear that this was a major step in administrative rationalization, bringing the empire's financial system more closely into touch with local realities. It was also a major innovation, in that for the first time the government tacitly abandoned the general principle of uniformity throughout the empire, both of the rates of tax and labour service, and of the administrative details of the financial administration.

Establishment of the civil provincial inspectorate

Li Lin-fu was not the only member of this ministry anxious to rationalize and improve local administration. We have already seen that the improved efficiency of local government, and the recruitment of better local officials had preoccupied the court since Hsüan-tsung's accession. One perennial problem was the effective central supervision and control of local administration. Since 706 civil inspectors (*hsün-ch'a shih* or *an-ch'a shih*) had

[161] *TT* 23, p. 136c; *TLT* 3, p. 43b; *THY* 59, p. 1020. Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 100–1, 332.

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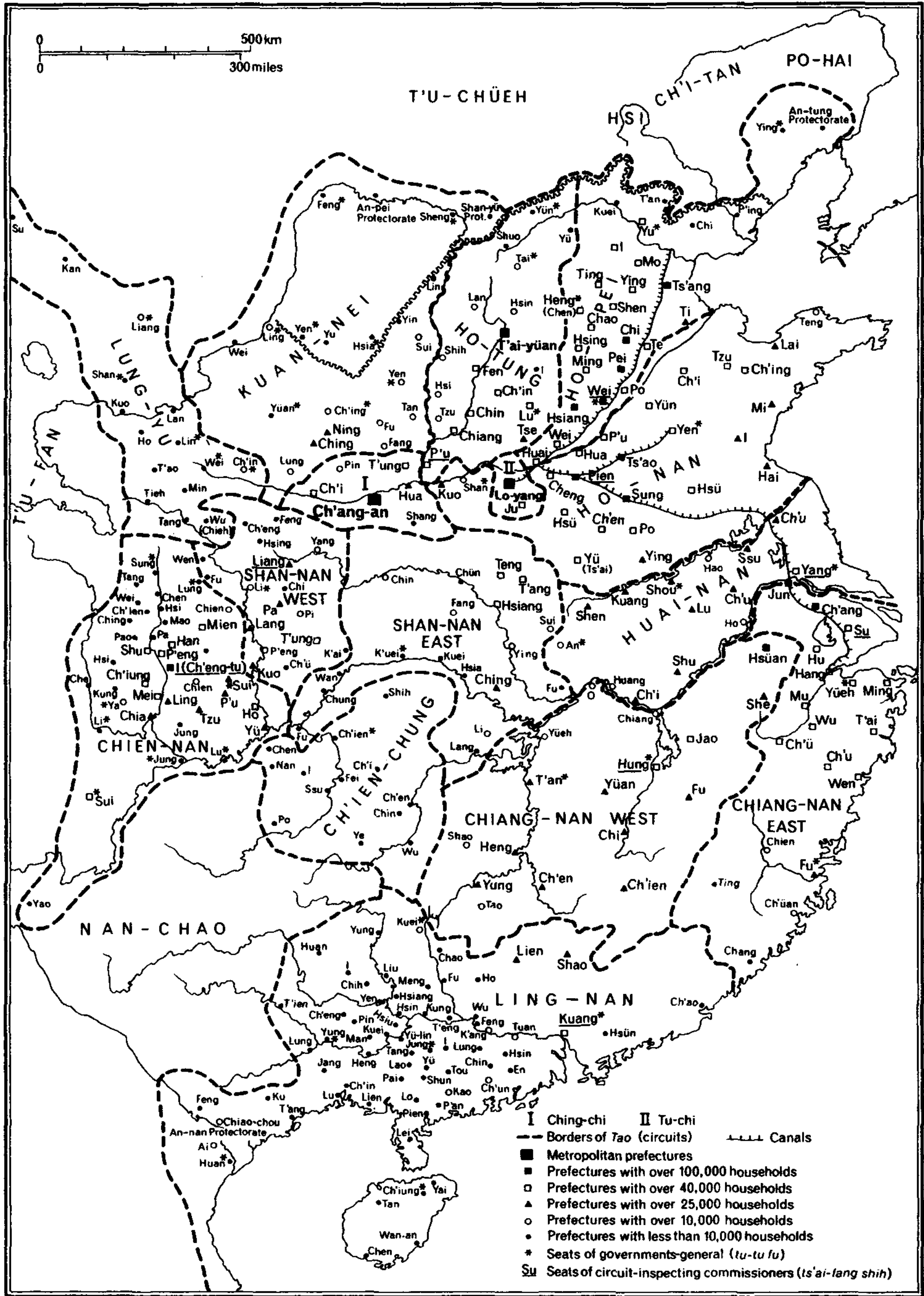

Map 11. T'ang China, 742

been intermittently appointed to the empire's ten provinces or rather 'circuits of inspection' (*tao*). In 733 the empire was redivided into fifteen circuits, dividing some of the more unwieldy areas into more manageable units for such inspections. Then in the second month of 734, following a memorial by Chang Chiu-ling, a system of permanent civil inspecting commissioners was established for the provinces, which continued in existence until after Hsüan-tsung's abdication.[162]

The immediate motive for this reform was the necessity to deal effectively with regional problems such as famine and relief measures, and to control migrant families; the new inspectors were also to superintend the work of local officials, to ensure that they distributed lands, enforced the laws on tax and labour service efficiently, and did not abuse their authority.

This new measure was important in that it established a permanent level of authority intermediate between central government and the individual prefectures. The new provincial commissions were, however, purely an advisory, inspecting body responsible for overall standards of administration. They were, indeed, expressly forbidden to intervene in routine affairs and in the actual conduct of local government, and were to have no executive powers, and no actual provincial civil jurisdiction.

They did sometimes overstep these limits on their authority. In 750 they had to be reminded that they were inspectors, not executive officials, and that they should not become involved in the running of affairs, or act as channels for the transmission of memorials to the court.[163]

They should not, therefore, be thought of as constituting an additional provincial level of administration.

Control of the examinations

We have already seen how, after P'ei Kuang-t'ing's death in 733 his system of rules for the selection of candidates for office on the grounds of seniority and experience had been abandoned. Hsiao Sung had been responsible for this, supported by Chang Chiu-ling.

Considering how important examination entry had become and how very conscious Chang Chiu-ling in particular was of its importance as a criterion of acceptable scholarship and literary skill, it was only to be expected that some reforms should also be made in this field. The first of these, although nowhere associated with Chang Chiu-ling by name, must

[162] *TCTC* 213, p. 6803; *Yü Hai* 18, p. 26b; *THY* 78, p. 1420; *TTCLC* 100, p. 510; *TFYK* 162, p. 11b; *CTS* 8, p. 200. See Herbert, 'Chang Chiu-ling', p. 278.

[163] *THY* 78, p. 1420.

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surely have emanated from him. Shortly after P'ei Kuang-t'ing died, in the fifth month of 733 an edict permitted, for the first time, the admission of gifted students from prefectural schools, who were sons of low-ranking officials, to the Ssu-men hsüeh school of the State University as fellow commoners. Provincial candidates, like Chang Chiu-ling himself, had always been under a great disadvantage in the examinations in competition with metropolitan students who had received tuition from the first-rate scholars of the State University. Although they had achieved somewhat more success since the beginning of Hsüan-tsung's reign, this measure gave them more likelihood of competing on equal terms.[164]

Until this time the system of selection of qualified candidates for appointment for office (*hsüan*), and the examinations (*chü*) which gave candidates entry onto the roll of officials, had both been administered by the Board of Civil Office. This had, as a result, become a most influential ministry, whose president and two vice-presidents wielded enormous influence, both over those who gained entry into the ranks of officials, and over those of the officials who were appointed to key posts. They were able to influence the whole make-up of the bureaucracy, apart from the highest-ranking appointments which were made by the emperor himself (or in effect by the emperor with the advice of his chief ministers).

Another important reform was carried into effect in 736. Early in that year there was a violent dispute between an unsuccessful candidate and the official in charge of the examinations. These had normally been administered by a low-ranking under-secretary (*yüan-wai lang*) of the Board of Civil Office. It was now decided that the examinations should be entirely separated from the selection procedures of the Board of Civil Office. From this time onwards the vice-president of the Board of Rites was given charge of the examinations for entry into the service.[165] This greatly diminished the power of the Board of Civil Office to monopolize control both over the entry of officials and over the crucial early stages of their careers.

The fall of Chang Chiu-ling

In spite of these very considerable positive achievements, the enmity between Chang Chiu-ling and Li Lin-fu repeatedly broke out over specific issues. The first of these occurred early in 735 and concerned one of the traditional points at issue between ethical moralist Confucians, such as Chang Chiu-ling, and the advocates of institutional and legal policies, such as Li. The case arose from the murder of a censor by the two sons

[164] *T'ang Chih-yen* 1, p. 6; *HTS* 44, p. 1164; des Rotours, *Traité des examens*, p. 171.
[165] *TCTC* 214, p. 6814; *TTCLC* 106, p. 549; *THY* 59, pp. 1024–5; *TFYK* 639, p. 246.

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of a man for whose execution he had been responsible. The sons, considering that their father had been wrongly punished, murdered the censor as an act of vengeance, and were subsequently apprehended. Such cases of vendetta which seem to have been far from uncommon, raised a very complex issue, since sons acting to revenge their fathers' deaths could claim the justification of the canonical code of ritual behaviour (*li*), but were at the same time clearly infringing the criminal law. The conflict between ethics and law implicit in cases of vendetta was so difficult to resolve that in a famous case under the empress Wu it had been seriously suggested that the offenders should be ordered both to receive public marks of approbation for their filial devotion, and also be executed for their offence against the Code. In the present instance, Chang Chiu-ling, as might have been expected, urged that the offenders be released, since they were under a moral obligation to avenge their father, while Li Lin-fu and P'ei Yao-ch'ing both took the view that the preservation of law and order and the criminal law had overriding importance. The emperor took the same attitude, and the murderers were executed.[166]

Another constant source of friction was the problem of the succession. Wu Hui-fei remained the most influential of the emperor's consorts, but had never succeeded either in herself being designated as empress, or in having the heir apparent replaced by one of her own sons. In 736 she claimed that the heir apparent and the other royal princes were planning to kill her and her son Prince Mao, a particular favourite of Hsüan-tsung, and then to depose the emperor. Hsüan-tsung wished to depose the heir apparent and the other princes but since this was such a serious matter first asked the counsel of his chief ministers. Li Lin-fu, who was rumoured to have come to power thanks to Wu Hui-fei's influence and to have promised to support her efforts to have the heir apparent replaced, encouraged the emperor through a eunuch intermediary, saying that this was a family matter in which his own wishes were paramount. Wu Hui-fei then sent word to Chang Chiu-ling that, if he would assist her, she would give her support to his continuing in office as chief minister. However, Chang had consistently advocated the importance of a stable succession, and a systematic training for the future emperor. He gave his advice against deposing the princes, and cast doubt on the possibility of their having made any such plot, living as they did in the palace under the emperor's watch. He now rejected Hui-fei's suggestion, and reported it to Hsüan-tsung, who seems anyway to have been undecided about the truth of the matter, and nothing was done.[167]

[166] *CTS* 188, pp. 4933–4; *TCTC* 213, pp. 6796–7; *TCTC* 214, pp. 6811–12.
[167] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6823–4; *CTS* 107, p. 3259; *CTS* 106, p 3236.

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Although in this case Chang Chiu-ling's view prevailed, it seems that by 736 his influence with the emperor was beginning to decline. He was certainly a difficult counsellor; even his extremely eulogistic biography admits that he was short-tempered, hasty and cantankerous, and disliked by the emperor's other courtiers. His constant insistence on moral issues had also begun to take the form of direct political criticism. By this time Hsüan-tsung's earlier devotion to his political responsibilities had begun to waver, and he became increasingly neglectful of his duties. In the autumn of 736 Chang presented to the throne a lengthy homily on the Confucian art of administration, entitled the *Ch'ien-ch'iu chin-ching lu* in an attempt to revive his flagging interest in practical affairs, and to encourage him to provide adequate moral leadership for the empire.[168]

Chang Chiu-ling was insistent that government should remain in the hands of scholar-officials of his own sort. He was opposed to those who had risen from the routine offices of the clerical service, but his passionate scorn was reserved for the military and he quarrelled openly with Li Lin-fu over a number of cases involving the advancement of military men. In 735 the emperor suggested that Chang Shou-kuei, a general who had won important victories over the Tibetans some years before, and who had just inflicted a serious defeat upon the Khitan, should be appointed an *ad hominem* chief minister as Hsüeh No and Wang Chün had been, earlier in his reign. Chang Chiu-ling, who had unsuccessfully opposed the campaign against the Khitan in favour of a 'diplomatic' settlement, now blocked Chang Shou-kuei's appointment as chief minister.[169]

In 736, while Chang Shou-kuei was in Lo-yang reporting his victories, the Khitan and Hsi again rose against the Chinese and one of his subordinate generals, An Lu-shan, led a disastrous punitive expedition against them. After returning to his headquarters Chang Shou-kuei at first wished to execute An, and reported the case to the throne. But he later changed his mind, and asked the court's permission to pardon him. Chang Chiu-ling strongly urged the emperor to order him to carry out the execution – an act which earned him a posthumous reputation for foresight, when An Lu-shan subsequently rebelled and threatened to overturn the T'ang empire.[170]

Late in 736 another dispute arose over the proposed appointment as president of one of the Six Boards of Niu Hsien-k'o, the military governor of Shuo-fang, who had won a great reputation both as a soldier and as a military administrator. Chang violently opposed this, averring that Niu

[168] *CTW* 288, pp. 1b–2b; *TCTC* 214, p. 6821. See Herbert, 'Chang Chiu-ling', p. 175–7.
[169] *TCTC* 214, p. 6811.
[170] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6814–17; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 116–18, n. 68.

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had neither the necessary administrative experience nor the ability required for high office. The emperor then proposed that Niu be enfeoffed with a noble title. Chang still doggedly opposed giving any special reward to Niu for what he considered no more than the routine performance of his duties. The emperor lost his temper and accused Chang of hypocrisy in opposing Niu on the grounds of his humble origins when Chang himself came from an obscure clan. Chang now openly declared his prejudice: Niu Hsien-k'o had been 'a minor official on the distant frontier and has no acquaintance with books'. The emperor was not convinced, and Niu was given his fief. But Chang had successfully blocked his promotion to high office in the central government. Chang was not a personal enemy of Niu, and praised him warmly in the epitaph which he wrote for his father about this same time. He opposed his promotion simply because he was a military man, and thus had no place in the central councils of the empire. There was however another dimension to this incident. Niu Hsien-k'o's promotion was supported by Li Lin-fu, on the grounds of his skill as an administrator.[171]

Soon afterwards another dispute arose over the return of the court from Lo-yang to Ch'ang-an. At the end of 735, encouraged by reports of more favourable supplies of grain available in Kuan-chung, Hsüan-tsung had decided to return to Ch'ang-an early in the new year of 736. However, the move was delayed, at first until the tenth month of 736, when the crops would have been safely gathered, and then further postponed until the second month of 737. The emperor, who was obsessed with anxiety to carry out certain ancestral rituals in Ch'ang-an, suddenly decided to bring forward the move to early autumn of 736, before the harvest was completed, because of unfavourable omens. Chang Chiu-ling and P'ei Yao-ch'ing protested against this, as being likely to cause great hardship to the people in those territories through which the imperial retinue would pass. Li Lin-fu, however, once again supported the emperor, saying that the two capitals were his alternative residences, between which he was at liberty to move whenever he chose.[172]

The emperor accepted Li Lin-fu's advice, and the court returned to Ch'ang-an, for the last time, on the twenty-first of the tenth month of 736. On the twenty-seventh of the next month Chang Chiu-ling fell from power. His friend and protégé Yen T'ing-chih, who was serving under him as vice-president of the Secretariat, had earlier earned the hostility of Li Lin-fu by bringing about the dismissal of Hsiao Chiung, P'ei Yao-ch'ing's former deputy in the transportation reform, who had just been appointed president of the Board of Finance and who was closely con-

[171] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6822–3. [172] *TCTC* 214, p. 6822.

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nected with Li Lin-fu. His dismissal was justified on the grounds of his shortcomings as a scholar. Yen now exposed himself to Li Lin-fu's vengeance by attempting to intervene in the trial for corruption of Wang Yüan-yen, the husband of his own divorced wife. Li Lin-fu accused Yen of partiality, and when Chang came to his defence, he too became implicated in Yen's disgrace.

The result of this affair was that both Chang Chiu-ling and P'ei Yao-ch'ing were dismissed from their positions as chief ministers, and appointed as the two vice-presidents of the Department of State Affairs, posts which had long become high-ranking but powerless sinecures.[173] P'ei Yao-ch'ing remained at court until his death in 743, occasionally intervening in affairs, but no longer with any real influence. With Chang Chiu-ling things were quite different. Li Lin-fu clearly regarded his continued presence at court as a potential threat to his own position. In the fourth month of 737 a censor whom Chang had recommended for appointment was disgraced for slandering Li Lin-fu's fellow chief minister, Niu Hsien-k'o, whose promotion Chang had earlier blocked. Li took this opportunity to have Chang Chiu-ling demoted to a provincial post, as chief administrator of Ching-chou on the central Yangtze.[174] Although his office was still of very high rank, and he was granted a noble title and a fief in 739, Chang Chiu-ling never returned to the capital, and died in 740.

LI LIN-FU'S REGIME (736–52)

Li Lin-fu was now undisputed master at court, and the aristocratic interest which he represented was firmly in the ascendant. The second chief minister, from late 736 until his death in 742, was Niu Hsien-k'o.[175] Niu was certainly no fellow aristocrat; he was from an obscure Kuan-chung family which had not previously produced officials, and he had entered the roll of officials in the least prestigious way, by transfer from the clerical service. A county magistrate under whom he had been a clerk had taken him as an aide when he was transferred to the military command of Lung-yu. In Lung-yu he served on the military governor's staff, both as a military commander and as an administrator. He was outstandingly successful in building up an adequate logistic system for the armies in Lung-yu, and later in Ho-hsi, where he held the post of military governor from 729 to 736, at first as deputy for the chief minister Hsiao Sung, who held the governorship *in absentia*, and later on his own account. In 736 he

[173] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6824–5.
[174] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6827–8.
[175] Biographies in *CTS* 103, pp. 3195–7; *HTS* 133, p. 4555.

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had been transferred as military governor of the all-important command of Shuo-fang, to the north of Kuan-chung.

Niu Hsien-k'o was thus an entirely new type of chief minister. He was not the first general to be promoted to the office: Hsüeh No, Wang Chün and Hsiao Sung had all become chief ministers as a result of their military achievements earlier in Hsüan-tsung's reign. But unlike them Niu neither came from a distinguished family, nor had any bureaucratic experience in civil office, nor even any experience in the established military departments of central government. He was the first man to reach the chief ministership through the new system of frontier commands, and his appointment marked the beginning of a period of ever-increasing involvement of the frontier generals in court politics.

After becoming chief minister Niu Hsien-k'o continued to hold his post as military governor of Shuo-fang until late in 740 and during 739 he held in addition the governorship of the neighbouring command of Ho-tung. In 738 Li Lin-fu also became concurrent military governor of the north-western commands of Lung-yu and of Ho-hsi, continuing to retain these titles until 742 and 740 respectively.[176] Although the routine administration of these commands was conducted by deputies, during the early years of Li Lin-fu's dominance, the military aspects of government were thus a direct concern to the chief ministers, who retained personal control over the crucial frontier commands protecting the metropolitan province of Kuan-chung. During 739–40 the two chief ministers were also personally in command of forces totalling over 300,000 men.

However, in spite of Niu Hsien-k'o's military experience and influence with the generals, at court he was in no position to pursue an independent policy; he was Li Lin-fu's man and no more. Unlike an ordinary chief minister he had neither experience of court politics, nor the network of connections within the bureaucracy which an ordinary civil official had built up during his career. Neither had he the backing of an influential family. Nevertheless, he proved an excellent and efficient administrator, carefully working out and implementing Li Lin-fu's policies and staying clear of controversy at court.

The new regime was thus in one sense a reversion to the dominance of single chief ministers during the early years of Hsüan-tsung's reign. But there was an important difference. Under Yao Ch'ung, Sung Ching and Chang Yüeh the principal chief minister had served under an emperor who was actively involved in the conduct of political affairs. But during Li Lin-fu's long tenure of office Hsüan-tsung became increasingly concerned with his own domestic affairs, more and more deeply involved in

[176] *THY* 78, p. 1437.

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Taoism and Esoteric Buddhism, and gradually withdrew from an active role in politics. Li Lin-fu's personal dominance of the court was thus far more complete than that of his predecessors, a situation which led Pulleyblank to characterize the period from 736 to his death in 752 as the years of Li Lin-fu's 'dictatorship'.

Hsüan-tsung's involvement with Taoism and Esoteric Buddhism

We have already seen how the first years of Hsüan-tsung's reign saw the enactment of various measures against the Buddhist church. These continued through the 720s and 730s. In 722 an attempt was made to register temple lands, and to limit the amount of property held in perpetuity by each community of monks. In 727 an attempt was made to reduce the number of small unregistered village shrines, and in 729 the Department of Sacrifices (Tz'u-pu) of the Board of Rites began the regular compilation of a comprehensive register of all the Buddhist clergy, in order to establish the status of monks and prevent fraudulent ordinations. In 736 control of the Buddhist clergy was transferred to the Court for Diplomatic Relations (Hung-lu ssu), the government office responsible for foreign affairs. This amounted to a public avowal of the inferior position of Buddhism as a foreign faith.[177]

In the next year, in contrast, the Taoist church was honoured by being placed under the Court of Imperial Clan Affairs (Tsung-cheng ssu), on the grounds that the T'ang royal house claimed descent from Lao-tzu. Hsüan-tsung had a long-standing interest in Taoism, as had his father and sisters. Throughout his reign he honoured a number of eminent Taoist adepts. In 726, every household was ordered to keep a copy of the *Tao-te ching*,[178] the primary Taoist canonical work, to which Hsüan-tsung himself had written a commentary.[179] In 732 every prefecture was ordered to set up a temple in honour of Lao-tzu. The study of the *Tao-te ching* as a canonical book had been required of candidates for the *chin-shih* examination since 675, with the exception of one brief period under the empress Wu, and it seems that candidates for the *ming-ching* degree were also examined on it. Citations from Taoist texts are common in official documents of the period.

In the early 740s Hsüan-tsung's public encouragement of Taoism took a new turn. In 741 the emperor set up special schools for Taoist studies,

[177] On these and other measures see the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

[178] *HTS* 44, p. 1164.

[179] See *THY* 36, pp. 657–9. Hsüan-tsung first wrote a commentary in 722 (*CTS* 8, p. 183), which was promulgated to the empire. In 735 an eight-chapter sub-commentary was compiled (*TFYK* 53, p. 16b), and in 743 the imperial commentary was re-edited.

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entitled Ch'ung-hsüan hsüeh, as a part of the State University, to prepare candidates for a special examination on the Taoist canonical scriptures (*Tao-chü*) modelled on the *ming-ching* examination.[180] In 742 these canonical books were all given grandiose new titles, and officially sponsored commentaries were prepared for them. In 747 the *Tao-te ching* was formally declared the most important of all the canonical books. From 743 onwards Lao-tzu was granted a series of progressively grander honorary titles. In 742, moreover, the emperor adopted a new reign-title 'Heavenly Treasure' (T'ien-pao), with Taoist connotations to symbolize the changed nature of his divine mandate to rule.

Hsüan-tsung was also much interested in the Esoteric Buddhism which was first introduced during his reign. The Indian Tantric master Subhakarasiṃha worked at the capital from 716 to 735, translating many texts, and performing Tantric rituals and incantations for the emperor. Another Indian Tantric master, Vajrabodhi also stayed at the capital from 719 to 741, and greatly impressed Hsüan-tsung by his magical powers, being given the title 'National teacher'. Two famous Chinese exponents of the new Esoteric Buddhism, I-hsing, who was also famous as an astronomer and mathematician, and Pu-k'ung (Amoghavajra) were also generously patronized by Hsüan-tsung.[181]

It was no accident that Esoteric Buddhism attracted Hsüan-tsung, in spite of his attempts to limit Buddhist influence, for Tantrism made use of magical spells, incantations and mystical techniques which were similar in many ways to those of Taoism, and indeed the Tantric masters at court were expected to compete with Taoist adepts in such skills as rain-making and healing.

Neither Taoism nor Esoteric Buddhism encouraged the emperor to become actively involved in public affairs. Both encouraged contemplation and personal religious perfection. Under these influences Hsüan-tsung began to pay less and less attention to his routine duties. But his withdrawal should be kept in proportion and should certainly not be blamed entirely on his Taoism. Unlike some of his successors – and indeed unlike his great predecessor T'ai-tsung – Hsüan-tsung continued his gruelling round of daily audiences, except for periods of state mourning, until 755, when he was already seventy years of age. No emperor, however superhuman, could have kept up the pace of Hsüan-tsung's early years for more than forty years without slowing down. Where traditional his-

[180] See *THY* 77, pp. 1403–4; *T'ang Chih-yen* 1, p. 6; *CTS* 9, p. 213; *CTS* 24, pp. 925–8; *HTS* 44, p. 1164.

[181] See Chou I-liang, 'Tantrism in China', *HJAS*, 8 (1945) 241–332. Most traditional historians put all the blame for Hsüan-tsung's withdrawal from active politics upon Taoism, but his first historian, Liu Fang, blames Taoism and Buddhism equally. *CTS* 9, pp. 236–7.

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torians place much of the blame on his devotion to Taoism, perhaps we should remember that by 742 Hsüan-tsung was already fifty-seven and had spent thirty extremely active years on the throne.

The succession problem

Almost immediately after Chang Chiu-ling had been removed from the court, Yang Hui, the husband of one of Wu Hui-fei's daughters, renewed the charge that the heir apparent and his fellow princes, Prince Yao and Prince Chü, together with the heir apparent's brother-in-law Hsüeh Hsiu (who was also the consort of Hsüan-tsung's third daughter) were plotting a rebellion. Again the chief ministers were called upon to give counsel, but Li Lin-fu told the emperor that the whole affair was a family matter in which he and his colleagues should not intervene. The emperor then reduced the princes to commoner status and banished Hsüeh Hsiu, subsequently ordering them all to commit suicide. Many relatives of the mothers and wives of the princes were also sent into banishment.[182]

Wu Hui-fei had now achieved her ambition, and the question of the succession was open. But her victory proved a brief one. In the twelfth month of 737 she died, haunted according to popular tradition by the ghosts of the princes whose deaths she had encompassed, and was posthumously given the title of empress. Hsüan-tsung was left with neither empress nor heir apparent, for he did not raise Wu Hui-fei's son Prince Mao to the succession as she had planned, in spite of Li Lin-fu's urging him to do so.

For over a year the succession remained unresolved. The emperor was inclined to appoint Li Yü, Prince Chung (711–62) his third son by his consort Lady Yang, but for a long time he could not reach a decision. He finally followed the advice of his favourite eunuch Kao Li-shih, who suggested that Li Yü's claim was by seniority, and thus could not easily be challenged.[183] The eldest son, Li Tsung, who had been passed over as heir apparent early in the reign, was again not considered, probably because he was childless. He adopted the infant sons of the former heir apparent as his own successors. Li Yü was made heir apparent in the sixth month of 738, and formally installed, to the accompaniment of a General Act of Grace a month later. The succession was to remain unchanged for the rest of Hsüan-tsung's reign, and Li Yü eventually succeeded to the throne in 756, being generally known under his posthumous temple name of Su-tsung.

[182] *CTS* 107, pp. 3259–60.
[183] *TCTC* 214, pp. 6832–4.

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Codification of the law

It was natural that a chief minister with such a concern for tidy and systematic administration as Li Lin-fu would give immediate attention to the up-dating and revision of the law – in particular of administrative law. He had, in fact, already been engaged in this task for some years. The codified law had not been re-edited or up-dated since 719, apart from the promulgation by P'ei Kuang-t'ing and Hsiao Sung in 731 of a series of *Permanently applicable edicts subsequent to the regulations* (*Ko-hou ch'ang-hsing ch'ih*), with the avowed purpose of removing anomalies which had arisen from legislative changes whose provisions had not been incorporated into a revised code of administrative law. There had earlier been complaints that the provisions of codified law were being overridden by the application of analogy and precedent.

In 734 Li Lin-fu was ordered to revise and edit the entire corpus of codified law. Together with a group of legal specialists he carried out a really rigorous re-editing of the law. No less than 1,324 provisions which had become irrelevant were removed and another 2,180 articles amended. The resulting codification was presented to the throne in 737; the Code (*Lü*) in twelve chapters and its Commentary (*Shu-i*) in thirty chapters; the Statutes (*Ling*) in thirty chapters, the Ordinances (*Shih*) in twenty chapters and the *New K'ai-yüan regulations* (*Hsin K'ai-yüan ko*) in ten chapters. These were promulgated to the empire in the autumn of 737.

This was to prove a momentous revision of the laws, for it was the last time during the T'ang that a systematic attempt was made to re-edit the whole body of codified legislation. The Code established at this time was to have a particularly long life, for it remained authoritative, with comparatively minor emendations, until the beginning of the fourteenth century. But perhaps more important, this was the last time that the T'ang attempted to produce standardized, uniform codified rules of administrative practice, embodied in Statutes and Ordinances. In later reigns, the ever increasing diversity of local practice would make this impossible.

Together with the codified law, Li Lin-fu and his collaborators also presented a digest of legislation arranged according to categories for easy reference, the *Ko-shih lü-ling shih-lei* in forty chapters.

The importance of the newly codified laws was such that after their promulgation Li Lin-fu specially requested an edict ordering that the provisions of all edicts issued previously to the end of the fifth month of 737 which had not been embodied in the new laws should cease to have any legal force.[184] The whole codification of laws bears the clear imprint

[184] *THY* 39, pp. 703–6; *CTS* 50, p. 2150.

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of Li Lin-fu's tidy and precise approach to the problems of administration, and to his determination to subject the procedures of government to a thorough-going reform and rationalization.

Another legal compilation of great importance, the *T'ang liu-tien*, was completed during the first years of Li Lin-fu's regime. This work had had a long and chequered career. The emperor had first ordered the Chi-hsien yüan academy to compile a work under this title in 722; originally the 'Six Regulations' of the title referred to the organization of the subject matter on an analogy with the *Chou-li* and the original work was probably connected in some way with Chang Yüeh's efforts to codify ritual in the late 720s. This work remained unfinished, and under Hsiao Sung the book in its present form, a digest of administrative law described under the relevant organs of government, was begun. Later Chang Chiu-ling had a hand in its compilation, and after his fall Li Lin-fu took over responsibility for its completion. It was eventually finished in 738 and presented to the throne in the second month of 739, after which it was promulgated to the empire.[185]

It remained in use for well over a century, as the most convenient authoritative digest of administrative law, even after many of the institutions it describes had undergone radical change, or had been replaced by new offices.

Reform of the military system

The system of frontier commands headed by military governors had by this time been fully established, and as we have seen Li Lin-fu and Niu Hsien-k'o were both themselves in control, *in absentia*, of very important border commands. In 737 two very important changes were made to the military system. First, the military governors were ordered to consult with the Secretariat-Chancellery to agree a fixed establishment of defensive troops appropriate for the strategic needs of each command. This establishment is preserved in some detail, in a form dating from about 742, when the empire supported a total of 490,000 frontier troops with more than 80,000 cavalry horses.[186] At that time the overall military establishment of the empire, including the various militia forces and palace armies (on which see below) came to 574,733 men, slightly more than 1 per cent of the entire population. These figures show that, although the empire now had a truly formidable force under arms, no less than 85 per cent of the empire's troops – and almost all its battle experienced soldiers – were

185 See R. des Rotours, 'Le T'ang lieou-tien décrit-il exactement les institutions en usage sous la dynastie des T'ang' *Journal Asiatique*, 263 (1975) 183–201.
186 *TCTC* 214, p. 6829; *TCTC* 215, p. 6837.

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under the control of the military governors. There were no comparable forces at the immediate disposal of central government, a fact which explains why Li Lin-fu and Niu Hsien-k'o clung to their nominal commands as military governors.

The second and even more important change was the transformation of the frontier forces into professional armies entirely composed of long-service troops (*chien-erh*). This process had been developing for decades, but in 737 an edict was promulgated ordering that all soldiers in the frontier commands should be permanently engaged from among former conscripts and members of unregistered households, who were fit and willing to serve. Those who volunteered were to be given higher allowances than had been normal and were granted special tax exemptions for several years. If they wished to take their families with them to the frontier, they were to be granted lands and houses so that they could settle permanently. This meant the final abandonment of the old system of conscription under which men, some members of *fu-ping* militias, some ordinary commoners, were selected for service on the frontier for periods averaging three years. Some of these had been induced to remain as long-service troops by the offer of bounties, but the system had involved constant replacement of hardened troops by untrained recruits, and had often been attended by hardship.[187] The reform seems to have been rapidly successful. Early in 738 an edict announced that the permanent engagement of long-service troops on the frontier had produced sufficient men. Conscription for frontier service was abolished, and those conscripts still serving in the frontier commands were released and sent back to their homes.[188]

These huge frontier forces raised financial and logistic problems of a totally new order. The costs of the frontier defence had increased five-fold between 714 and 741. Vast sums were needed to provide clothing and equipment for the troops, to procure grain and supplies. A large proportion of the country's revenues in grain went to provision the armies and to establish strategic reserves. Vast resources in manpower were employed in transporting rations and supplies to the forces.

With the establishment of a permanent professional army further complications and expenses arose. The troops, who had formerly been rewarded for success in the field on a modest set scale, now began to demand that they be granted offices and nominal ranks, entitling them to all sorts of grants and privileges. The lavish bestowal of such rewards for victorious campaigns increased the costs of defence still further. Military expenditures rose by a further 40 or 50 per cent between 742 and 755.

[187] See R. des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1947), pp. 672–3.
[188] *TCTC* 214, p. 6832.

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The government continued to encourage the foundation of military colonies (*t'un-t'ien*) on the frontiers, and Niu Hsien-k'o extended the system of 'harmonious procurement' of grain which he had used in the north-west to Kuan-chung, where it was also used to provide grain for civilian needs.[189] But these measures could not prevent the continued increase of military expenditure.

The military organization at the capital, meanwhile, had also undergone great changes. The old system of guards units drawing their officers and men from the various militias by rotation had begun to decay during the last decades of the seventh century. The status of guardsmen, which had formerly been a high one, had been gradually degraded, and apart from a few elite units the guards were by Hsüan-tsung's time undermanned, ill-trained and largely officered by inexperienced civilians with connections at court.

The place of the guards, as the main force at the emperor's direct disposal, had been taken by the 'Northern Armies', known since 662 as the Yü-lin Armies. These were a corps d'élite of permanent – in many cases hereditary – troops who guarded the palace. They had been strengthened under the empress Wu, and by the reign of Chung-tsung the Yü-lin troops numbered over 10,000 and completely overshadowed the guards units.

The inadequacy of the guards became embarrassingly clear in 722 when preparations were being planned for the progress to T'ai-shan for the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and in 723, as we have seen above, Chang Yüeh had begun the enlistment of a large force of troops called the permanent bodyguard of the emperor (*ch'ang-ts'ung su-wei*). This force was expanded to a strength of 120,000 by recruiting former guardsmen and other fit men who were willing to serve by turns of duty. In 725, renamed the Mounted Archers (K'uo-ch'i), they were split up and allocated to the various guards as an infusion of trained new blood. However, subsequently they were reallocated to the Yü-lin Armies, and the guards, apart from a few special units acting as bodyguards to the emperor and heir apparent, and providing the police for the capital, ceased to exist as effective military units.

However, this did not mean that the Northern Armies now became a very powerful force at the disposal of the emperor. After the crisis of 731 involving Wang Mao-chung and various generals of the guards, it appears that the Northern Armies too were deliberately run down. Although in 738 two new Northern Armies entitled the Lung-wu Armies were added to the Yü-lin Armies, apparently bolstering their strength, in fact their personnel were mostly wealthy traders and townsmen from Ch'ang-an who had themselves formally enlisted since the troops of these

[189] *TCTC* 214, p. 6830.

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armies were not only tax-exempt, but also exempt from frontier service. They then hired substitutes or sent their servants to take their place as soldiers. As a military force the northern armies became more and more negligible. By the end of Hsüan-tsung's reign, when they were most urgently required, they were a farce.[190]

The *fu-ping* militias were not abolished after Chang Yüeh's reform of 722–3. But as the frontier armies and the Northern Armies at the capital became more and more professionalized, their function disappeared and they remained little more than paper units. In 749 Li Lin-fu issued an edict which stopped their sending troops to serve at the capital. This edict says that they had recently merely been nominal establishments without organization, officers, arms, equipment or provisions.[191]

Their disappearance meant the abandonment of the idea, current since the Northern Wei, that an effective army could be maintained cheaply by the regular training of farmers who would be self-supporting but could perform regular turns of duty with the guards and form ready-organized military units in times of need. By Li Lin-fu's time, not only the frontier forces, but the Northern Armies at the capital too, were almost entirely composed of professional troops, for whose support the state was directly responsible.

There were, however, other local defence forces of a new type, known as *t'uan-lien* or *t'uan-chieh* militias. These were not an organization on a national scale, like the *fu-ping*, but were locally organized, for local defence. They were purely part-time soldiers, working on the land and drilling during the slack season. They did not have to serve either at the capital or on the frontier, and simply formed a local security force under the control of the local prefect. They first appeared in Ho-pei during the Khitan invasion in 697, and later emerged in the other regions threatened by foreign invasion, the north-west, the region around Ch'ang-an, and in Szechwan, where they seem to have been organized on a larger scale and to have formed a force of some 14,000 centred on Ch'eng-tu.[192]

The new military system provided China with an extremely effective defence against external threats, and during the early years of Li Lin-fu's regime the Tibetans and Khitan – the most powerful neighbouring peoples – were defeated and put on the defensive, while the Turkish qaghanate collapsed in ruins. But it was extremely costly, and concentrated power in the hands of military governors against whom the central government could no longer pose any counter-force.

190 *THY* 72, p. 1300.

191 *THY* 72, p. 1299.

192 Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 69–70; des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, pp. iii–v; *TCTC* 215, p. 6850; *TLT* 5.

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Financial developments

The most important of Li Lin-fu's financial reforms, the Permanently Applicable Directives (see page 402), had been undertaken while he still shared power with Chang Chiu-ling. By the early 740s, the empire's financial situation, in spite of the burgeoning costs of military expansion, was quite favourable. The registered population, only 7,069,565 households in 726 reached 7,861,236 households (45,431,265 persons) in 732, and 8,525,763 households (48,990,800 persons) in 742, an increase of 21 per cent in only sixteen years. This reflects partly the long-term effects of Yü-wen Jung's re-registration, partly natural growth, partly the improved efficiency of local administration. The government could thus count upon markedly greater revenues than in earlier years. In addition the terrible series of natural disasters of the 720s and 730s seems to have come to an end, and the 740s were generally a more prosperous time for the farmers.

During the 740s there was considerable relaxation of the tax system.[193] Surviving household registers from Tun-huang give evidence of increasing laxity in the registration of the population, which perhaps resulted partly from the establishment of fixed local quotas of prefectural tax under Li Lin-fu's earlier reform. In 741 an edict abolished the strict annual examination of the members of households, replacing it with a triennial inspection. In 744 the age when a man became fully liable to tax and labour service was raised from twenty-one to twenty-three.

Abuses crept into the system. In 742 and again in 744 edicts were issued in an attempt to prevent families dividing their property to reduce their assessment for the household levy, now an increasingly important source of revenue. The procedures for making these household assessments had to be tightened up in 741 and again in 745.[194] The land system was also subject to ever more abuse; the *chün-t'ien* system was formally re-imposed by an edict in 735 'to prevent the poor from losing their livelihood while the rich and powerful accumulate their lands'. But this had little effect, and a similar attack on those building up vast estates was made in 752.[195]

The transport system was further improved, making transfers of grain and supplies far easier. An attempt was made to cut a navigable channel through the San-men rapids in 741, while other improvements were carried out on the southern end of the Pien Canal near Yang-chou. In

[193] See Ikeda On, 'T'ang household registers and related documents', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 121–50.
[194] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, p. 32.
[195] *TFYK* 495, pp. 23b–26a.

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741–3 Wei Chien became commissioner for land and water transport, and built a new canal parallel to the Wei River for tax boats travelling to Ch'ang-an, where he constructed a new dock. The quantities of grain and goods shipped to the capital again grew very large, in 744 reaching four million *shih*. He also reorganized the local provision of transport, making rich families act as sureties for tax boats and their cargoes.[196]

Wei Chien was the first of a new wave of aristocratic finance experts who appeared at court during the next decade, and who, like Yü-wen Jung, are harshly criticized by the historians for their part in the collapse of Hsüan-tsung's last years. In one area of finance aristocratic dominance – indeed the dominance of a single family – had been continuous, since the beginning of Hsüan-tsung's reign. The Court of Treasury (T'ai-fu ssu) had as its permanent president from 713 to 733 Yang Ch'ung-li, a descendant of the Sui imperial family, and on his retirement at the age of ninety his sons Yang Shen-ch'in and Yang Shen-ming became presidents respectively of the Court of Treasury which controlled all revenues in cloth and money, and of the Court of Agriculture, which controlled all revenues in grain.[197] One of these brothers, Yang Shen-ch'in, was to become deeply involved with Li Lin-fu in factional politics. When Li Lin-fu came to power the Yangs controlled the disposition of all the empire's revenues.

Another question to which Li Lin-fu attempted an institutional solution was the perennial question of the currency. In 737 the first commissioner for casting coin (*chu-tao chu-ch'ien shih*) was appointed, with overall responsibility for all the empire's mints. This position was usually filled by a censor. In the early 740s Yang Shen-ch'in took over this commission, further strengthening his grip on the financial administration.[198] There was a temporary improvement in the currency supply, but in the late 740s counterfeiting again grew rife, and in 752 another attempt was made to take the worst coin out of circulation. It proved as unsuccessful as earlier measures of the same kind.[199]

The later years of Li Lin-fu; aristocratic factionalism

In the seventh month of 742 Niu Hsien-k'o died. Up to this point Li Lin-fu's administration had been markedly successful. His administrative reforms had made the empire's government smoother and more efficient

[196] Biographies in *CTS* 105, pp. 3222–5; *HTS* 134, pp. 4560–2. On his reforms see Twitchett, *Financial administration*, p. 90; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 36–7.
[197] *CTS* 48, p. 2086; *CTS* 105, p. 3225; *HTS* 134, p. 4563.
[198] *THY* 59, p. 1022.
[199] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, p. 76.

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than ever before. The regime was prosperous, and it had won a striking series of victories over its foreign enemies. Moreover, this had been accomplished without any purges of the bureaucracy. The aristocrats were firmly in a position of power, the last of the grand old men of the scholar-official interest, Sung Ching and Chang Chiu-ling, were already dead; of the other former chief ministers P'ei Yao-ch'ing died in 743 and Hsiao Sung had been demoted to the provinces. The Confucian scholars in the bureaucracy were carefully kept away from the real seats of power and influence, but nevertheless the six years of Li Lin-fu and Niu Hsien-k'o had been a generally peaceful time at court.

With Niu's death, the situation changed, and changed very much for the worse. The new chief minister appointed to replace Niu Hsien-k'o was Li Shih-chih (?–747).[200] Like Li Lin-fu he was a member of the imperial clan, belonging in fact to a senior line directly descended from T'ai-tsung. He too had taken no examination, but had entered official service in 705 through an appointment in the guards. During Hsüan-tsung's reign he had held a succession of prefectural posts, winning a good reputation as as administrator, and became governor of Lo-yang, where he completed important flood control works. From 739 until 741 he was military governor of Yu-chou, and was then brought to the capital and appointed president of the Board of Justice. He was obviously a much more formidable rival than Niu Hsien-k'o could ever have been, and it seems likely either that Hsüan-tsung himself appointed him to counterbalance Li Lin-fu's ever growing power, or that he was induced to do so by rival aristocratic groups. The details of his appointment, and indeed the details of the last decade of Hsüan-tsung's reign as a whole, are obscured by the surprisingly scanty historical record of the period which is blatantly hostile to Li Lin-fu. Whatever the motives behind the appointment of Li Shih-chih, it led to a period of bitter factional politics ending in a series of bloody purges.

Li Shih-chih soon became the leader of a group of talented and ambitious aristocrats who felt themselves frustrated by Li Lin-fu. Chief among them were Wei Chien (?–747) who stood high in Hsüan-tsung's personal esteem thanks to the success of his policies on transportation and in the financial field; P'ei K'uan who had succeeded Li Shih-chih as military governor of Yu-chou (Fan-yang) from 742–4 and then became president of the Board of Finance; P'ei Tun-fu who had suppressed an outbreak of piracy on the coast of Chekiang in 743–4 and had then been appointed president of the Board of Justice; and Huang-fu Wei-ming, the military governor of Lung-yu, where he had won important victories over the

[200] Biographies in *CTS* 99, pp. 3101–2; *HTS* 131, pp. 4503–4.

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Tibetans.[201] They formed a formidable group, with powerful interests in the two crucial areas of finance and defence.

In 744 Li Lin-fu, who was president of the Board of Civil Office, a post that gave him control of all routine appointments, was discredited by a scandal in the selection examinations. By an act of blatant nepotism the son of one of his close allies in the Censorate, who was notorious for his lack of education, was given the highest marks. This caused bitter comment, but no one at court dared speak out, since any protest would have been construed as criticism of Li Lin-fu. However an official persuaded An Lu-shan, who was now military governor of both Fan-yang and P'ing-lu commands in the north-east, to inform the emperor what had happened – the first time that a frontier general had actively intervened in court politics. The candidates were re-examined by the emperor in person, and the man who had been placed first turned in a blank paper. The two vice-presidents of the Board were sent out to the provinces in disgrace, and although Li Lin-fu himself escaped punishment the incident damaged his prestige.[202]

From 744 Li Lin-fu began seriously to undermine his rivals. He attempted to discredit Li Shih-chih with the emperor, and then stirred up discord between P'ei K'uan and P'ei Tun-fu, which led to their both being sent out to provincial posts. In 745 he instigated a rigorous investigation of the personnel of the Board of Justice, of which Li Shih-chih was head, and in the ninth month of 745 promoted Wei Chien from his various financial and transport commissions to the presidency of the Board of Justice, thus robbing him of his source of influence with the emperor.[203] His financial posts were given to Yang Shen-ch'in,[204] son of the former president of the Court of Treasury Yang Ch'ung-li, with whom Li Lin-fu was for the moment on close terms.

So far, the factional battle had been conducted along accepted political lines, with no blood spilt. At the beginning of 746, however, the situation changed and a series of deadly purges began. In the first month of that year Huang-fu Wei-ming, who now commanded both Lung-yu and Ho-hsi as military governor came to the capital to report further victories over the Tibetans. At court, he criticized Li Lin-fu before the emperor, and praised Wei Chien. Li Lin-fu now induced Yang Shen-ch'in to report to Hsüan-tsung that Huang-fu Wei-ming and Wei Chien were involved with the heir apparent in a plot to carry out a coup and place him on the throne.

The true facts of the conspiracy are obscure. But the heir apparent had

[201] Neither P'ei nor Huang-fu has a biography. For brief notices see Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 163–4, nn. 22, 23.

[202] See Pulleyblank, *Background*, p. 84.

[203] *TCTC* 215, pp. 6864, 6868.

[204] Biographies in *CTS* 105, pp. 3225–8; *HTS* 134, pp. 4562–4.

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certainly been appointed in the face of Li Lin-fu's opposition; Huang-fu Wei-ming was a close friend of long-standing of the heir apparent; and Wei Chien was the heir apparent's brother-in-law, and well known as a politically ambitious man. In addition, the threat of a coup backed by a general commanding 140,000 crack troops in a region close to the capital had to be taken seriously. In the event Wei Chien and Huang-fu Wei-ming were arrested and interrogated, but the case against them was not proven, and they were appointed as prefects away from the capital. The heir apparent was not affected. Li Shih-chih was not personally implicated in any way, but his close association with both Huang-fu Wei-ming and Wei Chien made him so apprehensive that he asked to retire from his post as chief minister. He was graciously permitted to do so, and somewhat surprisingly, in view of the circumstances, given a sinecure appointment in the heir apparent's household establishment. He withdrew from active participation in political affairs.[205]

His replacement as chief minister was Ch'en Hsi-lieh,[206] a man of an obscure Ho-nan family, who had apparently never taken an examination, but had nevertheless a great reputation as a writer and as a scholar. He was deeply versed in Taoist scholarship, and had greatly encouraged Hsüan-tsung's growing interest in Taoism. Since 731 he had been Chang Yüeh's successor as head of the Chi-hsien yüan academy, and had assisted Hsüan-tsung in drafting state papers and in the composition of his literary works. A weak and pliant man, with no practical experience of politics, he remained absolutely subservient to Li Lin-fu until shortly before his death in 752. Li Lin-fu began conducting much of his official business from his own home, with Ch'en simply countersigning his decisions. Ch'en Hsi-lieh also continued with his scholarly activities, being appointed special commissioner for the imperial library.

Although Li Lin-fu was absolute master of the court, the brothers of Wei Chien, themselves in high office, now in desperation appealed on his behalf to the emperor and asked the heir apparent to support their plea. Hsüan-tsung remained convinced of the heir apparent's innocence and loyalty, and did not punish him in any way, but he was furious with Wei Chien and his colleagues, who might well have thought themselves lucky to have escaped with their lives. Li Lin-fu now accused Wei Chien and Li Shih-chih of having formed a factional cabal. Wei Chien, his brothers and many other relatives were banished to the far south. Li Shih-chih was sent out to a provincial post, and other of their supporters such as P'ei K'uan and Li Ch'i-wu, the governor of Lo-yang, were also demoted

[205] Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 88–90.
[206] Biographies in *CTS* 97, pp. 3059–60; *HTS* 223A, pp. 6349–50.

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to provincial posts. The heir apparent, now himself thoroughly scared, asked permission to divorce Wei Chien's sister.[207]

Even then the purge was not over. At the end of 746 another alleged plot involving the heir apparent shook the court. Tu Yu-lin, the father of his senior concubine, was involved in a quarrel with his son-in-law Liu Chi, who tried to discredit him (and perhaps indirectly to involve the heir apparent) by accusing him of making false prophecies. His accusations misfired, however. He and a friend were interrogated by the allies of Li Lin-fu in the Censorate, and in the outcome Tu Yu-lin and his two accusers were all put to death, and their families exiled to distant frontier districts. Others were implicated: Li Yung, a royal prince who had been Liu Chi's patron, and P'ei Tun-fu who had recommended him for appointment were flogged to death early in 747 for their association with him. Finally a notorious censor, Lo Hsi-shih, was despatched to the provinces to execute Wei Chien, Huang-fu Wei-ming and their followers. Li Shih-chih poisoned himself; his son was killed and many of his associates degraded. The only notable member of Li Shih-chih's following who survived was P'ei K'uan, who retired from official life to devote himself to religion.[208]

Throughout these conspiracies and purges one of Li Lin-fu's most loyal supporters was the financial expert Yang Shen-ch'in, who had been able to rid himself of his professional rival Wei Chien, and establish himself firmly in Hsüan-tsung's favour by lavishly providing funds for his increasingly extravagant private life. Li Lin-fu began to resent his growing influence, and their relationship became increasingly hostile. Yang Shen-ch'in had also made another enemy, Wang Hung[209] who was the illegitimate son of a high official descended from a noted lineage in the T'ai-yüan area. Since 736 he had served in the Censorate and Board of Finance, holding a succession of special financial commissions, in which he had won a reputation for exacting the last penny from the taxpayers, and for his harsh imposition of the system of 'harmonious procurements'. Li Lin-fu had consistently given him his support, as he had earlier supported Yang Shen-ch'in, who now repeatedly insulted and belittled Wang Hung, in spite of the powerful position he held in the Censorate.[210]

At this time Yang Shen-ch'in consulted a soothsayer who advised him to buy a country estate as a refuge from the political disorders which he prophesied would soon arise. Wang Hung got to know of their dealings, and denounced Yang Shen-ch'in for being involved in prophecies, and more specifically for plotting a rebellion to restore to the throne the Sui

[207] *TCTC* 215, pp. 6873–4.
[208] *TCTC* 215, pp. 6874–5.
[209] Biographies in *CTS* 105, pp. 3228–32; *HTS* 134, pp. 4564–7.
[210] *TCTC* 215, p. 6879.

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royal house, of which he was a descendant. Yang was arrested, evidence was planted in his house by Li Lin-fu's agents in the Censorate, and Yang Shen-ch'in and his two brothers, who also held high financial offices, were forced to commit suicide. Once again dozens of their associates and colleagues were implicated and punished.[211] Wang Hung took over Yang Shen-ch'in's offices and now rose to a position of very great influence with Hsüan-tsung. Controlling numerous special commissions in the field of finance, he collected vast sums over and above the regular quotas of revenue which Li Lin-fu had fixed with such care, and had these paid into the emperor's private purse, encouraging Hsüan-tsung's extravagance still further. Wang Hung, unlike the Yang family who had had a reputation for personal honesty, shamelessly took advantage of his position to build himself a vast fortune.

Li Lin-fu, having ruined one potential rival in the finance expert Yang Shen-ch'in, now attempted to bring about the downfall of another, a frontier general whose success and whose influence at the court, like those of Huang-fu Wei-ming before him, had begun to threaten Li's own dominance. This was Wang Chung-ssu,[212] who had controlled Shuo-fang and Ho-tung commands from 742–6 and had then succeeded the luckless Huang-fu Wei-ming as military governor of Ho-hsi and Lung-yu, where he maintained a very successful defence against the Tibetans. He was, however, a prudent commander, and when in 747 Hsüan-tsung ordered an assault on the Tibetan fortress east of the Kokonor lake he advised that it was impregnable. Another general was then ordered to attack the fortress, but Wang refused to join in the assault, and when as was inevitable the operation ended in disaster, the blame was laid on him. Wang Chung-ssu had been brought up in the imperial palace, and was on very close terms with various of the royal princes, in particular with the heir apparent. Li Lin-fu now took advantage of Hsüan-tsung's displeasure to attack the heir apparent, and charges were made that Wang Chung-ssu had promised to assist him to the throne. Wang was arrested and interrogated, but this time the charges were far too flimsy to convince the emperor. Wang Chung-ssu nevertheless was sent to a post in the south-west and replaced in his frontier command by his deputy, the Turkish general Ko-shu Han.[213]

This period of bitter factional intrigue left Li Lin-fu the victor, but weakened both his own position, and more importantly the position of the central government and the emperor in several important ways. The

[211] *TCTC* 215, pp. 6879–82.
[212] Biographies in *CTS* 105, pp. 3197–201; *HTS* 133, pp. 4551–5.
[213] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6877–83; *CTS* 103, pp. 3199–200.

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central bureaucracy was staggered and to some degree cowed by the violence of Li Lin-fu's purges and great numbers of prominent men died or were thrust into obscurity. The control of state finances remained in the hands of an aristocratic specialist, Wang Hung, but he, unlike his predecessors Yü-wen Jung, Wei-chien and Yang Shen-ch'in, was purely concerned with exploitation for his own advantage at court, and with corrupt self-enrichment.

Control of the frontier commands

The threat of powerful frontier generals intervening in politics was staved off. But it was staved off at a great price. After the 'plots' involving Huang-fu Wei-ming and Wang Chung-ssu, Li Lin-fu decided that it was dangerous to allow high-ranking and talented officials, who might have ambitions to intervene in court politics, to hold commands on the frontier. From 748 he pressed upon Hsüan-tsung a quite deliberate policy of placing the frontier commands under non-Chinese military governors. They were considered better soldiers than the Chinese, and their ambitions were thought to be purely military rather than political.[214] By 751 all the commands except Chien-nan in Szechwan were under foreign generals – An Lu-shan held Fan-yang and P'ing-lu as he had done since 744, and from 751 commanded Ho-tung as well. His cousin An Ssu-shun commanded Ho-hsi from the end of 747, and from 750 Shuo-fang in addition. Ko-shu Han, a Turkish general, held Lung-yu from late 747, while in the far west Kao Hsien-chih, a general of Korean origin held An-hsi.

Of these generals by far the most powerful and the most long-entrenched in his command was An Lu-shan.[215] Half Soghdian and half Turk, the son of a Soghdian officer in the army of Qapaghan Qaghan, An Lu-shan became a soldier in the north-western frontier army under Chang Shou-kuei, and when Chang was transferred to Yu-chou in 733 went with him as a commander. When in 739 Chang Shou-kuei was disgraced and replaced by Li Shih-chih as military governor of Yu-chou, An Lu-shan was second in command of P'ing-lu, under the general Wang Hu-ssu. In 741 Li Shih-chih was recalled to Ch'ang-an; Wang Hu-ssu became military governor of Yu-chou; and An Lu-shan promoted to command of P'ing-lu which at this time remained subordinate to Yu-chou. In the next year, 742, P'ing-lu became an independent command, with An as its

[214] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6888–9.

[215] Biographies in *CTS* 200A, pp. 5367–72; *HTS* 225A, pp. 6411–21. On his origins and career see Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 7–23, 82 ff.; R. des Rotours, *Histoire de Ngan Lou-chan* (Paris, 1962), presents a copiously annotated integral translation of the *An Lu-shan shih-chi*, an early ninth-century account of his career, by Yao Ju-neng.

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governor. At this time he had close connections with P'ei K'uan, who was governor at Yu-chou from 742 until the third month of 744. An Lu-shan had thus had close links with two of Li Lin-fu's rivals. After P'ei's recall to Ch'ang-an, An Lu-shan was appointed concurrent military governor of Fan-yang (that is Yu-chou) as well. He had already attended court in 743 and 744 and as we have seen, had been involved in one *cause célèbre*. By 747 when he again came to the capital he was deeply entrenched in his position in the north-east, and immensely powerful. He and his wives had been given noble titles, and he had been given an honorary post as president of the Censorate. In spite of his power he stood in deep personal awe of Li Lin-fu, a relationship which played an important role in the maintenance of stability at court during these troubled times.

The rise of the Yang family and Yang Kuei-fei

Another new factor was introduced into court affairs with the rise of the Yang family, which resulted from harem politics.[216] After the death of Wu Hui-fei, Hsüan-tsung seems for a while to have had no steady favourite among his consorts. Sometime in the early 740s he seems to have become infatuated with Yang Yü-huan, the wife of Prince Shou, Li Mao, the favourite son of Wu Hui-fei who had been passed over as heir apparent in 738. In 741 she left her husband, and at her own request was registered as a Taoist priestess, and took up residence in the palace. In 745 Hsüan-tsung had her taken into his own harem with the title Yang Kuei-fei (precious consort), after she had been formally separated from Prince Shou, who was remarried. From this time onwards she completely dominated the palace. Although she was expelled briefly on two occasions, Hsüan-tsung was so infatuated with her that each time she was immediately recalled.

Yang Kuei-fei was the daughter of a local official from Szechwan, who came from the same Yang clan of Hua-yin as Hsüan-tsung's earlier favourite, the Lady Yang, and was distantly descended from the Sui imperial clan. A member of a family of notable beauties, Kuei-fei was also accomplished and witty, sharing Hsüan-tsung's passion for music and the dance, and was herself a skilled performer. She and her sisters, who also stood high in Hsüan-tsung's regard, proved adept manipulators of political

[216] On Yang Kuei-fei and her family see Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 92 ff. See also Howard S. Levy, 'The career of Yang Kuei-fei', *TP*, 45 (1957) 451–89, which includes translations of her biographies in *CTS* 51, pp. 2178–81; *HTS* 76, pp. 3493–6; also by Levy: 'The family background of Yang Kuei-fei', *Sinologica*, 5.2 (1957) 101–18, *Harem favourites of an illustrious celestial* (Taichung, 1958), *Lament everlasting; the death of Yang Kuei-fei* (Tokyo, Kenkyusha, 1962), and 'The selection of Yang Kuei-Fei', *Oriens*, 15 (1962) 411–12.

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influence and several members of her family were given noble ranks and high positions at court. In the late 740s she became a close friend of An Lu-shan, and in 751 adopted the grotesquely fat and massive general as her son. All sorts of scandalous stories circulated about them and her sisters, and about general debauchery in the palace, to which An Lu-shan apparently enjoyed free access. But these tales are in many respects improbable, and may be later fabrications, part of the mass of semi-fictional tradition which surrounded Hsüan-tsung and Yang Kuei-fei. The important fact is that both she and the emperor remained on close terms of personal friendship with An Lu-shan until shortly before his eventual rebellion.

Among Yang Kuei-fei's more distant relatives one second cousin, Yang Hsien, became president of the Court for Diplomatic Relations (Hung-lu ssu), another, Yang Ch'i became a censor and was married to one of Wu Hui-fei's daughters, the Princess T'ai-hua. A third and far more sinister figure was Yang Chao, to whom the emperor later gave the personal name Kuo-chung by which he is usually known.[217] Yang Kuo-chung was the son of a minor official, who had spent his youth in riotous dissipation, and despised by his relatives had gone to Szechwan where he served in the army, and was later appointed as a minor local official. Here he received the patronage of a wealthy and talented local scholar Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung, who later became an important administrative officer on the staff of the military governor of Chien-nan, Chang-ch'iu Chien-ch'iung (served as governor 739–46), and obtained for Yang a post as a provincial judge (*t'ui-kuan*). During these years in Szechwan he also made the acquaintance of his distant relatives, the family of Kuei-fei, and is accused of having seduced one of her younger sisters.

When Kuei-fei was formally installed as the emperor's favourite, Chang-ch'iu Chien-ch'iung and Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung decided to use him as an agent to secure their own position within the province, and sent him as an envoy to court. When he arrived in the capital, he was appointed as an examining censor thanks to his relationship with Yang Kuei-fei. He now took part, as Li Lin-fu's loyal and enthusiastic henchman, in the purges of 746–8. Chang-ch'iu Chien-ch'iung, thanks to the influence of the Yangs, was appointed president of the Board of Finance in the fifth month of 746, and given various commissions. He was replaced in Szechwan by Kuo Hsü-chi, formerly vice-president of the Board of Finance, who remained governor until 748, with Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung as his deputy. When Kuo returned to Ch'ang-an, Hsien-yü succeeded him as military governor in 748.

[217] Biographies in *CTS* 106, pp. 3241–67; *HTS* 206, pp. 5846–52; on his origins, see *TCTC* 215, pp. 6867–8; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 164–5, nn. 47, 48.

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Yang Kuo-chung was thus, in the years after 746, able to consolidate his position at the capital rapidly, thanks to the influence of his cousins and relatives, while maintaining strong links with the province of Szechwan where he had spent his early career. It was thanks to this special regional connection that Chien-nan (i.e., Szechwan) remained the only border command where Li Lin-fu's policy of appointing non-Chinese generals as governors was never applied.

There was no open break with Li Lin-fu, but from 749 onwards Yang Kuo-chung like Wang Hung was in a position to challenge Li, depending on the personal support he could count on from the emperor and Yang Kuei-fei. In 749 Yang brought about the disgrace and removal from court of Hsiao Chiung, the governor of the Metropolitan District and a long-term ally first of P'ei Yao-ch'ing and then of Li Lin-fu, and of Sung Hun, one of Li Lin-fu's associates in the Censorate. Li Lin-fu found himself powerless to save his friends. Yang Kuo-chung was appointed to successive posts in the Department of Public Revenue of the Board of Finance, and was granted more than fifteen special titles as commissioner, mostly in various financial fields, soon rivalling the power of Wang Hung, who became his political adherent.[218]

In 752 Wang Hung was eliminated from the scene. He and his brother Wang Han consulted a fortune teller about their prospects of overturning the dynasty, and then, fearing that this might become public had the fortune teller and a son of one of the royal princesses who also knew the matter judicially murdered. One of Wang Han's friends now plotted with him to seize control of the Lung-wu (Northern Palace) Army, and to eliminate Li Lin-fu, Ch'en Hsi-lieh and Yang Kuo-chung. The plot was revealed to the emperor, who ordered Wang Hung to arrest the plotters. Wang Hung warned his brother of his imminent arrest, and the conspirators escaped. Harried by soldiers led by Wang Hung and Yang Kuo-chung, the rebels were eventually cornered and taken by a force of eunuch cavalry, the Fei-lung Palace Army, led by Kao Li-shih.

Yang Kuo-chung now denounced Wang Hung as also having been a party to the conspiracy. But the emperor could not be convinced of Wang Hung's treason, and Li Lin-fu spoke up in his defence. Wang Han was therefore ordered to be exonerated and pardoned, but to save face all round Hung was asked through Yang Kuo-chung formally to confess his brother's guilt and beg for a pardon for him. Wang Hung, however, would not agree to this, which infuriated the emperor. Ch'en Hsi-lieh, for once acting independently of Li Lin-fu, now openly accused Hung of treason and asked for him to be executed. The two Wang brothers were

[218] *TCTC* 216, p. 6896; *CTS* 106, p. 6a.

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questioned by Yang Kuo-chung and Ch'en Hsi-lieh, and the interrogation revealed not only the plot which had been foiled, but also the murders in which the brothers had earlier been instrumental. In the fourth month of 752 Wang Hung was ordered to commit suicide, and Wang Han was flogged to death at court. Hung's sons were banished to the far south, and later put to death and the family's huge fortune was confiscated.[219]

The result of this affair was a serious blow to Li Lin-fu's position, for he had recommended Wang Hung for office, and had defended him against the charge of treason. He now faced the open enmity not only of Yang Kuo-chung and Ch'en Hsi-lieh, who had attempted to implicate him in their accusations against Wang Hung, but also that of the powerful general Ko-shu Han.

Foreign relations 720–55

One of the main criticisms levelled against Hsüan-tsung by the traditional historians is that after the initial period of his reign when the empire's defences were strengthened, and a passive defensive policy was followed, his ambitions led him increasingly into an activist, interventionist foreign policy that overtaxed the empire's resources. Certainly, after the comparatively peaceful years following the defeat of the Tibetans in 714 there was considerably more military activity in the middle and late years of the reign. But it was certainly not a period of deliberate territorial aggrandizement, as for example the later years of T'ai-tsung and the reign of Kao-tsung had been. During these years the T'ang court responded to pressures from their two most powerful and aggressive neighbours – the Khitan and the Tibetans – with both of whom there were prolonged periods of large-scale warfare. At the same time the overall pattern of China's foreign relations was changed by the emergence of powerful and stable states in Manchuria (Parhae) and Yunnan (Nan-chao), and by the final disappearance of her traditional northern enemy, the Turks, and their replacement as the masters of the Mongolian steppes by the Uighurs, who remained basically well-disposed towards the T'ang.

Tibet

The Tibetans remained the most formidable of China's neighbours. After their defeat in 714 they steadily consolidated their kingdom, and in 721 there was a marked break in Tibetan court politics with the coming to maturity of their young king, and the death of the chief minister and dowager queen who had controlled Tibet since 705. In 722 the Tibetans

219 *TCTC* 215, pp. 6910–12; *CTS* 105, pp. 3230–2.

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renewed their expansion in a new direction, by invading Gilgit in the west. Gilgit and its neighbour Baltistan were of great strategic importance to the Chinese, since they provided the main route from Kashgar through the Mintaka Pass to Kashmir and the Indus valley. They had been Chinese tributaries since the empress Wu's time. Their possession by Tibet would have given the Tibetans control of the Pamir region, and made it possible for the Tibetans to make direct contact with the Turgesh or the Arabs and thus threaten the Chinese position in central Asia.

Faced with a Tibetan invasion, the king of Gilgit appealed to China for assistance. A Chinese army was sent to his aid from Kashgar, and the Tibetans were repelled. They remained, however, in control of Baltistan.

This clash seems to have had no immediate repercussions on China's western frontier, but shortly afterwards relations with Tibet became a political issue at Hsüan-tsung's court. After the completion of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in 725, Chang Yüeh urged the emperor to make a permanent peace settlement with Tibet in order to reduce the enormous costs of the frontier defences in Lung-yu and Ho-hsi. The emperor, however, referred this suggestion to general Wang Chün-ch'o, the bellicose military governor of Ho-hsi, who in 724 had advocated a strike deep into Tibetan territory. Hsüan-tsung rejected Chang Yüeh's peace proposal and began to plan aggressive action against the Tibetans.

In 725 some Tibetans had joined in Turgesh raids on the Tarim oases. Now from 726 to 729 hostilities again flared up on the Chinese border. The Tibetans repeatedly raided Chinese territory in the Kansu corridor, while Chinese armies repeatedly struck into the Kokonor region. From the autumn of 728 the Chinese held the initiative, and their forces won a series of notable victories, capturing several major Tibetan strongholds. The Tibetans sued for peace, and Hsüan-tsung who still suspected the Tibetans because of their treachery in the earlier years of his reign, was finally persuaded to agree. A treaty was negotiated in 730. The Tibetan king acknowledged Chinese suzerainty, the Tibetan frontier commanders were ordered to cease their raids on Chinese territory, and a stele inscribed with the terms of the treaty was erected on the border. Peace continued for some years. Embassies were exchanged, the border demarcated and a pallisade set up along the frontier. During these years, moreover, the T'ang was preoccupied with the constant warfare with the Khitan in the north-east.

In 736, however, the peace broke down. The Tibetans again attacked Gilgit, and refused to call off their attack, despite Chinese protests. The situation in the Pamir region was now more critical than in 722. For some years Hsüan-tsung had been actively attempting to secure control of the

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southern routes to Iran and the West through the Pamir region, since Soghdiāna was in complete turmoil as a result of intervention by the Turgesh and renewed pressure from the Arabs, and the traditional northern trade routes were threatened. There was a further aspect to this confrontation. In 734–5 there had been an outbreak of fighting between the T'ang forces in Pei-t'ing (Zungharia) and the Turgesh. The qaghan of the Turgesh was married to a Tibetan princess, while one of the Tibetan king's consorts was a princess from Samarqānd. Thus the old fears of a Tibetan–Turgesh or worse still a Tibetan–Arab alliance in central Asia were revived.

Unable to prevent the Tibetan attack on Gilgit, the Chinese attacked them in the east, where the Tibetans, lulled by the peace settlement and an oath-bound pact between the Chinese and Tibetan commanders, were completely unprepared. A Chinese invasion of the Kokonor region was launched in 737, a Tibetan counter-offensive in 738 was beaten off, and the military governors of Ho-hsi, Lung-yu and Chien-nan were ordered to begin general hostilities against the Tibetans. The Chinese made considerable advances into modern Tsinghai province from Kansu. The forces from Szechwan were at first less successful, but in 740 took the crucial Tibetan fortress of An-jung, with the aid of local Ch'iang tribesmen, who were wearied of the exactions of their Tibetan governors. The Chinese held on to their gains, despite determined counter-attacks, and the T'ang thus regained control of a strategically important area lost to it in 680.

In 739 the Tibetan king's Chinese consort, the Princess Chin-ch'eng, who had maintained some degree of Chinese cultural influence at Lhasa, died, and the Tibetans took the opportunity of her funeral ceremony at Ch'ang-an in 741 to attempt to make a new peace settlement. Hsüan-tsung would not consent, and in the summer of 741 the Tibetans began a series of determined offensives which regained control of the Kokonor region. They recaptured the impregnable fortress of Shih-pao, and invaded Chinese territory on the Kansu border.

In the following years Huang-fu Wei-ming and his successor Wang Chung-ssu conducted a series of frontier campaigns, and steadily strengthened the Chinese defences in the Lung-yu and Ho-hsi commands, which by 742 already controlled seventeen armies and a total of 148,000 men. Both Huang-fu Wei-ming and Wang Chung-ssu were implicated in the factional disputes at court, and in 747 Lung-yu was placed under a Turkish general Ko-shu Han. In 749, leading a huge army drawn from Lung-yu, Ho-hsi, Shuo-fang and Ho-tung commands, he finally assaulted and took Shih-pao fortress, with enormous Chinese casualties. The place

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became the seat of a new Chinese army, and in the next few years the Chinese set up nine new permanent armies in the north-west, and opened up military colonies to supply them. In 753 Ko-shu Han again inflicted a major defeat on the Tibetans, regaining most of the area on the upper Huang-ho known as the region of the Nine Bends.

While the Chinese were engaged in large-scale hostilities on the Tibetan border throughout the 740s and early 750s, the situation on Tibet's western border again produced a direct confrontation with the T'ang. After their attack on Gilgit in 736 the Tibetans had steadily consolidated their position in the Pamir, and many of the mountain principalities cut their links with Ch'ang-an to become Tibetan vassals. Chinese generals in the Tarim had attacked the Tibetans from time to time, but inconclusively. In 746 Kao Hsien-chih, a Korean general serving in An-hsi, carried out a spectacular punitive expedition against Gilgit, leading ten thousand cavalry across the highest passes of the Pamirs. The Tibetans were driven out, a Chinese army stationed in Gilgit, and Chinese influence over the states of the Pamir region restored. The Tibetans now turned their attention to the petty state of Kāfivistān, and threatened to cut off the supply lines of the Chinese troops in Gilgit. In 750 Kao Hsien-chih sent another expedition which took Ghizar, and finally blocked the Tibetan attempts to establish dominance over the Pamir.

In 755 the Tibetan king died, and the Tibetan court sent an embassy seeking to establish friendly relations with the T'ang. A Chinese ambassador was sent to Tibet to invest the new king with Chinese titles and to convey the emperor's condolences. For a moment it appeared that the Tibetan threat was contained, both on the Chinese frontier and in the west. The outbreak of An Lu-shan's rebellion, and the consequent withdrawal of the Chinese armies from the Tibetan frontier, was, however, to open a new and disastrous chapter in Sino-Tibetan relations.

Central Asia, the Turgesh and the Arabs

Since the early years of Hsüan-tsung's reign the region between the Issyk-Kul and Lake Balkhash, the territory inhabited by the various tribes of the Western Turks, had been dominated by one tribe, the Turgesh and their formidable qaghan, Su-lu. Although the latter had formally submitted to the Chinese in 717, in the very same year he also raided the borders and attacked Aksu and other places in the Tarim. By 719 the T'ang forces had been driven back from their outpost in Tokmak and had lost considerable territories in the area north of the T'ien-shan range.

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Fortunately Su-lu now began to advance westward into the rich city states of Soghdiāna. Su-lu's rise to power had followed shortly after the death of Qutayba, the great Arab general who had finally established Arab dominance in Soghdiāna. The inexorable advance of the Arabs was temporarily halted, and the Turgesh now went to the aid of the Soghdians to resist them. In 724 the Turgesh won a crushing victory over an Arab expedition sent against Transoxiana in the battle known to the Arab historians as the 'Day of Thirst'. This set-back halted Arab expansion eastward for some fifteen years, and from 724–7 the Turgesh penetrated deep into Soghdiāna, as far as Samarqānd itself. By 726 the Turgesh were fighting the Arabs in defence of Khuttal (to the west of the Pamir), and it was not until 730 that the Arabs began to take the measure of the Turgesh.

The T'ang court felt it wise to appease Su-lu, arranging a dynastic marriage with a T'ang 'princess' (who was actually a daughter of the nominal qaghan of the Western Turks) in 722. Meanwhile the defences of the Chinese protectorates in An-hsi (the Tarim basin) and Pei-t'ing (Zungharia) were steadily strengthened. An-hsi became the garrison of a military governor (*chieh-tu shih*) in 718, and Pei-t'ing followed in 727. By the 730s each command had some twenty thousand garrison troops supported in part by military colonies, and by transit taxes levied on merchants involved in trade with central Asia.

These defensive precautions were necessitated not only by Su-lu's own obvious military power, but by the fact that he had contracted marriage alliances with China's two most powerful traditional enemies, the Eastern Turks and the Tibetans. In 725 he intervened in support of a rebellion against the T'ang by the king of Khotan. This was speedily put down, but Su-lu was involved in a personal vendetta with the Chinese deputy-governor of An-hsi, and pillaged the Tarim basin together with his Tibetan allies, besieging Kucha and attacking the Turfan region. The Turgesh, however, remained primarily involved in central Asia, and in 730 Su-lu made his peace with the T'ang court.

Turgesh power was almost entirely dependent upon the leadership of Su-lu himself, and upon his capacity to provide endless booty to his tribal leaders. By the early 730s relations with his sons and his chieftains grew more and more strained, while he suffered a stroke and lost the use of one arm. He was forced, nonetheless, to continue his campaigns. In 731 he undertook another invasion of Soghdiāna in an attempt to defeat the Arabs and to take the immensely wealthy city of Samarqānd, and came within an ace of success, inflicting huge losses on the Arabs before he was forced to withdraw.

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Thwarted in the west, Su-lu again attacked the Chinese positions in Pei-t'ing and the northern Tarim in 735–6. But this time he suffered a crushing defeat, and was again forced to conclude a peace settlement. In 737, therefore, he returned to the west, where the Arabs had attacked Khuttal, a key town on the southern route through the Pamirs. Su-lu, together with forces from several of the principalities of Soghdiāna and Ṭūkharistān crossed the Oxus and advanced on the main Arab forward base at Balkh. Although Su-lu's forces far outnumbered those of the Arabs, they were utterly routed.

This was the beginning of the end both for Su-lu and for the power of the Turgesh. Tribal rivalries reached a crisis, and in 738 Su-lu was murdered by one of the contenders for power. In the ensuing chaos, one party among the tribes called in the assistance of the Chinese, who joined with the king of Farghāna in a campaign to pacify the Turgesh. A general political settlement in the area was reached, and the kings of Farghāna, Tashkent and Kish were invested with Chinese titles. A Chinese attempt to impose a new qaghan upon the Western Turks, with control over the Turgesh, led to renewed trouble, but in 744 another punitive expedition finally crushed the Turgesh and re-established Chinese authority in the Ili valley and the Tokmak area. By 750 this had become a powerful Chinese base, from which Kao Hsien-chih was to mount his final attempt to expand power further into central Asia, which brought him at last into direct confrontation with the Arabs.

The Turgesh, split by internal strife, ceased to be a threat to the T'ang. In the 750s they were increasingly under pressure from their northern neighbours, the Qarluq, living south of Lake Balkhash. The Qarluq had taken part in the overthrow of the Eastern Turks by the Uighurs, but had then quarrelled with the victorious Uighurs, and now began to migrate south-west into Turgesh territory.

The fall of the Eastern Turks and the rise of the Uighurs

The death of Qapaghan Qaghan in 716 led to a period of instability among the Eastern Turks, already weakened by the defection of many of their subject peoples. The new Qaghan, Bögü, was very shortly deposed by Qapaghan's nephew, the great general Kul-tegin, who killed all the members of Qapaghan's family and his counsellors, with the exception of the aged Tonyuquq. Kul-tegin replaced Bögü by a new qaghan, Bilgä (Mo-chi-lien or P'i-chia in the Chinese sources) who ruled from 716–34. In 716–17 the Turkish territories were devastated by a pestilence, and a series of bloody wars with the subject tribes in the north of Mongolia broke out,

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as a result of which in 717 the Oghuz tribes fled to take refuge in China.

Bilgä, immediately after becoming qaghan, wished to launch an attack on China, but was dissuaded by his advisers. He then formed the ambition of settling his people and building himself a Chinese-style walled capital city. This plan was thwarted by Tonyuquq, who believed this development would have destroyed the Turks' ethnic identity and would have robbed the Turks of their strength against the Chinese – their mobility. At the same time Bilgä proposed a peace settlement with the Chinese. Hsüan-tsung refused and in 718 planned a concerted attack on the Turks, aided by the Khitan and Hsi tribes from the east, the Basmil and Kirghiz from the north-west, and by various groups of submitted Turks. In the autumn of 720 the offensive was mounted under the command of the Chinese general Wang Chün. The plan for a simultaneous thrust against the Turkish camp went wrong. The Basmil arrived before the main Chinese force, and were destroyed. The Turks then proceeded to raid Chinese settlements in the Kansu borders and the protectorate-general of Pei-t'ing to the west.

In 721–2 a peace settlement was finally reached: the qaghan agreed to serve Hsüan-tsung as his father, and Turkish tribute missions and embassies travelled regularly to the Chinese court. Bilgä repeatedly asked for a dynastic marriage with a Chinese princess, but this was never granted. The Turks were approached by the Tibetans to join them in an attack on the Chinese during the border troubles of the late 720s, but Bilgä refused, perhaps because the Chinese had opened a large-scale border market in Shuo-fang, which brought vast quantities of Chinese silk to the Turks and other border peoples.

In 731 Kul-tegin died, and Hsüan-tsung sent ambassadors to pay his condolences, and also had a Chinese inscription added to Kul-tegin's memorial stele, sending Chinese craftsmen to do the work. Clearly a very cordial *modus vivendi* had been arrived at, advantageous to Turk and Chinese alike. Bilgä was poisoned by one of his ministers in 734.

In the early 730s this political equilibrium was threatened by the rebellion of the Khitan and Hsi (see below), who, having rejected their status as Chinese vassals, offered their allegiance to the Turks. The Turks seem to have been unwilling to become directly involved, and to threaten their good relations with the Chinese, although in 733 some Turkish troops did fight alongside the Khitan forces. In 734, however, the Turks made unsuccessful overtures to the king of Parhae, hoping to form an alliance against the Khitan, and in 735 they themselves attacked the Hsi and Khitan, but were beaten off. The Turks were certainly much involved in this crisis in the north-east, and the T'ang court, which found the Khitans

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alone a powerful and determined enemy, trod very warily to avoid bringing the Turks directly into the hostilities.

Bilgä was succeeded by I-jan Qaghan, who died soon after and was succeeded by a younger brother Tengri Qaghan, a child who was dominated by Bilgä's widow. Both qaghans continued the tributary relationship with Hsüan-tsung's court. In 741 the stability of the situation was shattered. Tengri Qaghan was assassinated by one of his commanders, the *shad* of the east, who set up one of Bilgä's sons as qaghan. He was, however, almost immediately murdered by Ku-t'u Yabgu; his younger brother was set up as ruler, but murdered in his turn. The yabgu then made himself qaghan, but the Basmil, Uighurs and Qarluq rose against him and killed him. The Basmil attempted to make their own chief qaghan, but the Turks set up as qaghan Ozmich, a son of the assassin of Tengri Qaghan. The Chinese sent emissaries asking him to offer his allegiance, but he refused. His courtiers disagreed, and Ozmich was attacked by the Basmil and other tribes and fled, being killed in 744 by the Basmil, who sent his head to Ch'ang-an.

The Turks were now in complete anarchy. Ozmich Qaghan's younger brother was set up as Pai-mei Qaghan, but others of the Turks set up the Basmil chief as a rival qaghan. The Chinese took advantage of the chaos, and the military governor of Shuo-fang led his troops into the steppe and crushed the eastern tribes. Meanwhile the Qarluq and Uighur tribes killed the Basmil qaghan, and the Uighur chieftain Ku-li P'ei-lo took control of the country. In 745 the Uighurs killed the last Turkish qaghan, Pai-mei, and sent his head to the Chinese court. Bilgä's formidable widow now led her tribes and submitted to Hsüan-tsung. The Turkish empire was at an end.

The tribal confederation which had brought about their downfall was very shortlived. The Basmil, who had at first been the leading tribe among the rebels, were eliminated by the other tribes in 744, their chief fleeing to Pei-t'ing to seek Chinese protection. Shortly thereafter the Qarluq too became subjects of the Uighurs, whose ruler Ku-li P'ei-lo was now undisputed master of the entire steppe region formerly ruled by the Turks. In 746 Hsüan-tsung conferred upon him the title Huai-jen Qaghan, confirming him as ruler.

He was succeeded in 747 by his son Mo-yen-ch'o, who consolidated the supremacy of the Uighur over their former allies, and founded their capital city at Karabalghasun. The Uighurs had previously been a nomadic people of herdsmen. Mo-yen-ch'o now took the step that Bilgä Qaghan had contemplated for the Turks in 716, by giving them a fixed capital. Gradually, the Uighurs began to settle and engage in agriculture, while

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their capital, and another city Mo-yen-ch'o had built on the Selenga River by Chinese and Soghdians, became lively centres of trade and handicraft industry. The Uighurs never became a sedentary people. Until the end of their empire in 840 they remained pastoral nomads for the most part. But they soon developed a social and economic order far more complex and advanced than that of the Turks at their apogee.

Fortunately for the T'ang, they remained on friendly terms with China. During the last years of Hsüan-tsung's reign they established regular tribute relations, and laid the foundations of the lucrative commercial links which were to bind them to China for the next century.

The Khitan and Hsi

The re-establishment of Chinese control in southern Manchuria, the establishment in 717 of the powerful P'ing-lu Army at Ying-chou and the return to their allegiance of the kings of the Khitan and Hsi peoples in 714 had begun a period of comparative quiet in the north-east. This situation was bolstered up by a series of dynastic marriages of T'ang 'princesses' with the kings of both the Khitan and Hsi. Tribute missions arrived regularly at the Chinese court, and trade flourished at Ying-chou. In addition, the emergence of a powerful and stable state in eastern Manchuria, Parhae (of which more below) helped further to stabilize the north-east, while the generally passive attitude of the Turks obviated the traditional strategic threat, posed by the foreign peoples of this region, of a combined attack upon the whole length of the northern frontier. Finally the T'ang defences in the north-east were extremely powerful. The five armies established after the Khitan invasions of 696 had been supplemented by three more early in Hsüan-tsung's reign, and two more were added in 729. These came under the military governor of Fan-yang, who by the late 730s had 91,000 troops directly at his disposal. In addition the P'ing-lu Army and other forces in southern Manchuria were under his control. Fan-yang was the most powerful of all the frontier commands, a measure of the importance with which the court viewed the potential threat posed by the Khitan and Hsi.

The outward equilibrium of the region in fact masked a highly volatile political situation. This was true especially of the Khitan, where, after the death of Li Shih-huo in 718, four kings rapidly succeeded one another in the space of eight years. The real power at the Khitan court was a great minister called K'o-t'u-yü, who enthroned and deposed several kings and held great personal authority. In the late 720s he attended the court in Ch'ang-an with a tribute mission, and was treated rudely by the

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chief minister Li Yüan-hung. He conceived a deep hatred of the Chinese, and in 730 killed the Khitan king, forcing his Chinese 'princess' consort to flee to the T'ang garrison at Ying-chou, and proclaimed himself ruler of the Khitan. He then coerced his Hsi neighbours into joining his rebellion, and gave his allegiance to the Turkish qaghan, Bilgä.

Although the Chinese court decided to launch a punitive expedition against him, and ordered large levies of troops, it was not until 732 that any effective action was taken. Li I, the Prince of Hsin-an, was given overall command of a campaign in which K'o-t'u-yü was attacked simultaneously from several directions. After some set-backs Li I finally won a crushing victory, inflicting numerous casualties and taking many prisoners. K'o-t'u-yü was totally routed and fled with the remnants of his army into the mountains of Jehol, while his erstwhile Hsi allies surrendered to the T'ang and resumed their vassal status.

The Khitan, however, were by no means finished. In the spring of 733 a large force of Khitan with some troops from their Turkish allies camped beyond the Yü-kuan Pass. Hsüeh Ch'u-yü, the newly appointed military governor of Fan-yang, sent a force to attack them, but was decisively defeated. Later in the same year Hsüeh was replaced as governor by Chang Shou-kuei, a general who had distinguished himself in the recent hostilities with Tibet. K'o-t'u-yü, awed by his reputation, was driven off, and tried to win time by a false offer of surrender while he withdrew north-westward in the hope of joining up with the Turks. Chang Shou-kuei now subverted Li Kuo-che, one of the Khitan commanders who was on bad terms with K'o-t'u-yü. Li Kuo-che murdered K'o-t'u-yü and many of his supporters, sending his head to the Chinese court.

Early in 735 Hsüan-tsung confirmed Li Kuo-che as leader of the Khitan, and conferred various offices on him to symbolize his vassal status. It appeared that the Khitan problem was settled. But hopes of peace were soon dashed. Before the end of the year, surviving partisans of K'o-t'u-yü lied by Nieh-li, murdered Li Kuo-che and most of his family. At the same time the Turks attacked the Khitan and Hsi, but were repulsed. Nieh-li was pardoned and confirmed as king of the Khitan by the Chinese court. Nevertheless, early in 736 the Hsi and Khitan again rejected Chinese control. Chang Shou-kuei's commander, An Lu-shan, led a force to attack them, but was defeated. The next year Chang Shou-kuei inflicted a severe defeat on the Khitan. This was followed by a lull in hostilities but by no definite peace.

In the autumn of 738 two of Chang Shou-kuei's subordinate generals forged an order purporting to come from him commanding the chief general in Ying-chou to attack the Hsi in the valley of the Shira Muren.

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The attack was a failure. Chang Shou-kuei attempted to cover up the incident and reported a victory. The truth leaked out and in the scandal that followed Chang was demoted, and replaced by Li Shih-chih, under whom the Chinese forces defeated the Khitan and Hsi in the autumn of 740.

The situation now at last became more peaceful. The T'ang defence system was strengthened. Two new armies were set up in Ho-pei and another in P'ing-lu in 743, while in 742 P'ing-lu, which had formerly been under the command of the military governor of Fan-yang, was made into an independent command responsible for the security of the Chinese position in southern Manchuria. In 743 both the Khitan and Hsi sent embassies to Ch'ang-an and the T'ang court clearly decided to attempt a peaceful settlement, since in 745 Chinese princesses were given as brides to both the Khitan and Hsi kings.

At the end of 745, however, the two kings murdered their Chinese consorts and rebelled. An Lu-shan, who had been military governor of P'ing-lu since 742, and combined this with command of Fan-yang after 744, put down their rebellion, and in 746 the Chinese court invested new kings of both the Hsi and Khitan. Peaceful relations were resumed: a Hsi embassy came to Ch'ang-an in 749 and a Khitan embassy in 750.

To the end of Hsüan-tsung's reign, then, the problem of the Hsi and Khitan remained unresolved. Although the tribes had made no serious incursions into Chinese territory, Chinese attempts to exercise control over them had been inconclusive. They remained a powerful threat, and fully justified the maintenance of a huge military establishment in the north-east.

Parhae

During Hsüan-tsung's reign the T'ang became involved in relations with peoples in central and northern Manchuria with whom, previously, there had been little direct contact. The T'ang court had received occasional missions from a variety of shadowy peoples living in eastern Siberia, Sakhalin and possibly Kamchatka, and had regular contacts with the peoples of Manchuria and the Amur basin. In early T'ang times northern Korea and the eastern parts of modern Liaoning and Kirin provinces had formed the territory of the Koguryŏ kingdom. North of Koguryŏ the western half of modern Heilungkiang was inhabited by the numerous sub-tribes of the Shih-wei, a Mongol people related to the Khitan, while the eastern part of Heilungkiang and the lower Amur was the territory of the Malgal (Chinese Mo-ho) peoples of Tungusic stock. Much of the population of northern Koguryŏ was also of Malgal stock.

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With the fall of Koguryŏ their former territory became a power vacuum. In the south a weakly organized state of 'Lesser Koguryŏ' eked out an existence in the area between the new unified state of Silla and the Chinese settled zone in the lower Liao valley. Much of the ruling group of Koguryŏ had been transported by Kao-tsung, some of them to various places in China, but most had been settled in the region of Ying-chou. When the Khitan invasion of Ho-pei disrupted the Chinese administration in the north-east in 696 a group of these peoples both from the Yemaek ruling class and from the Malgal tribes from Koguryŏ rebelled and fled under the leadership of a former Koguryŏ general, Tae Choyŏng, to the upper Sungari valley in modern Kirin province where he proclaimed himself king of the state of Chin (in Chinese Chen) and established himself a vassal of the Turkish qaghan Qapaghan.

By 705 the Chinese court realized that he had succeeded in establishing a powerful new state in eastern Manchuria, and it was decided to recognize it, in the hope that it might become an ally in case of future Chinese hostilities with the Hsi and Khitan. Envoys were exchanged, but the outbreak of fighting with the Khitan and Hsi cut off communications until 712, when the Chinese recognized Tae Choyŏng as king of Po-hai. The new state of Parhae (the Korean pronunciation of Po-hai) began to develop into a powerful prosperous kingdom, organized like Silla on a strictly Chinese model. Regular tribute missions were sent to Ch'ang-an, and special arrangements made to facilitate trade.

In 719 Tae Choyŏng died and was succeeded by his son Tae Muye who ruled Parhae until 737. Although tribute relationships continued unchecked, in the 720s relations began to become strained. The Parhae king, as a symbol of his independence of the T'ang, adopted his own reign-title, rejecting the T'ang dating system, and the Parhae court was divided between a pro-T'ang party and a royal faction led by the king which sought to pursue a more independent line.

The T'ang court soon grew apprehensive about the growing power of Parhae, and began to seek allies to counterbalance it. The Parhae kings had been sharply rebuffed by their northern neighbours, the Malgal peoples of the Amur valley, and the T'ang court began to foster links with these tribes, famous for their warlike spirit. In 726 the Malgal sent envoys to court, and the Chinese set up a frontier administration in the Amur region with Chinese officers to advise the tribal leaders and to organize a tribal army.

Not unnaturally the Parhae king viewed these developments with apprehension. In 726 he ordered his brother Tae Munye, who had served as a hostage prince at the T'ang court from 705–12, to lead a pre-emptive

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strike against the Amur valley Malgal, to prevent a concerted attack on Parhae by the T'ang from the south and the Malgal from the north. Munye opposed the plan, saying that it would be a betrayal of their T'ang overlord, and fled to Hsüan-tsung's court.

The Parhae king sent envoys demanding his execution. Hsüan-tsung attempted to deceive the envoys by saying that Tae Munye had been exiled to Ling-nan, when in fact he had been sent to a post in central Asia. The truth leaked out, and the Parhae king was furious. In 732 he sent a naval expedition which raided the important Chinese port of Teng-chou on the Shantung peninsula, capturing the prefectural city and killing the prefect before withdrawing.

Hsüan-tsung now decided to take drastic action against Parhae. Plans were made with the king of Silla, who also felt menaced by the rise of its powerful northern neighbour, for a concerted attack by Chinese forces from Ying-chou, and the Silla army striking north from the peninsula. The campaign was a fiasco. The renewed trouble with the Khitan in 733 led to the abandonment of the Chinese campaign, while the Silla army was caught in snowstorms in the northern mountains of Korea, and had to be withdrawn having lost a large part of their men without ever having encountered the Parhae forces. In 734 Hsüan-tsung wrote to the king of Silla urging him to attack Parhae if the opportunity arose, and an agreement on the coordination of Silla and Chinese defences was made, which amounted to a formal renunciation by the T'ang of its long-standing claims to its former conquered territories in Korea. The Parhae king continued his vendetta against Tae Munye, and attempted to have him assassinated in Lo-yang, but the attempt on his life failed and the assassins were captured.

However, more sober counsels eventually prevailed. In the troubles with the Khitan in the 730s the Turks were repeatedly involved, and in 734 they approached Parhae with a view to an alliance against the Khitan who had for the moment again acknowledged Chinese suzerainty. The Parhae king, perhaps realizing that the Turks as masters of the Khitan territory would be a far more aggressive neighbour than the T'ang, turned the proposal down. In 735 Parhae sent a tribute mission to Ch'ang-an, led by one of the royal princes, and made a formal act of submission. After this missions were sent every year.

In 737 Tae Munye, whose policies had led to the breach with the T'ang, died. He was succeeded by Tae Hummu (generally known by his posthumous title Munwang), the greatest of all the Parhae kings. He was to reign for fifty-seven years, and during his reign Parhae reached the peak of its power and attained a very high level of culture. Under his rule the

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Parhae state became a close copy of T'ang China, in its institutions and literary culture, much as Silla and Japan had become. It became a part of the Chinese cultural sphere in the east, in which Chinese was the lingua franca in government and in literature. Although, like Silla and Japan, Parhae was fully independent, and the T'ang government was incapable of intervening in its domestic affairs, the forms of tributary relationship were carefully preserved. The Parhae and Silla kings were formally invested with their titles by the T'ang court, as were their queens and heirs apparent. Embassies from both states regularly attended the New Year celebrations at court, and their tribute gifts were repaid by still more costly luxuries of Chinese manufacture.

After the rise of Parhae the T'ang was faced with a new situation in the north-east. Silla and Parhae were neither tribal peoples at a notably lower level of development than China, nor nomadic empires with a totally alien life-style and social organization. They were sedentary societies organized as centralized bureaucratic kingdoms just like China itself, and with them the T'ang court had to devise a new style of relations accepting a far greater degree of equality and of common culture than in the case of any of its past neighbours.

Foreign developments 750–5

Until the end of the 740s, the conduct of affairs on the frontiers had been largely successful. The Tibetan frontier had been stabilized, and the strategically important areas, which had been lost in preceding times, recovered. The routes to central Asia through the Tarim, the Ili valley and the Pamir had been secured. The steppe was controlled by the comparatively peaceful and friendly Uighurs, and the threat of the Khitan and Hsi peoples successfully contained. The defence of the enormously long frontiers was costly both in manpower and in support. But the T'ang court was successful in securing its objectives, and few of the campaigns of Hsüan-tsung's time resulted from an aggressive policy towards China's neighbours or from expansionist ambitions.

About 750, however, China, after a decade of victorious foreign campaigns, suffered a succession of serious military reverses. In 751 Kao Hsien-chih, the military governor of An-hsi, who had had such spectacular success in his campaigns in Gilgit and in the Farghāna region, finally came into conflict with the Arabs on the Talas River, and was routed.[220] This battle was not in itself of great importance. But its implications for the future were very serious, for it left the Arabs in a strong position from

[220] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6907–8.

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which to extend their influence over central Asia when, after An Lu-shan's rebellion the Chinese garrisons in Turkestan were first left isolated and then overrun by the Tibetans. In 751 An Lu-shan also suffered a serious defeat. In 750 war had again broken out on the north-east frontier between his forces and the Hsi and Khitan. These hostilities, which the histories suggest were deliberately provoked by An Lu-shan in the hope of achieving an easy success and subsequent rewards from the emperor, had ended in a Chinese victory. An Lu-shan returned to court late in 750 and was lavishly rewarded, being given the unique honour of being allowed to mint cash on his own account. After his return to the north-east in 751 he prepared a major campaign against the Khitan, and led sixty-thousand troops of his own and a force of Hsi cavalry against them. This expedition ended in total disaster, and the loss of most of An Lu-shan's army.[221] In spite of this complete fiasco, which was largely the result of An Lu-shan's over-confidence, Hsüan-tsung by now held him in such great personal esteem that he was not punished.

An equally disastrous defeat took place in the same year in Yunnan. Here the Chinese were faced with the newly emergent state of Nan-chao, the rise of which they had encouraged in the hope that it would act as an ally of the Chinese against the Tibetans. In the late 730s P'i-lo-ko, the ruler of Meng-she (Nan-chao), gradually expanded his control over the six native kingdoms (Liu Chao) of modern Yunnan, with the acquiescence and assistance of the military governor of Chien-nan, Wang Yü. In 739 he had established his capital near modern Ta-li, which was heavily fortified. The king and his heir apparent were granted Chinese titles, and entered into feudatory relations with the Chinese court.[222]

In 750 Chang Ch'ien-t'o, prefect of Yün-nan, attempted to plunder the Nan-chao envoys. The king, Ko-lo-feng would not submit to this treatment; upon which Chang denounced him in a secret memorial. Ko-lo-feng, bitterly resentful, then attacked Yün-nan fu in 750, killed Chang Ch'ien-t'o and took possession of thirty-two native tribal prefectures under Chinese protectorship in the area.

The governor of Chien-nan, Yang Kuo-chung's protégé Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung, had been steadily building up a power base in Szechwan. He now decided to lead a great punitive expedition against Nan-chao. In early summer 751 he sent a force of 80,000 men to make a double-pronged assault on Ta-li. Ko-lo-feng offered to make restitution of the

[221] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6908–9; *CTS* 200A, p. 5369; *An Lu-shan shih-chi*, (Ou-hsiang ling-shih edn, 1910) A, p. 11a; des Rotours, *Histoire*, pp. 111–15; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 96–8.

[222] On the rise of Nan-chao see Michael Blackmore, 'The rise of Nanchao in Yunnan', *Journal of South East Asian History*, 1.2 (1960) 47–61; Fujisawa Yoshimi, *Sei-nan Chūgoku minzoku shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1969).

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territories which he had occupied, but Hsien-yü refused to listen and pressed on with his assault. The result was a catastrophe. Ko-lo-feng inflicted a crushing defeat on the T'ang army; Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung barely escaped with his life, and the T'ang army suffered 60,000 casualties – many of them through disease. Yang Kuo-chung was able to conceal the facts from Hsüan-tsung, and claimed a great victory. But this ill-advised expedition left China with a very weak position in Szechwan. Ko-lo-feng's immediate response was to become a vassal of the Tibetans, and the Tibetan/Nan-chao alliance threatened the south-western border for the next forty years.[223]

This resurgence of frontier problems after more than a decade of steady Chinese success led Li Lin-fu, early in 751, to have himself appointed military governor of Shuo-fang *in absentia*, the actual command being in the hands of a deputy, Li Wei. After the debacle in Szechwan, Yang Kuo-chung in the eleventh month of 751 decided to consolidate his own regional power base in Szechwan by being appointed military governor of Chien-nan.[224]

Early in 752 Li Lin-fu was once again attacked by Yang Kuo-chung and his allies, on account of his responsibility for Shuo-fang. In the spring of 752 An Lu-shan raised a huge force of 200,000 cavalry to avenge his defeat by the Khitan. As part of his plan he had requested the aid of a large force of cavalry from Shuo-fang province, under the general Li Hsien-chung, Prince of Feng-hsin – in fact a surrendered Turk originally named A-pu-ssu – who was unwilling to serve under An Lu-shan. An Lu-shan bore a long-standing grudge against A-pu-ssu, who not unnaturally feared that An would try to have him killed. Instead of joining the campaign against the Khitan, A-pu-ssu rebelled, raided the arsenals and granaries of Shuo-fang and fled into the steppe.

An Lu-shan now cancelled the whole expedition. A-pu-ssu had been Li Lin-fu's deputy military governor in Shuo-fang, and Yang Kuo-chung, Ch'en Hsi-lieh and Ko-shu Han attempted to have Li Lin-fu held responsible for his rebellion. Although they failed, Li Lin-fu was forced to resign the governorship of Shuo-fang, which passed to An Lu-shan's cousin, An Ssu-shun who was already governor of Ho-hsi.[225] From now until 755 the whole northern border from the Ordos to Manchuria was controlled by the Ans, who remained for the time supporters of Li Lin-fu.

Li Lin-fu shortly afterwards attempted to turn the tables on Yang Kuo-chung. Since Hsien-yü Chung-t'ung's abortive invasion of Yunnan,

[223] *CTS* 197, pp. 5280–1; *THY* 99, pp. 1763–4; *TCTC* 216, pp. 6901–2, 6906–7.
[224] *THY* 78, p. 1437; *TCTC* 216, p. 6909.
[225] *TCTC* 216, p. 6910; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 101, 167, n. 87.

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there had been continuous border trouble with Nan-chao. Li Lin-fu now requested that Yang Kuo-chung should heed the urgent pleas of the people of Szechwan for him to take up his post as military governor. Yang Kuo-chung and Yang Kuei-fei pleaded with the emperor, but Hsüan-tsung insisted that he should go, promising that he would soon be recalled to court as chief minister.

This, however, was Li Lin-fu's last throw. He was already mortally ill. A soothsayer told him that if he could see the emperor once more he might recover. In spite of the protests of his entourage Hsüan-tsung agreed; but Li Lin-fu was now too sick even to make obeisance to his sovereign. Yang Kuo-chung, on the verge of setting out for Szechwan, was recalled, and Li Lin-fu on his death-bed entrusted him with the future affairs of the empire. Almost immediately after, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of 752 Li Lin-fu died, after nineteen years in power.[226]

Yang Kuo-chung was immediately appointed chief minister. Early in 753 he revived the charge that Li Lin-fu had been involved in the rising of A-pu-ssu. The latter had been defeated by the Uighurs, and the remnants of his supporters had taken service with An Lu-shan, who sent one of their leaders to court to report that Li Lin-fu had adopted A-pu-ssu as a son. The emperor ordered an investigation. Li Lin-fu was still unburied, but in the second month of 753 he was posthumously deprived of all his ranks and offices; his descendants holding office were reduced to commoner status and banished to the borders of the far south and south-west, and fifty or more of his close kin and associates were involved in his disgrace. His property was confiscated, his coffin opened and the precious grave-goods removed, and he was given a commoner's burial.[227] Yang Kuo-chung and Ch'en Hsi-lieh were given new noble titles to reward them for their part in this sordid act of revenge.

With Li Lin-fu's passing the empire was left without a strong and responsible leader. For two decades the court had been accustomed to his unyielding control, and since the purges of 746–8 most of the alternative leadership was either dead or serving in the provinces. Hsüan-tsung had long since relinquished his active role as monarch, and now followed the easiest path by acquiescing in the exercise of supreme political power by Yang Kuo-chung, who, for all his skill as a manipulator of court politics, and for all his personal influence on Hsüan-tsung, was in no way comparable to Li Lin-fu as a practical statesman.

The political developments of the preceding forty years had concen-

[226] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6912–14; *CTS* 106, pp. 3239–41, 3243–4.
[227] *TCTC* 216, pp. 6917–18; *CTS* 106, p. 3241.

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trated unprecedented power in the hands of the chief minister. But to ensure that the system functioned well, the emperor had to retain both the power and the will to replace his chief ministers. Abnormally long tenures of office, such as Li Lin-fu and Ch'en Hsi-lieh had enjoyed, made this increasingly difficult, since not only did the incumbents become more and more firmly entrenched in office, but the orderly regular promotion of men in high office, who could normally have expected to become their successors, was blocked. Yang Kuo-chung thus inherited a position at court that was virtually impregnable so long as he and Yang Kuei-fei retained Hsüan-tsung's favour.

YANG KUO-CHUNG'S REGIME (752–6)

From the end of 752 until the end of Hsüan-tsung's reign, Yang Kuo-chung thus remained the dominant figure at court. In addition to his chief ministership and his substantive post of president of the Secretariat, he was also, as Li Lin-fu had been since 739, concurrently president of the Board of Civil Office, which gave him control over civil appointments. He also continued to hold the many special finance commissions that he had accumulated under Li Lin-fu, and these gave him complete control over the empire's finances, since the Board of Finance was left without either president or vice-presidents. The second chief minister continued to be Ch'en Hsi-lieh, who had showed somewhat more independence in Li Lin-fu's last years, but was no serious political rival. Moreover, before Li Lin-fu's fall he had been removed from his concurrent post of president of the Board of War, which had been customarily held by the second chief minister.

However, the influence of the court was now plainly overshadowed by the enormous power of the military governors on the frontiers, and the final years before An Lu-shan's rebellion were occupied with a growing tension between An Lu-shan who posed a massive potential threat to the empire thanks to his control of the northern and north-eastern border commands, and Yang Kuo-chung who firmly dominated the capital and the court. He now desperately attempted to establish for himself a territorial base and a military backing to counterbalance the power of An Lu-shan.

Yang Kuo-chung's attempts to consolidate his own position as military governor of Chien-nan were not particularly successful; Szechwan was distant from the court and communication was not easy, its military establishment was smaller and far less well-integrated than that of the north-eastern commands, and the attempt of Yang's protégé Hsien-yü

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Chung-t'ung at territorial aggrandizement at the expense of Nan-chao had ended in disaster. The establishment in 753 of a powerful overall military command in Ling-nan under Ho Fu-kuang to threaten Nan-chao from the south had little effect. A renewed invasion of Nan-chao from Szechwan in the summer of 754 again ended in the loss of some three quarters of the expeditionary army.[228]

Yang Kuo-chung most urgently needed a powerful military ally, and his choice rested upon the only obvious rival of An Lu-shan, the Turkish general Ko-shu Han,[229] who was military governor of the two north-western provinces of Lung-yu and Ho-hsi. Ko-shu Han had been ennobled as a prince in the eighth month of 753. He had long since quarrelled with An Lu-shan's cousin An Ssu-shun, the governor of Shuo-fang, and although towards the end of Li Lin-fu's life the emperor had tried to patch up the differences between them with the help of his chief eunuch Kao Li-shih this had only exacerbated the situation, and An Lu-shan and Ko-shu Han had quarrelled bitterly and publicly at court.

Ko-shu Han controlled very large forces – a total of 143,000 men, a battle-hardened force which had been continually at war, and generally victorious, on the Tibetan frontier for more than a decade. In 754 his forces were greatly expanded. Eight new armies were established in Lung-yu province, and another was founded in Ho-hsi early in 755.[230]

In the winter of 753–4 An Lu-shan came to court to attend the new year audience anxious to strengthen his position with Hsüan-tsung. Yang Kuo-chung told the emperor that An Lu-shan was sure to rebel and suggested that he test his loyalty by summoning him to an audience. When the summons was issued, Lu-shan complied – to the consternation of Yang Kuo-chung – and assured the emperor of his undying loyalty. Hsüan-tsung heaped rewards upon him, and trusted him more than ever before, although the heir apparent joined Yang Kuo-chung in warning him that An was likely to rebel. To make matters worse Hsüan-tsung even suggested that An Lu-shan should be made an *ad hominem* chief minister, and only Yang Kuo-chung's urgent plea that An Lu-shan was illiterate and unfit for such a high office prevented the appointment. In the end An was given only the post of vice-president of the Department of State Affairs, by now a high-ranking sinecure usually conferred upon former chief ministers.[231]

An Lu-shan was, nevertheless, given another post which undermined the power both of Yang Kuo-chung and of Ko-shu Han. He was created

[228] *TCTC* 216, p. 6918; *TCTC* 217, pp. 6926–7; *THY* 99, p. 1734; *CTS* 9, p. 228.
[229] Biographies in *CTS* 104, pp. 3211–15; *HTS* 135, pp. 4569–74.
[230] *TCTC* 216, p. 6919. [231] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6922–3.

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commissioner of the Imperial Stables and for the Imperial Horse Pastures of Lung-yu (the command controlled by Ko-shu Han). Although An Lu-shan's three commands outnumbered Ko-shu Han's armies in man-power, the armies of Ho-hsi and Lung-yu were much better provided with cavalry mounts, and in addition, the huge state pastures upon which all the Chinese cavalry depended, were concentrated in Lung-yu and the region of modern Shensi and Kansu provinces north-west of Ch'ang-an. An Lu-shan through this new appointment was enabled to select for his own armies many thousand first-rate cavalry horses, to redress the balance of their forces.[232]

During An Lu-shan's stay at the capital, the enmity of Yang Kuo-chung became so apparent that when he left to return to his command at Fan-yang in the third month of 754 he went post-haste by boat, travelling night and day and never leaving his boat at any of the cities he passed, for fear that Yang Kuo-chung would have him pursued and detained.[233] It was clear that the situation between the chief minister and the empire's most powerful general was now quite impossible. But the emperor remained convinced of An Lu-shan's personal loyalty, and no courtier dared raise again the possibility that he might rebel.

As a result of An Lu-shan's visit to court Yang Kuo-chung was able to rid himself of a rival group of high-ranking officials who had become very intimate and influential with the emperor. The Chang brothers, Chang Chün, president of the Board of Justice, and Chang Chi, president of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, were the sons of Chang Yüeh.[234] Chang Chün had had a distinguished career, both in metropolitan and provincial office. A very able writer, he had long had ambitions to become chief minister, but had been kept down by Li Lin-fu. After Li's death he had become a supporter of Ch'en Hsi-lieh, in the hope of succeeding him. Chang Chi had also served in various prestigious court offices in the 720s, and was a special favourite of Hsüan-tsung, who married him to his daughter the Princess Ning-ch'in, and allowed him to live in a mansion inside the palace. He was employed by the emperor both as a personal secretary to draft edicts, and as a master of ceremonies for important rituals. He too had hopes of becoming chief minister in place of Ch'en Hsi-lieh when the latter asked permission to resign, indeed Hsüan-tsung appears to have promised him the post. Yet another brother, Chang Shu was chief secretary of the Chancellery. However, the power of the Chang brothers depended not so much on their high offices as on the position

[232] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6923–4.
[233] *TCTC* 217, p. 6924.
[234] Biographies in *CTS* 97, pp. 3057–9; *HTS* 125, pp. 4411–12.

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which both Chang Chün and Chang Chi held as Han-lin scholars-in-waiting (*Han-lin yüan kung-feng*).

We have already seen how, in the 720s, Hsüan-tsung had deliberately developed the Chi-hsien yüan academy to provide himself with a group of talented young men who could assist him in his various literary projects, and in the preparation and drafting of important state documents. The Chi-hsien yüan had been first headed by Chang Yüeh, and later by Ch'en Hsi-lieh, and it still remained important. But late in Hsüan-tsung's reign it came to be challenged by another 'academy' of talented young men, the Han-lin yüan. Unlike the Chi-hsien yüan the Han-lin yüan was a palace organization directly attached to the emperor himself. It originally comprised a large group of writers, poets, experts in geomancy, diviners, Buddhist and Taoist clergy, artists, painters, calligraphers and even masters of chess, who were at the emperor's disposal in the palace (*Han-lin tai-chao*) to make his life fuller and more agreeable. In 738 a new section of the Han-lin academy was founded with the establishment of the Academy of Scholars (Hsüeh-shih yüan). This new academy, which soon overshadowed the original Han-lin yüan in importance, was a private confidential secretariat dealing with state business and drafting documents for the emperor, and soon replaced the Chi-hsien yüan in this function.[235] Chang Chi was one of its first members, and its premises were located in his own mansion in the palace. By 754 Chang Chün was also a scholar-in-waiting. They were thus very influential, and very close to Hsüan-tsung.

Chang Chi had actually drafted the edict appointing An Lu-shan as chief minister, which had never been put into effect thanks to Yang Kuo-chung's opposition. When An Lu-shan left the capital in the third month of 754, he was seen off by the emperor's chief eunuch, Kao Li-shih, who reported to Hsüan-tsung that An had left very discontented since he knew that the emperor had intended to make him a chief minister but had finally failed to do so. Yang Kuo-chung surmised that this fact could only have been leaked to An Lu-shan by Chang Chi or his brothers. The emperor was furious, for complete confidentiality was required of the Han-lin scholars, and Chang Chi and his brothers were all demoted to minor provincial posts.[236]

Later in the year Yang Kuo-chung won another political victory. Ch'en Hsi-lieh had repeatedly asked to retire from his chief ministership, and in the seventh month of 754 the emperor agreed to this, with Yang Kuo-chung's approval, since he had been on bad terms with his colleague.

[235] On the development of the Han-lin academy see F. A. Bischoff, *La Forêt des Pinceaux* (Paris, 1963), pp. 6–9.

[236] *CTS* 97, p. 3058; *TCTC* 217, p. 6925.

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The emperor wished to replace Ch'en Hsi-lieh with Chi Wen, a ruthless and sinister man who had been one of Li Lin-fu's chief agents during the purges of 746–8, and had served for many years in the Censorate. Chi Wen by this time had become a supporter of An Lu-shan, who had requested his appointment as his own deputy commissioner for the state pastures earlier in the year, and had also engineered his promotion to vice-president of the Board of War. Yang Kuo-chung, alarmed at the thought of having to contend with so dangerous a colleague, protested against the emperor's choice, and succeeded in having the elderly Wei Chien-su, the vice-president of the Board of Civil Office, appointed as president of the Board of War over Chi Wen's head, and made *ad hominem* chief minister.[237]

Wei Chien-su[238] (687–762) was both a *chin-shih* graduate and a member of a prominent noble family, and had been a minor official in Jui-tsung's princely household before his accession, and had thus been known to Hsüan-tsung all his adult life. He had held a long succession of high offices at the capital, and was well known as an unaggressive and tractable man. As Yang Kuo-chung had hoped, he proved to be little more than a figurehead, countersigning the orders made by Yang Kuo-chung without question.

Later in 754 Yang Kuo-chung rid himself of another enemy, the very popular and capable governor of the Metropolitan District, Li Hsien, a member of the imperial clan. He accomplished this, according to some accounts, by blaming him for the continual rains that had affected Ch'ang-an since 753. Other accounts suggest that Yang sent agents to expose a plot involving An Lu-shan, forcing the officials of Li Hsien's metropolitan administration to raid An's mansion in the capital, where evidence that he was planning a rebellion was discovered. Two of An's agents, An Tai and Li Fang-lai were executed. An Lu-shan was furious, and complained to Hsüan-tsung, who then demoted Li Hsien – the official theoretically responsible – in order to placate An Lu-shan.[239]

He also brought about the disgrace of Wei Chih, governor of T'ai-yüan and civil inspector of Ho-tung province, a well-known scholar with a high reputation as an official, whom he feared Hsüan-tsung might be planning to bring to the capital as chief minister. Wei Chih was accused of misappropriation of official funds, and censors were sent to investigate him. Wei was foolish enough to bribe Chi Wen to intercede for him, and also sent letters to An Lu-shan begging his assistance. This came to light, and Yang Kuo-chung was able not only to have Wei Chih sent in disgrace

[237] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6927–8.
[238] Biographies in *CTS* 108, pp. 3275–8; *HTS* 118, pp. 4267–9.
[239] *TCTC* 217, p. 6932 and *k'ao-i*; *CTS* 112, p. 3343.

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to the far south, but also to have Chi Wen removed from the capital and subsequently executed. An Lu-shan thus lost his chief adherent in the central government, and his pleas for a pardon for Chi Wen went unheeded.[240]

Early in the next year An Lu-shan, who no longer dared attend court in person sent a deputy commander to request permission to replace many of his Chinese generals with non-Chinese officers. Yang Kuo-chung and Wei Chien-su took this as clear evidence that he now planned to rebel, and asked Hsüan-tsung to refuse his request.[241] But Hsüan-tsung grew angry, and issued an edict appointing the new officers as An Lu-shan had asked. The chief ministers then suggested that An Lu-shan be brought to court and appointed a chief minister, and that his commands should be divided up and placed under Chinese officials so as to rob him of his power. At first Hsüan-tsung was inclined to follow their suggestion, and the necessary edicts were drafted. But before they could be issued, the emperor had second thoughts, and sent a eunuch envoy to An Lu-shan's headquarters, with orders to ascertain whether in fact he was planning to rebel. The eunuch was heavily bribed by An Lu-shan, and reported back that An remained totally loyal to the dynasty. Hsüan-tsung thereupon ordered Yang Kuo-chung and Wei Chien-su not to trouble him again with such accusations.

However, early in the spring of 755 one of the chief secretaries of the Chancellery, P'ei Shih-yen was sent out to make a tour of Ho-pei, presumably as a precaution.[242] An Lu-shan, meanwhile, had again been at war with the Khitan and Hsi, and reported a victory over them in the fourth month.[243] Whether he hoped to win back Hsüan-tsung's favour, or whether he hoped to neutralize his foreign enemies in preparation for his own rebellion is not clear. An Lu-shan remained at his headquarters in Fan-yang, repeatedly refusing to receive the emperor's envoys, and claiming that he was sick. When P'ei Shih-yen arrived, he was kept waiting for three weeks before An would agree to see him, and even then was treated with scant courtesy.

Meanwhile, in the capital Yang Kuo-chung continued his harassment of An Lu-shan's known supporters, and tried constantly to produce proof of his treasonable intentions. The new governor of the metropolitan district had An's mansion surrounded, and one of his agents was arrested, questioned by the Censorate and then secretly murdered. One of An Lu-shan's sons, An Ch'ing-tsung, was married to a minor royal princess and serving as an officer-in-attendance at court. He secretly informed An

[240] *TCTC* 217, p. 6929.
[241] *HTS* 118, p. 4627; *TCTC* 217, p. 6929.
[242] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6929–34.
[243] *TCTC* 217, p. 6932.

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Lu-shan of these happenings. An Lu-shan was now even more terrified, and when the emperor sent an edict written in his own hand summoning him to Ch'ang-an to attend the wedding ceremony for his son in the sixth month, An Lu-shan pleaded that he was sick, and refused to come.

In the seventh month An Lu-shan sent in a memorial offering to present as tribute three thousand horses, each to be accompanied by two grooms, and led by twenty-two of his non-Chinese generals. The governor of Lo-yang, Ta-hsi Hsün, warned Hsüan-tsung that he suspected these men might take part in a coup, and suggested that An be asked to wait until winter before sending the horses, and that the government would itself provide grooms, so as not to trouble his army. By now even Hsüan-tsung was aware that An Lu-shan might be intending to rebel, and just at this time the facts of his having bribed the emperor's eunuch envoy earlier in the year came to light. The eunuch was executed, and another eunuch envoy was sent to Fan-yang with an edict addressed to An Lu-shan along the lines suggested by Ta-hsi Hsün, and inviting him to visit Hsüan-tsung during his customary stay in the hot springs during the late autumn. When the emperor's envoy arrived in Fan-yang, An Lu-shan received him seated and refused even to make the customary obeisances. After a few days the envoy was sent back to Ch'ang-an without having another audience.[244]

It was now clear that a rebellion was only a matter of time. On the ninth day of the eleventh month of 755, at the head of his own troops and contingents of Tongra, Khitan, Hsi and Shih-wei tribesmen, An Lu-shan rebelled, claiming that he had received an imperial edict ordering him to subdue the rebellious bandit Yang Kuo-chung.

THE END OF THE REIGN

An Lu-shan's initial campaign was a complete success.[245] His main forces, numbering over a hundred thousand men, struck rapidly southward through Ho-pei, virtually unopposed, while subordinate commanders were left in charge of the rebel bases in Yu-chou (Fan-yang), Ying-chou, and Tai-chou in northern Shansi. In little more than a month they were in Ho-nan.

It was some days before news of the rebellion reached the court. Even

[244] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6932–4.

[245] On An Lu-shan's rebellion the most coherent account is in Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The An Lu-shan rebellion and the origins of chronic militarism in late T'ang China', in J. C. Perry and Bardwell L. Smith, eds. *Essays on T'ang society* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 33–60. The basic sources on An Lu-shan are translated in des Rotours, *Histoire*, and in Howard S. Levy, *Biography of An Lu-shan*, which translates his biography in *CTS* 200A. The following account is largely drawn from *TCTC* 217–18.

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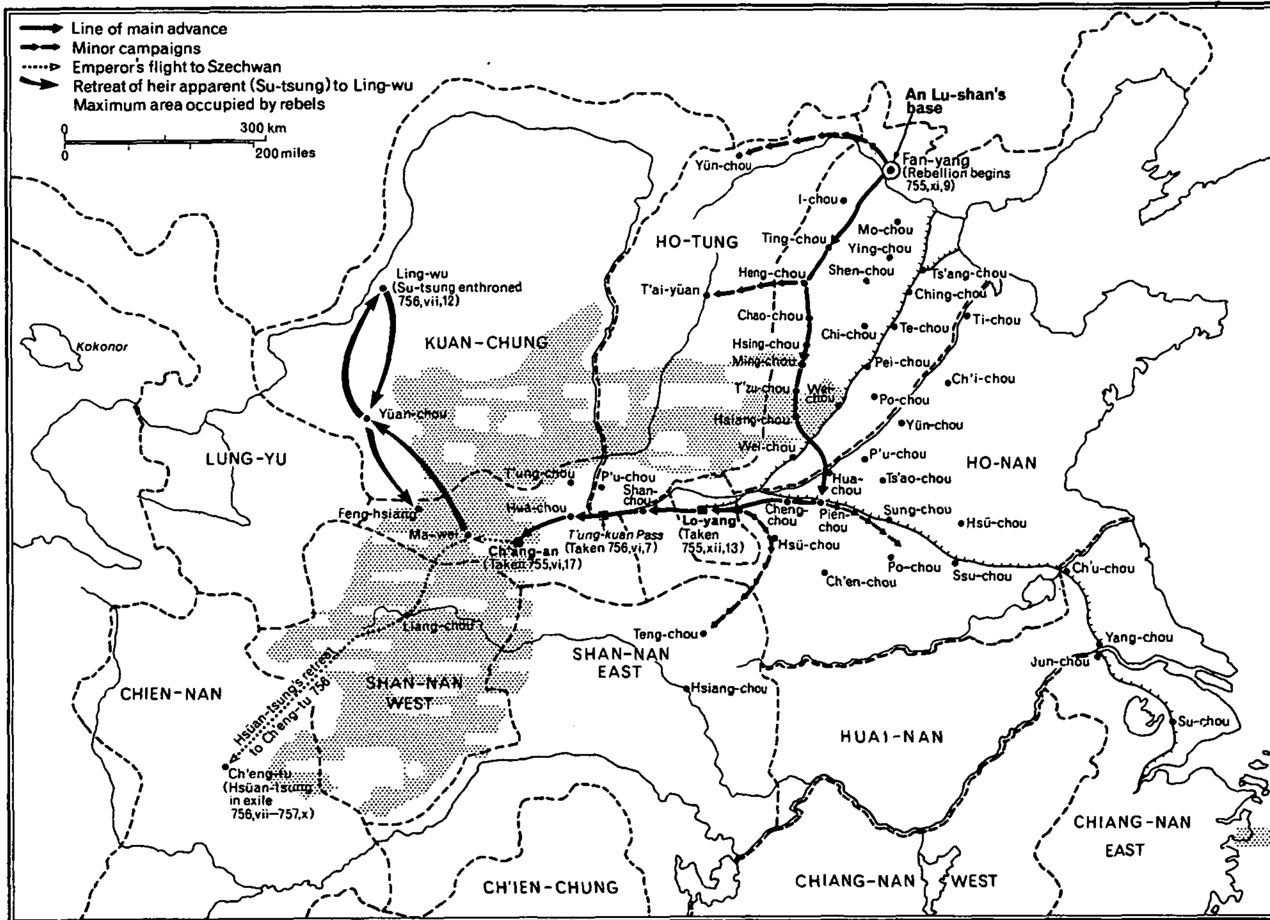

Map 12. An Lu-shan's rebellion

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now Yang Kuo-chung advised the emperor that the rebellion would be over within a few days, and that only An Lu-shan himself wished to rebel while his troops followed him unwillingly. However, this blind under-estimate of the threat to the dynasty was immediately proved completely false, and after an initial reaction of stunned disbelief Hsüan-tsung dispatched loyal generals to Lo-yang and to southern Ho-tung to conscript and train troops as best they could, while General Feng Ch'ang-ch'ing, who had just returned from An-hsi in the Tarim basin, was sent to Lo-yang to prepare its defences against the rebels. Feng hastily assembled a force of sixty thousand men, and cut the main bridge over the Huang-ho at Ho-yang to halt the rebel advance. An Lu-shan, however, crossed the river further downstream and advanced upon Pien-chou (modern K'ai-feng), which fell to him early in the twelfth month. Just at this time news reached An Lu-shan that Hsüan-tsung had executed his son, and forced his wife to commit suicide. In his rage he massacred the entire garrison of Pien-chou. The possession of the city, one of the main ports on the canal system, cut off the court's main supply route from the south, and An Lu-shan, leaving one of his subordinate generals to garrison Pien-chou, turned west to attack Lo-yang.

Feng Ch'ang-ch'ing's army of raw levies proved no match for the rebels, and was defeated in a series of encounters. Lo-yang's governor Ta-hsi Hsün surrendered the city to An Lu-shan on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of 755. Feng Ch'ang-ch'ing meanwhile had fallen back first to Shan-chou and then, after suffering yet another bloody rout, retreated to the virtually impregnable pass at T'ung-kuan, the last defensible position before the invaders reached Kuan-chung and the capital city Ch'ang-an. Here he joined forces with Kao Hsien-chih, the hero of so many campaigns in Inner Asia, who had already prepared the defences. The rebel army was at last halted, and their main force encamped at Shan-chou, some miles to the east.

An Lu-shan, having attained his first objective by taking the eastern capital city of Lo-yang, now began preparations to establish a permanent dynasty of his own. At the beginning of 756 he proclaimed himself emperor of the new dynasty of Greater Yen, announced a new reign title, and set about appointing ministers to form his central administration. Quite a number of prominent T'ang officials gave him their support. Meanwhile his forces moved out to occupy the surrounding areas of northern Ho-nan.

Here, for the first time, they met determined resistance. P'u-chou and Ts'ao-chou, east and north-east of Pien-chou, held out against his troops, while the stubborn defence of Yung-ch'iu county by a resourceful local

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commander prevented the rebels moving south to Ch'en-chou. To block any advance of the rebel forces south-westward into the central Yangtze region Lu Kuei, governor of Teng-chou, was put in command of a large force mostly made up of non-Chinese troops from Ch'ien-chung (modern Kweichow) and Ling-nan. Although An Lu-shan's armies drove him back and besieged him in Teng-chou by the fifth month of 756, he was relieved by a force sent from the capital across the Lan-t'ien Pass, after which the rebel troops were forced to withdraw northward.

It was not only in the south that the rebels suffered set-backs. In the far north of Ho-tung a subsidiary rebel army had attempted to strike westward to the northern bend of the Huang-ho. They suffered repeated reverses at the hands of Kuo Tzu-i, whose loyalist troops recovered Tai-chou and gained control of the vital strategic pass of Tung Hsing-kuan.

An Lu-shan's major problem, however, was in Ho-pei. During the first dash of the rebel troops to Lo-yang they had neither systematically subdued nor occupied the province, but had merely left a small garrison force to control the Ching-hsing Pass across the T'ai-hang mountains and thus prevent the movement of loyal forces into Ho-pei from Ho-tung. Almost immediately a widespread, though loosely organized, loyalist resistance movement grew up in Ho-pei, led by Yen Kao-ch'ing the prefect of Heng-chou and his cousin Yen Chen-ch'ing, prefect of Te-chou. This rising threatened to cut off the rebel armies in Lo-yang from their northern base in Yu-chou. By the first month of 756 An Lu-shan, who had been planning to lead a grand final assault on T'ung-kuan in person, found that he had lost control of all of Ho-pei except for the rebel base around Yu-chou in the far north, and the south-western corner of the province immediately around Lo-yang. The seventeen prefectures of central and eastern Ho-pei, with a population of some twelve million, hastily raised some 200,000 troops and declared their loyalty to the T'ang.

Yen Kao-ch'ing sent agents to attempt to win over to the loyalist cause the rebel commanders in the Yu-chou base area. But An Lu-shan learned of the plot, and executed and replaced his commanders. The rebels now mounted campaigns against Yen Kao-ch'ing's stronghold of Heng-chou simultaneously from the north and south. After fierce fighting, Heng-chou fell, Yen Kao-ch'ing was captured, sent to Lo-yang and executed, and the rebel forces recovered control of the prefectures on the main north–south route along the foot of the T'ai-hang range, where they carried out a campaign of bloody reprisals. An Lu-shan's line of communications with his northern base was thus restored, but loyalist forces remained firmly in control of the densely peopled and wealthy prefectures of the central and eastern plain of Ho-pei.

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Meanwhile the court at Ch'ang-an, afforded a respite by the halt of the rebel advance at T'ung-kuan and the containment of the rebel armies to the south, had taken very drastic measures to assure the empire's security, which were to have the most serious long-term effects. Immediately news of the rebellion was confirmed it was decided to withdraw the entire military establishment of permanent armies from the north-west, leaving only such small garrisons as were needed to maintain order locally. This withdrawal had no immediate repercussions, as the Tibetans, whose king had just died, were then anxious to keep the peace. But in the long term the removal of the huge garrisons from Ho-hsi and Lung-yu left the north-west and the Chinese dominations in central Asia at the mercy of the Tibetans and of the Uighurs, and marked the end of Chinese control over the Tarim and Zungharia for almost a millenium.

Hsüan-tsung, however, had no alternative. The armies at the capital were small and ill-trained; to levy and train fresh troops in metropolitan China would take time, and the first encounters around Lo-yang showed that such hastily levied conscripts were no match for An Lu-shan's veterans. The north-western frontier armies were the only force of experienced fighting troops in the empire capable of matching the rebel armies. The large armies of Shuo-fang command, immediately to the north of Ch'ang-an which had been under the command of An Ssu-shun, had remained loyal and were placed under the command of Kuo Tzu-i, one of An Ssu-shun's subordinate commanders who, although a distinguished professional soldier, was the son of a high-ranking official of good family. Another of An Ssu-shun's commanders, Li Kuang-pi, a man of Khitan descent, was made acting military governor of Ho-tung.

The crucial command, however, was that of the forces assembled at T'ung-kuan for the defence of the capital. Hsüan-tsung had been infuriated by the failure of Feng Ch'ang-ch'ing and Kao Hsien-chih to defeat the rebels, and had them both summarily executed. Ko-shu Han, until lately governor of Lung-yu, and the only general whose prestige equalled An Lu-shan's, was appointed commander-in-chief of all the troops assembled in Kuan-chung and of the armies of T'ung-kuan, while all the provinces were ordered to levy troops in preparation for an all-out attack on Lo-yang. Ko-shu Han, however, was seriously ill and incapable of effectively exercising his command, while his deputy commanders were constantly at loggerheads.

At the end of 755 and early in 756 the court, in order to facilitate the organization of defence against further rebel advances, began to appoint military governors (*chieh-tu shih*) to the command of provinces within the empire, and defence commissioners (*fang-yü shih*) in areas threatened by the

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rebels. Such appointments became more and more numerous, and the establishment of these new provincial commands in the interior of China set in train the devolution of central authority to the provinces which was to prove one of the most important changes in the latter years of the dynasty.

By the second month of 756 the rebel forces still held the initiative in Ho-pei, and had begun to attempt the recapture of the loyalist prefectures in the central plain. Here the rebel general, Shih Ssu-ming, had begun a siege of Shen-chou, and attempts by loyal commanders of neighbouring prefectures to relieve the town were beaten off with heavy losses. To relieve Shen-chou, Li Kuang-pi now invaded Ho-pei through the Ching-hsing Pass, taking the key city of Heng-chou on the fourteenth day of the second month. This gave the loyalist armies a foothold in Ho-pei with control of the crucially important Ching-hsing Pass from Ho-tung, and again cut the main rebel supply route from the north. Shih Ssu-ming raised the siege of Shen-chou to confront this new and formidable enemy, but was defeated and forced to withdraw north to Ting-chou.

Meanwhile in the east of Ho-pei, Yen Chen-ch'ing had gained control of an extensive area including his own prefecture of Te-chou, Pei-chou (a vital supply base with the main stores and arsenals for the north-eastern armies), and Po-chou. His forces now moved south-west to take Wei-chou. Ho-lan Chin-ming, prefect of Ch'ing-chou in northern Shan-tung, who had also raised a loyalist army, now crossed the Huang-ho to join forces with Yen Chen-ch'ing, and took over effective command of operations. By the sixth month the loyalist provincial troops had also taken Chi-chou and controlled the rich central area of the Ho-pei plain.

Shih Ssu-ming had counter-attacked strongly against Li Kuang-pi's forces in Heng-chou, and surrounded them closely. Li asked for Kuo Tzu-i's assistance, and early in the fourth month Kuo led his troops through the Ching-hsing Pass and joined forces with Li Kuang-pi, forming an army of more than a hundred thousand. On the tenth day the loyal armies joined battle with the rebel forces, inflicted a crushing defeat upon them, and forced Shih Ssu-ming to flee north to Ting-chou, and Ts'ai Hsi-te, another rebel general, to retreat southward to Hsing-chou. The loyal armies occupied Chao-chou.

Early in the fifth month An Lu-shan ordered reinforcements both from the Lo-yang area and from the northern base at Yu-chou to join Shih Ssu-ming in an attempt to dislodge Li Kuang-pi and Kuo Tzu-i from Ho-pei. On the twenty-ninth day of the fifth month the two armies met in a major set-piece battle at Chia-shan. The rebels were routed with huge casualties, Shih Ssu-ming barely escaped with his life and fled to Ting-chou where Li Kuang-pi followed and besieged him.

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Following this, many of the prefectures of Ho-pei again rose against their rebel prefects and went over to the loyalist side. An Lu-shan was now in a most difficult position. Unable to advance into Kuan-chung, and equally unable to break out to the south, he had lost a great part of his forces, and was threatened once again by a loyalist occupation of Ho-pei cutting him off from the north. He seriously contemplated abandoning Lo-yang altogether and retreating to his old base area at Yu-chou.

The court was now in a strong position and there was an excellent chance that the rebellion could be suppressed in a matter of months. Court intrigues, however, decided otherwise. Yang Kuo-chung, whose position was increasingly vulnerable, since opposition to him and his faction was An Lu-shan's overt justification for his rebellion and also the reason for many defections to the rebels, had become increasingly apprehensive of Ko-shu Han's overwhelming military power as commander of the main loyal armies at T'ung-kuan. Yang's enemies had already attempted to persuade Ko-shu Han either to demand Yang Kuo-chung's execution, or simply to have him assassinated. Ko-shu Han had refused to countenance any such move, but Yang Kuo-chung arranged to mobilize two armies in the rear of the main forces, ostensibly as a second line of defence in case T'ung-kuan were to fall, but in reality to protect himself against any coup launched by Ko-shu Han. Ko-shu Han, however, demanded that these forces too should be placed under his overall command, and early in the sixth month summoned their general to his headquarters and beheaded him. Yang Kuo-chung was now in a more vulnerable position than ever.

Reports now began to reach the court that the rebel forces facing the royal armies at T'ung-kuan had been depleted, and were weakened and exhausted. The emperor ordered Ko-shu Han to make a frontal assault to take Shan-chou and advance to recapture Lo-yang. Ko-shu Han, quite rightly, refused, saying that his army was in an impregnable defensive position, and the rebels were being defeated and forced back on every other front. He was backed up by the commanders in the field in Ho-pei, Li Kuang-pi and Kuo Tzu-i, who were on the point of striking north against the rebel base at Yu-chou. Yang Kuo-chung, however, urged the emperor to force Ko-shu Han to take the offensive, and eunuch envoys were sent with Hsüan-tsung's personal orders to his headquarters. With no alternative but to comply, Ko-shu Han reluctantly ordered his armies to advance from their defensive positions. On the seventh day of the sixth month they were ambushed by rebel forces in a narrow defile between the banks of the Huang-ho and the mountains, and utterly destroyed. By the ninth day, the rebel general Ts'ui Ch'ien-yu had taken T'ung-kuan and

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nothing stood between his army and Ch'ang-an. Ko-shu Han, who had escaped from the battle with a handful of men and attempted to organize the remnants of his army for a last-ditch defence, was forced by his own staff to surrender to An Lu-shan.

On the ninth day, members of Ko-shu Han's staff arrived in Ch'ang-an, and reported the desperate situation to Hsüan-tsung. The ministers were consulted, and Yang Kuo-chung, who had ordered the deputy governor in his own home province of Chien-nan (Szechwan) to prepare a refuge there should events go badly for the court, suggested that the emperor should retire to Szechwan, which was virtually impregnable against any rebel attack. The emperor had little alternative but to agree. By the eleventh and twelfth days most of the officials and many of the common people had fled from Ch'ang-an into the mountains and the surrounding countryside. When a handful of officials appeared at the palace for the dawn audience on the thirteenth day, they discovered that Hsüan-tsung had fled secretly during the night with a carefully chosen cavalry escort attended only by Yang Kuo-chung, a handful of high-ranking ministers, Yang Kuei-fei and her relatives, some members of the imperial family and some of the emperor's personal eunuchs. Most of the high-ranking officials and many of the imperial clan had been left behind.

The emperor's flight from Ch'ang-an was carried out in conditions of great hardship, and the escorting troops were mutinous and particularly resentful of Yang Kuo-chung, the cause of the débâcle at T'ung-kuan. On the fourteenth day the royal party reached Ma-wei post station where they encountered a group of Tibetan envoys, who blocked Yang Kuo-chung's way and began complaining to him that they were short of food. Some of the soldiers in the escort accused Yang of plotting treason with foreigners, and attacked and killed him and other members of his family. After order had temporarily been restored, the commander of the escort demanded that Hsüan-tsung should also execute Yang Kuei-fei. The emperor, powerless and at the mercy of his mutinous troops, had no choice, and reluctantly ordered his faithful chief eunuch Kao Li-shih to strangle her, after which his escorting army was pacified.

With Yang Kuo-chung and his family dead, a dispute arose over whether it was sensible for the emperor to proceed to Szechwan, which was dominated by Yang Kuo-chung's former supporters. Some suggested that Hsüan-tsung should withdraw either to the north-west or to T'ai-yüan to rally support, others that they should return to Ch'ang-an, which was not taken by the rebels until the seventeenth day, and prepare for a siege. Hsüan-tsung, however, had made up his mind to seek refuge in Szechwan and decided to go on to Ch'eng-tu, while the heir apparent

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was persuaded to remain behind in Kuan-chung to rally and organize resistance in the north. With a small escort of two thousand troops, he travelled by forced marches, first to Yüan-chou, in western Kuan-chung, and then to Ling-wu (Ling-chou; modern Yin-ch'uan in Ning-hsia) the headquarters of the Shuo-fang command, where he arrived on the ninth day of the seventh month. Three days later he was persuaded by his officers to usurp the throne. He is known in the histories by his posthumous temple name, Su-tsung.

Immediately he began to organize the loyal forces in Kuan-chung province, most of which, apart from the area of the Wei valley immediately around Ch'ang-an, remained in loyal hands, and began to summon aid from the Uighurs, the Tibetans and from the various client kingdoms in the Tarim and as far afield as Farghāna.

Hsüan-tsung, who was given the title retired emperor (*shang-huang*) was meanwhile still on the road to Szechwan, unaware of these events. He arrived in Ch'eng-tu, his entourage reduced to 1,300 persons, on the twenty-eighth day of the seventh month, and went through the formalities of establishing a court in exile. It was not until the twelfth day of the eighth month that the envoys from Su-tsung, announcing his usurpation of the throne, reached Ch'eng-tu. The emperor, old and exhausted and racked with remorse for the death of Yang Kuei-fei, gave his assent without demur, and on the eighteenth day dispatched his own chief ministers with the imperial regalia to Su-tsung's headquarters. The T'ang's longest and most brilliant reign was at an end.

Hsüan-tsung remained in Ch'eng-tu until the tenth month of 757, when, after Kuo Tzu-i had recovered the two capitals from the rebels, Su-tsung summoned him back to Ch'ang-an, where he was received with honour and allowed to reside at first in his favourite Hsing-ch'ing palace. Later in the seventh month of 760, he was moved to quarters in the imperial palace, probably because he still retained the loyalty of many of the court and posed a potential political threat to his successor, as a possible focus of factional intrigue. He died in the fourth month of 761 at the age of seventy-seven.

The account given in this chapter depends very heavily upon the version of events contained in the two Dynastic Histories, and in the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, composed in the eleventh-century by Ssu-ma Kuang. It is important to draw the reader's attention to some of the ways in which the historiography of the period materially affects our understanding of events. The *Chiu T'ang shu* (completed in 945) provided almost all the basic information on the period; it was supplemented in *Hsin T'ang shu*

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(completed in 1060) by the use of some anecdotal material, and rearranged and subjected to close critical scrutiny in the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* (completed in 1085), the compilers of which had at their disposal some sources which have since been lost.

However, for the period before 756 the compilers of the *Chiu T'ang shu* merely reproduced integrally the last of the National Histories (*Kuo-shih*) of the T'ang completed and presented to the throne by Liu Fang in 759. They had little other resource, since the official archives of the Historiographers' Office for the earlier reigns of the T'ang, including the Court Diaries, and Veritable Records (*Shih-lu*), together with earlier National Histories, had been destroyed by fire during An Lu-shan's occupation of Ch'ang-an in 756.

The only major account of the early part of the dynasty to survive this destruction was a draft National History (*Kuo-shih*) prepared by Wei Shu, one of the official historiographers. It is not certain precisely what period this history covered, but it almost certainly ceased with the end of the K'ai-yüan period in 741, if not before. The early part of Hsüan-tsung's reign had been recorded while he was still on the throne in two separate Veritable Records, a *Chin-shang Shih-lu* of twenty chapters compiled under the direction of Chang Yüeh and T'ang Ying in the 720s, and a *K'ai-yüan Shih-lu* in forty-seven chapters, compiled some time after 742. The latter is specifically stated to have been destroyed in the fire of 756,[246] but since Wei Shu had been an employee of the Historiographers' Office since the 730s, he had presumably used these materials in compiling his draft National History.

When Liu Fang was ordered to write a National History in 758 he thus probably had an account of the early part of the reign based on earlier Veritable Records which, since they were written while Hsüan-tsung was still on the throne, must have presented him in a favourable light. For the completion of the record down to 756 Liu Fang was in great difficulties. Much material had been irretrievably lost – we know that when in the 760s an attempt was made to compile a new Veritable Record of Hsüan-tsung's reign, much of the documentation was missing. Moreover, Liu Fang was writing under singularly difficult political conditions. He was working at the command of the new emperor Su-tsung, who had deposed Hsüan-tsung by a flagrant act of usurpation, and needed to present the last years of his father's reign as a period of misgovernment in order to provide some moral justification for his act. Meanwhile, however, Hsüan-tsung himself was still alive, and many of the leading figures of his latter years were still active and in positions of power. The rebellion begun by An Lu-shan was still unresolved; Liu Fang himself was in a very insecure

[246] *THY* 63, p. 1095 (memorial of Yü Hsiu-lieh).

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position since he had been hastily reprieved from a sentence of exile for treasonable collaboration with the rebels in 756, specifically so that he could work on the history.

We know that Liu Fang's history was harshly criticized when it was submitted to the throne. The draft was subjected to minor editing after 760 by Yü Hsiu-lieh who added Basic Annals for Su-tsung's reign, and by Ling-hu Huan. Liu Fang himself was dissatisfied and went over the ground again in a privately compiled history *T'ang-li*, now lost, in which he added further detail.

However, it was basically Liu Fang's National History of 760 which the compilers of *Chiu T'ang shu* incorporated, to a large extent verbatim, in the early sections of their history. The resulting account of Hsüan-tsung's reign is thus a patchy one. It is well documented and generally favourable until about 741, but comparatively slender and extremely critical in tone for the last years of the reign. The imbalance is apparent not only in the Basic Annals, but also in the biographies. Many of the highest-ranking ministers of the 740s and 750s have very short and uninformative biographies. Others have no biography at all. To compound this lack of materials in the Dynastic Histories on the later years of Hsüan-tsung, none of the major figures active at court has left extensive collections of personal writings comparable with those of Chang Yüeh and Chang Chiu-ling, which enable us to fill out in great detail the history of the 720s and 730s.

For any study of Hsüan-tsung's reign, we are thus reduced to dependence upon inadequate material, the circumstances of whose compilation render its reliability suspect. In this chapter, as all my predecessors have done, I have reproduced the overall picture given by Liu Fang, of a reign falling into three parts, a period of consolidation, a period of active government increasingly marred by court tensions, and a last period of Hsüan-tsung's withdrawal from an active political role, and the dominance of his court by Li Lin-fu and Yang Kuo-chung. The reader should remember, however, that Liu Fang's account was commissioned for compelling political motives and written under very special and difficult circumstances. We shall never get at the truth behind many of the events of the 740s and 750s – the materials simply do not exist. But we should at least remain aware of the problems of interpretation implicit in the sources at our disposal.[247]

[247] On the sources for the reign of Hsüan-tsung detail is given in Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The Tzyhjyh Tongjiann Kaoyih and the sources for the period 730–763', *BSOAS*, 13.2 (1950) 448–73, and Twitchett, 'Liu Fang, a forgotten T'ang historian'. Pulleyblank believes that Wei Shu's National History draft ended with the beginning of Hsüan-tsung's reign, although he adduces some evidence that he worked on the later period. As an official historian he would almost certainly have been involved in the compilation of the *K'ai-yüan shih-lu*.

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CHAPTER 8

COURT AND PROVINCE IN MID- AND LATE T'ANG

The powerful decentralized provincial order which emerged in China after the middle of the eighth century was a direct result of the An Lu-shan rebellion of 755–63. After the founding itself, the rebellion is without doubt the most significant event in the history of the dynasty. It transformed a centralized, rich, stable and far-flung empire into a struggling, insecure and divided one. It has long been treated by historians as a turning-point in T'ang history; in recent decades it has even been treated as a major turning point in Chinese history as a whole. Yet, there is a striking disparity between the event and its consequences. Although such a major internal upheaval was bound to have grave and far-reaching effects, could what was essentially a military event have brought about the profound changes which differentiate the second half of the dynasty from the first so completely?

In reality, the changed situation of China after An Lu-shan's rising resulted not merely from the rebellion alone, but had its roots in developments long under way. As preceding chapters in this volume have shown, T'ang political institutions had undergone significant modifications since the beginning of the dynasty. These changes already anticipated the emergence of forms of government quite different in character from those of early T'ang. But it is imperative to distinguish these long-term changes from the specific origins of the rebellion itself. There was nothing inevitable about this event, even though when it came, it caused a tremendous disruption and acted as a powerful catalyst.

Of the changes which distinguish mid- from early T'ang, we need here review only those intimately related to the crisis which emerged in 755 and to the resulting state of political fragmentation. The most important were the steps undertaken in the first quarter of the eighth century to consolidate China's external position. Following the major set-backs suffered in the final decades of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries, a new institutional framework was developed for the maintenance of an expanded empire which now stretched from southern Manchuria to the Pamirs and from Inner Mongolia to Vietnam. These

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changes put the empire on quite a different footing from that which T'ai-tsung had bequeathed over half-a-century earlier, an empire created by major (and generally successful) campaigns and preserved by the dynasty's unchallenged prestige, by diplomacy and by no more than a thin defensive perimeter. They came about in response to increased foreign military pressure, principally from the renascent Eastern Turks, the Khitan and the Tibetans. In the face of recurrent conflicts with these powerful and well-organized neighbours, the T'ang regime was gradually forced to erect a permanent, large-scale defence system. The fact that this system in time acquired significant offensive capabilities has tended to obscure its defensive beginnings.

The extent to which this growth was justified by genuine national interests, as distinguished from the personal ambitions of the emperor or his military commanders, has been questioned.[1] But critics have frequently overlooked the basic strategic considerations which impelled the extension of Chinese military power well beyond the limits of possible Chinese settlement. It was only in this way that highly mobile nomadic neighbours could be prevented from making rapid, destructive penetrations into the interior. Maintenance of communications for foreign trade may have provided an additional motive, even though the resulting trade could hardly have offset the enormous expense of such policies. In any event it is significant that this policy of maintaining a large military establishment on the frontiers was not seriously questioned at the time.[2] To contemporaries it appeared to be a continued necessity, justified by its overall success, and by the ability of the T'ang state to pay for it without undue strain on its resources.

The adoption of this policy meant that the earlier reliance on a system of small garrisons manned by troops of mixed provenance (militiamen, professional soldiers and convicts) was no longer possible. The militia (*fu-ping*) system, the effectiveness of which was already limited by the turn of the seventh century, could never conceivably have sustained large-scale permanent garrisons on the frontier. A new kind of army had to be created to provide the larger and more permanent forces which were then required. The early decades of the eighth century witnessed a striking increase in the size of the standing armies on the border, which

[1] For representative late T'ang and Sung views see *TT* 148, 1a – trans. and discussed in Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955); *TCTC* 216, pp. 6888–9; and Ku Tsu-yü, *T'ang-chien* (Japan, 1839) 9, p. 14a, and, more recent western ones, O. Franke, *Geschichte des chinesisches Reiches* (Berlin, 1961) 3, pp. 437–51 *passim*, and Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 70–2.

[2] A single exception: Chang Yüeh's proposal for troop reduction (from an obviously exaggerated total) in 722. *TCTC* 212, p. 6753; R. des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires et traité de l'armée* (Leiden, 1946), p. 774, n. 1.

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eventually attained a level at least five times greater than a century earlier. The figure of nearly half-a-million troops given for the 740s[3] was certainly not overwhelming in relation to the enormous areas of operation, but it did represent the largest number of troops ever regularly deployed on the frontiers of China up to that time. A major change in the composition of the armies was inevitable. Such massive armies could only be made up of troops recruited on long-term enlistments. This meant the full professionalization of the army, a process which was already far advanced by the time the government proclaimed long-term service as standard practice in 737.

Fundamental changes in the system of frontier administration accompanied those in the military. It had been the practice to rely on the appointment of temporary commanders for major campaigns and actions on the frontiers. The regular frontier administration was in the hands of offices with very carefully circumscribed powers. Now, the new standing armies required a new command structure which provided for the relatively independent operation of these armies over broad, designated frontier zones. Each such zone, or command (*fan-* or *fang-chen*), was under the control of a military governor (*chieh-tu shih*) who succeeded such officials as the temporarily appointed expeditionary commander-in-chief (*hsing-chün ta-tsung-kuan*) the protector-general (*tu-hu*), and the governor-general (*tu-tu*), the latter of whose titles he usually accumulated.[4] In addition to his military responsibilities the new military governor also held broad civil power over local administration, finance and supply. This concentration of authority in a single man was a striking departure from previous practice. However, anything less would not have permitted adequate on-the-spot direction and logistic support for the frontier armies which were frequently obliged to operate at great distances from the Chinese heartland. In these circumstances, the central government clearly had to exercise the greatest care in the selection of officials to fill these powerful posts and also to maintain regular rotation among them, in order to prevent the development of excessively strong personal ties within a particular command.

Subsequent changes in the type of official employed in these posts should have made the government even more sensitive to these issues. At the outset, when no hard and fast division existed between civil and military

[3] *CTS* 38, pp. 1385–9; *TCTC* 215, pp. 6847–51; also des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, p. 786, n. 2; cf. low figures estimated for defence of north-west frontier in Former Han in M. Loewe, 'The campaigns of Han Wu-Ti', in F. A. Kierman and John K. Fairbank, eds. *Chinese ways in warfare* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 93.

[4] Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 68–9, 149–52, n. 32; Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu* (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 16–21.

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officials in the highest echelons, appointees to the military governorships were normally high civil officials who could expect to return to court office after the completion of their service in their frontier command. They were fully oriented towards the established structure of power at court, and a part of the regular bureaucratic hierarchy. From about 730, however, these court-oriented officials gradually gave way to a different sort of man, professional military officers, frequently with extensive personal experience of life on the border. Many had risen through the ranks of the army, enjoying a degree of advancement which had not previously been possible. Many too were non-Chinese, which is hardly surprising in view of the large number of tribesmen always employed by the T'ang in their frontier armies. This change in personnel occurred for practical reasons, from the desire to obtain the best possible results by employing professional military specialists.[5]

However, the very success of the new institutions bred indifference, and the dangers inherent in the growth of such powers in the hands of frontier commanders were forgotten.

The distribution of military strength which took shape under the military governorships had two noteworthy results. First, the success of the system in providing external defence coupled with the decline of the militia institution led to the disappearance from the interior of any effective military forces. An army continued to be maintained at the capital, but its quality deteriorated to the point where it became an object of ridicule. Second, the overwhelming bulk of Chinese military power was now distributed among five commands stretched out along the long, easily penetrable northern frontier. By order of size, these five commands were: Fan-yang (northern Ho-pei), Lung-yu (southern Kansu), Ho-hsi (northern Kansu-Ninghsia), Shuo-fang (eastern Kansu-Shensi), and Ho-tung (northern Shansi) (see map 10). They were basically frontier commands but in two cases, Fan-yang and to a lesser degree Ho-tung, were largely supplied on a local basis and required relatively less direct support from the central government than the other northern commands. This was also true of one other command, Chien-nan (Szechwan), but prior to the rebellion it possessed forces of comparatively modest size.[6]

As new conditions on the periphery brought about changes in the system of frontier administration, so did internal developments – population growth, increased incidence of migration and vagrancy, tax registers falling out-of-date, a growing complexity of administrative procedures,

[5] However, Pulleyblank, *Background*, p. 95, and most other writers on the subject adopt the traditional view that chief minister Li Lin-fu brought about this change to protect his own position at court.

[6] See references in n. 3 of this ch.

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occasional lawlessness (plus the perennial tendency of bureaucrats to become lax) – induce modifications in the administration of the interior. In part the solution was, here as on the frontier, to create a higher-level administrative division, one which carried jurisdiction over an area comprising many prefectures. Because of the reluctance of the court to delegate any effective authority on a regular basis to any such large local administrative unit, the evolution of this type of office was uneven and from the outset its functions were intended as supervisory rather than executive. Finally in 733 civil inspecting commissioners (*ts'ai-fang ch'u-chih shih*) were appointed in each of the fifteen new provinces (*tao*) into which the empire was divided.[7] This provided no more than the skeleton of a provincial system, but in the years down to the rebellion the provincial inspectors tended to exercise more and more active authority over the prefectures and counties under their jurisdiction.

The institutional changes made by the government during the first half of the eighth century seem to have worked relatively well. They permitted the empire to attain its apogee in extent and power, to achieve a high degree of internal stability and to maintain an acceptable degree of centralization. There is good reason why the reign of Hsüan-tsung has been remembered as the most resplendent period of the T'ang. But the statesmen of the time failed to recognize the gradual relaxation of the strong centralized control of local affairs on which the whole structure of local government, land allocation, taxation, labour mobilization and conscription depended, and were even more culpable in that most of them remained unaware of the dangers inherent in the great military establishment which they had created on the frontiers.

THE NORTH-EASTERN FRONTIER

The growth of a powerful frontier command on the north-eastern border was fully consonant with overall Chinese foreign and military policy. Persistent pressure from the Khitan and the Hsi ever since their great invasions of Ho-pei at the end of the seventh century required the maintenance of substantial forces here. By about 742, with 130,000 men between them, Fan-yang and its subordinate command P'ing-lu formed a strong defensive bulwark and possessed considerable striking power as well. Yet, this did not betoken any significant territorial expansion. Though Chinese control was eventually re-asserted in the north-east as far as the Liao River, this fell far short of the aims of Sui Yang-ti, T'ai-

[7] R. des Rotours, 'Les grands fonctionnaires des provinces en Chine sous la dynastie des T'ang', *TP*, 25 (1927) 279–86; Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu*, pp. 13–16.

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tsung and Kao-tsung in the seventh century.[8] Leadership at Fan-yang, as in other frontier commands, fell increasingly into the hands of professional soldiers. Where previously such men could rarely hope for promotion beyond middle and lower echelons, the ablest of them now found it possible to rise to the highest ranks.

It is in this context that we must see the career of An Lu-shan.[9] Of mixed Soghdian-Turkish blood and in Chinese service since his youth, he unquestionably owed his rise to merit. By his early forties he had attained the highest and most powerful position open to a career officer, becoming military governor of P'ing-lu in 742 and the neighbouring command of Fan-yang as well in 744. There was good reason to give him this joint appointment, since the two commands demanded the closest coordination. However it was quite irregular to permit him to remain in these posts for a dozen years and more (three years was the normal tenure of office for a *chieh-tu shih*) and in the meantime to confer on him further concurrent posts – the civil inspectorate of Ho-pei in 750 and the military governorship of Ho-tung in 751, which left him the unchallenged governor of all north-eastern China. Clearly, by allowing one man to accumulate such power the court had become imprudent in the basic task of delegating authority, thereby giving An Lu-shan a remarkable opportunity for self-aggrandizement – and for a recalcitrant course should he choose to pursue one.

Part of the explanation for this favoured treatment of An lies in his own character and past career. Although the overwhelmingly hostile sources, written largely while the rebellion was still in progress, portray him as a gross buffoon, nevertheless he was a successful military commander who had kept the north-eastern border secure throughout his lengthy period of command. In addition he assiduously cultivated relations at court, so successfully in fact that he remained safe in the favour of the all-powerful chief minister Li Lin-fu down to his death in 752 and in that of Hsüan-tsung virtually to the bitter end. In view of all the powers and honours heaped upon him, it is likely that from the mid-740s he was considered indispensable. None of this, seen against developments generally at court, was fortuitous: An's rise and the consolidation of his position coincided with Hsüan-tsung's withdrawal from active leadership and with the growing involvement of the powerful military governors in court politics.

[8] See Hino Kaisaburō's comprehensive (but in parts highly speculative) treatment of the history of this frontier in his articles in *Shien*, 87 (1962) 1–60, and 89 (1962) 1–26.

[9] On An Lu-shan's career see esp. Pulleyblank, *Background* (which covers up to 752); also R. des Rotours, *Histoire de Ngan Lou-chan* (Paris, 1962); and Howard S. Levy, *Biography of An Lu-shan* (Berkeley, 1960).

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How much positive direction Hsüan-tsung actually provided in his final two decades on the throne is difficult to say. He came to rely increasingly on strong figures, both at court where Li Lin-fu served as chief minister and virtual dictator for the exceptionally long period 734–52, to be succeeded by the almost equally dictatorial Yang Kuo-chung, and also on the frontier where in the north-east An Lu-shan and in the north-west Ko-shu Han held multiple commands for very long periods. Moreover, reduced imperial involvement in the day-to-day management of affairs is clear from the political wrangling and manoeuvring at court during the 740s and 750s.

Under the circumstances the governorships, wielding more direct territorial and military power than any other posts in the empire, could hardly help becoming involved in political manipulation. But this involved the risk of introducing the frontier generals into politics, or at least those of them who were ambitious and astute enough to operate in a political sphere. The demise of Li Lin-fu was the turning-point, for only he had possessed the unquestioned authority and prestige necessary to maintain an equilibrium among the other powerful figures in the empire. After his death, the final years leading up to the rebellion saw a bitter struggle for survival between An Lu-shan and Yang Kuo-chung, a struggle which only strong action by the emperor could have resolved but which Hsüan-tsung's negative attitude effectively encouraged. In this context, attempts to remove An were no longer simply to be seen as the mere rotation or retirement of an officer who had long since completed his term of office. Yang himself may well have stood for a general policy of increased central control over the frontier commanders; but in An's eyes success in replacing him would merely have placed even greater power in Yang's own hands.

However, court politics, despite the intense interest shown by historians, do not provide a complete or satisfying explanation of the origins of the rebellion. Many observers, past and recent, have focused attention on the non-Chinese origins of An and many of his followers, whom they have held to be by nature (or training) recalcitrant and greedy. Only superficially influenced by Chinese culture and thus unencumbered by the traditional restraints, they were moved solely by lust for conquest and loot. Hence, the An Lu-shan rebellion has been regarded as an 'external invasion carried out from within'.[10] Though not entirely without foundation, this view does not offer a very convincing explanation either. It assumes a common character among the various peoples from whom

[10] This view underlies most of the traditional accounts; see Ts'en Chung-mien's *Sui T'ang shih* (Peking, 1957), pp. 257–60 and 264–5, n. 8, for recent revisions of it.

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recruits into Chinese military service were drawn, without regard for the important differences of language and culture which existed among them. Second, it assumes that all 'barbarians' had a common low level of exposure to Chinese civilization, whereas clearly the degree of acculturation varied widely according to length and quality of this contact. The long-time resident of a border town, possibly married to a Chinese or a second or third generation sinicized 'barbarian', would be unlikely to have the same reactions as a fresh recruit from the steppes. Third, it disregards the simple facts that An's entourage included numerous Chinese while, on the other hand, Uighur and other 'barbarians' later proved to be among the dynasty's stoutest defenders.

In recent years two major attempts have been made to explain the rebellion by reference to specific regional features. The late Ch'en Yin-k'o developed a sophisticated variation on the barbarian theme: an influx of non-Chinese into Ho-pei from early in the eighth century had initiated a process which, in the course of time, 'barbarized' society in the north-east. The process had already gone so far by the 740s that the T'ang court, fully aware of the situation, installed a 'barbarian', An Lu-shan, as the only means whereby it could retain its hold over Ho-pei and the north-east. The barbarian factor as seen by Ch'en Yin-k'o, therefore, involves not merely An Lu-shan and the men under his command but the population of an entire region.[11] Apart from the highly subjective nature of such a cultural definition, with its vague and emotive concept of 'barbarization', Ch'en's intriguing hypothesis is not backed by adequate evidence. His pre-rebellion evidence refers not to the Ho-pei region as a whole but specifically to the frontier, while his use of post-rebellion material, which forms the bulk of his evidence, mistakenly attributes a given set of effects to presumed cultural changes rather than to the *de facto* political autonomy which the region enjoyed.

The other major explanation following quite different lines has been made by Ku Chi-kuang, and followed, with modifications, by E. G. Pulleyblank. Both explain the rebellion in the context of the long-standing alienation of Ho-pei (in the north-east) from the T'ang court (in the north-west), an alienation due essentially to a discriminatory policy on the part of the court towards the region. According to this theory An Lu-shan emerges as representative of regional sentiment and interests.[12] However, evidence of an abiding split between the court and Ho-pei is thin and comes almost entirely from the seventh century. Moreover, the broad

[11] See his *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao* (Chungking, 1944; reissued Peking, 1956), pp. 25-48.

[12] Ku Chi-kuang, 'An-Shih luan-ch'ien chih Ho-pei tao', *Yen-ching hsüeh-pao*, 19 (1936) 197-209; Pulleyblank, *Background*, pp. 75-81.

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base of regional support for the rebellion which this view would presuppose is never apparent – before, during or after the event.

My own view is that the rebellion sprang from a relatively narrow set of circumstances, basically political in character, which had no essential connection with mass infiltration by the enemies of Chinese culture or long-standing regional separatism. Nor, for that matter, did the rebellion spring from any broad social crisis. At the outset the province of Ho-pei itself was not involved beyond providing a base. The explanation for the revolt is to be sought in the frontier situation, not in the province itself. While the establishment and subsequent growth of the frontier commands had obviously made possible a military challenge to the ruling house, the crucial step was the gradual domination of the command structure by men who could hardly be considered members of the T'ang ruling class. Soldiers by profession, provincial in outlook, and frequently of humble social origins, these men formed a group quite distinct from the regular bureaucracy.[13] This social and cultural gap between the court and its frontier commanders did not necessarily nurture antagonism, nor did it make rebellion inevitable. But it did permit a powerful commander, acting purely out of his own personal interest, to collect support from his fellow officers and declare war on a court with whom they felt little in common. In this sense the rebellion is best explained by the dynamics of the T'ang political-military structure as it had evolved by the end of Hsüan-tsung's reign.

It is most unlikely that An Lu-shan, as our sources claim, had long nourished plans to revolt; in fact, his potentially hostile moves seem to have begun only towards the end when after the death of Li Lin-fu he first perceived the threat to his position posed by Yang Kuo-chung. It is, however, clear that during his lengthy period of command he had taken the opportunity to expand and consolidate his personal power and the military strength of his command. He increased the size of his army, by both authorized and unauthorized methods, and established an elite corps of eight thousand 'sons', a precursor of the personal armies of the Five Dynasties period, who owed him absolute personal loyalty. He is also said to have drawn numbers of fresh recruits from across the border, men hardly likely to feel any strong ties of loyalty to the throne, and pursued a generous policy of promotions and bonuses, all for the purpose of strengthening his ties with his men. By virtue of his favour with the emperor, he even obtained direct authority over one of the chief centres

[13] The biographies in both T'ang official histories of military figures who rose to prominence during and after the rebellion make this point clear. Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao*, pp. 35 ff., has collected much material on such men.

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of horse-breeding in the north-west, which assured him of an adequate supply of cavalry mounts. Finally, through his long service in the north-east and also in his concurrent capacity as civil inspector of Ho-pei, he could exercise influence over appointments in the north-east, both military and civil.[14] Thus, by the time of his break with the court he possessed a strong and wealthy territorial base and had built up a large, well-trained army whose core was made up of a devoted personal following, far more An Lu-shan's troops than the emperor's. It is not too much to say that by 755 in An Lu-shan's commands the principal features of the autonomous and semi-autonomous provinces of the post-rebellion period had already appeared, though they had yet to penetrate into the interior of the country.

An's final break with the court occurred only when he became convinced that he had lost the support of Hsüan-tsung and that his disgrace was certain and imminent; he was surely also convinced that he had sufficient force at his disposal to overturn the dynasty. It was crucial to his hopes that he struck quickly and decisively; hence his strategy was built around the immediate seizure of the political heartland. This would discredit, and perhaps destroy, the reigning house, leaving An as the most likely successor. An's confidence was understandable, for the troops under his command numbered some 200,000 at the outset, of whom 150,000 were mobilized for the main campaign. His overall strength was soon reduced by the defection of units comprising perhaps 20,000 men remaining in the P'ing-lu command and by the failure of some of the Ho-tung units to join his revolt. When, due to An's over-estimate both of his hold on Ho-pei and of his offensive strength, this strategy failed, a war of attrition ensued which thus raged from start to finish at the very centre of the country.

Loyalist forces were numerically far superior, but for two reasons this superiority was of little use. First of all, the distribution of almost all the empire's military forces along the frontier which we have noted above left few trained troops available in the interior to impede An's attack. Hence, An's army advanced right through Ho-pei and on past Lo-yang before encountering any firm resistance. Furthermore, the best government armies were engaged on the distant frontier and could be recalled only after a costly interval; such a step would obviously weaken or force the abandonment of frontier positions. Secondly, the strategy of the loyalist forces throughout the first stages of the rebellion required an indiscriminate use of manpower. Again and again they sought to overcome the rebels in broad frontal attacks which not only failed but even severely

[14] See biographical material cited in n. 9 of this ch.

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handicapped subsequent efforts by heavy loss of manpower. The seasoned troops from the three great north-western commands, Lung-yu, Ho-hsi and Shuo-fang, were drastically depleted as a consequence and only the Shuo-fang troops survived as integral units to pursue the fight.

The course of An Lu-shan's rebellion

The rebellion lasted over seven years, from December 755 to January 763. In purely military terms it can be divided into five distinct phases, each determined by decisive, or potentially decisive, battles. They are as follows.

(1) Dec. 755 – July 756: initial rebel success, ended by the halting of the rebel advance at T'ung-kuan and loyalist uprisings in the rebels' rear in Ho-pei.

(2) July 756 – Nov. 757: period of rebel ascendancy and the high-water mark of rebel military power and territorial control.

(3) Nov. 757 – April 759: government recovery of the capital and progress towards the suppression of the revolt.

(4) April 759 – Oct. 762: rebel resurgence followed by a lengthy stalemate.

(5) Oct. 762 – Jan. 763: final government offensive and victory.

This was a long and bitter conflict, whose outcome remained in doubt almost to the very end. Nevertheless, there were lengthy periods of relative military inactivity, as for example the period from autumn 757 to autumn 758 after the government's recovery of the two capitals; virtually the whole of 760; and the eighteen months preceding the final campaign. Strictly speaking, therefore, the rebellion should be thought of not as seven years of uninterrupted fighting, but as a lengthy period during which the empire remained on a full war footing.

Although there were various reasons for the lulls in battle – changes in command, the need for further recruitment, and even the weather – no doubt the overriding one was logistical. Each major shift of position necessitated a new disposition of supply lines at a time when the financial structure of the empire was completely disrupted. In this respect, the rebels were probably better off than the central authorities, despite the smaller territory under their control. Ho-pei was compact, defensible and close to the main areas of conflict. By contrast, the government found itself deprived of its principal sources of revenue: Ho-pei of course was lost, Ho-nan partly occupied by rebels and ravaged by war, while the Yangtze provinces were largely cut off because of rebel disruption of

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communications on the Pien Canal. Moreover, the enormous surpluses of grain and goods built up under Hsüan-tsung had been largely destroyed when the rebels occupied the two capitals. Under these circumstances, the government was forced to depend on the modest regular revenues from three sources: local production in Kuan-chung (but again only after 758), a trickle from the south brought up over the Chin-ling mountains via the Han River, and whatever could be carried overland from Szechwan. Otherwise they were led into short-term expedients, such as the sale of offices and ordination certificates, manipulation of the currency, and levies on trade and production. The central government had thus to fight the rebellion in severely straitened circumstances, a factor which helps account for the slow and spasmodic tempo of its operations.

Leadership also influenced the course of the conflict. In time, as we shall see, the government came to suffer grievously from lack of control both over its own troops in the field and over its representatives in positions of local authority, yet at least from the autumn of 756 it enjoyed continuity and stability of leadership at the centre. This was not true of the rebel regime. Four men served successively as leaders of the rebel forces, each of whom (excluding An Lu-shan himself) gained command by killing his predecessor. Each went on to assume imperial pretensions, as an attempt to make his power legitimate. An Lu-shan's failure to exploit his initial advantages, and the descriptions of him that have come down to us, suggest that he may have been well past his prime in 755. Assassinated early in 757, he was succeeded by his son An Ch'ing-hsü, who remained in control until the spring of 759. An Ch'ing-hsü is treated as a mediocrity in the sources, but owed much of his misfortune to the inadequate support which his regime in Lo-yang received from the rebel-held territories in Ho-pei, which were under the control of his eventual successor Shih Ssu-ming. Shih in his turn proved to be an outstanding general and might well have succeeded in destroying the T'ang dynasty, had he not been murdered through the complicity of his own son Shih Ch'ao-i, in the spring of 761. Although the latter held his own against larger loyalist forces until well into 762, he was ultimately destroyed at the end of that year by the final imperial assault. Whatever the personal qualities of these four individuals, the constant and violent changes in leadership obviously made it difficult for the rebel forces to maintain any strong sense of unity and cohesion.

An Lu-shan's initial campaign achieved considerable success. In the space of a month he had occupied Ho-pei, portions of Ho-tung, and northern Ho-nan, including the Eastern Capital Lo-yang and the middle course of the Huang-ho. At this point his drive was halted by a combina-

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tion of loyalist resistance in Ho-pei and a hasty concentration of imperial troops at the T'ung-kuan Pass, which blocked an advance on the Western Capital Ch'ang-an. In spite of these set-backs, An Lu-shan proceeded to proclaim himself emperor of a new dynasty, the 'Greater Yen', at Lo-yang on the first day of the lunar new year in 756. The court was by then making frantic efforts to mobilize resistance, recalling troops from the northern and north-western frontiers, recruiting new manpower, and conferring extraordinary military powers on local officials.

One of these emergency measures proved to have particularly long-term effects. In attempting to provide a command structure for its hastily assembled troops, the court turned for its model to the military governorships (*chieh-tu shih*) previously developed for use on the frontier. The first military governor in the interior was appointed in the province of Ho-nan, shortly after the rebellion broke out.[15] Since the *chieh-tu shih* structure had long been used for the active direction of operations, unlike the clumsy military organization under court control, the reasons for its extension to other regions are not hard to imagine. However, the military governorship had from the beginning been intended to function with a high degree of independence and essentially represented a decentralization of military authority. In important respects it was incompatible with the principle of close central control. Though at first its extension to the interior of the empire was simply a military expedient, the system was allowed to remain permanently in force and provided the overall administrative and military framework in the provinces for the next two centuries.

The loyalist risings in Ho-pei were a major blow to the rebels. Lasting nearly a year from the end of 755 to late 756, they induced An Lu-shan to halt his westward advance and might well have led to the early suppression of the revolt. An Lu-shan had advanced rapidly through Ho-pei, taking few systematic measures to bring the province under firm control. He was evidently confident that the garrisons which he had left at Yu-chou (modern Peking) and on the Manchurian border in the P'ing-lu command could dominate the region, and in addition he had had good reason to be confident of an early victory. However, within little more than a month of his passage through Ho-pei loyalist revolts flared up and spread rapidly from two main centres, Te-chou (Techow in modern Honan) in the east and Chen-chou (Chengting) in the west. In some places they were led by prefects whom An Lu-shan had not thought necessary to replace and in others by lower officials and local leaders who killed or expelled the local prefects appointed by An. Well over half the prefectures in Ho-pei rose against the rebels, and, although very little coordination was ever achieved

[15] *CTS* 9, p. 230; *TCTC* 217, p. 6937.

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among them – their forces were individually weak as well – they did maintain close communications, which helped to spread the movement. The loyalist objective was not merely to deny to the rebels control over their own districts, but, more important, to cut the communications between An Lu-shan's main force at Lo-yang and the rebel home base at Yu-chou. They of course realized that their chances for holding out for any length of time against the rebels without aid from central government forces were virtually non-existent.[16]

The fortunes of this loyalist movement fluctuated violently. Following the failure in early 756 of a first, feeble rebel effort at suppression, significant numbers of regulars were drawn from An's armies in Ho-nan and in the north, and quickly recaptured most locations. However, the arrival in Ho-pei of regular government forces led by Li Kuang-pi and Kuo Tzu-i via passes in the T'ai-hang range from Ho-tung (modern Shansi) stimulated a new wave of risings. Then, in early spring the rebel position took another turn for the worse upon the unexpected reversal of allegiance by the P'ing-lu units who went over to the government.[17] This reduced the rebel reserve in Ho-pei to the garrison at Yu-chou. Driving the rebels back, the loyalist forces had by mid-756 gained control over a zone stretching right across Ho-pei to the coast, and total recovery of the region seemed possible. However, most people at court failed to perceive the larger strategic possibilities, but instead were completely preoccupied with the situation at the approaches to the capital, where government forces and the main rebel army faced one another in a stalemate at the T'ung-kuan Pass. There the largest government forces were making no headway against the rebels. Political considerations dominated the views of these courtiers. They were apprehensive lest the government's apparent inability, for months on end, to crush the rebellion outright undermine the people's confidence. There was also a sharp conflict over strategy, between the officials of the court and the commanders of their armies at T'ung-kuan, in which one may detect the same kind of rivalry and differing interests between the civilian establishment and the military, between the court and the frontier commanders, which had led up to the rebellion in the first place.

In the end the civilian court interest led by Yang Kuo-chung, whose hostility to An Lu-shan had unquestionably helped to bring about the rebellion, predominated. In the sixth month of 756 a court order was issued commanding the army to launch an all-out attack, a politically

[16] The fullest account of the loyalist risings is found in C. A. Peterson, *A fragment of empire: northeastern China in middle and late T'ang*, ch. 1 (in preparation); also see Tanigawa Michio, 'An-shi no ran no seikaku ni tsuite', *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronsō*, 8 (1954) 86–91.

[17] Hino Kaisaburō in *Shien*, 91 (1963) 3–17, carefully traces the history of these P'ing-lu forces.

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expedient but militarily foolhardy move which was bungled in its execution.[18] The result was a government defeat of major proportions: the bulk of the 180,000 government troops participating in the attack was ambushed, cut off and annihilated. Lacking any intact forces in reserve, the government could place no further defences between the rebel armies and the capital. Within a few days the emperor and his court were in flight, and Ch'ang-an was occupied by the rebels. Hsüan-tsung made his way to safety in Szechwan, though, in a frequently dramatized episode, Yang Kuo-chung and his cousin Yang Kuei-fei were killed along the road by the disgruntled troops. Meanwhile, the heir apparent, the future Su-tsung, withdrew to Ling-wu in the north-west, where he hoped to rally support.

In the eyes of many, the old emperor's leadership was now completely discredited, so that the heir apparent's usurpation of the throne and assumption of power in the following month was widely accepted. Among the troops summoned to Su-tsung's court in exile were those on campaign in Ho-pei, an unavoidable move but one that ensured the collapse of the loyalist resistance in that region. One by one the loyalist centres were reduced, bringing about the virtual end there of any T'ang authority. The loyalist garrison in the extreme north-east at P'ing-lu was isolated, and eventually in 762 its forces were withdrawn by sea to Shantung. The disastrous battle at T'ung-kuan must be regarded as a vital turning-point, for it revived rebel fortunes, brought the dynasty to the point of collapse, and prolonged the war far into the indefinite future.

Yet in the long run the crucial factor proved to be the continuing attachment of most of the empire to the T'ang ruling house. This loyalty was severely tested in the course of the following year when the court under Su-tsung experienced a series of major failures offset by only minor successes. All efforts were concentrated upon the single aim of recovering Ch'ang-an. Attacks were mounted against the rebel forces occupying the capital in the autumn of 756 and again in the spring of 757, but both were repelled with crippling losses to the loyalist armies. To the south the rebels crossed the Chin-ling mountains and descended as far as Hsiang-yang on the Han River, though their south-eastward advance to the Huai River was hindered by heroic resistance in Sung-chou (Shang-ch'iu), which lasted until the autumn of 757.[19]

Trouble erupted further south as well. Faced with the possible break-

[18] See des Rotours, *Histoire*, pp. 241–55; Lü Ssu-mien, *Sui-T'ang Wu-tai shih* (Peking, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 217–18 (who, exceptionally among historians, exculpates Yang from blame and attributes the decision to attack entirely to Hsüan-tsung's military naïveté).

[19] On the long seige of Sung-chou see Chang Chün, *T'ang shih* (Hong Kong, 1971), pp. 103–4; *CTS* 187B, pp. 4899–900; *HTS* 192, pp. 5534–41.

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down of authority following the defeat at T'ung-kuan, Hsüan-tsung had placed large sections of the empire under the command of imperial princes, a desperate attempt to rely on clan loyalty to maintain the dynasty. One of his sons, Prince Lin, who had, exceptionally, actually gone out to his post on the middle Yangtze, now early in 757 went into revolt. Anticipating perhaps that he would successfully lead a T'ang restoration, he moved downstream to seize the rich lower Yangtze region; however, he was speedily defeated and killed. Meanwhile, on the borders, foreign nations began exploiting China's internal crisis by encroaching on lands till then under T'ang control. The principal beneficiaries were the Tibetans, who expanded into Lung-yu (Kansu), limiting T'ang contact with central Asia, and Nan-chao which nibbled away at Szechwan. But even in the far south, including Annam, non-Chinese tribes revolted and forced Chinese authorities to withdraw.

Despite the court's weakness, the rebels, who temporarily held the military advantage and controlled Ho-pei, the Huang-ho and Wei river valleys as far as Ch'ang-an, and much of Ho-nan (by far the richest and most populous region of China), made little headway towards creating a stable alternative regime to the T'ang. Though scarcity of information makes it impossible to evaluate their policies, it is clear that they attracted little support and were never seen as more than rude, frontier soldiers with no claim to rule apart from the right of military conquest. Perhaps An Lu-shan's failure to achieve total victory at the outset was sufficient to doom his hopes; once the struggle was protracted, the dynasty was able to draw on enormous residual strength and support, much of it intangible. This is itself testimony to the success of T'ang rule down to 755. But the limited political acumen of the rebels must also have played a role. Another factor was dissension within the rebel leadership, which came to a head with An Lu-shan's assassination at the beginning of 757.[20] The succession to command of his son An Ch'ing-hsü may have restored harmony in the main camp at Lo-yang, but it alienated the officers of An Lu-shan's own generation remaining in command in Ho-pei, most notably Shih Ssu-ming. The rift which was then opened between the forces in Ho-pei and those in Lo-yang very nearly proved fatal to the rebels. Finally, it is noteworthy that the rebels, having established Lo-yang as their capital, never expressed more than a negative interest in Ch'ang-an, namely to deny it to the T'ang. Apart from their origins in the north-east, did they perhaps also recognize the growing unsuitability of the Wei river valley as a political centre?

Events appeared to take a decisive turn with the success of the offensive

[20] See des Rotours, *Histoire*, pp. 290–5, and his references.

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launched by the government forces in autumn 757. This began with the recovery of Ch'ang-an in the ninth month following a massive attack spearheaded by remarkably effective Uighur mercenaries, the first of two such occasions during the rebellion when their contribution proved decisive. It ended, after a series of victories, with the recovery of Lo-yang in the tenth month. The rebel forces were obliged to give up the adjoining areas, including southern and eastern Ho-nan where they had at last gained the upper hand, and to withdraw beyond the Huang-ho. The rebel headquarters was pulled back to Hsiang-chou (Anyang) in south-western Ho-pei. The government had certainly mounted an effective military effort, but its success derived largely from the failure of the rebel units in Ho-pei to provide adequate support for their armies in the west. These defeats, and the loss of the two capital cities then openly split the rebels into two opposing camps, An Ch'ing-hsü's at Hsiang-chou and Shih Ssu-ming's at Yu-chou. Prospects appeared so bleak to the rebels by early 758 that Shih Ssu-ming himself declared his submission to the throne. The court, which was in no position to crush him finally, had to content itself with his nominal surrender and therefore confirmed him in his current command.

Upon the recovery of Lo-yang the court virtually suspended active military operations. Its own resources were momentarily exhausted, and court politicians realized that the rebels, though now contained in Ho-pei, were still too formidable to be crushed at a single blow. In any case, the general expectation was that the worst was over, that the T'ang house had been preserved, and that the necessary reconstruction might now get under way. In an Act of Grace issued in 758 clemency was extended to all of the rebel forces except for a few prominent leaders.[21] This was a deliberate attempt to heal the divisions within the empire, but it also served the tactical purpose of weakening the enemy by causing defections among the rebels' rank and file.

The limited military initiative displayed by the government throughout most of 758 is inexplicable save on grounds of its own continued weakness. Fresh attacks launched in the autumn drove the rebels from the Huang-ho, but the main rebel army under An Ch'ing-hsü successfully withdrew to safety in its strongly fortified headquarters at Hsiang-chou. Government forces, pursuing an excessively cautious strategy and indifferent to gaining control of the rest of Ho-pei, then undertook to reduce the city by siege. The siege lasted throughout the winter; by spring of 759 the besiegers were almost as weak as the besieged. Meanwhile, the court's inept treatment of the surrendered rebel Shih Ssu-ming in the

[21] For assertion and reiteration of this policy, see *TFYK* 87, pp. 13a–b, 14b, 17a.

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north, probably the fault of his old military rival Li Kuang-pi, again alienated him from the government. Once again in revolt, he led his army southward. For a long time he harassed the government forces besieging An Ching-hsü in Hsiang-chou, and eventually engaged them in a pitched battle in the third month. Although reportedly outnumbered by more than ten to one, Shih's forces utterly routed the loyalist armies of the so-called 'nine military governors', who withdrew all the way to Lo-yang. Shih then proceeded to eliminate An Ch'ing-hsü and his supporters, taking the throne of the rebel Greater Yen dynasty for himself.[22] At the time, the disastrous defeat of overwhelmingly superior government forces was attributed by stunned courtiers to the lack of a supreme commander empowered to direct and coordinate the movements of the commanders of the several armies. Although this does not entirely explain this defeat, there were to be many more examples in the next few decades of the disastrous results arising from the operational independence of the individual military governors in combined campaigns.

Thus the rebellion, which only a little more than a year earlier had appeared to be almost over, entered another phase, with an end no longer in sight. Government fortunes declined still further when Lo-yang and Pien-chou fell in the autumn of 759. From that time onwards, hostile initiatives were taken first by one side, then by the other, but without any marked successs in either case. The long stalemate lasted until early 761. It was probably at this stage in the rebellion that the effects most injurious to the existing political and social order developed. Though the court was fortunate in that no other serious claimants to the throne emerged, it was itself in a poor position to recover strength. The loss of key areas at the head of the Pien Canal and the disrepair of the canal itself ruled out the possibility of drawing large revenues or transporting military supplies from the Yangtze provinces. The areas from which it could draw revenue and support, therefore, remained very limited and in those areas the government was obliged to impose increasingly stringent measures.[23] The rebel territory in Ho-pei must also have come under great strain as a result of the prolonged war, but, having been spared serious fighting since 756, it had presumably recovered from the initial results of the rebellion by this time and once again become relatively productive.

With equally grave results in the long term, local control slipped more and more from the hands of the central authorities. The record of these years is filled with mutinies and petty revolts almost always stemming

[22] Des Rotours, *Histoire*, pp. 307–21.

[23] Wu Chang-ch'üan, *T'ang-tai nung-min wen-ti yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1963), pp. 94–101; Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 34–5.

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from personal ambitions and rivalries, rather than attachments to larger causes. Time and again the court was distracted and hindered in pursuit of its main goals by such disorders, which had no connection whatever with the main rebel efforts, or with the rebel regime. Revolts on a considerable scale broke out in the Han River valley and the middle Yangtze late in 759 and again early in 760. Late in 760 there was a major rising in the lower Yangtze, and there were risings in Szechwan in 761 and 762, but this was far from the sum of disorder. Instances of local struggles for power, assassinations and open defiance of orders were even more frequent.

Such lawlessness often made it difficult to distinguish friend from foe. For example, the only occasion when the cities in the lower Yangtze area suffered serious war damage was during the suppression of the revolt there led by Liu Chan in the winter of 760–1. Government forces brought in to suppress the rebels ran amok in the immensely wealthy trading cities of Yang-chou and Ch'u-chou, looting and killing indiscriminately and with impunity. Thousands of foreign merchants were slaughtered.[24] In 762 the lower Yangtze area was also swept by a popular rising provoked by harsh attempts to levy taxation. Led by Yüan Ch'ao, whose army was said to total nearly 200,000, the rebels overran most of Chekiang and were not finally put down until the fourth month of 763.

Even more serious than these rebellions from the point of view of the central government was the increasing tendency of its local commanders to act without reference to the capital. Often these local authorities had received no guidance and very little real help from the court, and had merely improvised to meet their local needs, as for example in the field of finance. But in other cases they simply disregarded the court's directives. On the whole it seems clear that, as the war effort stumbled on with no sign of an end to the conflict, a crisis of confidence in the regime developed, which in turn inhibited the government from making a decisive effort to crush the rebellion.

The rebels certainly must have continued to hope for a complete breakdown of imperial authority. At the very least, Shih Ssu-ming's officers could have expected a compromise settlement, which would allow them to retain their positions and local spheres of authority. But in any event, the war of attrition was by now wearing down the rebels as well as the central government. Probably in search of new sources of supply Shih renewed his offensive against loyalist territory in early 761. In fact the rebels rather than government forces very nearly made the decisive breakthrough. In another of the war's great battles, fought in April 761

[24] *HTS* 144, p. 4702; *TCTC* 222, pp. 7101–4.

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near Lo-yang, they routed the government forces and threatened to start another western offensive along the Huang-ho. However, shortly thereafter Shih was assassinated by his own subordinates.[25] This was a major disaster for the rebels. His death cut short the prospect of a new offensive snd probably doomed the rebels' long-term hopes of victory. Like An Ch'ing-hsü, Shih Ch'ao-i is given short shrift in our sources, but we should recognize that for some time the rebels remained powerful under his leadership. It was well into 762 before the tide turned against him, and again like An Ch'ing-hsü, he was finally undone only by the desertion of his senior military commanders, who, now serving under their fourth leader, found the claim of self-preservation superior to that of loyalty.

In the third month 762 a new emperor, Tai-tsung, came to the throne in Ch'ang-an, but his accession had little immediate effect on the course of the conflict. However, upon his accession Tai-tsung reasserted Su-tsung's policy of clemency by promulgating a general amnesty, a policy that played a direct role in ending the rebellion.[26] The end came abruptly. It may be possible to date the final phase of the war from early or mid-762, but whatever changes in relative strength may have occurred early in that year, the government's major victories and significant recovery of lost territory took place only as a result of its autumn offensive. In the ninth month an envoy to the Uighur qaghan discovered that Shih Ch'ao-i had been attempting to persuade the Uighurs to intervene against the T'ang. The emperor sent his general P'u-ku Huai-en, whose daughter was the qaghan's wife, to the Uighur court, where he persuaded the qaghan to join in a concerted attack on Shih Ch'ao-i. For the court to turn once again to the Uighurs for military assistance was surely a measure of its weakness and desperation after six years of continual war and civil disorder.[27]

The decisive engagement was the severe defeat inflicted on the rebels outside Lo-yang in the eleventh month. Lo-yang was retaken, and then pillaged and looted by the loyal armies and the Uighurs alike. The heavy loss of manpower suffered by Shih Ch'ao-i in this battle left him at a serious disadvantage. The impact of the defeat upon his major field commanders was equally important because, despite the fact that the rebels still had substantial forces in Ho-pei, the generals were now convinced that their cause was lost. One by one they deserted Shih Ch'ao-i and submitted to the throne. Shih Ch'ao-i was driven in successive battles northward through Ho-pei. When early in 763 he reached An Lu-shan's

[25] See des Rotours, *Histoire*, pp. 335–45, and his references.

[26] *TFYK* 88, p. 1a; *TTCLC* 8, p. 9.

[27] On Uighur involvement in the rebellion, see C. Mackerras, *The Uighur empire according to the T'ang Dynastic Histories* (Canberra, 1972), pp. 17–25, 55–77.

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original base at Fan-yang, the garrison commander closed the city gates against him. Forced to flee northward into the border country of the Khitan and Hsi tribes, he eventually met his death, according to one account by his own hand, in the first month of 763. With his death, the rebellion was over.

The way in which the rebellion came to an end without any final and decisive military victory was reflected in the new structure of authority now established in Ho-pei in 763. The throne, both under Su-tsung and Tai-tsung, had for several years actively encouraged the voluntary surrender of rebel leaders. In the post-rebellion settlement the entire responsibility for the revolt was laid upon the An and Shih families and their immediate supporters. All other rebels were accepted back into the service of the T'ang, and in many cases rebel leaders were confirmed in control of the territories that had been under their authority.[28] The reason why the court was willing to offer not only amnesty and guarantees of safety, but also the assurance of authority and rank to the rebel commanders was twofold: it was anxious to bring the hostilities to an end almost regardless of cost; and it anticipated being able to control the former rebel commanders once peace and the status quo had been established. Such a policy had worked excellently in the first decade of the dynasty. But the results of its application at this point were not quite what had been anticipated. Certainly the defections of major rebel commanders eventually caused the rapid collapse of the rebellion. But Ho-pei, one of the most populous and rich provinces of China, was now divided into four provinces and left in the hands of ex-rebel generals who were appointed military governors (*chieh-tu shih*) by Tai-tsung's court. The government did not so much suppress the rebellion as terminate it by a compromise settlement. In Ho-pei, it was a compromise which was to prove costly.

In the empire at large, the prevailing mood was relief rather than jubilation. Hopes of victory had already been raised too often, only to be disappointed. The 'victory', now that it had come, was a pale one, achieved by the intervention of Uighur allies, at very great cost, and by a blanket pardon for the rebels.

The whole empire was in disarray, troubled and disunited. The termination of actual hostilities faced the government with a great array of critical problems. The first inclination was to think of a re-establishment of the status quo of 755, for few people can have realized, even though they perceived the gravity of the situation, how far the events of the years of

[28] C. A. Peterson, 'P'u-ku Huai-en and the T'ang court: the limits of loyalty', *MS*, 29 (1970–1) 29–33.

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rebellion had transformed the state and society alike. These changes had made a simple return to old institutions impossible. The most important of them can be set out as follows.

(1) Militarization had occurred on a large scale. Military officers wielded enormous power, dominating local government and occupying all the chief strategic places. Large numbers of men, probably over 750,000, were under arms. For the next half a century and to a lesser degree for the rest of the dynasty the military remained a major force in the life of the empire.

(2) Local government had been restructured. By 763 the provinces controlled by military (*chieh-tu shih*) and civil (*kuan-ch'a shih*) governors had formed a permanent tier of authority throughout the empire, interposed between central government and the old prefectures and counties. These provinces developed forms of autonomy and semi-autonomy which are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

(3) New social elements were introduced into the political leadership. Through successful military careers as soldiers or by service in the quasi-military provincial governments, many persons rose to high rank in the official hierarchy or achieved wealth and social prestige who previously would have had no such opportunities.

(4) The state's financial structure had collapsed, necessitating new methods of raising revenue. Local tax records were destroyed, scattered and rendered obsolete. By 763 the government totally lacked the tight administrative control needed to re-impose the old highly centralized system. New systems more suitable for the new situation had already begun to evolve during the rebellion.

(5) The disturbances consequent upon the rebellion gave the *coup de grâce* to the land allocation system, which could no longer restrict land-holdings, or control the transfer of property, and could no longer function even as a system of land registration. Its final disappearance combined with the general social dislocation brought about the large-scale movement of landed property into new hands.

(6) Large scale shifts of population took place. Many of the war-affected areas in Ho-pei and Ho-nan were partially depopulated, and many people migrated to the Huai and Yangtze valleys and to the south.

(7) The government lost effective control of Ho-pei and major portions of Ho-nan which, in the hands of former rebel provincial governors, became a bloc of semi-autonomous provinces within the empire. This resulted in the loss of control over 25 to 30 per cent of the empire's population, and massive loss of revenues.

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(8) The provinces of the Yangtze and Huai valleys acquired a new and critical importance. Because of the limited control exercised by central government elsewhere, this region, with its increasing population and great productivity, became the dynasty's chief source of revenue. As a result the canal system by which this revenue was transferred to the capital, became the absolute life-line for the court, without which it was starved of supplies and of funds.

(9) Externally the empire suffered grievous losses of territory and prestige. Borders on all sides contracted as troops and civil administrators were withdrawn to meet the internal crisis. Central Asia was lost to Chinese control, although isolated Chinese outposts there survived for some years. More important, the modern provinces of Kansu and Ninghsia were occupied by the Tibetans. This made the political centre of the empire more vulnerable than ever before to outside attack.

These changes were already being deeply felt by 763. Whatever lip service statesmen might have given to 'restoration', they were irreversible, and precluded any real return to the old policies and procedures of government. Within a few years this fact had become apparent, and the government was forced to feel its way towards new institutions. These were often sharply at variance with traditional political models, which were posited on the existence of a strong centralized state capable of imposing uniform administrative practices throughout its empire. The old order of the early T'ang was gone for good.

The post-rebellion structure of power

The immediately visible legacy of the rebellion was a general state of instability presided over by a badly weakened central authority. Physical damage was severe in some areas, especially in northern Ho-nan which suffered continual fighting, and where reconstruction promised to be long and painful. In other regions where significant fighting had occurred but only intermittently, such as Kuan-chung, southern Ho-tung and Ho-pei, the most serious effects resulted from requisitions and levies of manpower and hence were shorter-lived. What specific hardships faced the general populace at this time is largely a matter for conjecture; but there is abundant evidence of widespread destruction, desolation and depopulation. The government was itself beset with difficulties of every description – a serious shortage of funds, its bureaucratic apparatus in disarray, communications disrupted, a grave external threat posed by the Tibetans, a serious (and apparently popular) revolt in Chekiang. Yet, events would show that the most intractable problem of all was posed by

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the very instruments which had assured the dynasty's survival, the military commands established in the interior to exercise decentralized authority, to mobilize resources and to wage war.[29]

As we have seen, these commands had been created specifically to meet the military emergency. But, having taken root during the course of the rebellion, they now formed the principal nodes of authority beyond the gates of the capital. On the one hand, military power unquestionably enabled military governors to assert themselves against and even to defy the court; it is in this guise, as unruly, power-hungry generals, that they have normally been represented in the histories. On the other hand, circumstances themselves – namely the breakdown of the old closely-knit, highly centralized institutions of government – required far more devolution of authority to the local level than in the past. Therefore, the development of the new provincial regimes can also be seen as a positive response to critical needs, a point confirmed by the creation of new territorial units in the years following the rebellion where none had previously existed. For example, the creation in 764 and 765 of the more unified and compact provinces of Hu-nan and O-yüeh out of the large, parent provinces of Ching-nan and Chiang-hsi surely resulted from the inadequacy of existing administrative arrangements (rather than, as in later cases, the desire to weaken militarily powerful provinces). The T'ang regime survived only at the cost of becoming highly decentralized.

The administrative arrangements made at the close of the rebellion established some thirty-four of these new provincial units (see map 13). Their number grew in subsequent decades, later varying between forty-five and fifty.[30] Creation of new provinces and complex boundary changes make of T'ang administrative geography after 763 a rather fluid affair. Nevertheless, virtually all of the thirty provinces in existence in the first post-rebellion years survived in one form or another and by 785 all the provinces of any significance had come into being. Differences in size were considerable, some provinces comprising a mere two prefectures, others a dozen and more. Differences in status and administrative structure also complicate matters.

At first a majority of provinces, and almost all those in north China, were under the direction of military governors (*chieh-tu shih*) who invariably held concurrent powers as civil governor (*kuan-ch'a shih*). The

[29] The most complete single treatment of the T'ang post-rebellion provincial structure, though outdated at points, is Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu*. Very useful, esp. for its tabular material, is Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai fan-chen yü chung-yang kuan-hsi chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1969) which, however, by no means renders obsolete Wu T'ing-hsieh's older compilation, 'T'ang fan-chen nien-piao', in *Erh-shih-wu shih pu-pien*, vol. 6.

[30] Numbers and variations are taken up by Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui T'ang shih*, pp. 272–3.

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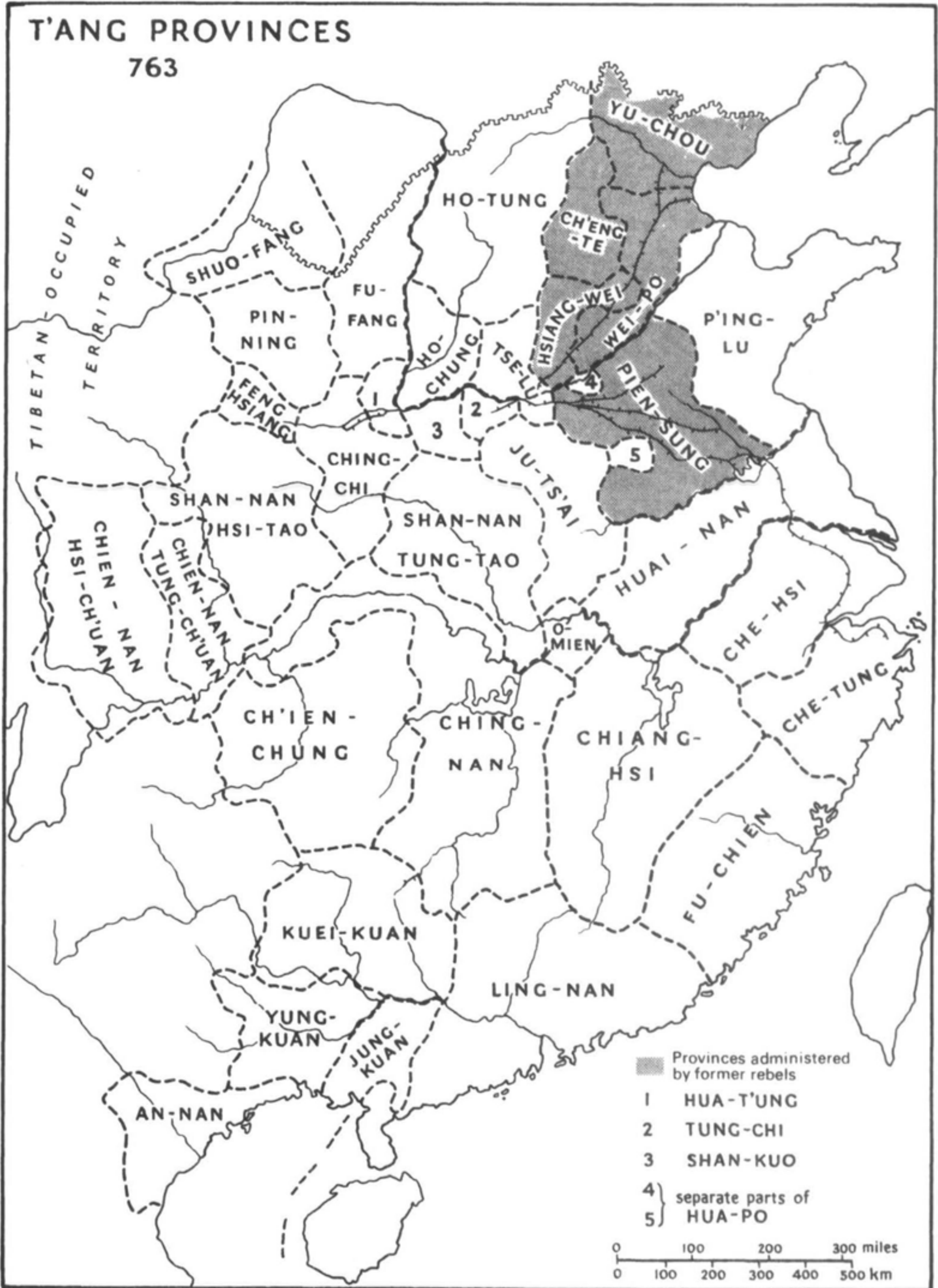

Map 13. The T'ang provinces, 763

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latter office was a direct successor to that of the civil inspectors of Hsüan-tsung's reign but now conferred wide administrative powers. By definition, military governors had standing troops under their command, theoretically for the fulfilment of military missions. Here again variations were great, the armies in some provinces numbering but a few thousand, in others as many as 75,000 to 100,000 men. Provinces headed by civil governors had few troops of any sort; but such officials normally held concurrent titles as general militia commissioners (*tu-t'uan-lien shih*) or as general defence commissioners (*tu-fang-yü shih*), which gave them power to mobilize troops for local action if necessary. The total number of men under arms at the end of the rebellion (including frontier forces) can be estimated at about 850,000, exclusive of the militia troops who were disbanded at that time.[31] Yet in such a highly militarized state there was not one central army of any size at the disposition of the court. Militarily the government was almost completely dependent on the armies of loyal governors, armies not under its direct authority, whether those established along the frontier or those distributed throughout north China.

From the very beginning, the continued presence, even after the return of peace, of large concentrations of troops in the interior militated against any strong and effective reassertion of central authority. This was true for two reasons: local garrisons were often a source of disorder; and, more importantly, they provided a source of power for ambitious provincial leaders striving for independent status. Mutinies and disorders among provincial troops were frequent, sometimes occasioned by genuine grievances such as arbitrary or inhumane leadership, as in Ho-chung province in 764 and in Ho-yang in 775, but at least as often by simple personal rivalries and a collapse of discipline as in Hu-nan in 770 and at Pien-chou in 774.[32] Although they contributed to the general sense of insecurity and there was always the danger of their escalating into a major rising, such disorders had primarily local effects.

The emergence of essentially autonomous political authority in the provinces which were sustained by such garrisons was another matter. These forces soon challenged the central government for the effective control, and eventually even the sovereignty, over important parts of the empire. Military power not only supported their ambitions, but also provided the means whereby their leaders achieved fully integrated control within their territories. Thus, in those provinces which remained outside central control for long periods, we discover a definite evolution

[31] Revising slightly upwards the probable underestimate given in *CTS* 17B, p. 567; *HTS* 164, p. 5057; *TFYK* 486, p. 21a.

[32] See accounts in *TCTC* 223, pp. 7166–7; 224, p. 7214; and 225, pp. 7225, 7229.

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from a narrow military authority, based on the army originally assigned to that area, to a genuine territorial control. This was true even in provinces such as Wei-po and Chao-i (the former recalcitrant, the latter loyalist) whose armies became formidable only after large-scale conscription and training of local inhabitants in the post-rebellion period.

The central government was only too aware of the dangers of this diffusion of military power. However, it lacked the means either to dissolve it or to superimpose any tight central control over provincial forces: both the military leaders and the rank and file in the provinces bitterly opposed any such policies. Thus, no attempt was made to implement proposals such as that of the war hero Kuo Tzu-i to abolish the provincial military commands, or that of the civil official Tu-ku Chi to reduce the size of the armies of all the interior provinces.[33] As the post-rebellion situation became clear, it was recognized that the presence of large garrisons was absolutely necessary in several of the provinces under direct court control to counterbalance the power of those provinces which were not. The bulk of the military forces readily available to the central government was stationed along the north-western frontier. In general these armies posed fewer problems than those in the interior simply because the areas in which they were quartered were poor and thinly peopled and they were heavily dependent on the central government for supplies and funds. Nevertheless, the first major political-military crisis of the post-rebellion era arose among the frontier armies, a crisis which was shortlived but had far-reaching consequences.

A third illustrious hero of the rebellion whose exploits rivalled those of Kuo Tzu-i and Li Kuang-pi, was P'u-ku Huai-en, a career officer of Uighur blood who had commanded the final drive which brought the rebellion to a close. As commander of the north-western Shuo-fang Army, he remained the most powerful military figure in the country in the months following the imperial victory. In the autumn of 763, as he was conducting the Uighur qaghan and his court homeward following their participation in suppressing the revolt, P'u-ku Huai-en and his guests found themselves denied entrance into T'ai-yüan by the Ho-tung governor. The pretext given was security precautions, but personal rivalries were probably at the root of the difficulty. In the bitter dispute which now broke out, P'u-ku felt, with no little justification, that the court gave him insufficient backing. As a result, while awaiting the opportunity to square accounts on his own, he kept his Shuo-fang troops inactive in Ho-tung despite the threat of a Tibetan invasion to the west of the capital. When in November the Tibetans actually crossed the frontier

[33] *TCTC* 223, pp. 7165, 7173; *CTW* 384, pp. 20a–22b.

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they swiftly overwhelmed the limited resistance which confronted them and, as none of the governors from nearby provinces nor P'u-ku himself responded to urgent appeals for aid, proceeded to occupy Ch'ang-an. For the second time in seven years, the court was put to flight, on this occasion fleeing to the east and taking refuge in Shan-chou on the Huang-ho. In no position either militarily or politically to hold the capital, the Tibetans departed after only two weeks. There was some loss of life and property but by far the greatest damage was that done to imperial prestige which the return of peace had only just somewhat restored.[34]

It became apparent, as a result, first that the government no longer had any fully reliable military force at its disposal, and secondly that its primary objective had to be defence against the foreign menace from the Tibetans. P'u-ku Huai-en was driven by court-inspired intrigues from his post as commander of the Shuo-fang garrison and replaced by Kuo Tzu-i, and a new and more or less effective deployment of the frontier forces was carried out. P'u-ku Huai-en fled to Ling-wu in modern Ninghsia, and in the autumn of 764 allied himself with the Tibetans and guided and led a renewed Tibetan invasion. This struck deep into Chinese territory but achieved no lasting gains. In the next year he formed a broad alliance of Tibetans, his own Uighurs, and other tribal peoples to invade China. However, fortunately for the T'ang, he fell ill during the invasion, and died shortly afterwards. For the whole of this decade the Tibetans attacked the frontier every autumn, and these raids posed serious problems of security, logistics and morale. The Tibetan threat was compounded by the ambiguities and uncertainty of the nominally friendly Uighurs. This external menace severely hampered the government in its efforts to restore central control over the various regional centres of authority in the interior of China.

At the outset the government had only an imperfect idea of which provincial authorities would respond to its directives and which would not. The relationship with each province became clear only in the course of time and evolved by trial and error. The ultimate test in each case was the ability of the central government to select and install the provincial governor. In the Yangtze provinces and further south the government steadily maintained this authority and, despite occasional mutinies or disorders, there was no real military problem. In the north the pattern was more irregular and, initially at least, completely unpredictable. Although at any given time the government controlled the selection of governors in the majority of provinces, it was usually unable to impose

[34] Peterson, 'P'u-ku Huai-en and the T'ang Court', pp. 423–55.

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its candidate upon a province against strong local (military) opposition. Nevertheless, in the decade following the rebellion it did succeed in making changes in a number of difficult, or potentially difficult, situations. In 764, for example, it managed to transfer without incident a former rebel commander from the strategically vital command of Pien-chou on the Pien Canal to a relatively insignificant province, replacing him with a loyalist general. In 767 it used force to eliminate a recalcitrant governor from Hua-chou in south-east Shensi, a command too close to the capital for comfort, and in 773 it installed a governor of its own choice to command the small but important I-ch'eng province on the Huang-ho in Ho-pei despite pressure from the garrison to appoint one of its own officers.

At the same time the central government made some progress in the pursuit of a related policy, the return of provincial authority to civilian officials. At the end of the rebellion approximately 75 per cent of all governors of provinces, whatever their precise designation, were military men. By the end of Tai-tsung's reign (779) this proportion had been reduced to about three-fifths. These gains came primarily in the south, for in many northern provinces, where a powerful military presence was necessary for strategic reasons, professional military leadership could not be dispensed with without unacceptable risks to security.[35]

Yet, despite the government's progress in some cases, in others it simply lacked the power to assert its will over ambitious governors who allied themselves with and exploited the local soldiery. In 763 at Hsiang-chou (on the Han River), in 765 in P'ing-lu (then the title of an important provincial command in Shan-tung to which the P'ing-lu army had been transferred), and in 767 in Szechwan (all 'loyal' provinces), it was obliged to observe passively the power struggles among local officers and then to reward the winner with official appointment as governor. The first instance of this sort in former rebel territory occurred in 768 at Yu-chou, when the governor was assassinated. The court felt confident enough of its military strength and prestige to send one of its own high-ranking ministers to take charge of the province. However, a show of force by the local garrison sufficed to turn him back, after which the assassin received legitimate confirmation as governor. When he in turn met a violent end four years later, the court made no attempt to intervene, simply permitting a respectable interval to pass before giving its formal approval to the succession.

[35] These conclusions are based on Wu T'ing-hsieh's tables. See C. A. Peterson, 'Control of appointments and the incidence of hereditary succession in the T'ang provinces, 763–875', unpublished paper prepared for the Conference on Tradition and Change in T'ang-Sung China, Chicago, 1965.

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Until 775, the government did not undertake major military action against a recalcitrant province, and even then only following the most extreme provocation. Not surprisingly this crisis arose in Ho-pei where Wei-po, under the shrewd and resourceful leadership of T'ien Ch'eng-ssu, a former lieutenant of An Lu-shan, had become the strongest of the four provinces. In 775, T'ien attempted to take over the neighbouring province of Hsiang-wei where a change of governor had occurred. Had this move been successful, and widely emulated, it could have unleashed chaos in the empire. The government therefore ordered nine nearby provinces to launch a campaign against T'ien Ch'eng-ssu. Some of them were only too willing to obtain a share of the spoils and all of them were probably financed by the court. The central government's primary aim was to contain or even reduce Wei-po, but it must also have hoped that the conflict would help weaken the less submissive provinces.

These aims were only partly achieved. T'ien was able, through a combination of stratagems, diplomacy and timely victories, to maintain his military position. Moreover, the governors of other strong provinces eventually came to recognize that their long-term interests were far closer to his than to the court's. As a result, after winning modest territorial gains, Yu-chou, Ch'eng-te and P'ing-lu provinces temporized and eventually abandoned the campaign. This led the court to suspend operations altogether early in 776, without having reduced Wei-po, but at least having restrained it. Wei-po, despite the overwhelming odds it had faced, lost little territory in the aggregate, its acquisition of half of Hsiang-wei province (which now ceased to exist) largely compensating for its losses elsewhere. Moreover, it had convincingly demonstrated the defensive viability of the individual, heavily-armed provincial regimes, especially in Ho-pei, where the court could expect little support for any action against an individual governor.[36]

Later that year (776) the court did successfully utilize a combination of provincial armies to eliminate a potentially dangerous provincial leader. An obscure general named Li Ling-yao had seized control at Pien-chou following the death of the governor there and had immediately begun to pursue an arrogantly independent course. Such behaviour in a strategic garrison on the Pien Canal simply could not be tolerated by the court. A campaign was mounted to eliminate him and achieved immediate success, despite aid provided to the rebel by the unrepentant governor of Wei-po, and completely new administrative arrangements were made in this Pien-chou area.

However, in such circumstances the provinces participating in the

[36] On this episode see Peterson, *A fragment of empire*, ch. 2.

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campaign tended to gain quite as much from the victory as did the central government. This was clearly one of the great disadvantages of its being forced to rely entirely on provincial forces rather than on centrally controlled armies. On this occasion the already powerful province of P'ing-lu was the overall victor, acquiring five new prefectures at the expense of the defeated province.

Throughout this period the court's record in attempting to control the more heavily garrisoned and advantageously located provinces was thus at best uneven. By the end of Tai-tsung's reign there were at least half-a-dozen provinces which were beyond any meaningful degree of central direction: Yu-chou, Wei-po, Ch'eng-te (northern and central Ho-pei), P'ing-lu (Shan-tung), Hsiang-yang (north Hupeh) and Huai-hsi (south-west Ho-nan). In these provinces, governors had been determined locally with no more than *ex post facto* recognition by the court. (Ch'eng-te is no real exception since the tenure there of Li Pao-ch'en dated from his rebel command.) Perhaps Chien-nan West (western Szechwan), long in the hands of a usurper, also ought to be included in this group despite the fact that it adopted an anti-dynastic posture only much later and under different leadership. All these provinces conducted their internal affairs with no court interference and must properly be regarded as autonomous units. As the Sung historian Ssu-ma Kuang remarks, 'Though the leaders of these provinces bore titles within the realm as protectors of the throne, their conduct was in truth like that of barbarians in the remotest of lands.'[37]

Clearly, nothing but the realities of power could have induced the T'ang regime to accept such a situation. It is little short of remarkable that it did so and yet preserved the unity of the empire and its own sole claim to legitimacy. The explanation lies in its ability to maintain firm control over four regions which were absolutely essential to its survival. The first of these key regions was of course the metropolitan province of Kuan-chung which, though an area of dwindling resources, was still unrivalled as the political centre of the country. The second key area was the north-west frontier zone, the protective shield covering the capital against the greatest external threat posed to the empire. The third was the Yangtze-Huai basin, a region of rapidly expanding productivity, increasing population and flourishing trade, which had become the government's chief source of revenue. The fourth was the canal zone, embracing those provinces through which revenue from the south had to pass. (Szechwan was arguably a fifth such region, but, despite its pivotal importance in defending the western and south-western frontiers, it did not bear the

[37] *TCTC* 222, p. 7175.

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same crucial relationship to the fortunes of the central government as the four under discussion.) As two of these four areas were important primarily for strategic reasons, they required very substantial troop concentrations, which compounded the problem of control. We have already noted that the north-west frontier commands, lacking any adequate local resource base, were in no position to seek separation from the central government. With the heavily garrisoned provinces along the canal, however, it was another matter. Becoming highly volatile, they required the greatest delicacy in handling and evidently were largely exempted from making central tax contributions.

Essentially, therefore, T'ang rule survived in the late eighth and ninth centuries only, as Ch'en Yin-k'o has pointed out, by virtue of the north-west–south-east axis which it successfully sustained.[38] It was a cause of serious tension that the economic base of the dynasty's prosperity in the Yangtze valley lay so far removed from its political centre at Ch'ang-an, but obviously there were good historical reasons for this. Such geo-political considerations also explain the specific shape assumed by state finances in this and following periods. During the latter half of Tai-tsung's reign, approximately from 770 to 780, the salt monopoly, which bypassed the provincial governors without challenging their collection of direct taxes, supplied about one-half of central revenues. Further, the two-tax system which was adopted in 780 emerged out of the conditions of a decentralized empire and was implemented in a manner acknowledging them.[39]

Along with the simple problems of military control, central authority faced other specifically administrative problems in the provinces. These were complicated by the ambiguity of the relationship of the provincial governors to the central government, so that even in areas amenable to central control these problems posed difficulties. Much, in fact, of the achievement of Tai-tsung's reign must be seen to lie in simply restoring some degree of administrative order to most parts of the empire.

The years of disruption left many men in local posts who, by previous standards, were not qualified to fill them but who could not now easily be displaced. The standard procedures for appointment had been upset and tacitly abandoned. They continued to be often disregarded as governors advanced their own aides and personal favourites. The proper rotation and routine promotion of officials had also been disrupted. Combined with cut-backs in staff and reductions in salary resulting from the general shortage of funds, these conditions must have seriously lowered

[38] Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao*, p. 20.
[39] Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 41, 52–3.

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the quality of administration as well as damaged the morale of the regular corps of officials. Nor was strict supervision and regular assessment of administrative performance possible, especially as greater latitude in the conduct of affairs became accepted all along the line. The provincial governors were assigned the explicit responsibility for grading officials within their jurisdiction, but they were frequently more interested in building up a loyal clientele than in making objective evaluations. In addition, no systematic procedures existed for supervising the governors themselves. For example, one of the scourges of the age was the illegal tax levies arbitrarily imposed by the governors; yet, given the great freedom of action permitted them in their local operations, it was not easy to expose specific, clearly reprehensible cases.

Finances in general posed a difficult problem because of the drastic decline in the state's administrative control over the population. The loss, destruction and obsolescence of the old census and tax records left the number of registered households at less than three million – a mere third of the pre-rebellion total.[40] Revenue was consequently available only at sharply reduced levels precisely at a time when the need for positive administrative action was greater than ever before. Moreover, the effort to re-register population and to bring the information on the tax rolls up-to-date was probably the most exacting of any administrative task. Even under the favourable conditions of the seventh century, it had taken almost a century to re-register population fully after the fall of the Sui.

The central government promulgated numerous edicts and pronouncements in an endeavour to meet these problems, but they either remained dead letters or received only half-hearted enforcement. Throughout most of Tai-tsung's reign the central government was powerless to make any major initiative and gradually a quite conscious *laissez-faire* policy towards administration in the provinces came to be accepted. This policy is associated particularly with Yüan Tsai, who served as chief minister from 764 to 777.[41] Yüan is strongly criticized in the histories of the period for his dictatorial control over central administration during these years and for his patronage of Buddhism, and his open venality and corruption is implicitly treated as one reason for the lack of active policy towards the provinces. However, the court enjoyed a welcome stability during his ascendancy and for the time being at least, he successfully eliminated the eunuch influence which had dominated the court since Su-tsung's time.

Yüan Tsai's policy towards the provinces was a pragmatic one. More

[40] *THY* 84, p. 1551; *TFYK* 486, p. 19a.

[41] See Lü Ssu-mien, *Sui-T'ang Wu-tai shih*, pp. 264–71; also ch. 9 below.

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conscious perhaps than anyone of the court's limited options, he determined on a course of caution and compromise, aimed at maintaining internal peace and a gradual recovery of central power. Easily the most urgent concern in his eyes was the defence of the country against foreign enemies: the Tibetans who had recently invaded the capital and still occupied large parts of the north-west, and to a lesser degree the nominally friendly, but unruly Uighurs. This policy achieved its main goals, but it did so only at a price. The provincial regimes, especially those with substantial military forces, were given the opportunity to become firmly entrenched and to normalize their relationship with the territories and populace under their control. The decentralization which the rebellion had brought about thus gradually became institutionalized during Tai-tsung's reign. This was true not only of the provincial regimes, but even of institutions devoted to central interests such as the Salt and Iron Commission which the gifted administrator, Liu Yen, built up in this period to become one of the court's financial mainstays while managing it on a highly autonomous, and virtually regional, basis independent of the court.

A brief flurry of legislation directed towards provincial problems followed Yüan Tsai's disgrace in 777. It was aimed at restoring the prefects to a more fully civil role while yet protecting them from encroachments by the provincial governors. They were now denied the possibility of holding the concurrent office of militia commissioner (*t'uan-lien shih*), and the numbers of troops in the individual prefectures were to be kept within strict limits. At the same time governors were prohibited from suspending prefects, authorizing their departure without reference to the court, or installing their own men in any vacancies.[42] This legislation may not have had any great immediate impact, but coming as it did after active intervention by the court against T'ien Ch'eng-ssu in 775 and Li Ling-yao in 776, it did show a new confidence at court and a growing sentiment in favour of pursuing stronger policies. Such policies were adopted almost from the outset by Tai-tsung's successor, the emperor Te-tsung.

TE-TSUNG (REIGN 779–805)

Te-tsung ascended the throne in mid-779 among high expectations for a resurgence of T'ang power and glory. There were no problems to mar the succession; mature but not yet forty, the new emperor was respected for his intelligence and vigour; and conditions in the empire at large had become relatively stable. But although no impending crisis faced him at

[42] See relevant documents in *THY* 68, 69 and 78; *HTS* 142, pp. 4664–5.

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the beginning of his reign, he was fully aware of the state's uncertain financial base and of its shallow hold over the country as a whole. Judging by the policies which he introduced almost immediately on coming to the throne, he had probably long been convinced of the feasibility of pursuing stronger policies. In many respects he was correct, a point which has been obscured by subsequent events. His first priority was the issue of financial reform.

The adoption early in 780 of the two-tax system (*liang-shui fa*) is normally considered one of the major events in Chinese economic history. Recent research has not reduced its significance by showing that the new system was largely based upon the practices and policies which had developed in the preceding decades and contained little real innovation.[43] We need mention only some of the better-known features of the reform: unification of the multifarious existing taxes into one basic tax, paid according to local conditions in either of two collections per annum (hence the somewhat misleading designation); taxation levied on a graduated scale according to wealth and property rather than at a uniform rate for all; partial assessment in cash, despite the continuing heavy dominance of payment in kind; and the elimination of any distinction between native and newly settled households in any given locality. These features amply attested a response to the changed economic circumstances of the times.

However, the new tax could only produce adequate revenues if a suitable mechanism for procuring the revenue from the provinces was found. It was in this respect that the new tax structure was really adapted to existing conditions. It was to be imposed through a local quota system.

Under this system local authorities were given a great degree of freedom in managing fiscal matters, but were required to produce tax quotas which had been determined beforehand by mutual consultation between the local authorities and central government. In effect, the central government abandoned any further pretence of close direct central control over local financial administration throughout the empire in return for a fixed and regular revenue. In establishing these quotas, which reflected widely varying administrative practice and different social conditions, and in giving up any pretence at uniformity, the government tacitly accepted existing tax inequalities – a point which subsequently aroused vigorous criticism. In the actual disposition of revenue collected in the provinces the two-tax reform systematized procedures that were no doubt already in use. There was to be a three-fold allotment of revenue at the prefectural

[43] On the principal features of this reform see Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 39 ff., and his references.

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level, specific portions of which were retained for local expenditures (*liu-chou*), sent to the provincial administration (*sung-shih*), and dispatched to the central treasury (*shang-kung*). Like other aspects of the new policy, this remained the normal practice until the end of the dynasty. In order to initiate the reform, the court deputed specially empowered officials (the so-called 'commissioners of advancement and disgrace', *ch'u-chih shih*) to the eleven major regions of the empire where they made direct contact with the local governors and negotiated quotas with them. As normal bureaucratic channels were far from suitable for such a broad, new innovative measure, Te-tsung thus employed specially appointed and trusted agents.

Te-tsung's fundamental aim of restoring central power required not only an increase in central revenue *per se* but improved control over the financial apparatus in general. However some historians, notably Hino Kaisaburō, have gone further, and argued that virtually every feature of the new system was conceived as a means of reducing provincial power.[44] But it is doubtful whether it had such a specific, positive intention. For example, it is no doubt true that, by the elimination of the distinction for fiscal purposes between native and immigrant households, the pool of potential taxpayers whom local authorities could tax and yet let go unreported to the central government was significantly reduced. Yet, surely the first motive of the central government was simply the enlargement of its own tax base from this obvious source. Above all Te-tsung clearly realized that to whatever extent the measure failed in its implementation it was meaningless. Hence, the new system was a deliberate compromise with current political realities, attacking provincial power, but only in indirect ways. Moreover, since the full implementation of the policies in the autonomous provinces could hardly have been anticipated, the real target of the measure was that twilight zone of ostensibly obedient provinces where the execution of central policies was little more than half-hearted and where the fiscal machinery was relatively unproductive.

Even with such reservations, however, the adoption of this new and comprehensive system unquestionably established Te-tsung's image as a forceful, reformist monarch from the very beginning of his reign. The consequences of the implementation of the two-tax reform led almost at once to the first friction between the new regime in Ch'ang-an and the forces of provincial autonomy. Early in 780 the special commissioner dispatched to deal with the three Ho-pei provinces directed Wei-po to cut its army from seventy to thirty thousand men, possibly because this was the maximum authorized for the province. The commissioner may have

[44] See esp. his 'Ryōzeihō no kihonteki yon gensoku', *Hōseishi kenkyū*, 11 (1961) 40–77.

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exceeded his authority in Ho-pei, or he may, at the court's bidding, have been testing the reaction of the provincial regime; or indeed the mandate of these commissioners may have been broader than extant documents suggest. In the event, the order was not only rejected but also exploited by the governor, T'ien Yüeh (successor to T'ien Ch'eng-ssu), who was able to pose as the protector of the livelihood of the soldiers threatened by the court with disbandment. Since rumours had already been circulating about an impending government attempt to pare down the provincial armies, this incident must have left a strong impression.

Te-tsung also sought to demonstrate unequivocally his attitude that the autonomous provinces had their regular financial obligations towards the court like any other. Shortly after his accession he had already rejected a lavish personal gift offered by the governor of P'ing-lu. Then in the spring of 780, when the governors of P'ing-lu (again) and Wei-po presented large sums to the throne as 'tribute', the emperor ostentatiously turned the money over to the state treasury as regular tax revenue. Te-tsung also endeavoured from the outset to reassert control over the high provincial officials themselves. Late in 779 he successfully recalled, and then detained at court, a governor who had held sway in western Szechwan for fourteen years and whose loyalty was in question. In the spring of 780 he moved quickly to punish and replace a usurper in the north-western command of Ching-yüan rather than merely to recognize him and confirm him in his command as Tai-tsung might have done. Even the respected and remarkably effective Liu Yen, head of the salt and transport commissions, proved dispensable: in the summer of that year he was disgraced and executed, and his Yang-chou-based administration partially dismantled.

The most powerful provincial leaders were surely convinced by the end of Te-tsung's first year on the throne that it was only a matter of time until he took some action against them. Their interest was of course in preserving the status quo, which the emperor now threatened to destroy. On the whole their aims were strictly limited. Like the warlords of modern times, they sought largely to be left alone to rule their respective areas as they wished. In this respect it is never easy to say what legitimacy they had in the eyes of the people they controlled. Occasionally we do hear a few voices in these provinces urging compliance with the wishes of the throne; but little actual resistance to local rule emerges. To preserve their special status through a common front, four of these provinces had, late in Tai-tsung's reign, entered into a defensive pact against the court. These included Wei-po, P'ing-lu, Ch'eng-te and Hsiang-yang, the latter a Han River province which, despite limited resources, had adopted

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independent pretensions under its usurper governor Liang Ch'ung-i. During these years Yu-chou and Huai-hsi pursued a conciliatory course towards the court but they were headed by usurpers, Chu T'ao in the first, Li Hsi-lieh in the second, and thus should not be confused with provinces genuinely responsive to central directives.

Under the circumstances, tensions could not help but mount as Te-tsung adopted an increasingly stiff attitude, so much so that, when the fortifications of Pien-chou were strengthened early in 781, rumours quickly spread that the court was preparing a campaign against P'ing-lu, which in turn mobilized its troops for the defence of the province. The real *casus belli*, however, materialized shortly afterwards in Ch'eng-te following the death of Li Pao-ch'en, the last of the old rebels who had been appointed as governors of the territories they controlled at the end of An Lu-shan's rebellion, when the court refused to confirm Li's son Wei-yüeh as his successor. Despite pressure applied by Ch'eng-te's allies, Te-tsung remained firm in his denial, which left the younger Li in the position of a usurper. Obviously, he could be removed only by force, and, as his allies saw the writing on the wall, they prepared to support him in his resistance to the court. This ignited a complex series of provincial revolts in the north-east which lasted from 781 to 784 and secondary rebellions which lingered on in Ho-nan and in the north-west until 786.[45]

Since Te-tsung has often been condemned for his rashness in forcing a military confrontation, it should be observed that his initial assessment of the situation was by no means unsound. Though the bloc formed by Ch'eng-te, Wei-po and P'ing-lu was imposing, it was faced on the west by the three strong loyal provinces of Ho-tung, Chao-i and Hsüan-wu (Pien-chou) and on the north by the still more powerful Yu-chou. The easing of relations with the Tibetans from early 780 which eventually led to the conclusion of a formal treaty in 783 also permitted the redeployment of some troops from the north-west to the north-east. And, while the court hoped by special treatment to keep Liang Ch'ung-i at Hsiang-yang from joining the revolt, it assumed that, even if he should rebel, he could be easily contained by the loyal provinces which surrounded him. Te-tsung's major error lay, then, not so much in pushing for action at this point as in failing to recognize the necessity of pursuing only limited objectives and at a deliberate pace. The goal of the rebel provinces was simply self-preservation. At the worst, they hoped to preserve their territories and military-political organizations intact; at best to make some

[45] The revolts themselves and the steps leading up to them are treated in Denis Twitchett, 'Lu Chih (754–805): imperial adviser and court official', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Confucian personalities* (Stanford, 1962), pp. 91–103, and in greater detail in Peterson, *A fragment of empire*, ch. 3.

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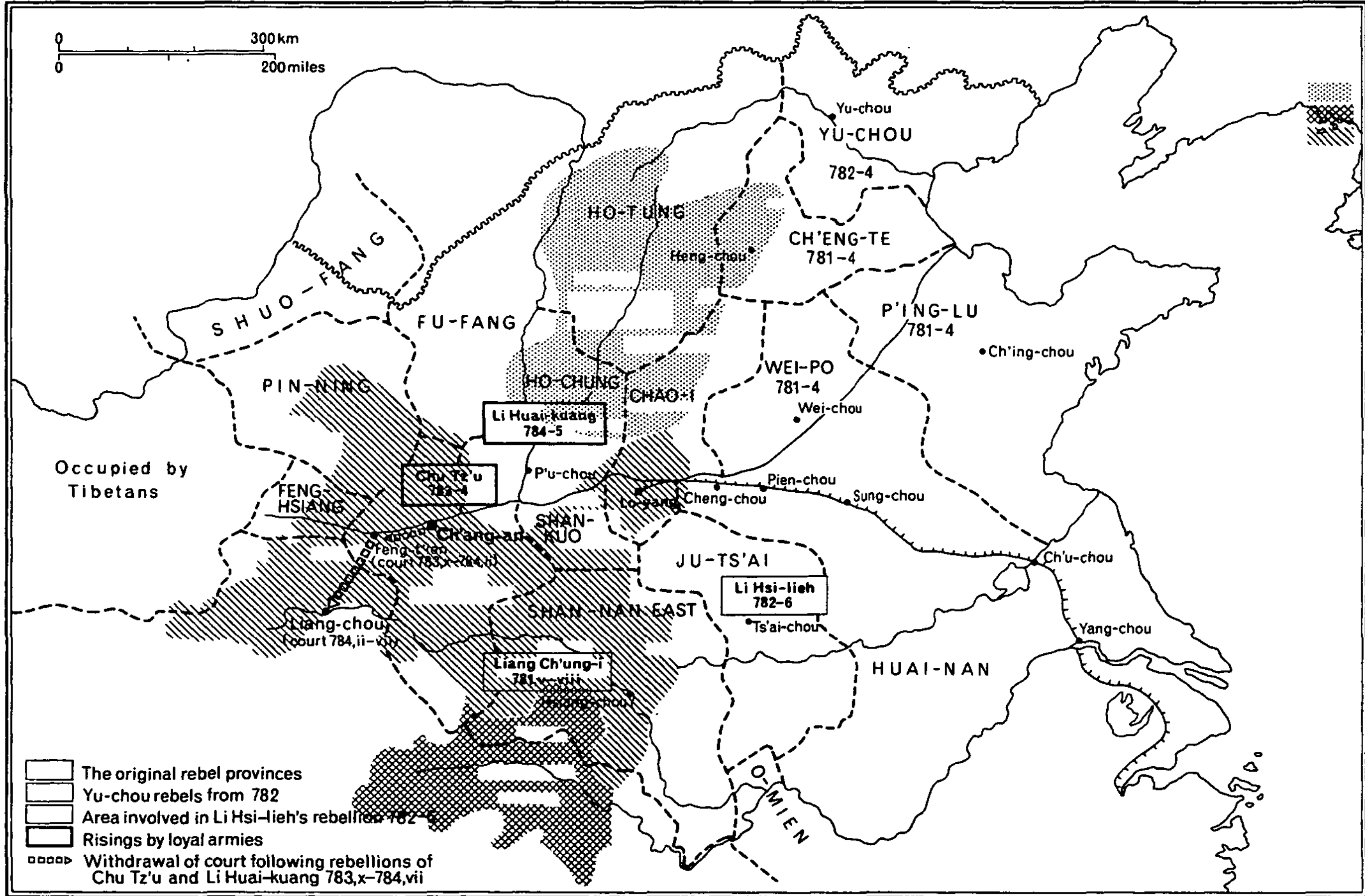

Map 14. The Ho-pei rebellions, 781–6

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modest territorial gains. Wei-po had already shown how this could be done in 775–6.

The first phase of the conflict went successfully for the court. Significantly, elements of the newly expanded Palace Armies (Shen-ts'e chün) for the first time played an important role in this provincial campaign. Though the alliance of rebel provinces held and some mutual aid was given, the allies were obliged by and large to fight independently.

The weakest and most isolated among them, Hsiang-yang, offered little real resistance and fell before the superior loyal forces of Huai-hsi province in the autumn of 781. In Ho-pei, T'ien Yüeh (of Wei-po), seeking to reduce the few important loyalist towns in Chao-i province east of the T'ai-hang mountains, was held up in besieging them and met with a major defeat in mid-781. A further defeat at the beginning of 782 left him besieged in his own provincial capital at Wei-chou. To the north the defection of one of Ch'eng-te's leading generals, Chang Hsiao-chung, in the critical strategic city of I-chou severely weakened the province before any fighting had even occurred. Chang then joined forces with the Yu-chou army under its governor Chu T'ao to inflict a heavy defeat on Ch'eng-te early in 782, jeopardizing the survival of the province and causing the assassination of Li Wei-yüeh over whose succession the struggle had begun in the first place. His assassin, the senior military commander Wang Wu-chün, usurped the governorship of Ch'eng-te and immediately submitted to the throne. To the south, Li Na, the *de facto* but unconfirmed head of P'ing-lu since the death of his father the year before, failed in his first aim, to seize control of the canal, and thereafter found himself under stiff military pressure. By spring of 782 he too was seeking an accommodation with the court. Termination of the rebellion was thus well within reach, only Wei-po remaining in open rebellion, and a settlement depended only upon the terms which the court would offer.

Yet, Te-tsung and his advisers were confident that a forceful line could be pursued further. It was ordered that Ch'eng-te be dismembered and portions given to Wang Wu-chün, to Chang Hsiao-chung, and to another Ch'eng-te general who had defected. Wang was further directed to provide logistic support for the armies of Ho-tung and Yu-chou who were to continue the campaign against Wei-po. Yu-chou was to receive control over the prefectures of Te-chou and Ti-chou, which had been under P'ing-lu. Li Hsi-lieh, governor of Huai-hsi, whose forces had eliminated Liang Ch'ung-i, was denied any territorial gain at all, and Li Na's bid for peace was bluntly rejected. In short, the court not only failed to reward its allies adequately, as sometimes charged; it also sought to reduce and permanently cripple the hostile provinces wthout unduly strengthening

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those whose armies had ensured its victory, thus ensuring that the power of central government would be further increased.

Certainly it was recognition of these aims which led to the Yu-chou governor Chu T'ao's changing sides in the spring of 782. He was, it is true, dissatisfied with his share of the spoils: he did not receive an extension of his existing territory; the new prefectures he was offered lay at a distance and represented no real increase in power. The fundamental issue emerged in an argument which the beleaguered governor of Wei-po offered through his emissaries to Chu T'ao: 'martial, autocratic and possessing those same gifts which enabled Ch'in Shih-huang and Han Wu-ti to exterminate figures of any independence, the emperor intends to sweep clear Ho-pei and deny to the provinces hereditary succession of command'.[46] He also pointed out how vital it was for the security of Yu-chou that Wei-po should remain intact. Clearly it was in Chu's interest to switch sides. Wang Wu-chün's case is even more clear-cut. Following his submission to the throne he was not appointed military governor of the old Ch'eng-te province but, consequent on the division of the province, he became a mere militia commissioner (*t'uan-lien shih*) with jurisdiction extending over no more than two prefectures. In addition, he was required to turn over a large quantity of rations to other armies. Hence, following a series of negotiations, he decided to reject the court's solution and to join Chu T'ao in an effort to save Wei-po. For the first time since the An Lu-shan rebellion the main forces of Ho-pei were united in a common defence of the region. The war in the north-east now entered a new phase.

Forces on both sides grouped near Wei-chou where in mid-782 large loyalist armies suffered a major defeat, a defeat which really marked the end of the court's chances of bringing the Ho-pei provinces under central control. But at the time this could not be foreseen, and the court, retaining control over a couple of prefectures in southern as well as four others in central Ho-pei, persisted in its effort. The result was a long stalemate which endured for the remainder of 782 and well into 783, punctuated only by a few largely unproductive attacks launched into northern Ho-pei through Ho-tung. Probably the court was hopeful of wearing down the rebels. Although conditions at the capital deteriorated rapidly from mid-782, canal transport from the south was adequate to supply the armies in the field until early 783. Moreover, Te-tsung fully realized that he could not now abandon his campaign without a severe loss of prestige. The rebels themselves showed no new military initiatives, but late in 782 they acted jointly with Li Na of P'ing-lu to assert their political independence. In a formal ceremony celebrated east of Wei-chou they each assumed the

[46] *CTS* 141, p. 3843.

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attributes of kingship, styling themselves kings (*wang*) over their respective domains: Chu T'ao as 'King of Chi', Wang Wu-chün as 'King of Chao', T'ien Yüeh as 'King of Wei', and Li Na as 'King of Ch'i'. Harking back to China's feudal past, they copied Chou dynasty usage in establishing courts and hierarchies of their own and consciously posed as equivalents of the Chou feudal kingdoms which had owed no more than symbolic subservience to the Son of Heaven. Changing very little in practice, this move was intended above all to provide for themselves some kind of acceptable legitimacy within their provinces. It was quite natural for them to go back to the Chou model. The idea that China had passed into a period of fragmented sovereignty like the 'feudalism' (*feng-chien*) of the later Chou period was commonplace in the late eighth century.[47] But it does not mean that the Ho-pei governors took their titles literally. Their preference for a more normal status within the empire is clearly shown by subsequent events.

Though the military issue still hung in the balance in Ho-pei, the action most critically affecting the central government developed elsewhere. The model of successful resistance to the government and hardships resulting from the war both served to extend the rebellion to areas where the very survival of the dynasty was placed in jeopardy. In Ho-nan, Li Hsi-lieh had taken no part in the campaign against the north-eastern rebels after his victory over Liang Ch'ung-i in Hsiang-yang. The news of government reverses and the assumption of royal titles by the rebels – who actively sought Li's support in view of his strategic position between the court and its main source of supplies in the Yangtze valley – finally drew Li into the revolt at the beginning of 783. Subsequently, however, save for occasional joint attacks upon the canal, he and his fellow rebels in Ho-pei seem not to have achieved any coordination of policies. Li Hsi-lieh pursued his own expansionary aims, and soon absorbed the attention of all the provincial armies in Ho-nan and the adjoining areas as well as of units of the Palace Army dispatched against him. Checked temporarily at the outset, he went on throughout the remainder of 783 to score a series of successes, culminating in the capture of Pien-chou early in 784. By this time his forces occupied a broad stretch of territory from the Han River to the Pien Canal, had completely cut the supply routes from the south, and threatened to push further south into the rich Yangtze provinces.

In the meantime the government was confronted with an even more urgent crisis. In the autumn of 783 frontier troops passing through the

[47] See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'Neo-Confucianism and neo-legalism in T'ang intellectual life, 755–805', in A. F. Wright, ed. *The Confucian persuasion* (Stanford, 1960), pp. 102–4.

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capital on their way to the front in Ho-nan mutinied over the inadequate provision of rations and found a willing leader of their revolt in Chu Tz'u, Chu T'ao's brother and himself a former governor of Yu-chou. Widespread unrest at the capital, resulting from dwindling supplies and a series of harsh emergency tax measures, hastened a rapid breakdown of order. The court fled in haste to nearby Feng-t'ien where it was besieged by Chu Tz'u, who already announced himself the founder of a new dynasty.

This period of exile at Feng-t'ien was a difficult period for an already hard-pressed emperor, though the documents drafted at the time by able adviser Lu Chih by no means reveal a court in disarray.[48] Te-tsung had no choice but to recall his armies from Ho-pei to deal with the rebels in the metropolitan area, thus abandoning the objectives which had first led to the current crisis. He could not, however, abandon the effort against Li Hsi-lieh when he, like the others, turned down peace feelers from the court. The central government had done without the north-east for over two decades, but it could not even contemplate survival without the resources of the Yangtze valley. It is hardly possible to imagine any further decline in the government position that would not have led to a total collapse. Yet, early in 784 another blow was to fall. The commander of one of the main armies recalled from Ho-pei, Li Huai-kuang, now revolted at his base at Ho-chung. The court took refuge in a more secure location beyond the Chin-ling range in southern Shensi and adapted its strategy accordingly. Li Huai-kuang's revolt has always been something of a mystery. Clearly, he felt that he and his army had been badly treated, not least in the distribution of basic supplies which were by now generally wanting in any case. Once having refused orders, he then evidently hesitated to put himself again at the mercy of the court. Yet, he took little direct military action against the court and his failure to join forces in any way with Chu Tz'u permitted the dynasty to survive this double revolt in the metropolitan heartland. Chu Tz'u's new regime at Ch'ang-an attracted few adherents and declined throughout the year 784.

But, if the court recovered ground against the Kuan-chung rebels on its own, it played only a secondary role in the decisive action which now took place in Ho-pei and which proved decisive for the outcome of this whole complex of revolts. It is true that the court's offers of full pardon and recognition of the political status quo provided an alternative to those rebel leaders who all along had entertained only limited aims. But even more important was their realization that they had almost as much to fear from an ally grown too strong as from an emperor determined to assert his full sovereignty. Thus, when Chu T'ao mounted a great offen-

[48] See Twitchett, 'Lu Chih', pp. 96–101.

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sive at the beginning of 784 which was designed to drive through Lo-yang and western Ho-nan to link up with his brother's forces at the capital, he found his erstwhile allies unwilling to cooperate and armed conflict soon sprang up between them. Finally in the fifth month of 784 the dénouement of the long and chequered north-east revolt occurred as the armies of the rebel province Ch'eng-te and the loyalist governor of Chao-i province combined to inflict a decisive defeat upon Chu T'ao in Pei-chou, forcing him to retire to his northern base and ending the fighting in this region. Wang Wu-chün, T'ien Hsü – T'ien Yüeh's assassin and the new governor of Wei-po – and Li Na had by this time already come to terms with the court and within months Chu T'ao did likewise. All the surrendered rebels were confirmed in their commands and given high court titles. Shortly afterwards Chu Tz'u was defeated and killed, permitting the court to make a return to the capital in the seventh month of 784, although Li Huai-kuang remained in rebellion though immobile in Ho-chung until his assassination in the eighth month of 785.

The government situation had now greatly improved, though difficulties persisted for some time to come. Li Hsi-lieh remained in revolt, having by now announced himself the founder of a new 'Greater Ch'u' dynasty. He continued to control central Ho-nan, and maintained a stranglehold on the vital Pien Canal throughout 784, although on one occasion in the summer a heroic force under Han Huang achieved passage of a major convoy of urgently needed supplies. Only late in 784 did the tide begin to turn against him, as the settlement of the conflict in the north permitted the government to divert more men and material to the southern front. Nevertheless, for the whole of 785 Li continued to fight tenaciously, spurning an offer of amnesty. Not until his assassination in the fourth month of 786 did his subordinates in Huai-hsi surrender and come to terms with the court. The spate of provincial revolts was at long last at an end.

Consequences of the rebellions

What were the ultimate results of the court's attempt to reassert central control? Clearly, Te-tsung completely failed to achieve his principal goal. Not only did he fail to bring the autonomous provinces back under strong central control, but he was obliged to agree to a settlement which officially confirmed their autonomy. There were some gains: Hsiang-yang was eliminated as an autonomous area, and the political geography of Ho-pei was significantly modified by the creation of two new splinter provinces. These two, I-wu (made up of I and Ting prefectures) and Heng-hai (the very large and rich Ts'ang prefecture), enjoyed virtual

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Map 15. The T'ang provinces, 785

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autonomy like the others, but being of moderate size, were obliged to maintain close relations with the court, which could put them to good tactical use in the region. The major provinces in the north-east remained formidable, though Ch'eng-te in particular underwent considerable territorial modification (see map 15). Huai-hsi too, despite the demise of Li Hsi-lieh, remained beyond central control, under leaders no less independent than Li Hsi-lieh had been.

The effect on the other court-controlled provinces throughout the empire of this failure to impose central control by force was very significant. Bankrupt alike of funds and of prestige, the central government was obliged to return to conservative policies which involved minimal friction with key provincial forces and interests. Te-tsung's government thus came to accept such serious compromises as maintaining governors in a single post for very long tenures (sometimes in order to avoid any confrontation over the succession until death), conferring legitimate office on all manner of usurpers and mutineers, and even sounding out local garrisons on the acceptability of potential appointees for local posts. Problems of local control, especially in the provinces with sizeable armies, not only continued but, as the inability or unwillingness of the court to take strong corrective action became clear, grew more frequent.[49] The state's finances also suffered adverse effects. Though the two-tax system was retained, its abuses became legion. This was partly the result of the long period of deflation which began after the end of the rebellion. But Te-tsung himself stimulated increasing fiscal autonomy and malpractice on the part of provincial officials by encouraging extra-legal tribute contributions which were paid directly into his private treasury, unquestionably at the expense of the regular tax quotas destined for state coffers. In addition, its basic weakness exposed, the government simply could not enforce all the provisions of the reformed system, for example, the prohibition against special or 'supplementary' levies. As the invaluable financial report of 807, the *Yüan-ho kuo-chi-pu*, attests, effective central control over finances was maintained in only eight provinces of the Yangtze valley (though revenue in some form was surely forthcoming from others as well) and the overall registration of taxpaying households dropped at least 30 per cent from the first year of Te-tsung's reign.[50]

Overall, then, the revolts of 781–6 confirmed the results of the An Lu-shan rebellion. The T'ang imperial house retained the throne over a country which was in most respects actually and in all respects formally unified and whose unchallenged political centre remained in the north-

[49] Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai fan-chen yü chung-yang kuan-hsi chih yen-chiu*, pp. 206–7.
[50] See *TFYK* 486, pp. 19a–b; *THY* 84, pp. 1553–4; map 16.

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west at Ch'ang-an. Second, with revenue in most provinces largely or entirely disposed of by local authorities, the only dependable source of revenue for the central government lay in the Yangtze provinces. Thus, the critical importance of the canal system, and the need to protect it, were confirmed. The provinces flanking the canal, Ho-yang, Chung-wu and Wu-ning (see map 15), which had emerged during this period, were thereafter consciously maintained for the defence of the canal and all played significant roles in years to come. Third, the north-eastern corner of the empire remained beyond the effective control of the central government forming a bloc of provinces whose practically independent status became increasingly accepted as time went on. But, by the same token, it is precisely on the matter of continuity with previous circumstances that the great rebellions of the second and third quarters of the century differ from one another. Whereas the rebellion of An Lu-shan effected sweeping changes which ushered in a new age, the revolts of 781–6, even though comparable as military events, brought about changes in degree rather than in kind. At least part of the explanation lies in the fact that by 781 a looser structure characterized the empire permitting it to absorb the violent shocks of war and insurgency without fundamental modification, even though royal authority was left prostrate by the experience. One basic feature of this looser structure was that most of its major beneficiaries in the provinces had little interest in contending for the throne and were satisfied to control their individual domains. Such an alternative had earlier been unthinkable. The results of this series of revolts – a further weakening of central control and solidification of provincial authority – were grave but not irreversible, though many contemporaries had good reason to think they were. Their major significance lay, in fact, in setting back some thirty years central efforts to reassert control in the provinces.

Later years of Te-tsung's reign

Te-tsung reigned for another twenty years, but never really recovered from this initial failure. His supine policy towards the provinces was notorious among traditional historians who, assuming he had other options, condemned his 'policy of indulgence' (*ku-hsi chih cheng*). Whether or not he was unnecessarily cautious, the long catalogue of disturbances in provincial administrations and armies from this time does underline continued central government weakness. Yet, during his twenty-five-year reign the court made gradual but nonetheless steady progress in recovering control over appointments to the highest provincial posts and in increasing the number of bureaucrats occupying them as opposed to professional

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soldiers. By 804 half of the provincial governors were bureaucrats, not military men.[51] Moreover, if Te-tsung's policy towards the provinces after 785 appears weak, there is more to it than a weak and fearful monarch; for from 786 Te-tsung adopted an altered conception of sovereignty, which focused on the sector of state power and resources under the direct control of the throne. Thus, his chief objective was to strengthen the most immediate bases of the monarchy – its territorial centre, the armies protecting it and court finances – and to increase his own personal control. Since the safety of the capital depended directly on the security of the north-western frontier, he expended considerable funds and effort to expand and maintain the armies there, the only centrally supported external armies in the empire. This improvement of the north-western defences was associated with the strengthening of the Palace Armies (Shen-ts'e chün) which Te-tsung properly saw as the surest protection against any repetition of his 783 trauma. As these armies were expanded several of them were posted on the frontier (which meant that the court to this degree assumed direct responsibility for external defence). It is not easy to determine the size of the Palace Armies quartered around the capital. But by the end of the reign the total number of Shen-ts'e troops both on the frontier and near the capital appears to have reached 200,000.[52] In part because of these measures, this critical frontier remained secure, and, by the end of his reign, there was a powerful and well-trained force immediately at the disposal of the throne.

Te-tsung seems to have enjoyed some modest success in his search for revenue. The somewhat unsympathetic sources present an image of him as a grasping, avaricious ruler. Clearly he was determined never to lack for funds again and was none too particular how they were to be provided. But his success came at the expense of the long-term, normal functioning of the fiscal administration. We have already called attention to his encouragement of 'tribute' contributions, which were essentially a means by which provincial governors bought off the emperor. He also showed little inclination to remedy the shortcomings and abuses of the two-tax system as it was now functioning, which were forcefully exposed in Lu Chih's comprehensive six-part memorial of 794.[53] Most serious among these abuses was the maintenance of old tax rates, set in cash terms, under severe deflationary conditions – a situation which gave great

[51] See references in n. 35 of this ch.

[52] T'ang Ch'ang-ju, *T'ang-shu ping-chih chien-cheng* (Peking, 1957), pp. 94–5; for a general treatment see Obata Tatsuo, 'Shinsakugun no hattatsu', in *Tamura hakushi shoju tōyōshi ronsō* (Kyoto, 1968), pp. 205–20.

[53] Twitchett, 'Lu Chih', pp. 116–18; and for a complete translation see S. Balazs, 'Beiträge zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte der T'ang-Zeit (618–906)', *MSOS*, 36 (1933) 168–206.

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profit to the tax-levying authorities, whether central or provincial, and imposed severe hardship on the taxpayer.

Te-tsung was also intensely preoccupied with day-to-day administration at court, unwilling to delegate authority and distrustful of the bureaucracy. Within the limits he had set himself he was determined to be undisputed master. He turned increasingly to the use of eunuchs for important tasks, since they possessed no status save by reference to the throne. During his reign eunuchs acquired command over the Palace Armies at the capital and were used with growing effectiveness as imperial representatives attached to the provincial administrations under the title of army supervisors (*chien-chün shih*). Eunuch control over the armies at the capital, which became all but permanent after 783 and which was a major factor in their emergence as a dominant influence upon the central government, is treated elsewhere in this volume. The system of army supervisors, on the contrary, lies at the heart of our concerns.[54]

The use of eunuch observers at army command headquarters had already begun before the An Lu-shan rebellion, but such assignments were then made purely on an *ad hoc* basis and exclusively to frontier armies. The office as it subsequently developed was a product of the rebellion, for eunuchs provided (or seemed to provide) the throne's most trustworthy liaison men with the military both during the rebellion itself and in the turbulent years which followed. Under Tai-tsung it is clear that eunuch army supervisors were regularly attached to provincial and frontier military administrations as a matter of course. In line with Tai-tsung's relatively passive policy in the provinces, they seem not to have intervened actively in provincial matters, but largely to have acted as sources of intelligence for the throne, separate and distinct from the normal bureaucratic channels. Even in this capacity their presence must have imposed some constraint on the conduct of provincial officials, for the information which they submitted surely influenced court policy towards individual provinces and the subsequent assignments for their officials. Moreover, since direct access to the emperor was itself a source of power, the potential clearly existed both for an expanded role for the army supervisors and for their coming into conflict with the governors under whom they served.

Te-tsung came to the throne quite convinced of the utility of this system and, despite repeated warnings from bureaucrats about the adverse effects of assigning such serious responsibilities to eunuchs, he gave the army supervisors increasing scope during the course of his reign. In view of the

[54] See primarily Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai kangunshi-sei no kakuritsu ni tsuite', *Nishi-Nihon Shigaku*, 14 (1953) 16–32, and 'Tōmatsu kangunshi-sei ni tsuite', *Shakai kagaku ronsō*, 7 (1957) 17–25.

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near-fatal set-back which he suffered in his frontal attack on provincial power, this is not surprising. Enlarging their sphere of activities beyond that of mere observers, he made the supervisors the key liaison agents between throne and province in all political matters and even in some fields of administrative activity. Most significant was the part which they played in the appointment of new governors, decisions on which were taken only after consideration of the army supervisors' reports on local conditions and frequently following direct consultation between them and the local garrisons. This obviously opened the way for abuses, and cases of bribery or intimidation of army supervisors were far from unknown; but such abuses were probably less common than our sources, which are violently biased against all eunuchs, would have us believe. Supervisors were also employed to take temporary charge of a province upon the death of a governor, to conduct negotiations with recalcitrant governors, and to undertake relief measures in times of emergency. In terms of routine administration they had considerable influence with respect to appointments of personnel and they seem also to have acquired specific logistic responsibilities. Enjoying such powers, which the emperor either assigned to them or acquiesced in their taking, the supervisors were not loath to assume others, including even the conduct of military operations. Time and again bitter complaints were raised about this interference. For example, during the court's unhappy attempt to suppress the rebellious province of Huai-hsi in 798–9, decisions on strategy in the field were generally made by the army supervisors of the various participating loyalist armies gathered in conference and only then passed on to the nominal commander-in-chief. However, by intervening actively in this way, as on this occasion, they invariably found themselves made the scapegoats in the case of defeat.

However, Te-tsung was most reluctant to listen to any criticism of this system. He not only continued to employ army supervisors on a large scale but he even increased their number by assigning them to even smaller military units. In 795 he conferred regular status on the post, by issuing the supervisors with formal seals of office. Above all, when conflicts arose between governor and supervisor, he supported the latter whenever possible. The dramatic confrontation at I-ch'eng in 800 is an example of the lengths which such conflicts could reach. Following a steadily intensifying conflict between the governor Yao Nan-chung and the supervisor Hsüeh Ying-chen, rival envoys bearing conflicting reports were engaged at one point in a race to the capital, the dénouement of which was the murder of Hsüeh Ying-chen's envoy by the governor's man who then wrote a memorial of protest before committing suicide.

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Despite hostility to Hsüeh Ying-chen at court, the emperor refused to do more than recall him and give him a court post.

Te-tsung no doubt appreciated the flexibility which this system gave him in dealing with provinces and governors individually as well as the direct personal control over relations with the governors which it afforded him. But the effectiveness of the army supervisors was in direct proportion to the prestige of the sovereign which, as we know, was at low ebb throughout the latter part of the reign. Moreover, the supervisors can have had little effect in those provinces outside court control.

In these ways Te-tsung showed his almost exclusive concern with strengthening the immediate powers of the throne. His conduct may reflect merely limited ambitions, or perhaps he actually intended his work to provide the foundation for a general recovery of central authority by his successors. In fact, the only subsequent military offensive he mounted against a province, forced upon him in 798 by the provocations of Huai-hsi, resulted in failure, and did not bode well for imperial power in the future. Moreover, he was foolish to maintain his disabled son, the future Shun-tsung, as his heir. Yet it is true that when the architect of central recovery, Hsien-tsung, ascended the throne in 805, he found the institutional means and the financial and military resources to pursue a vigorous policy already largely at hand, thanks to Te-tsung's quiet persistence.

THE PROVINCES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINTH CENTURY

By the beginning of the ninth century the new provinces had been in existence for some four decades and had become permanent features of the T'ang landscape, although the boundaries of individual provinces were subject to change.[55] To Li Chi-fu in his geographical description of the empire, the *Yüan-ho chün-hsien t'u-chih* written in 814, they are facts of life, the major administrative units under which he arranges his information. During this period they had developed their own institutional structure and methods of administration, a fuller description of which must now be attempted. This description will concentrate upon the provinces north of the Yangtze where these new institutions were found in their most developed form. In the south the provincial administrations were weaker and their relationship to the court more subservient.

The army remained the nucleus of the province.[56] Essential for the

[55] Commonly, though not universally, they are referred to by the old provincial appellation *tao*.
[56] The most penetrating analysis of provincial military structure is Hori Toshikazu, 'Hanchin shineigun no kenryoku kōzō', *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 20 (1960) 75–149.

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security of the province, it usually absorbed the major share of local revenue. Not only was its presence the *raison d'être* for the appointment of a military governor over a specific area in the first place, but it also provided him with immediate physical backing in his relations both inside and outside the province. The principal concentration of troops was at the prefectural seat of the province where the garrison was called the *ya-chün* ('headquarters garrison'). The *ya-chün*, capable of overwhelming any opposition within the province, was normally the only provincial force which possessed significant striking power. Its nucleus was an elite corps of guardsmen responsible for the governor's safety and no doubt used as a general security force at the provincial capital. Usually known as the *ya-nei-chün* (the 'inner army') under the more militaristic or independent governors, it frequently consisted of soldiers of special status: 'private' soldiers maintained out of the governor's personal purse; fictitiously adopted sons; 'retainers' who remained in the governor's service as he was transferred from one province to the next. Since the elite guard was closest to the governor's person, it often played a crucial role in provincial politics and we find case upon case of usurpation (attempted and accomplished) by its officers. The remaining military units in the province were quartered in the administrative seats of prefectures and counties and at other strategic locations.[57] Appropriately they were known as 'the outer garrisons' (*wai-chen*). Their disposition was determined by various considerations, defence of the province (especially in the autonomous and frontier provinces), security within the province and control over sources of revenue (such as trade centres and salt pools). The size of these garrisons varied enormously, from a few hundred to several thousand men, but garrisons of this great size were quite exceptional.

Most if not all members of the units we have been discussing were regular soldiers and spent their entire careers in the army. But there is much evidence to suggest that local militia (*t'uan-lien*) were also widely used in the provincial armies and may have formed a much larger component than is yet suspected. Local militia had the obvious advantage of low cost and, even though they were not constantly under arms, they could be mobilized with sufficient speed on the provincial scale. Although not well-enough trained for campaigns outside the province, they could be expected to fight tenaciously in defence of their homes. In fact, the war records of provincial armies throughout this period seem to suggest that the percentage of militiamen was substantial; these armies were

[57] The fullest treatment of these is Hino Kaisaburō, 'Tōdai hanchin no bakko to chinsō', *TYGH*, 26 (1939) 503–39, and 27 (1939–40) 1–62, 153–212, 311–50.

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notoriously ineffective in campaigns waged outside their provinces but fought doggedly in defence of their own territories.

In two other ways the army had a significant impact on the long-term development of the province. First, it was in part through the army that the provincial administration took on an increasingly local colouration. As we have noted, once armies were stationed in specific areas, their personnel inevitably became identified with those areas, an identification which grew stronger with the passage of time. Eventually, they came largely to represent local interests, a fact which often put them at odds with the governors who were appointed to the province from the outside. A second point partly qualifies the first. In most of the provinces the military became an hereditary occupation, not because it conferred high status but because it promised high material rewards. In a position to demand higher pay and better treatment, the army frequently did so. In the course of time, therefore, its members, and principally those in the *ya-chün*, became a new kind of lower-ranking privileged elite. This naturally made them sharply opposed to any changes in the status quo, whatever their loyalties to the throne or to their local governor. (In the ninth century the armies of Wei-po and Wu-ning were notorious in this respect.) In addition, as their demands had to be supplied by local taxpayers, they even set themselves off from the populace as a special interest group. In view of these circumstances it becomes clear why some governors developed special bodyguard units of their own which accompanied them from post to post.

We may recall how the provincial framework was imposed upon the original prefectural system which was left largely intact. Since the prefectures were never, in theory at least, made unequivocally subordinate to the provincial authorities, the result was parallel structures which threatened to, and often did, merge. Technically, each could have functioned almost independently of the other. The governor in this case would have limited himself to maintaining security in the area and acting in a purely supervisory capacity vis-à-vis the prefects and county magistrates who would have continued to perform their established local functions. In practice, the governor – usually enjoying the advantages of higher nominal rank, greater prestige and better connections at court, besides having command over military forces – was generally able to impose his decisions on his prefects. Moreover, as he assumed the function of handling communications between court and the prefectures and counties, the transmission of court directives provided him with the means for giving his own orders. His power of assessing the performance of officials within his jurisdiction also clearly encouraged their personal

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subservience to him. Finally, the prefecture's obligation to contribute to the support of the provincial apparatus and army made it fiscally subordinate to the province. Since the province commonly took on the role of receiving and disposing of both its own and the central government's shares of local revenue the financial subordination of the prefectures was very nearly complete.

With respect to his own administrative staff (*shih-fu*) and military officers, the governor had virtually full power of appointment. This meant that such personnel had a means of access to official positions different and separate from that administered by the central Board of Civil Office. The pools of manpower drawn upon by the provincial administrations and by the Board of Civil Office overlapped to a considerable degree. However, in contrast to the rather well-defined group regarded as officially qualified (having *ch'u-shen*) by the board – men who gained official status through noble birth or hereditary privilege, literati who had passed the examinations and those who had risen from the clerical service – the group which fed the provincial administrations was far more amorphous and varied. It included literati who either had not passed the examinations or had not yet been able to obtain appointment to a substantive post (Han Yü's case being notable among many examples), military men who turned to administrative specialization, and men generally of lowly social origins who had acquired a degree of literacy sufficient to handle basic administrative tasks. Advancement under these provincial authorities became, in fact, the most important avenue of social mobility during the second half of the dynasty, as innumerable individuals achieved official status and advanced up the administrative hierarchy who would previously have had no such opportunities. Thus, the parallel county-prefectural and provincial administrative organizations in the provinces differed markedly, not only in their basic political and administrative affiliation but also in their overall social composition. To be sure, where governors successfully installed their own appointees in prefectural and county posts, these differences tended to break down. From the central government's point of view, men who entered official service through the non-established provincial employment were not altogether regular officials, and remained technically 'outside the current' (*liu-wai*). As a result, it placed restrictions on their promotion and tenure of office, and attempted to maintain a strict division between them and regularly qualified officials. Virtually none of them, apart from the military officers, were permitted to enter central government service. Nevertheless, as Po Chü-i, a regular bureaucrat in the central administration, observed, officials serving in the provincial apparatus were both more numerous and better paid than the

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regular local officials, a testimony to the financial resources available to the provincial authorities.[58]

Hence, in the essentially court-controlled provinces governors enjoyed direct authority over their provincial chain of command and were in a position to exert powerful influence over the officers of their subordinate prefectures and counties. In the period examined so far, most of them operated comparatively freely, especially when they had remained in a single post for many years at a time. Most of them, moreover, according to their personal inclinations, strove either to consolidate and to expand their personal power within their province like Wei Kao in Chien-nan West, or to amass large personal fortunes like Wang O who served in several provinces and became immensely rich. As these and other examples attest, this did not necessarily entail antagonistic relations between the governor and the court.

But, as we have seen, once an official became firmly entrenched as head of a sizeable or rich or strategically located province, his conduct became less predictable. Even in the normal course of events, since the sphere of authority of the provinces and prefectural structures was not properly demarcated, and since central and provincial authorities were always in actual or potential competition for control over the prefectures, a distinct tension pervaded central–provincial relations. Until the beginning of the ninth century, with the exception of Te-tsung's first years on the throne, increases in tension resulted primarily from the actions of provincial authorities. From 805 to 820, however, the central government itself increased this tension by its new and vigorous efforts at recentralization.

In the autonomous provinces the problem was posed in entirely different fashion, for here the lines of authority had merged into one. The prefects and magistrates, like the military officers and members of the provincial staff, were all appointees of the governor who were given their positions of responsibility precisely because of their firm adherence to him. In these provinces the court had no inner access, so to speak, to affairs of the province through their prefects, and they were therefore obliged to deal with it only through the governor and his provincial administration. But, if control lay far more completely in the hands of the governor in such a province, it was also a far more critical issue than in the other, less independent provinces. Power there rested quite bluntly on military force, and the governor alone bore the responsibility for its effective employment. Since he had kept his province outside the control of the court, he could not count on the court's backing in case of the

[58] Ch'en Yin-k'o, 'Official salaries as revealed in T'ang poetry', in E-tu Zen Sun and J. De Francis, eds. *Chinese Social History* (Washington, 1956), pp. 192–5.

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failure of his regime. The penalty was assassination or expulsion. As a result, a sophisticated system of controls was employed by the governors of these provinces, which are described in part in a memorial offered to the throne by minister Li Chiang in 812:

> Your servant has observed that the law-breaking governors of Ho-pei and Ho-nan do not entrust their military power to any single man but rather distribute it among several. It is their fear that power accumulated in the hands of one man would lead him to revolt which lies behind this. Since power is evenly distributed among all the commanders, they exert a mutual control over each other. Should they wish to combine [to increase their strength], they would risk encountering those not of like mind who would reveal the conspiracy. But, should any one of them revolt entirely on his own, his strength would not suffice and he would most certainly fail. Furthermore, just as the rewards [for loyal behaviour] are great, punishment [for disloyalty] is heavy. As a result, the military commanders can only look at each other in impotence, and none dare take the first step. It is on this that the rebel governors count.[59]

In addition, such governors employed a hostage system, to deter defection or rebellion, and relied heavily upon family members on whom they could personally rely to fill critical posts. Promises of promotion and the frequent distribution of bounties were positive inducements to loyalty. Such features were also to be found in provinces under court control. But the link with the court, which involved the governor in strict accountability for his activities but which also guaranteed support in case of difficulty, made for a qualitative difference in court-controlled provinces.

With respect to finances too, a clear distinction must be drawn between the two types of province. This difference applied not so much to the specific sources of revenue – for the revenue base remained essentially the same despite changes in the political order – as to its disposition. Evidence for both is scanty, but it is clear that far greater complexity obtained in the court-controlled provinces. The autonomous provinces simply collected their taxes and retained them, whether they made even a nominal report to the court or not. The only form of revenue received from them by the central government was 'tribute', offered irregularly (if at all) and in amounts which were decided by the governor. Much the same can be said of such loyal provinces as Chien-nan West under Wei Kao whose complete fiscal autonomy, however, was probably rationalized on the grounds of the critical need for defending Szechwan against Nan-chao and the Tibetans. Still, the fact was that most provinces *were* accountable to the central authorities.

The amount of revenue to which the provincial administration was entitled was the sum of the provincial shares (*sung-shih*) turned over by

[59] *TCTC* 238, pp. 7692–3.

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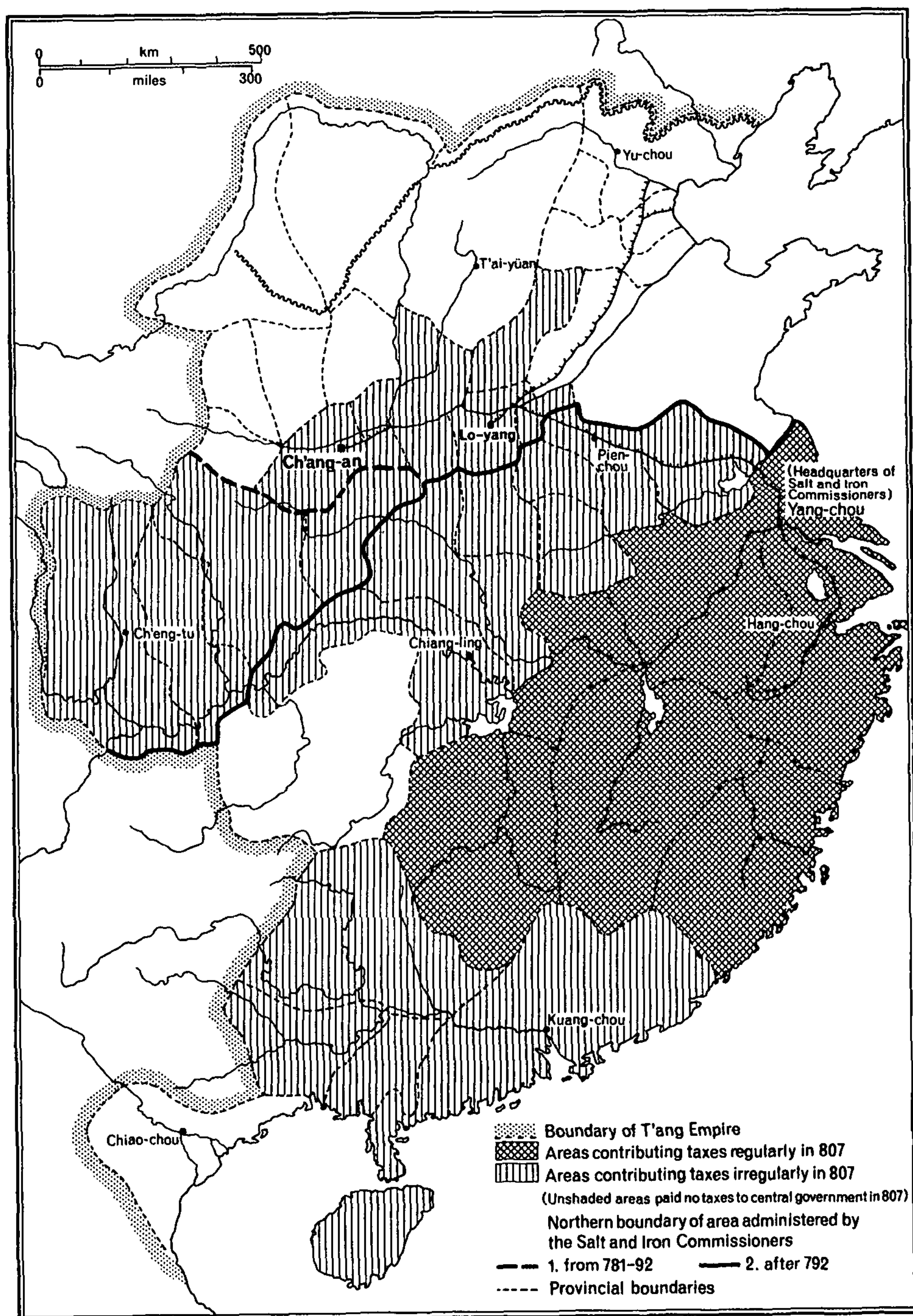

Map 16. The fiscal divisions of the empire, 810

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each of the prefectures under its jurisdiction, in addition to the entire revenue available from the home prefecture. If the governor and his staff wished to go beyond these legal limits they had, therefore, to do so with circumspection. One common way of raising extra revenue was to maintain a separate list of households unreported to the central government whose taxes would be earmarked exclusively for provincial revenue. There was also the practice of *ying-pi*, almost literally translatable as 'tax shelter'. By this practice local, usually wealthy, landowners nominally assigned their lands to tax-exempt individuals of official status, to whom they paid money in return for the tax exemption their lands received.

The power of levying taxation opened up great possibilities for personal profit. Whereas some of the other sources of power were available to provincial officials at all levels, these financial powers lay uniquely in the hands of the governor, for he was the highest financial official in the province and alone in a position to levy taxes. His monopoly on communication with the court was of vital importance since none but himself and his immediate aides could determine which levies had been centrally authorized and which not. The illegal, supplementary levies (known by a variety of names such as *p'ei-shuai*, *chia-p'ei* and *chia-cheng*) were applied in two main ways: first, simply as an increase in rate of a tax already being collected on a regular basis, and second, as an entirely new levy whether intended as regular or not, justified by some presumed need. The two-tax reform was devised to put an end to the plethora of such special levies then in existence; but the eclipse of central power frustrated this hope.

Provincial officials also exploited the growth of trade in the late eighth and ninth centuries by establishing internal customs, much like the imposition of *likin* in the nineteenth century. A location on the main lines of communication offered great opportunities. Such provinces as Hsüan-wu and Wu-ning capitalized without restraint on their positions on the Pien Canal. In Hsüan-wu the long-time governor Han Hung had accumulated a fortune running into millions (in cash, silk, grain and valuables) by the time he retired in 819.[60] It is also clear that provincial authorities operated businesses of their own, despite prohibitions againsts such activities. Finally, governors and their subordinates sometimes simply seized funds and property from people under their jurisdiction, though normally under a specific pretext. The best-documented case is that of Yen Li, governor of Chien-nan East in the early years of the ninth century. On the grounds that members of some eighty-eight households had been guilty of collusion with rebels, Yen carried out a massive confiscation of 122 estates and domiciles which embraced all manner of property, com-

[60] *CTS* 156, p. 4135; *HTS* 158, p. 4945.

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pletely ignoring an imperial pardon which had been granted to all such individuals.[61] However, such acts could not be repeated often and were probably exceptional.

The aspect of provincial administration which is most difficult to document is the precise relationship of the provincial authorities to the local populace, and how far they enjoyed popular support in their provinces. No doubt the new provincial organs and personnel came to be accepted as integral parts of the normal administrative order. And, as we have already suggested with respect to the army, much of the administrative and military substructure, at least at the lower- and middle-ranking levels, must have become staffed with local personnel and deeply involved with local interests. But did this, combined with other factors, produce sectionally inspired pressure towards separatism? We can only speculate. We do know from court policy deliberations that the firm adherence of the populace in the autonomous provinces to their provincial leaders was taken seriously into account.[62] As there was a high degree of continuity in the composition of the provincial leadership, despite struggles at the top, this encouraged the development of strong local ties. Absence of any material commitments to the court may even have permitted the governors of autonomous provinces to pursue tax policies more favourable towards the average taxpayer than in the loyal provinces elsewhere.

The development of such popular support in a province came only in the course of time, and cannot explain the emergence of autonomous regimes in the first place. Similar possibilities existed in many other parts of the empire where, as we have seen, there were ample means for the emergence of a higher degree of separatism than actually developed. The fact that separatism did not develop more widely must in large part result from the continuing identification of the elite throughout the country with the established order as they knew it, that is, with the court presided over by the T'ang imperial house. This identification was not only material, but equally cultural and moral. Such an attachment to the dynasty may also have permeated the sentiments of the common people to a greater extent than is realized.

HSIEN-TSUNG (REIGN 805–20) AND THE PROVINCES

The years between the aftermath of the An Lu-shan rebellion and the accession of Hsien-tsung in 805 saw no basic changes in the provincial

[61] C. A. Peterson, 'Corruption unmasked: Yüan Chen's investigations in Szechwan', *AM*, 18 (1973), esp. 43–5.

[62] *TCTC* 237, p. 7659; 238, p. 7664; *CTW* 646, pp. 2a–6b.

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structure, despite the major events which occurred. Similarly, the modified provincial structure which resulted from Hsien-tsung's reforms lasted with little modification until the T'ang collapse in the third quarter of the ninth century. His reign, then, stands out as a second formative period in the relationship between centre and provinces after 755.[63]

Hsien-tsung ascended the throne in May 805 upon the abdication of his gravely ill father, Shun-tsung. Events were to prove him an activist, forceful monarch who seized the opportunity to pursue interventionist policies. But at the outset conditions could hardly have appeared favourable. Harmony was yet to be restored at court following the dissensions under Shun-tsung, and wide latitude in local government had become the accepted norm throughout the empire. Hsien-tsung, under no illusions about the possibility of a rapid restoration of central power, moved with caution and sought to exploit opportunities as they arose rather than to impose a sweeping master-plan of his own.

Nevertheless, Hsien-tsung tenaciously maintained his basic objectives of recovering control over the autonomous provinces and of making all provincial authorities fully responsive to central direction. He could hardly have hoped to go further: the need for high-level authority in the provinces precluded any return to the centralization of pre-rebellion days, and the military establishment was both too large and too well-entrenched to permit any substantial demilitarization. It is further characteristic of Hsien-tsung that he did not see the provincial problem purely in military terms. He recognized the equally great need for institutional changes which would reduce the capacity of the provinces for independent action. His reforms were, it is true, aimed at increasing central power rather than improving the welfare of the populace. But they enabled the central government to reassert decisive control over the entire empire except for portions of Ho-pei until the final quarter of the ninth century and thus ushered in an age of relative peace.

The new emperor was hardly seated upon the throne when he found himself faced with a major political crisis in the crucial frontier region of Chien-nan (Szechwan), which confronted the powerful kingdoms of Tibet and Nan-chao. Chien-nan West, the larger and more powerful of the two provinces into which the region had been divided since the An Lu-shan rebellion, had by this time developed a tradition of relative independence. For a decade and a half following the rebellion, its governor was Ts'ui Ning, a usurper who had achieved power in a local civil war

[63] This section is drawn from C. A. Peterson, 'The restoration completed: Hsien-tsung and the provinces', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 151–91.

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against court-sponsored rivals but who had subsequently remained essentially loyal to the T'ang. Following the civil wars of the early 780s, the court in 784 appointed as governor a trusted bureaucrat, Wei Kao, who succeeded superlatively both in maintaining control within the province and in defending it against external attack. However, being left in this office for life, he enjoyed an unrivalled opportunity to turn his provincial administration into a highly autonomous one, not unlike the north-eastern governors. The crucial difference was that he remained steadfastly loyal to the throne and contributed huge sums to demonstrate his attachment (even if as tribute rather than regular tax revenue).

Upon Wei's death late in the summer of 805, after a twenty-one-year tenure, one of his subordinates, Liu P'i, seized control of the province and immediately began to put pressure on the court for formal confirmation as governor. The emperor at first adopted a tough stance but backed down upon perceiving Liu's readiness to resort to arms. A call for firmness from his chief minister Tu Huang-shang, however, persuaded Hsien-tsung to temporize no longer:

> Once having passed through the grievous troubles [of his first years], Te-tsung strove [only] to be accommodating. He would not seek to replace any governor in his lifetime and then, upon his death, would send a palace official (i.e., a eunuch) to learn the sentiments of the garrison before appointing a successor. Occasionally, eunuchs accepted bribes from leading generals and returned to court singing their praises. Thus, when the insignias of office were conferred [on a new appointee], it was never a case of the court's truly deciding the matter.
>
> As Your Majesty most certainly wishes to restore to vigour the basic principles of our land, He must bring the provinces under the rule of law. Only then can proper order be restored to the realm.[64]

It was not until the following spring (806) that a punitive campaign could be mounted against Liu P'i. But then, although Liu P'i had achieved some initial advantages by the occupation of the neighbouring province of Chien-nan East, the campaign made steady progress. By autumn Liu had been crushed. This was the first significant military success for the central forces in the provinces for a quarter of a century. Characteristically, the province itself was not held responsible for the revolt. Apart from a minor reduction in territories, no official sanctions were imposed on the area (though unofficially both Chien-nan provinces were plundered egregiously by their new governors).

Having already earlier in the year quickly disposed of a usurper in the north-western province of Hsia-Sui, Hsien-tsung's new regime had now passed its first military test and enjoyed vastly improved status. Neverthe-

[64] *CTS* 147, p. 3974; *TCTC* 237, p. 7627.

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less it was still obliged to compromise when the first north-eastern governor sought official confirmation from the throne. In 806, the governor of P'ing-lu died, and his step-brother, Li Shih-tao, assumed control and appealed to the court for formal appointment with the proper credentials. Hsien-tsung was most unwilling to accede and even considered opening up a second front in the north-east while action was still under way in the south-west. But more cautious counsel prevailed, leading the court to accept a compromise: in return for the appointment, Li Shih-tao agreed to accept court appointees to subordinate posts, to obey court directives and to pay taxes on a regular basis. There are no indications that he subsequently did anything of the kind; but Hsien-tsung had at the least laid down a firm line for dealing with the governors of autonomous provinces and had set a precedent for negotiating terms rather than merely rubber-stamping any demands which they might make. Though his first steps hardly transformed the political situation, they did alter the whole climate of central–provincial relations. Governors, who had grown scornful of emperor and court alike, now became more sensible of their obligations and began to attend more regularly at court.

One of those who refused to do so was Li Ch'i, governor of Che-hsi since 799 and a distant member of the royal clan. Li not only headed a rich and important province, but up to 805 he had served concurrently as commissioner for salt and iron, a post giving him access to enormous additional revenues which he did not hesitate to use for personal purposes. But his military aspirations were probably even more troubling to Hsien-tsung's court. He had obtained from Shun-tsung appointment as military as well as civil governor, and had made efforts to build up his provincial army far beyond the needs of normal security. In China's most critical revenue-producing area, this simply could not be tolerated. Fearful for his own safety in view of his past flagrant financial irregularities, Li rejected repeated summons to attend court. Finally, late in 807, the emperor ordered him to be forcibly removed. The armies of the neighbouring provinces had hardly got beyond the stage of mobilization when Li's own commanders turned upon him and killed him, putting an end to the crisis. The military prospects for an isolated rebel in Che-hsi, a province with no defensible frontiers, had been poor from the outset, and in this sense the result was no great military triumph for the emperor. But it was a significant political victory, confirming his determination to spare no means in bringing recalcitrant provinces to heel.

Yet, for any genuine restoration of central power such piecemeal political victories left untouched the roots of provincial separatism. In order to attack these, institutional changes were indispensable. This

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necessity was one of the fundamental motives for the important new financial legislation proposed by the chief minister P'ei Chi and promulgated in the spring of 809. The other was the need to restrain the severe deflation which had been plaguing the country since the mid 780s and which now threatened a major social crisis. Though the central government was primarily concerned with the effects of deflation on its tax-producing peasantry, it was also sensitive to the manner in which the provincial authorities were exploiting it. As a result of the cash accounting prematurely introduced with the *liang-shui* tax reform of 780 and the persistent inadequacy of the money supply, taxes assessed in cash were paid in goods, at locally defined conversion rates. By using arbitrary conversion rates officials beyond the control of the central government reaped immense profits. This was one of the problems to which the 809 measure was addressed. Henceforth, conversion rates fixed at the capital were to be employed throughout the country, arbitrarily increased rates being strictly forbidden. In addition, in order to meet the problem of the cash shortage the percentage of taxes to be paid in commodities was increased. This part of the new measure was addressed primarily to an economic issue, but there were also important political implications in that it deprived provincial officials of a major source of illegal revenue.

More clearly political in its import was that part of the legislation which called for a reallocation of provincial tax revenues. We may recall the disposition of revenue which was in use up until this time. After collection on the county level and dispatch to the prefecture, tax revenues were divided into three separate parts, one for use within the prefecture of origin, another assigned to the provincial administration, and a third sent to the central authorities. Though developed as a means to provide for the needs of all administrative levels, this system resulted, as we have seen, in considerable fiscal imbalance and tended to keep the prefecture subordinate to the province. The 809 measure sought to change all of this. First, provinces were henceforth to draw all their necessary revenues from the prefecture in which the provincial administration was situated. Only in cases where this was insufficient might they derive additional revenue from their subordinate prefectures. In return for this reduction of revenue the prefectures which formed the provincial seats were exempted from making any tax contributions to the central government. Second, all prefectures were required to pay to the central treasury all revenue beyond what was necessary for local expenses or beyond any special levies which the province had been authorized to make. The aim of this measure was transparent: to weaken the link between the province and its prefectures and to reduce the province in a fiscal sense to the status of

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little more than a privileged prefecture. This also, in effect, turned a three-tier system (province–prefecture–county) into a two-tier one (province/prefecture–county). In its attempt to restructure fiscal relations throughout the provinces and to reduce the financial basis for regionalism, the reform of 809 probably went further in political intent than any other financial legislation issued in the entire course of T'ang history after 755.

Yet, it would be idle to pretend that this measure gained immediate and universal application, especially in view of the subsequent military confrontations to which we shall shortly turn. It is clear that in many cases prefectures continued to make direct contributions to the provinces; but subsequent court decrees showed too the central government's determination to implement and maintain the new policy. Moreover, there was some disagreement over the precise impact of the measure: some see its effect as immediate, bringing about a relatively rapid increase in central revenues; others believe that it was rapidly implemented precisely because, at the outset, it did *not* seriously reduce provincial revenues, which were only in the long run affected by the new constraints on their financial independence. The disagreement, in short, depends upon whether the emphasis is placed on the positive effects for the central government, or upon the negative effects for the provinces.[65] In any event, as could be expected with any legislation which was potentially hostile to the interests of a substantial number of the officials who would enforce it, only continued insistence on its implementation and continued demonstration by the central government that it had the means to back up its decrees could effectively turn these decrees into law. After An Lu-shan's rebellion it was only from the reign of Hsien-tsung that this was the case, and developments during this reign would strongly suggest that the reform was effective.

In the meantime Hsien-tsung by no means slackened his efforts to reassert the power of direct control over individual provinces, a course which led inevitably to conflict with the powerful north-eastern provinces. Early in 809 the governor of Ch'eng-te died, and the succession was claimed by his son, the young and able Wang Ch'eng-tsung. Finding this an opportune moment to reassert the royal prerogatives in this region, the emperor withheld recognition of the transfer of power, clearly a hostile response in view of the well-established precedent in Ho-pei. This in turn touched off a protracted debate at court which is of especial interest since it reveals how these provinces were viewed from the capital.

[65] See esp. Hino Kaisaburō, 'Hanchin jidai no shūzei sanbunsei ni tsuite', *SGZS*, 65.7 (1956) 650–2, 660–2; Matsui Shūichi, 'Hai Ki no zeisei kaikaku ni tsuite', *SGZS*, 76.7 (1967) 1039–61.

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Both at this time and later, Hsien-tsung showed himself absolutely determined to be emperor of all China in fact as well as in name. Of course he was full of confidence following his early successes; but more than an autocrat's vanity underlay his determination to exercise his power, a position which for that matter enjoyed considerable support at court. In his eyes the empire, at least as a healthy polity, could not indefinitely survive the continued presence of these autonomous pockets, standing threats to order and models of resistance to the central government. Equally significant, he was convinced that, through the proper military and diplomatic measures, the recovery of control over these provinces was quite possible. Hence, further temporizing only obstructed attainment of the final goal.

But strong voices were raised against this proposed course, among whom that of Li Chiang, then a Han-lin academician, seems to have been the most persuasive. Li warned that powerful historical and geo-political factors lay in the way of any central attempt to recover Ch'eng-te (or by implication other north-eastern provinces). First of all, the several decades of self-rule enjoyed by the province since the An Lu-shan rebellion had tied the populace to the Ch'eng-te leadership and conferred on the latter a *de facto* legitimacy. Any attempt to alter this state of things was sure to stimulate broadly based resistance from the province itself. Second, Ch'eng-te, unlike Chien-nan West under Liu P'i and Che-hsi under Li Ch'i, was virtually surrounded by provinces of similar character which, despite occasional rivalries, shared an overall identity of interests. This made them unreliable allies for the court, even should they ostensibly participate in forcible action against Ch'eng-te. In short, Ch'eng-te could in no way be isolated and defeated. Finally, Li pointed out that state finances were not in good enough shape for such an undertaking because of the floods currently affecting the Huai and Yangtze provinces.[66]

The emperor did finally accept a compromise solution, recognizing Wang Ch'eng-tsung as the head of his province in return for Wang's agreement to fulfil normal administrative commitments vis-à-vis the throne and to give up the two prefectures of Te-chou and Ti-chou, which had been acquired by the province comparatively recently. Evidently only feigning acceptance of these terms, Wang moved immediately thereafter to retain the two prefectures by force. This now gave the emperor the opportunity – indeed he had no other real option – to intervene militarily. Late in the autumn of 809 the armies of numerous provinces, including all its immediate neighbours except Wei-po as well as units of the Palace Army, were ordered to take the field in a full attack on Ch'eng-te. On

[66] *CTW* 646, pp. 4a–6b; Eugene Feifel, *Po Chü-i as a censor* (The Hague, 1961), pp. 117–19.

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paper Ch'eng-te should have been overwhelmed. But from the outset there were serious problems of coordination and individual commanders proved reluctant to commit their forces before those of anyone else. Ch'eng-te, on the other hand, had no command problems and its superb army was fighting in the defence of its own homes. Eventually, the drain on central finances became decisive, and in mid-810 Hsien-tsung, recognizing the half-hearted efforts of his armies, called off the campaign after less than a year. Wang Ch'eng-tsung, having retained his two prefectures, agreed to abide by the other terms of the original agreement in return for formal appointment by the court. However, this was merely a face-saving solution for the crown and led to no real change in the relationship as it then existed.

Thus, with the failure of yet another attempt to reassert central power in the north-east Hsien-tsung met his first defeat. The set-back had further repercussions. During the course of the conflict the court was obliged to accede without quibble to changes in the provincial leadership in Huai-hsi and in Yu-chou which was a more or less active ally in the Ho-pei campaign. The most powerful autonomous provinces remained as yet unaffected in any serious way, save for the exertions forced upon Ch'eng-te. However, subsequent developments showed that the government suffered no irreparable damage and that its prestige remained high. This is borne out, for example, by the voluntary relinquishment of command over the small but strategically located I-wu province late in 810 by its governor Chang Mao-chao who had himself succeeded to its hereditary command nineteen years before. Though disorders affected this province occasionally in subsequent years, the number of autonomous provinces was thus permanently reduced by one.

There was one other respect in which the conflict of 809–10 had a major impact, namely, on state finances. The large-scale mobilization seems to have quickly exhausted central reserves, so that, especially in view of the lack of success by the armies in the field, continuation of the campaign became impracticable. The reasons for the high cost of such military efforts will already have become clear: the lack of immediate control over participating provincial armies by the central government and the separate interests which generally governed the conduct of provincial leaders. Under the circumstances, the central government was obliged to use a highly inefficient system of support for the armies mobilized for offensive purposes, which put a severe strain on central resources. Quite simply, direct subsidies, called 'expeditionary rations' (*ch'u-chieh liang*), were paid out to such armies at a fixed rate per man. Whereas provincial armies normally drew all their support from within their province (save

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for those in the north-west), they qualified for the central subsidy once their troops had left their own provinces. From its inception in the period following the An Lu-shan rebellion, this system was a frequent object of criticism because of its inherent wastefulness and unaccountability. Provincial commanders, we are told, did not hesitate to dispatch their armies outside their borders and then suddenly, on one pretext or another, become immobile. Already qualifying for financial support, they by no means found it necessarily in their interest to engage in serious combat. But there seemed to be no good alternative to this mode of financing. For the first time in the conflict with Ch'eng-te of 809–10 Hsien-tsung experienced the painfully high cost of a major internal campaign whose gains in the field were not even remotely related to the outlay. Not only was he obliged to cut the campaign short, but undoubtedly the attempt to implement the fiscal reform of 809 was adversely affected. In addition, it was years before the exhausted treasury recovered to the point where significant military action could again be contemplated. Indeed, the four years 810–14 were the longest period of peace in his entire reign.

Ironically, dissension in one key province provided Hsien-tsung with his first opportunity to crack the Ho-pei bloc. The death of the governor of Wei-po in mid-812 left as successor a mere boy whose aides and servants soon alienated the majority of the garrison. It then required only the uncertainty fostered by the court's quite deliberate delay in recognizing the successor to provoke a mutiny which deposed him. It is remarkable that, despite the full autonomy in internal operations which these provinces enjoyed, they still felt an acute need for recognition and formal ties with the court. The absence of recognition was regarded as an abnormal condition which reflected on the leadership, and, accordingly, often had important consequences. The Wei-po mutineers soon installed as governor a popular general, T'ien Hsing (also called T'ien Hung-cheng) who, only too conscious of the instability of the situation, opened negotiations with the court. Having secured his garrison's consent to normalize relations with the court, T'ien offered to make the province genuinely subordinate to the central administration in return for official recognition. There was considerable scepticism at court over the sincerity of T'ien's offer; but, having already rejected a proposal for armed intervention, Hsien-tsung finally decided to accept it. Conditions in the province quickly reverted to normal and an alliance of extraordinary importance to the court was opened up.

It is questionable to what extent Wei-po ever became integrated into the regular administrative fiscal framework of the empire. For the following decade it did remain closely wedded to central policy but as an

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ally rather than as a subordinate, a relationship supported more by T'ien's personal loyalty and the court's occasional large grants to the army, than by sentiment or formal means of control. But as an ally it proved an enormous boon to Hsien-tsung's further plans, neutralizing the other north-eastern provinces, its troops participating directly in subsequent campaigns, and increasing still further the prestige of the court. The remaining achievements of Hsien-tsung's reign would have been very nearly unimaginable without Wei-po's change of posture.

By 814 the emperor was once again prepared to undertake military intervention and late that year an opportunity presented itself in Huai-hsi following a change of leadership and the accession of a new governor, Wu Yüan-chi. Long a thorn in the side of the government (despite its modest size of three prefectures) Huai-hsi was within striking range of almost any point along the Pien Canal and could easily threaten several of the rich Yangtze provinces as well. But, territorially isolated, it was the most vulnerable of the autonomous provinces. The campaign mounted against Huai-hsi early in 815 initiated a three-year period which was perhaps the most critical of the entire reign.[67] If Wei-po's allegiance was of incalculable importance, victory over Huai-hsi while holding other potentially hostile forces in check formed the keystone to Hsien-tsung's final political accomplishments. Putting the prestige of his court to its severest test, this arduous military effort strained central resources and the unity of the ruling elite to the limit. But, unless it had succeeded, it is doubtful whether the court could have recovered full control over Honan. Ch'eng-te and P'ing-lu to the north, which had been on the verge of hostilities with the court from the beginning of the reign, were keenly aware of the likely consequences of a government victory. They attempted to hinder its conduct of the war in numerous ways. P'ing-lu alone was responsible for three spectacular acts of destruction and terrorism in the course of 815: the burning of the huge tax entrepôt at Ho-yin (near Lo-yang); the assassination at the capital of Wu Yüan-heng, a hard-line chief minister; and an attempt to throw Lo-yang into chaos by the use of armed terrorists. Strategic considerations made impracticable an immediate campaign against P'ing-lu – the largest, richest and most populous of the autonomous provinces, a point which the emperor subsequently did not feel applied to Ch'eng-te.

The campaign against Huai-hsi moved slowly from the outset, the first year showing almost no progress at all. It was certainly hoped that the

[67] On this campaign, with special reference to its military aspects, see C. A. Peterson, 'Regional defense against central power: the Huai-hsi campaign of 815–817', in F. A. Kierman Jr and John K. Fairbank, eds. *Chinese ways in warfare* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 123–50.

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array of troops collected on its borders could put a rapid end to resistance, possibly by inducing internal dissension. When this hope was frustrated, the court was obliged to wear down the province by maintaining inexorable pressure. The campaign then became a war of attrition which did not end until late 817.

The mediocre showing of the government forces was partly the result of political considerations. To avoid dangerously altering the distribution of military power within the empire and unduly strengthening any individual provinces, the court drew contingents from some dozen-and-a-half provinces to form its attacking armies. But these armies never attained any adequate degree of cohesion. Moreover there was great difficulty in establishing a unified command, and the separate sectors encircling the enemy seldom coordinated their movements.

But they were also faced by a determined and well-led defence, strongly supported by the local population. This defence, which relied on local militia or volunteer units, prevented any serious penetration by the attackers for nearly three years, during which time Huai-hsi was able to sustain itself through domestic production. Eventually, the unrelieved pressure from the overwhelmingly superior imperial forces began to tell on the morale and on the resources of the province. A decline in both greatly facilitated the decisive military move, the imperial commander Li Su's brilliant surprise attack on the provincial capital of Ts'ai-chou in the autumn of 817, which terminated the campaign.

To prevent any recurrence of trouble in this area, the government simply abolished Huai-hsi, and assigned its territories to three adjoining provinces.

From the beginning of 816 the court had simultaneously been engaged in a campaign against Ch'eng-te, carried on by its Ho-pei and Ho-tung forces and allies. This had broken out when, following a series of provocations and conflicts with neighbouring provinces, Ch'eng-te was held responsible (mistakenly, it turned out) for the assassination of chief minister Wu Yüan-heng in the summer of 815. Even though the limits of court tolerance had been reached there were vociferous objections to the opening of a second front, and some high officials resigned in protest. However, Hsien-tsung overrode his opposition, probably anticipating an early end to the Huai-hsi campaign. Several minor initial successes were scored against Ch'eng-te, but the tide soon turned. Having less control over the armies engaged in Ho-pei than over those fighting to the south, the court did not even make a pretence of appointing an overall commander, and the few successes of individual armies were wasted by lack of support from the others. The indecisive outcome, like that of 809–10,

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is less surprising in view of two factors which facilitated defence of the province: the impregnable natural line of defence which it enjoyed on the west, along the T'ai-hang mountains; and the ambiguity of Yu-chou's conduct to the north. Again, large sums were expended to keep the armies fighting, and the commitment of funds here no doubt prevented a full-scale effort against Huai-hsi. Again, after meagre gains the campaign was suspended.

But this time, when hostilities came to an end in mid-817, the usual amenities were not resumed. On the contrary, Ch'eng-te had still received no amnesty well into 818 and Wang Ch'eng-tsung remained, officially, a rebel and an outlaw. In the meantime, of course, Huai-hsi was successfully defeated and dismembered. Then early in 818 the governor of Heng-hai, Cheng Ch'üan, who had succeeded his father in this post thirteen years earlier, voluntarily resigned his command. For the first time the court had an opportunity to install a man of its choice at the head of this province. These developments together with the internal strains which total lack of official status had evidently produced within his province finally persuaded Wang to come to terms. In the spring of 818, in return for pardon and re-investiture as governor, he agreed to the integration of his province into the regular administrative structure of the empire and to the surrender of the two disputed prefectures, Te-chou and Ti-chou, which were subsequently assigned to Heng-hai. He also agreed to send his two sons to the capital as hostages, a concession which meant relinquishing any family claim to the governorship. This turnabout in Ch'eng-te's relationship with the court could well have been the first step in the full recovery of the province, and it constituted a major shift in the political situation at the time. On the one hand, the prestige and strength which the court was progressively gathering certainly formed the immediate background to these changes, but, on the other, the role played by direct military intervention – even though this was indecisive – was far from insignificant. Despite the central government's inability to subdue the province, these factors were instrumental in persuading its leadership to compromise its special status voluntarily.

The obvious remaining target for the recovery of central control was P'ing-lu, the largest of all the provinces in north China which had been involved in almost every central–provincial conflict in the east since the An Lu-shan rebellion. Yu-chou, the other remaining major autonomous province, presented no urgent problem since it was located on the periphery of Ho-pei and had maintained friendly relations with the court throughout Hsien-tsung's reign. Following the liquidation of Huai-hsi and the establishment of a new relationship between the court and Wei-po

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and Ch'eng-te, P'ing-lu could no longer count upon the support of any other province, and the necessity of a new accommodation with the central government became obvious. Concessions of the sort Wang Ch'eng-tsung had found it necessary to make were urged upon the governor Li Shih-tao by some of his followers. However, others believed that time would remain for diplomatic compromise even if things went badly on the battle-field, and prevailed upon him to follow a harder line. The local tradition of autonomy and the successful maintenance of P'ing-lu's provincial hereditary leadership for over half a century blinded this faction and Li Shih-tao himself from perceiving the new realities.

Negotiations for a political settlement broke down, and the government made careful preparations for military action. Late in 818 the campaign was launched. The task proved far less arduous than expected, partly because of P'ing-lu's political isolation and the court's generally improved position and partly because of the difficulty experienced by P'ing-lu in defending its extraordinarily long border. In the face of certain defeat, Li was assassinated early in 819 by subordinates who immediately surrendered. The court had no intention of permitting a province of such size to survive, especially in this strategic location. Therefore, following a survey of its material and human resources, P'ing-lu was carved up into three new provinces: the north-eastern portion retained the old name but was reduced to five prefectures; the province of T'ien-p'ing, with three prefectures, was created in the north-west; and the province of Yen-hai, with four prefectures, was created in the south. However, these new provinces were permitted to continue using their entire revenue for local expenditure, and contributions to the central government were not forthcoming till 832.

This was Hsien-tsung's last major military success, one which removed the only remaining threat in Ho-nan and thereby secured for the court firm control over this central part of the empire until the Huang Ch'ao rebellion. It also left the governors of the three major Ho-pei provinces (Wei-po, Ch'eng-te and Yu-chou) as the only provincial leaders who did not owe their appointments entirely to the court. But even two of these had acknowledged the court's right to name their successors. With the court's prestige higher than at any time since An Lu-shan's rebellion, the last long-entrenched provincial satrap outside Ho-pei, Han Hung, voluntarily gave up his command at Hsüan-wu soon afterwards and removed to the capital. Though apparently more interested in exploiting his position astride the Pien Canal to make a personal fortune than to build an independent power base, Han might, nevertheless, have proved

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irremovable by court order. Hence, save in the few individual cases noted, the T'ang court had by 820 consolidated its control over the appointment and installation of the highest level provincial officials.

Throughout his reign Hsien-tsung attempted to strengthen control from the centre by political and administrative, as well as by military, means. One political tool which he put to extensive use was the network of army supervisors. This was consistent with his heavy reliance on eunuchs in general and, as a direct extension of the power of the throne, with his own autocratic tendencies. Inevitably, objections by bureaucrats to his conduct of affairs in this respect persisted throughout the reign. But, sensitive to the need for high morale among his officials, Hsien-tsung proved to be somewhat more flexible than Te-tsung had been. When, for example, a chorus of protests challenged his appointment of his favourite eunuch T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui as commander of the campaign against Ch'eng-te in 809, he appointed him to a lesser post, although leaving him in a position to influence command decisions. Upon unsuccessful termination of the campaign, he again heeded demands to demote T'u-t'u.[68] Later, during the interminable campaign against Huai-hsi, he accepted the recommendation of his officials to withdraw the eunuch supervisors from the war theatre because of their harmful interference. What seems to have been involved, not only on this but on earlier and later occasions as well, was an attempt to achieve virtually complete direction of the campaign by the throne itself. If so, Hsien-tsung at least in this instance acknowledged failure. It is difficult to pinpoint specific changes which he introduced into the system of army supervisors, but the strong leadership he provided made it vastly more effective. Another effect of his policies, which Hsien-tsung's own supreme confidence probably prevented him from perceiving, was that a strong eunuch presence was established in the provinces corresponding to the powerful position which eunuchs had achieved at court.

As a consequence of the central government's improved position, the tempo of centralizing legislation picked up towards the end of the reign. From this time we find measures aimed at eliminating agricultural colonies as a supplementary source of revenue for provincial governors, at keeping the governors from playing a direct part in the appointment of county magistrates, and generally at strengthening the position of the prefect vis-à-vis the governor. However, by far the most significant measure was the reform carried out in the spring of 819 altering the lines of military authority in the provinces. The circumstances which this legislation was designed to eliminate were described by Wu Ch'ung-

[68] Feifel, *Po Chü-i*, pp. 125–33, 153–4, 226–8.

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yin, a veteran official and newly appointed governor of Heng-hai, as follows:

The reason that the Ho-pei provinces have been able to resist the orders of the court over the last sixty years is that they place garrison commanders in charge of affairs in all prefectures and counties, who, taking over the powers of the prefects and magistrates, usurp the supreme authority (i.e., that of the emperor). Were the prefects again to exercise their functions independently, it would be impossible for any governor, even if he had the perverse ability of an An Lu-shan or a Shih Ssu-ming, to revolt on the strength of the resources of a single prefecture. In the three prefectures of Te, Ti and Ching, which are under the direction of your servant, I have issued orders that the proper functions be returned to the prefects and also that they assume jurisdiction over the military units in their areas.[69]

Wu was describing here the extreme form which this development had taken in Ho-pei; but it was common elsewhere as well, and the danger of the provincial administrations being able to dominate completely the local civil authorities would remain as long as they had complete military authority. This could hardly have been unknown to central officials at the time that Wu submitted his report. But the initiative he took in his own province apparently became the model for a general measure which was now promulgated throughout the empire.

The measure contained two key provisions. First, it removed from the governors authority over all military units outside their home prefectures; second, it placed these units under the individual prefects in whose prefectures they were located. For this purpose prefects were given permanent and explicit military powers for the first time since the Six Dynasties period. For obvious reasons border regions were excluded from the legislation. The aim of the measure was transparent, to cut back the military potential of the provinces in the same way that the 809 measure sought to reduce their financial potential. This was to be accomplished, not by a direct reduction of manpower, which posed other problems, but by fragmenting that concentration of provincial military power which till this time had wreaked such havoc. Those governors with military responsibilities (*chieh-tu shih*) were by no means rendered powerless. They retained control over their headquarters garrisons which were invariably their largest and best-trained military force; nor could local power relations have changed overnight. But now the means for consolidating control over a region, or simply exerting military influence over the civil authorities, was largely lost to any governor inclined to take such steps. It is likely that financial relations too between province and prefecture were altered as a result, though explicit evidence on this point is lacking.

[69] *TCTC* 241, p. 7768; *TFYK* 60, pp. 21b–22a.

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The prefectures now bore a military burden which had not at all been foreseen under the old system and which in large part invalidated the rationale for the prefecture's financial contribution to the province. Probably the province could still call upon its constituent prefectures in times of emergency or special need; in routine operations, however, it was obliged to sustain itself from the limited revenue of the provincial seat. Hence, in these closing years of the reign the provincial structure underwent another major modification. This change went far towards eliminating the features which distinguished it from the older administrative order based firmly on the prefectures and counties.

What action Hsien-tsung might have taken following these successes and persistent new initiatives is a matter for conjecture. In February 820 he was murdered by two eunuch malcontents, putting an end to the last reformist reign of T'ang times. Though dissatisfaction had begun to simmer among officialdom over his autocratic ways and his unrelenting search for revenue, his murder does not seem to have been the result of any political opposition. It would be difficult to overestimate his achievements. Hsien-tsung restored the authority and the strength of the monarchy, in the process assuring vastly improved bureaucratic control for the next half-century. Most significantly, his modification of the provincial structure sharply reduced the possibility of any military threat from the provinces. His political gains on behalf of the throne not only secured far fuller implementation of central decrees in general but, as Hino suggests, were also significant in extending the genuine application of the two-tax system to virtually all parts of the realm.[70]

In making an assessment of his achievement, it is important to take as a point of departure the preceding reigns rather than the impossible standard of complete recentralization. By this standard Hsien-tsung achieved his objectives to a remarkable degree and emerges as the only really successful emperor of the second half of the dynasty. How can we explain his achievement? There appear to be three broad reasons for it. First of all, the circumstances under which he launched his programme were more favourable than the political failures of Te-tsung's last years would lead one to believe. From Te-tsung he inherited a replenished treasury and a strong central army, so that, even though the throne still could not command universal compliance with its laws, its position was essentially secure. Another major resource was the bureaucracy which, despite outbreaks of factionalism and signs of corruption, was in a relatively healthy state and contained many brilliant officials such as Li

[70] Hino Kaisaburō, 'Hanchin taisei ka ni okeru Tōchō no shinkō to ryōzei jōkyō', *TYGH*, 40 (1957) 227–8.

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Chi-fu, Li Chiang, P'ei Tu and Yüan Chen. The court possessed, then, the resources needed for strong central action. Second, Hsien-tsung had a strong grasp of the political-military situation throughout the empire which enabled him to fashion an effective strategy. Maintaining flexibility of plan and above all avoiding overcommitment at any single point, he moved against his targets one at a time (the only exception being his second front against Ch'eng-te in 816–17). His administrative measures too, though striking at the heart of provincial strength, never went beyond the limits of what seemed practicable. Third, he knew well how to employ the powers of the throne, providing the leadership himself and remaining at the forefront in policy-making. He seems by and large to have chosen his men well and in return to have inspired their confidence. Li Ao's paean of praise, 'of all restoration monarchs since antiquity none have come up to this', may be immoderate, but it betrays the confident sentiment of the times.

THE PROVINCES UNDER HSIEN-TSUNG'S SUCCESSORS

In the year following his death, under the new emperor Mu-tsung, the momentum created by Hsien-tsung carried on to achieve even more surprising gains. Late in 820 Wang Ch'eng-tsung of Ch'eng-te died, leaving no obvious successor. Though the garrison prevailed upon his brother to assume command, the latter, perhaps concerned whether he could control the unruly garrison, immediately requested the court to appoint another governor in his place and himself accepted transfer to another province. The court replaced him with the trusted veteran T'ien Hung-cheng in whose place as governor of Wei-po the hero of the Huai-hsi campaign, Li Su, was now installed. This development left Yu-chou as the only province remaining entirely outside court hands. Its governor, Liu Tsung, becoming at this time preoccupied with his spiritual salvation (indeed taking the cloth), forestalled the efforts of the garrison to interfere and, upon his withdrawal from public life, turned the province over to central authority. The court, detaching two prefectures in an effort to divide the province into two parts, appointed two regular literati officials to take charge of them. Hence, by the spring of 821 the court could gaze with satisfaction upon an empire, whose highest-ranking provincial administrators it had itself without exception selected and appointed.

However, these successes were shortlived. Within months, mutinies led to the murder of T'ien Hung-cheng (together with numerous followers) in Ch'eng-te, and the imprisonment of the governors appointed by the court to both parts of Yu-chou. Local military officers took charge in both

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Map 17. The T'ang provinces, 822

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provinces. The court launched a campaign against Ch'eng-te, where the bloodshed had been most serious and which was also the more accessible target. Hampered from the beginning by lack of funds, poor direction from the centre, and highly uneven efforts from the participating provincial armies, this campaign continued indecisively until early 822 when it was suspended. In the meantime a mutiny by the Wei-po army resulted in the death of T'ien's son, who had been appointed governor in the vain hope of securing the loyalty of that critical province. With a mutineer in charge, Wei-po too now slipped out of the grasp of the central government. Shortly afterwards, the court, unable to sustain further direct military action and anxious for peace, accepted the *fait accompli*, and conferred official appointments on the usurpers in all three provinces.

It is perfectly evident that Mu-tsung's court, in spite of its apparent success in bringing all Ho-pei under central authority, never came to grips with the persistent factors which underlay the autonomy of these provinces. In the cases of Yu-chou and Ch'eng-te in particular, it was given little time to do so. It was an act of sheer folly to send civil officials with no experience in the area, rather than professional soldiers, to administer Yu-chou. Their careless, insensitive administration soon alienated the garrisons which in the event showed considerable restraint before finally resorting to violence. In Ch'eng-te too there was bitter enmity between the army and the new governor who had in the past led a rival province in war against it and who had exacerbated matters by sending substantial sums out of the province for his own private purposes. Once T'ien Hung-cheng relinquished his sizeable personal bodyguard of troops from Wei-po, a move dictated by the court's unwillingness to provide for its support, he no longer possessed the means to maintain control in his own provincial capital. The mutiny at Wei-po followed as part of a chain reaction, when its soldiers were required to fight the recalcitrant provinces. With better leadership and more adequate supplies this might have been avoided; but in any event it shows how little change in the internal power structure of the province had occurred since T'ien Hung-cheng's submission to the throne in 812.[71]

The court also failed to respond to the new crisis with the vigour it had so recently shown under Hsien-tsung. There was a sense of let-down at the centre following the massive expenditure of funds and energy under Hsien-tsung, and a reluctance to demand the same sacrifices. Yet, it is worth noting that central forces had never at any time been able decisively to defeat these three Ho-pei provinces, either individually or collectively. Hence, it is a moot point whether Hsien-tsung himself, who reversed the

[71] These developments are treated in some detail in Peterson, *A fragment of empire*, ch. 5.

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process of decentralization in important respects, could have kept them genuinely within the fold, had he lived.

The other gains won under Hsien-tsung were, however, sufficiently secure to keep at a minimum the repercussions of these set-backs in Ho-pei on the rest of the empire. Under special circumstances a popular military leader, Wang Chih-hsing, did seize control at Wu-ning immediately afterwards, in the spring of 822. In consideration of its recent exertions in Ho-pei and of Wang's sterling war record, the court granted him formal appointment. But this was the only successful usurpation leading to official recognition outside the north-east in the next half-century. Clearly the reforms introduced by Hsien-tsung had significantly reduced the potential for independent action on the part of individual provinces. With the fiscal and military links between provincial centre and subordinate prefectures severely weakened, any governor entertaining separatist designs found it difficult to build up adequate funds and military strength to realize them. The reforms were effective primarily in preventing the growth of new power centres, but they had a long-term effect on well-established ones as well. The constriction of provincial finances, in particular, may well have been a cause of the garrison mutinies and disorders which continued to occur, though less frequently. Such problems were inevitable under a system which quartered large garrisons in strategic locations throughout the country, particularly when military service was a career undertaken for purely mercenary reasons by the least favoured members of the social order. Lacking any broader political aims, these disorders normally had only limited consequences, however.

The number of troops in the empire declined unquestionably in the decades following Hsien-tsung's reign (despite suggestions to the contrary by the few statistics which remain). Mu-tsung ascended the throne in 820 to find an empty treasury and strong sentiments at court hostile to the continuation of a strong military policy. He responded by issuing, probably late that year, a secret edict ordering a general cut-back of all provincial armies. This was to be accomplished by the simple expedient of not replacing soldiers lost to service through the normal processes of attrition (death, desertion, etc.) which were calculated at a rate of 8 per cent per year. The concern not to provoke resistance from local garrisons is evident both in the secrecy which surrounded this measure and in the passive means adopted to achieve the objective. By definition, this order could not have had a sudden or dramatic impact, but the efforts at speedy implementation reported by two provinces, T'ien-p'ing and Che-tung, shows that it was taken seriously. Possibly the threat which it posed to the provincial forces contributed to the emergence of the new crisis in the

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north-east which led in turn to an apparent reversal of the policy. An edict issued in the spring of 822 now forbade sudden, unwarranted reductions of troops and prescribed the maintenance of military complements at their old levels.[72] Presumably, provincial budgets were readjusted accordingly. The intention was surely to reassure the military throughout the country that they stood in no danger of losing their livelihood.

However, some of the consequences of this measure, which in effect re-opened the ranks, were quite unforeseen. Many provincial authorities, rather than recruiting men for actual military service, sold the vacancies to local men of means, including landlords, merchants and yamen personnel, who sought the advantages which such an attachment to the local provincial regime could give them. This was one of the means whereby dominant local economic interests gradually penetrated the provincial administrations, but it was a gradual process which continued throughout the course of the ninth century. Another result, as the thirteenth-century historian Ma Tuan-lin observed, was a serious weakening of the armies, for although their rolls remained nominally filled, the number of true effectives was much reduced. Moreover, the court had by no means definitely abandoned the policy of reducing the numbers of men under arms. On occasions it explicitly encouraged cut-backs of troop numbers where this was feasible; it also pursued a personnel policy which, by giving highest merit ratings to provincial officials who achieved an increase in revenue, encouraged reductions in the number of revenue-absorbing soldiers or even in their scale of remuneration.[73] Eventually, as we shall see, when disturbances began to take on a menacing aspect after the middle of the century, one factor in their rapid spread and duration was the lack of adequate military forces to control them.

Such global figures for the number of troops as we do possess from the ninth century require very careful interpretation. The figure of 830,000 given for 807 by the *Yüan-ho kuo-chi pu* is certainly reliable, but it is not clear whether the north-eastern provincial armies are included in the total. Probably they are, but only according to their officially stipulated strength as this appeared on the central administration's books, rather than according to their actual manpower. More difficult to explain is the assertion by Wang Yen-wei in his financial report of 837 that there were altogether 990,000 soldiers in the empire in the early 820s.[74] Some overall

[72] For both edicts see *CTS* 16, p. 486; *TCTC* 242, pp. 7808, 7811.

[73] On these developments see *TCTC* 242, pp. 7811–12; *WHTK* 151, p. 1321c; Matsui Shūichi's discussions in his 'Tōdai kōhanki no Kō-Wai ni tsuite kōzoku oyobi Kō Zentai, Kyū Ho no hanran o chūsin to shite', *SGZS*, 66.2 (1957) 95–8.

[74] For these documents see n. 50 of this ch. and the following: *CTS* 157, p. 4157; *HTS* 164, p. 5057; *TFYK* 486, pp. 21a–b.

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increase as a result of Hsien-tsung's campaigns might have been expected; but Mu-tsung's early policies should have worked in the opposite direction. This figure is not only greater than that for 807, but also far larger than any figure we have for the eighth century. The explanation may be that it refers to the short period (821–2) during which all the Ho-pei provinces were in court hands and that it includes the *actual* sizes of their armies. These may easily have been twice or more the officially authorized numbers. If this explanation is correct, this would be the most complete figure for the empire's military strength that we have for the entire period after 755, although there is no way of estimating what proportion represented actual trained fighting men. Unfortunately Wang Yen-wei's report, as it has been retained by the sources, does not contain a global figure of troops in the empire in 837 but only the number (400,000) maintained out of central funds. But certainly when serious challenges to authority appear in the provinces in the latter half of the ninth century, the number of men under arms seems to have been much diminished.

Central–provincial relations continued to develop along lines which we have seen emerge thus far, becoming in general increasingly bureaucratized. Since the appointment of governors was no longer a predominantly military problem, administrative criteria could be employed in appointing officials to governorships. Purely military men were appointed only to those provinces which had an important military function. As civil administration continued to be far more important in most of the provinces, the bureaucrat governors came to outnumber the military commanders by an average of about two-to-one. Most of the higher military officers were also appointed at one time or another to posts in the Palace Armies, and thus lost the purely provincial identification which had once characterized them. The unruly type of provincial governor who rose to power through the backing of the local garrison gradually became rarer and was all but eliminated, until the period of the final T'ang collapse. The former distinction between central and provincial careers among high-ranking official personnel disappeared. Rotation between court and province became the rule, so much so that, by the end of his career, any successful ninth-century official would perhaps have served as governor in three or more provinces. Regular rotation also restricted tenure in any given province. While no limit was ever officially prescribed, practice dictated a six-year maximum, and many tenures were much shorter.[75]

Governors became subject to other bureaucratic restrictions as well,

[75] See references in n. 35 of this ch. and Wang Gungwu, *The structure of power in north China during the Five Dynasties* (Kuala Lumpur, 1963), pp. 11–12.

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some of the most elaborate applying to the personnel at their disposal. Numerous central directives issued in the course of the ninth century attest to concern over the creation by governors of large personal entourages, and over the quality of provincial administrators in general. These directives attempted to regulate the numbers of staff members, especially of key administrators, the standards by which they were appointed, and the procedures governing their promotion. The number of aides that could be taken along by an outgoing chief minister to his new provincial post was also limited, clearly in an effort to discourage the formation or maintenance of personal factions out in the provinces in a period when court politics were dominated by intense factionalism. Upon the termination of his service in a province, the governor was similarly obliged to discharge and disband his staff. No doubt, actual practice departed significantly from these dictates which must have been designed to prevent prevalent abuses. Moreover, the governor's power to nominate his own provincial staff was never questioned. But the fact that attempts were made to restrict his freedom in employing subordinate staff reveals the strengthened position of the central government and, compared with the position in the late eighth century, shows a qualitative change in the position of the provincial governor.[76]

Governors continued under the watchful eyes, and were often subject to the meddlesome hands, of the eunuch army supervisors. The eunuchs' role in the provincial administrations must have increased with the growth of their power at court after 820. They now enjoyed the services of a sizeable personal staff and a personal military escort, the latter in exceptional cases numbering in thousands. Supervisors' abuse of their position became so flagrant during the military campaigns of 843–4 that the chief minister Li Te-yü was able to obtain the assent of two high-ranking members of the Eunuch Palace Council (Shu-mi yüan) to restrict their authority and activities. Henceforth, they were prohibited from issuing orders affecting the conduct of military affairs and from forming escort units larger than a stipulated size. Subsequently, in 855, as a result of their continued interference in routine administration, the supervisors were even made co-responsible with the governors for serious short-comings and derelictions in the administration of the provinces in which they served. Designed to halt their arbitrary behaviour and to assure more conscientious reporting, this measure tacitly confirmed on them joint responsibility in running the province. Biased reporting, as we suggested earlier, makes any balanced assessment of the supervisory system difficult. Probably judged by the normal standards of bureaucratic efficiency, it left

[76] For these various regulations see *THY* 79, pp. 1446–51.

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much to be desired; but as a control mechanism it was evidently highly effective.[77]

Easily the most intractable problem facing the central authorities in the provinces, on higher and lower levels alike, was that of fiscal control. Of derelictions of official duty, none was of greater concern than those involving fiscal irregularities, which came under the category known as *tsang* ('unlawful acquisition'). This offence was frequently singled out and specifically excluded from the general amnesties issued on special occasions. Another particularly stubborn abuse was the imposition of unauthorized, supplementary levies, against which prohibitions were repeatedly promulgated. The governorships continued to be lucrative posts, worth a substantial investment in bribes (often to influential eunuchs) to obtain. Indeed, it was said that such an investment would be recouped three times over in the course of a single provincial tenure, but the initial cost forced many officials into heavy debt. Probably not many governors found it possible to lay their hands immediately on two million strings of cash as Ling-hu Ch'u did upon taking over Hsüan-wu province in 824; but indications are that only slightly more modest opportunities were not lacking. The court prosecuted offenders on occasion, but it was far more strict regarding misdemeanours by central officials than over the offences of provincial officers. The repeated stress in legislation on the responsibility of the governors for the conduct of officials falling within their jurisdiction may have helped to reduce the incidence of such offences at the lower administrative levels; but it is clear that few governors themselves came under prosecution. The wide latitude initially introduced into local fiscal operations after the An Lu-shan rebellion seems to have remained a permanent feature and, norms of bureaucratic conduct evolving accordingly, gave officials serving in the provinces the opportunity of compensating themselves handsomely for the misfortune of being away from the capital.

Yet, the administrative hold of the government over the populace shows marked improvement in the ninth over the late eighth century. The number of registered households which in 807 stood at only two-and-a-half million rose to four million by the end of Hsien-tsung's reign. By 839 it had reached a peak for the second half of the dynasty of five million.[78] This appears to fall far short of the high number of nine million households in 755; but, in view of the total absence of any figures from Ho-pei, it compares well for the country as a whole. The higher level of registration surely meant increased revenue, both for the central government and for the local authorities, but the scanty financial figures which

[77] See references in n. 54. of this ch. [78] *THY* 84, pp. 1551–2.

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have survived make it difficult to reach any firm conclusions. Of a total revenue in 837 of thirty-five million units (of mixed media, cash and goods), we are told that the central government received one-third; of *this* portion two-thirds went on the maintenance of the central and north-western armies. These figures are not altogether implausible, but, as the resourceful Hino has shown, they are misleading. Central revenue was considerably higher when account is taken of indirect taxes and of the reserves maintained throughout the provinces for special and emergency purposes. A subsequent figure on central revenues alone shows that approximately the same level of revenue was maintained at least into the 850s. The ratio of central to provincial income was certainly smaller than in the years preceding the An Lu-shan rebellion. According to Tu Yu's figures, there was at that time nearly an exact equivalency (more strictly, 5:6), whereas for this later period the proportion was perhaps at best in the order of 3:5. Hence, the sums at the immediate disposition of the central government were, both absolutely and relatively, far less. Nevertheless, since the system of finance had changed so completely and since government operations had become so highly decentralized, the lower figures are by no means an index of central weakness.

Now, to characterize central-provincial relations for the first three quarters of the ninth century, we find a hybrid structure, contrasting markedly not only with that of early T'ang but also with the system which had arisen following the An Lu-shan rebellion. The basic administrative units remained the prefectures and counties, pursuing their traditional functions and headed by central appointees. The prefecture enjoyed a high degree of direct communication with the central government, but in important ways it also remained subject to the provincial governor. By establishing a need, the governor could draw revenue from the prefecture; in possession of the principal military force in the area, he could take a free hand in responding to the needs of security; his responsibility for the evaluation of local officials in the province gave him a powerful influence over them; and he could himself punish any infractions on their part, and even administer corporal punishment. Technically, the prefecture, not the province, was after 809 the main tax-contributing unit in the empire. But whether or not a prefecture actually contributed revenue to the central government depended on the function or status of the province. In cases where a province absorbed all local revenue for the maintenance of its army (as in the canal zone) or where a province actually received central support (as in the north-west), the prefecture's link with the province was correspondingly stronger and that with the central government weaker. So far as we can determine at present, the province,

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absorbing the revenue of its home prefecture, was not expected to contribute to the central treasury. However, it was in return expected to perform important services. Its army, as we have mentioned, maintained local security; it contributed troops for the suppression of rebellions; and it even contributed troops for external defence, as in the south-west in 849 and in the south in 862. In the civil sphere it was assigned a variety of functions, such as the administration of emergency relief and the maintenance of communications. And, as numerous central directives make clear, the governor's role as general overseer vis-à-vis the local administrations was repeatedly stressed. In this sense, perceived as occupying a position not so much superior as external to the prefectures, the governor still reflected the essential character of the special commissioner, or *shih* – offices which go back to the early days of the dynasty. Finally, the great degree of variation from province to province bears repeating. We have indicated at the outset some of the ways in which this was true. Of the fifty discernible provincial units which had some kind of existence in the ninth century, some, lacking in size and any true cohesive quality, were hardly 'provinces' at all. But only a region-by-region analysis could take such differences fully into account.

Ho-pei after 822

Little of what we have been saying on preceding pages applies to the three autonomous provinces of Ho-pei. Until the Five Dynasties, Wei-po, Ch'eng-te and Yu-chou pursued a separate existence, joined in hardly more than ceremonial ways to the rest of the empire. After 822 the court made no further attempts to recover control over these provinces, which, under military leadership, conducted their affairs with virtually no outside interference. A stable equilibrium characterized their relations both with the court and with each other; nor is there any suggestion, though materials are admittedly thin, of difficulties with regard to the local population. However, their leadership remained comparatively unstable, struggles for power being common in Wei-po and absolutely endemic in Yu-chou. Only Ch'eng-te could boast significant continuity of rule and a relative absence of violent changes in high bureaucratic positions, apparently the result of the acceptance within the province of the right of hereditary succession to the governorship. In the entire period from 782 down to 907, Ch'eng-te was ruled by two lines: one, founded by Wang Wu-chün, continued through three successors until 820, a total of thirty-eight years; the other, founded in 821 by Wang T'ing-tsou, continued through five successors for eighty-six years more. Hereditary

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succession was not unknown in the other north-eastern provinces: the Liu line ruled for thirty-six years in Yu-chou (785–821); and in Wei-po the T'ien and Ho lines ruled for forty-nine and forty-one years, respectively (763–812 and 829–70). But it did not guarantee order and smooth succession to the governorship as it did in Ch'eng-te.

As a practice, hereditary succession became known as a specifically Ho-pei phenomenon, 'the Ho-pei custom' (*Ho-pei chiu-shih*). The very negation of the principle that all authority emanated from the emperor and the *ne plus ultra* of provincial hubris, it was seen as the quintessence of Ho-pei's autonomy. The reasons for its emergence are not far to seek. In a part of the empire where bureaucratic institutions had been terribly weakened, it was only natural for the family to assume a major political role. Hereditary right was, in a sense, the only remaining legitimacy. Moreover, since in this region of highly personalized rule a governor surrounded himself with a strong personal clientele, these adherents often found it both right and expedient to support his son upon the governor's death. The peculiar stability of the Ch'eng-te succession is perhaps explicable mainly on the grounds of the cohesion and discipline of the elite guard at the provincial centre. Yet mutiny and usurpation were as common in Ho-pei as peaceful succession; and even in the latter case, the ultimate source of power was the army. If a governor lost its support, he had no hope of remaining in command. On the whole, hereditary succession probably functioned less as a right than as a practical advantage which an heir held over his potential competitors. Quite as much, therefore, as establishing a claim for the heir of a governor to succeed him, 'the Ho-pei custom' signified the army's power to choose its own commander, a characteristic in short of garrison rule.

The court was at times tempted to exploit local divisions in order to reassert its voice in the region. But, calling attention to past failures, the high cost of uncertain recovery, and the genuine support of the populace for these long-established local regimes, cooler heads always prevailed. The argument offered by high minister Niu Seng-ju in 831, on the occasion of a mutiny at Yu-chou, typifies this view:

> Since the Rebellion of An Lu-shan, Fan-yang [i.e., Yu-chou] has not been part of the empire. Liu Tsung once gave up this territory (in 821), but, though the court expended 800,000 strings [to hold it], in the end it had nothing to show for it. Today Yang Chih-ch'eng has taken over; yesterday Li Tsai-i was in command. We should simply come to terms with him, regardless of whether he is obedient or rebellious, and employ him as a shield against the northern barbarians.[79]

[79] *TCTC* 244, p. 7874; *CTS* 172, p. 4471.

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The latter is a crucial point. As we have seen, the north-eastern frontier was long a troublesome area for the T'ang, the cost of defending which could only barely have been covered by its tax revenue. The T'ang court lost little materially through the autonomy of Yu-chou. The same was hardly true of the other two Ho-pei provinces which were located in far richer and more populous areas and themselves required the presence of strong garrisons counterpoised against them in the provinces to their south and west.

Thus, after 822 the three Ho-pei provinces were written off, and such realism, obviating any further crisis in the north-east, permitted the court to concentrate its efforts in areas where the returns were more likely to cover the investment. Yet, the court remained surprisingly able to influence developments in these provinces, if only in indirect fashion. For, despite their virtually independent status, they made no attempt to sever their formal links with Ch'ang-an, and unfailingly sought legitimate appointment by the crown. As Li Te-yü remarked in 844, 'In spite of their great military power, the provinces of Ho-pei cannot stand alone. In order to keep their armies under control, they require the titles and the majesty of the court.'[80] Events time and again revealed the truth of this observation. Refusal by the court to grant official confirmation usually brought about serious local instability. Clearly, the people of these areas felt that, specific relationships aside, they continued to be part of a greater political order under one legitimate ruler. Hence, the court was in a position to arbitrate and to manipulate local political struggles at least to some degree, throwing its weight behind the man likely to be the most tractable. It could also offer refuge and further employment to a governor who had been cooperative but who was now driven from his province, while denying them to less acceptable former governors. Why then did the court grant formal appointments to any of these governors at all? Essentially because, keeping nominal ties intact, it ensured the governors' recognition of the kind of peaceful coexistence which had been established. Refusal of recognition was a sword which cut both ways: it was likely not only to produce grave internal unrest in the province but also to provoke the province to aggressive behaviour externally.

The government's control of the two splinter provinces, I-wu and Heng-hai, gave it certain strategic advantages in Ho-pei. Though control of these provinces broke down occasionally, court appointees were always re-established at their head. This bridge-head in Ho-pei was a major concern for the court. In 826 Heng-hai threatened to revert to autonomous status when one Li T'ung-chieh, supported by the garrison, sought to

[80] *TCTC* 248, p. 8010.

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succeed his father as governor. This coincided with the accession of a new emperor, so that the court initiated no move against Li until well into 827. What elsewhere in the empire would have been a comparatively straightforward task, the reduction of this single, comparatively weak province, became here in Ho-pei a long drawn-out and complicated one. Of the three autonomous provinces, Yu-chou fought half-heartedly on the side of the court, Wei-po played a rather unsuccessful double-game, while Ch'eng-te was itself eventually declared an outlaw. Wei-po and Ch'eng-te, moreover, themselves came to blows. Finally, after a disproportionately large expenditure of funds and effort, control of the province was recovered in the spring of 829.

Clearly the court was determined not to lose this eastern base in Ho-pei, primarily for its defensive value in affording greater protection to Ho-nan. Having become larger since 822 by two prefectures and being in possession of significant economic resources, Heng-hai dispensed with its central military subsidy after 830. Conceivably, it even became a contributor of revenue thereafter. I-wu, on the contrary, remained a small garrison province, half of its military costs being borne by the court. Its garrison too was an occasional source of trouble, the crisis it fomented in 838–9 in particular giving leaders in Ch'ang-an some anxious moments before it was resolved. The precise impact of court control on the internal life of these provinces cannot be known; but we can be sure that the central government must have afforded some tangible incentives to the army and to other powerful local elements to remain loyal.[81]

The greatest test for the equilibrium established between the court and Ho-pei in 843–4 came with the attempt by Chao-i province to secure confirmation by the central government of its *de facto* autonomous status and thus the government's assent to the hereditary succession to the governorship, resulting in the last major revolt by an old-style provincial regime. The history of Chao-i is inextricably connected with the special status of Ho-pei, for from first to last it was regarded as the main bulwark against the dangerous forces of that region. Its position astride the T'ai-hang mountains, placing it in both Ho-pei and Ho-tung, conferred advantages as well as disadvantages. Above all it could not hope to survive as an independent unit without the backing of Ch'eng-te to the north and Wei-po to the east. Manifestly, the consequences of its slipping completely out of the hands of the court promised to be grave.

The Liu line had held command in Chao-i since 820 when it was established by Liu Wu, who had served in autonomous P'ing-lu but turned loyalist in 818 in time to receive grace and employment from the

[81] On developments in Ho-pei *c.* 820–74 see Peterson, *A fragment of empire*, ch. 5.

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throne. Already the first hereditary succession in 825 had provoked sharp debate at court, but the vacillating court leadership of the time eventually agreed to the appointment of Liu Wu's son, Liu Ts'ung-chien, who governed the province for the next eighteen years, a long tenure which could hardly but have attenuated the degree of court control over this province. He was notorious in particular for the extent and variety of his business enterprises, dealing in salt, horses, metals and general commerce, and sharing his profits with merchants on whom he conferred office in order to facilitate their movements. His willingness to take a strong public stand against the eunuchs following the Sweet Dew affair of 835 testifies to his independence and the strength of his position. It is thus not surprising that when he died in 843 the court, now under far more determined leadership than in 825, decided that the central government should exercise its right to choose his successor. The court was however in some difficulty in devising a strategy to attack the province. Knowing that the penetration of Ho-pei by central army troops would induce the autonomous provinces to close ranks in support of Chao-i, the court persuaded the governors of Ch'eng-te and Wei-po to join its campaign and attack Chao-i from the east. The governors were no doubt lured by the promise of material rewards; but, equally important, they were apprehensive lest this struggle on their doorstep should disturb their own favourable *modus vivendi* with the central power. The campaign was hard and long, occupying most of 843 and 844. Chao-i put up a tenacious defence which bespoke not only its strong military tradition but also considerable depth of popular support for the provincial regime. Though the usual difficulties of conducting a campaign with diverse, divided and uncommitted government forces again appeared, and though the effort was costly to the court, the main objective was achieved without any adverse effects on the political situation. Authority over existing Chao-i military units was then carefully transferred to the prefectures following the lines laid down by the 819 reform.[82]

The peculiarity of Ho-pei's status in the second half of the dynasty led the Ch'ing historian Ku Yen-wu to advance the theory that by the ninth century a genuine interdependence had evolved between the T'ang court and the Ho-pei provinces. Ultimately, once one fell, the other was bound to fall as well.[83] Ku Yen-wu certainly overstates the positive aspects of this relationship, for the position of the T'ang government throughout the second half of the dynasty remained permanently weakened by the loss of these provinces. Yet, there is no doubt that Ho-pei, despite its

[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Ku Yen-wu, *Jih-chih-lu* (Shih-chieh edn, Taipei, 1962), ch. 9, pp. 220–1.

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special situation, had a strong stake in the late T'ang political order and in dynastic survival. The real, and ultimately successful, challenge to T'ang rule eventually arose from a quite different quarter. Contemporaries in the ninth century were fully conscious of the separatism of Ho-pei. It became known as 'rebel country' (*fan-tsei chih ti*) for its tradition of stubborn resistance to the central government. Some scholars, reacting against the coarser aspects of its military regimes, even likened it to a land of barbarians. Interestingly, such dramatic contrasts with the rest of the country escaped the keen eye of the Japanese monk Ennin who passed through Ho-pei in 840. From his account, Ho-pei, to the traveller, was just another part of China. He does, however, make one important exception: in 845 he notes that the Buddhist persecution in the 840s was unenforceable in Ho-pei – truly telling evidence of the political independence of its governors.[84]

DECLINE OF THE PROVINCIAL SYSTEM

It would be futile to attempt to pinpoint a moment in the ninth century when central authority in the provinces began to break down.[85] Problems of maintaining order appeared locally before the middle of the century, but the rapid and complete collapse of central authority which took place in the final decades of the dynasty did not begin until the Huang Ch'ao rebellion. The decline of central power was not a purely political phenomenon. It was closely linked with the deep social and economic crisis which gradually affected rural life in the rich and productive agricultural regions of the Huai and Yangtze valleys.

This crisis was not a product of economic decline, but the indirect result of rapid development. There had been steady growth in agricultural productivity and trade and rapid population increase in these areas since the early eighth century. But this growth was accompanied by the progressive accumulation of land into fewer hands, a trend accelerated after the abandonment of all semblance of state control of land allocation after 755, an inequitable distribution of the tax load, and an increasing disparity between rich and poor. By the mid-ninth century local brigandage and vagrancy, the classic symptoms of rural distress, assumed serious proportions, while at the capital the central authorities were faced with

[84] Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's diary* (New York, 1955), pp. 205–13 *passim*, 388.
[85] This section draws on the following studies: Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōdai kōhanki no Kō-Wai ni tsuite', pp. 94–121; Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu*, pp. 208–15; Kurihara Matsuo, 'An-Shi no ran to hanchin taisei no tenkai', *Iwanami Kōza sekai rekishi*, 6 (1971) 173–8; Wu Chang-ch'üan *T'ang-tai nung-min wen-ti yen-chiu*, pp. 137–209, *passim*; Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Chō no ran', *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 13 (1957) 1–108.

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declining revenues from the area. The government and its policies were in part responsible for this situation, but they were only a secondary factor. The fundamental change, rapid growth and their broad social impact were beyond the control of the government, which neither understood these changes nor had the power to affect them. Nevertheless, the court's insistence on obtaining increased revenues, or at least maintaining the current levels, without any regard for local conditions encouraged abuses on the part of its local officials, who were aware that this achievement would be assessed by results alone without consideration of the means by which they were obtained. Nor was the crisis accompanied by any positive government policy to assist the distressed. Hence, although the peasants probably suffered equally from the exactions of private interests, the government's public tax demands made it appear the chief factor in their distress. Provincial officials also increased the burden on the ordinary taxpayer by granting protection and privileges to wealthy and influential local people and by other forms of corruption. Such cases are best documented from the Yangtze valley region, not only because central government interest was strongest there but also because the opportunities for profit were greater. Not, to be sure, that all officials were hopelessly corrupt; it was rather that the gradual accumulation of individual favours and malpractices could not suddenly at any single point be undone. Moreover, when a landowner of any size obtained tax-exempt status, more often than not he extended it to cover the peasants whom he had recruited to work his lands. The imbalance in tax burden among the local population which resulted from this loss of taxpayers, to which were added many other peasants who simply fled and emigrated to other regions, was in turn a source of grief for the officials themselves, who were still expected to meet their quotas. An example of what might happen when the local official was put under such pressure is shown by one over-zealous prefect in Che-hsi in the 830s who himself determined who was and who was not liable to taxation and then sent soldiers throughout the villages and countryside of the prefecture directly to extract the taxes due.[86]

The provincial administration underwent considerable evolution in the course of the ninth century and this goes far towards explaining the course of events within the empire from about 855 onwards. We have already observed its recruitment of local elements, whose social origins were notably different from those of most regular bureaucrats, and the manner in which positions within provincial government were used to provide tax protection through the fictitious assignment of property. The

[86] *TFYK* 698, p. 17b.

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local organs of government in China always necessarily relied on local personnel for a number of basic tasks and they were always subject to strong local pressures. However in late T'ang the local administrations gradually lost much of their character as representatives of central government and became increasingly sectionalist. They became inextricably involved in local webs of interest which by no means always regarded the policies and directions of the central government in a favourable light. As a result, the ever-present potential conflict of interests between the court appointees – the governors, prefects and their staffs – and the local personnel in provincial government, including the army, became a reality, and the former increasingly came to be regarded as agents of an alien and hostile interest. This situation reflects the extent to which the formal provincial structure had been bureaucratized in the century since the An Lu-shan rebellion; but it also underlines a growing gap between the court at Ch'ang-an and the local communities in important sections of the empire. One major reason for this may have been the lack of strong social ties between the membership of the national bureaucracy and these communities. The examination system which in theory opened access to the bureaucracy still functioned only on a small scale. Another factor was the scale and speed of growth of the private economic sector. However, it would be going too far to suggest that there was a strong undercurrent of anti-dynastic sentiment either among the officials in provincial government or among the local populace generally: their desire for less central government interference need by no means have conflicted with an abstract loyalty towards the throne.

At the same time provincial military capabilities declined seriously. The reduction of military budgets and cut-backs of garrisons significantly reduced the number of men under arms who could be immediately mobilized in an emergency. Inevitably too, garrisons long accustomed to nothing more than guard duty found it impossible to maintain either their fighting skills or their morale. But there was a further reason for the decline in military strength of the provincial forces, which became fully evident only after the outbreak of revolts from the late 850s. The reforms adopted by Hsien-tsung and implemented in his and succeeding reigns had left the operational size of units quite small and authority over them broadly distributed between the governors and the prefects. Designed to meet another problem altogether, i.e. the excessive concentration of provincial military power, these reforms (albeit combined with other factors) resulted several decades later in reducing the military strength of the provincial governments below the level necessary for local security. With the exception of the provinces on the frontier, the recalcitrant provinces in the north-

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east and one or two special cases in the interior, such as Wu-ning (from 870 Kan-hua), the provinces had become essentially civilian in character.

It is in the light of these changes that the gradual rise in incidence of lawlessness and of resistance to authority must be seen. A report on river piracy submitted to the throne by poet-essayist Tu Mu from his post on the Yangtze in 845 relates in detail how bandits in bands up to a hundred moved with impunity along the river attacking and sacking settlements and markets.[87] According to Tu, these settlements had long been subjected to looting and banditry. Significantly, the bandits were said to have descended upon the Yangtze area to make their raids from the Huai River region. This suggests that by perpetrating their deeds elsewhere they could avoid prosecution in their home districts. They would also have needed a clandestine market for their loot. Tu, indeed, asserts that they had wide connections with local residents in the Huai and Yangtze areas and that they enjoyed the open and armed protection of a number of villages (whether he had ever seen any of these places is not clear). He also identifies the bandits as salt smugglers, and it is evident from many other sources that this period saw a rise in salt and tea smuggling. The latter was mainly a fiscal problem, but, as those engaged in it did so in defiance of established authority and were not disinclined to use force in their illegal operations, they posed a security problem as well. Tu Mu's proposed solution, which chief minister Li Te-yü supported, was to establish a fifty-boat patrol to operate along the Yangtze and protect its settlements. If actually implemented this might have successfully solved the problem. But in general a serious level of lawlessness persisted, and it is significant that in 852 the court ordered the appointment of commissioners for training (*chiao-lien shih*) at all garrisons for the purpose of conducting periodic training sessions.[88] Bandit activity led in fact to the first popular uprising of any scale in 859, but by then the garrisons themselves were the main cause for concern.

Though trouble continued to occur in the traditionally difficult provinces (the north-east, Wu-ning), mutinies and disturbances among the provincial garrisons took on a new pattern at that time. They began cropping up in the Yangtze provinces, where they had previously been rare, and among the garrisons along the southern and south-western border. The latter troubles were directly related to the mounting external pressures from Nan-chao after the middle of the ninth century, both in China proper and on Annam, and to the increasing insurgency among the aboriginal tribes in these areas. The government found it difficult to redirect its resources so as to provide stronger defences in the south;

[87] *CTW* 751, pp. 16b–19b.

[88] *TCTC* 251, p. 8121.

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one of its solutions was to draft contingents of troops from various interior provinces for service there. This and other makeshift measures, resulting in inadequate logistic arrangements and overdue terms of service, led to discontentment and occasional violence among the troops in the southern garrisons.

The disturbances in the Yangtze region, in the course of which governors were driven out from Che-tung in 855 and from Hu-nan, Chiang-hsi and Hsüan-She in 858, occurred in part for similar reasons. As court official Chang Ch'ien observed to the throne in 858, governors sought to build up fiscal surpluses in order to achieve favourable merit assessments. When any increase in tax revenue was difficult the only alternative was to cut expenditures, of which military supplies and wages for the troops were the most vulnerable.[89] Such mutinies were thus related, but only indirectly, to distress among the peasantry in the countryside. In the case of the Hsüan-She mutiny of 858 at least, a recent study has shown that there was an added dimension.[90] A reaction to the strict administration of the then governor Cheng Hsün, the mutiny was ostensibly led by one K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai, a military officer. However, the real ringleader was a staff official, Li Wei-chen, who was at the same time a wealthy merchant who had used the protection and privileges of his position to build up his fortune and who had a large number of people privately organized in his service. Moreover, one of his collaborators owned extensive lands, for the irrigation of which he had monopolized a water supply formerly used for the benefit of 130 households. Such conflicts of interest had no doubt become common throughout the provincial administrations, and attempts by court officials strictly to enforce laws and central policies inimical to such persons' private interests always threatened to provoke dissidence and even forcible resistance.

The rising of Ch'iu Fu in Che-tung late in 859 was the first major military disturbance in this area since Yüan Shu's revolt a century earlier. The south-east had been exceptionally peaceful throughout the dynasty, and even Li Ch'i's revolt in Che-hsi in 807 had occasioned little actual fighting. Ch'iu Fu's rising was something new under the T'ang, a genuine popular peasant insurrection. Ch'iu Fu was himself a desperado of poverty-stricken origins, who put together a band of a couple of hundred followers and pursued a career of banditry, finally graduating to attacks on towns and villages. He achieved several early successes with relative ease, capturing a few county seats, and soon found his ranks swollen with thousands of recruits numbered, perhaps with some exaggeration, at 30,000 in our sources. Described as criminals and good-for-nothings, a substantial

[89] *TCTC* 249, p. 8071. [90] Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōdai kōhanki no Kō-Wai ni tsuite', pp. 116–17.

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portion of these must nevertheless have been members of the distressed rural poor. The movement was anti-dynastic from the beginning and perhaps inspired by class hatred as well: officials and scholars were killed; and Ch'iu assumed a grandiose title, changed the reign title, and created a royal seal bearing the legend 'Heavenly Peace' (*T'ien-p'ing*).

Since the local military forces in Che-tung proved completely inadequate to contain the rising, the court placed one of its top commanders, Wang Shih, in charge of suppressing the rebels and sent in troops from several neighbouring provinces and from Ho-nan. Wang took the precaution of sealing off all escape routes for the main concentration of rebel troops in Ming-chou and Yüeh-chou. He also reduced Ch'iu's popular support, or potential support, by opening up the state granaries to the poor and needy. Nevertheless, the campaign lasted till late summer of 860, terminating only after bitter resistance by the rebels. Though its effects were mainly local, the rebellion showed that social and economic problems were approaching a critical stage in a region which was essential to the dynasty's survival. Not unjustly, it is often regarded as a forerunner of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion as a first outbreak of popular revolt, or, more accurately, a revolt fuelled and sustained by popular resentment and suffering.

It is interesting to speculate on what possible courses of action the government might have followed to prevent further erosion of its power and control over the provinces. But probably too many of the people who were politically significant, especially at the provincial level, profited from the situation as it was, so that no real base of support for fundamental change existed. In any event none was attempted under I-tsung (reign 860–73), who devoted himself to his own pleasures, and whose ministers betrayed little aptitude for new initiatives. At the same time it would be misleading to portray conditions in such a light as to suggest that the sharp decline in the fortunes of the dynasty *must* have been widely perceptible. Ch'iu Fu's revolt had been a fairly localized event, and in the Yangtze region order had been quickly restored following the mutinies by individual provincial garrisons. No major political threats were apparent within the country, as, with good reason, the court became preoccupied with defence problems in the southern regions. One of the steps taken in this connection, however, was to have significant internal implications.

Long one of the trouble spots in the empire, the garrison of Wu-ning province expelled its governor in 862. In his place the court appointed the tough veteran of the wars in Annam and of the rebellion in Che-tung, Wang Shih. Despite punitive measures which had been taken against them

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in the past, the troops at Hsü-chou had never remained amenable to the control of court-appointed governors for long. Wang Shih now entered the city at the head of contingents of troops from other provinces and, evidently with the court's blessing for his projected action, proceeded to execute a large number of the Wu-ning troops, running we are told into thousands. (Though remarkable for its scale, this mass execution was not unique, others having occurred at Shan-nan West in 831, Yen-hai in 819, I-wu in 840 and Chao-i in 845.) This stabilized the situation at Wu-ning for the time being, although many Wu-ning soldiers managed to flee, turning to other pursuits including banditry. Subsequently, in order to weaken this army still further, some three thousand men were sent for a tour of duty on the southern frontier where defence problems had again become critical. In principle, they should have been returned home after a tour of duty of three years, but one contingent of eight hundred men was left at Kuei-chou through *two* tours and then ordered to remain an additional year. This, combined with other grounds for dissatisfaction with their leadership, proved too much. In the summer of 868 the garrison force mutinied and, led by one of its own officers, P'ang Hsün, began the journey home on its own.[91] The court gave its *ex post facto* approval to their action, and were satisfied with merely disarming the mutinous troops. However, they obtained new arms and continued their return journey reaching Hsü-chou in less than two months' time. Here, the governor refused them admission to the town, since there were strong grounds for doubting their loyalty. They then turned to force and their mutiny was swiftly transformed into open rebellion. Once again a rebel force rapidly collected large-scale popular support, the local origins of the mutineers and the stormy past history of the province probably both being contributing factors. The rebels captured Su-chou, Hsü-chou the provincial capital itself, Hao-chou and several other important places. They also carried out attacks into the modern provinces of Shantung, Kiangsu, Honan and Anhwei. A major purpose for these raids into neighbouring territories was to obtain the supplies necessary for the large assemblage of people who went over to the rebels. The government was obliged to mobilize massive forces, first to contain and then to suppress the revolt, which took over a year. The rebellion was finally crushed in late autumn of 868. During this period communication on the Pien Canal was of course impossible, forcing the government to use alternative (and certainly inadequate) routes for the shipment of goods from the south to Ch'ang-an. Moreover, some of the government's decisive victories

[91] For a chronicle of this rebellion see R. des Rotours, 'La révolte de P'ang Hiun', *TP*, 56 (1970) 229–40.

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were won through the assistance of three thousand Sha-t'o Turkish cavalry who were brought in from the frontier, the first time under the T'ang that foreign auxiliaries had been brought south of the Huang-ho.

Some modern historians perceive in this event the makings of a popular revolt which could have attained massive dimensions but which was betrayed by the narrow, selfish aims of the rebel military leaders.[92] However that may be, it is clear that a large pool of potential rebels existed in the heart of the empire – discontented soldiers, soldiers released from duty, ex-rebels, brigands, smugglers and, most numerous of all, the oppressed and the dispossessed of the countryside. The region affected by the rebellion was seriously disrupted, and must have remained highly unsettled, requiring no little time to become economically productive again. Central finances suffered a serious blow, both through the direct loss of revenue from a rich and productive region, and through the massive expense of supporting the armies in the field. Central administrative control in the provinces must also have become looser, not least through a decline of confidence in the imperial regime among officials themselves. It says little for the leadership at court at the time that such a minor incident should have been allowed to escalate into a major rebellion.

However, a major reason for the government's difficulties in dealing with incidents and crises as they arose lay in the weakness of the provincial administrative and military structure which, by this time, lacked both power and responsiveness as an extension of central authority. Because of the diffusion of military control and inadequate funds for military support, provincial officials could no longer provide adequate security in their areas of responsibility; moreover, the quality of the garrisons themselves had deteriorated seriously. Equally important, as the provincial centres of administration came increasingly under the influence of local wealthy groups, internal divisions threatened to undermine them from within. A century earlier provincial confrontation with the central government usually found the governor able to organize the resources of his provinces behind him. Now a pattern began to emerge in which the first level of confrontation occurred *within* the province, the antagonism being directed against the court-appointed governor (or prefects). The provincial centres, in other words, became sources of internal instability in quite another sense than they had been after the An Lu-shan rebellion. But through the third quarter of the ninth century they had as yet not assumed an overtly anti-dynastic aspect. This occurred only amid and following the chaos unleashed by the Huang Ch'ao

[92] Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōmatsu no minshu hanran to Godai no keisei', *Iwanami Kōza sekai rekishi*, 6 (1971) 246–7; Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Chō no ran', p. 52.

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rebellion. They then fell prey to interests which had become accustomed to exploiting them and to brigands who, as in the old days, first seized power and then demanded official confirmation from a weakened, temporizing court. The provincial structure, it has been said, ended by providing the means for the destruction of the dynasty, but this came about only after a rapid and complete change in the composition of its leadership and its remilitarization on a new basis.[93]

It is tempting to see in the shifts of power between court and province in the period 755–906 a pendulous or even a cyclical action, movement in one direction eventually giving way to movement in the other and so on. But until our knowledge is sufficient to show that the interaction of factors involved did in fact produce a pendulous or cyclical pattern, such conceptions do little more than remind us that 'there is a time and tide in the affairs of men'. Moreover, as the chapters in this volume make clear, T'ang China changed markedly throughout this period. The circumstances attending the Huang Ch'ao rebellion and its aftermath bear little resemblance to those surrounding the An Lu-shan rebellion and the attenuation of central authority which resulted from it.

The T'ang court, it is no exaggeration to say, made a remarkable recovery following the crises of 755–63 and 781–6 when rebellion severely shook its hold on the country. In its efforts it was clearly grappling with one of the key problems confronting any central regime in Chinese history, the unity and cohesion of this vast territory we have come to know as China. Government action was no doubt a precondition for the maintenance of this unity and cohesion, but it could not long remain effective without at least the tacit assent of important segments of the population. Therefore, while we have necessarily been preoccupied with the methods and policies employed by the government in its efforts to recentralize, the resonance it found on the level of application must not be overlooked. Identification with the political centre and acceptance of the established order must have been strong throughout the country or else the T'ang government could not have survived the deadly challenges it had had to face in the eighth century. After the middle of the ninth, the discrepancy for many of the people between institutional demands and prevailing social conditions decisively weakened these sentiments. Thus, when lawless elements seized power locally and confusion came to reign at the centre, adequate support for restoration of a T'ang central government, as in the preceding century, could not be found. The final dissolution of T'ang authority, it is clear, admits of no simple explanation.

[93] Cf. *HTS* 50, p. 1324 (des Rotours, *Traité des fonctionnaires*, pp. 751, 785) which ignores the changes in the provincial administrations from one time to another.

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CHAPTER 9

COURT POLITICS IN LATE T'ANG TIMES

The sources for eighth and ninth century Chinese history, most of which have been described in the scholarly literature, far outnumber those for earlier periods, and so we can readily imagine what the general quality of life in late T'ang Ch'ang-an must have been. Moreover, the subject of this essay, high politics from 755 to about 860, is probably better represented among the documents and in the histories than any other topic. Nevertheless, to the particular frustration of the political historian, there are some basic questions about the late T'ang court that we may never be able to answer satisfactorily owing to the lack of sufficient reliable data. This is not merely a matter of details, or of refinement of interpretation, for the quantity and quality of ninth-century data represent a severe constraint. We must therefore subject the extant Chinese records to the most painstaking scrutiny, so that their preconceptions and omissions will mislead us as little as possible. That procedure is not unusual in itself, of course, but for some late T'ang topics (such as ninth-century political factionalism, which has suffered from a thousand years of biased interpretation), the lack of substantial new evidence makes it difficult to do more, in honesty, than unravel inherited distortions. Occasionally we can glean bits of information on such difficult questions from the general collections of T'ang poetry and prose, but it should come as no surprise that corroborative material about events which took place so long ago frequently proves thin, or untrustworthy. In any case, modern scholars have only just begun to address themselves to many significant aspects of the history of China during the eighth and ninth centuries, so the account that follows ought to be regarded as a preliminary outline of late T'ang politics.

THE REBELLION OF AN LU-SHAN AND ITS AFTERMATH (755–86)

An Lu-shan (703–57) was a career military officer of partly Soghdian stock.[1] Under the patronage of the political strongman, chief minister

[1] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *The background of the rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London, 1955), ch. 2.

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Li Lin-fu (d. 752), An Lu-shan had risen through the ranks of professional soldiery in the provinces to hold an exceedingly powerful post as military governor (*chieh-tu shih*) of the Fan-yang defence region on the Manchurian frontier.[2] In the late 740s and 750s, assuming the role of a simple soldier and rustic buffoon, he became Ch'ang-an's newest curiosity and was even adopted as a son by the famous concubine and imperial favourite, Yang Kuei-fei. After the death of Li Lin-fu in 752, however, An Lu-shan found himself to be a serious contender for power at the T'ang court, building upon his strong base in the north-east. He became a threat to Yang Kuei-fei and to her second cousin Yang Kuo-chung (d. 756), the new chief minister. A battle of nerves ensued between these two political forces, for although by mid-century the emperor Hsüan-tsung (reign 712–56) had withdrawn from active participation in court business (the histories blame this on his preoccupation with religion and over-indulgence in high living) his favour and approval was still required for the conduct of government affairs and the exercise of power. In such a struggle for influence, the Yangs, in the capital, had a natural advantage over An Lu-shan, who was eight hundred kilometres away in Fan-yang. He could not risk a trip to Ch'ang-an to refute their accusations against him, but neither could he permit a conspiracy to grow until he was forced from his command and tried by his enemies. This atmosphere of suspense doubtless hastened his decision to rise in rebellion against the dynasty.[3]

At An Lu-shan's disposal was a seasoned force variously estimated at 100,000 to 200,000 men, including cavalry recruited from the border tribes, with a secure base area around modern Peking. The government, by contrast, was ill-prepared as a result of the decline of the central army and other military organizations.[4] It had no force under its direct control except the small detachments making up the palace guards. Within two months of the outbreak of the rebellion in late 755, consequently, An Lu-shan's troops were able to move southward through Ho-pei, take the T'ang Eastern Capital of Lo-yang and advance to the eastern end of the T'ung-kuan Pass at the confluence of the Wei River and the Huang-ho, a mere hundred kilometres from Ch'ang-an.[5] (For a more detailed account of the rebellion see pages 472–84.

The court had to rely on the armies of those *chieh-tu shih* still loyal to the imperial house. The military governor Ko-shu Han (d. 756), who had previously buttressed the dynasty's defences against Tibet on the western

[2] *Ibid.* ch. 5; Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu* (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 10–27.
[3] See chs. 7 and 8 above.
[4] Hamaguchi Shigekuni, 'Fuhei seido yori shin heisei e', *Shin Kan Zui Tō shi no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 3–83; Ku Chi-kuang, *Fu-ping chih-tu k'ao-shih* (Peking, 1962), pp. 215–46.
[5] *TCTC* 217–22.

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front, was put in charge of blocking An Lu-shan's advance at the T'ung-kuan Pass. An impasse followed his assumption of command, however, and trouble erupted between him and the court. Pursuing a long-standing grievance, Ko-shu Han persuaded the emperor to execute another military governor early in 756. Yang Kuo-chung had no influence over that event, and in his anger viewed Ko-shu's vendetta as another thrust by a provincial general to gain power at the expense of the court bureaucracy. Yang therefore countered by suggesting to the emperor that Ko-shu leave the safety of the stronghold at the Pass and charge the rebel troops. Hsüan-tsung followed Yang's advice, and despite his objections Ko-shu Han had no choice but to obey the order. His army was promptly defeated and scattered in all directions. Ko-shu Han then deserted to An Lu-shan. The road to Ch'ang-an was open.

The flight of the terrified emperor and his retinue in mid-756 from the capital south-west through precipitous mountains into Szechwan is one of the best-known episodes in all of Chinese history. Hsüan-tsung's search for a refuge became the subject of many paintings and poems, the most famous of which is the 'Song of everlasting remorse', (*Ch'ang-hen ko*), a literary ballad by Po Chü-i (772–846), which describes the emperor's grief after being forced by his mutinous guards to consent to the execution of Yang Kuei-fei.[6] The soldiers also demanded the life of Yang Kuo-chung as their price for conducting Hsüan-tsung onwards into an exile that must have looked bleak indeed. In this and other sentimentalized versions of the incident, the chief minister and the concubine generally appear as symbols of the grandiose decadence of the preceding fifteen years, and as corrupt figures condemned to a well-deserved fate. While responsible to some extent, they were also scapegoats, victims of the outrage of those whose comfortable lives had been upset. It was a terrific shock for the political and social elite to see the government of the mighty T'ang empire collapse so quickly, and even more to be deserted by their emperor, who had slipped out of the capital by night with only a few of his relatives and closest confidants. Many members of great families fled in panic to the south, some of them never to return. The moods of pessimistic distrust and searching criticism, often found in late eighth century politics and thought, began to emerge not long after the fall of Ch'ang-an.[7]

Having left the site of the executions at Ma-wei Post Station, the

[6] *Po Hsiang-shan chi* (Commercial Press edn), 12, pp. 47–8; cf. Cyril Birch, ed. *Anthology of Chinese literature* (New York, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 266–9.

[7] Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'Neo-Confucianism and neo-legalism in T'ang intellectual life, 755–805', in A. F. Wright, ed. *The Confucian persuasion* (Stanford, 1970), pp. 83–5; D. M. McMullen, 'Historical and literary theory in the mid-eighth century', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 307–42.

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imperial refugees split into two groups. Actually several different destinations – T'ai-yüan, Ling-wu, even a return to the capital – had been proposed to the emperor at Ma-wei, but he insisted, despite considerable opposition, upon Yang Kuo-chung's original idea, namely that he should retire to Szechwan while his subjects found the time to rally and drive the rebels away. As he set out for Ch'eng-tu, Hsüan-tsung asked the heir apparent to stay behind temporarily and to explain this strategic retreat to representatives of the common people. They became quite angry, and as a consequence the heir apparent's closest advisers, including his two sons, urged him to catalyse the dynasty's efforts to defend itself. They argued that the T'ang ruling house would be forgotten quickly if both he and his father disappeared into the far-away south-west. The sources tell us that after suitable misgivings, the heir apparent bowed to the will of his counsellors and the people and proceeded north, by forced marches with only a few hundred men, to Ling-wu, on the western course of the great bend of the Huang-ho. At that well-fortified base he planned to summon loyal generals and military governors, assemble and equip an army, and launch the recapture of the capital, all in preparation for Hsüan-tsung's triumphal return. As the advisers pointed out, there could be no greater act of filial piety.[8]

It soon became obvious that the heir apparent ought to have assumed the throne himself, and the stories of his reluctance to do so were probably rationalizations in the history books. In the summer of 756 Hsüan-tsung was given the title of retired emperor (*shang-huang t'ien-ti*); although he continued to hold court for a time, the imperial insignia were sent to the 45-year-old prince, known by his temple name as Su-tsung (reign 756–62). Presumably there was some opposition to this act of usurpation, but the old emperor, who after all had been treated with decorum and who surely recalled the unusual circumstances of his own accession, did not try to prevent it. In any case, almost no high officials supported a plan put forward by a chief minister to divide the empire among Hsüan-tsung's sons, forming a kind of feudal polity.[9] The consensus was that further fragmentation would be disastrous.

Two months or so passed before loyal officials in the more distant provinces learned of Su-tsung's enthronement, but at least they had reason to begin to hope for a restoration under his leadership. In spite of initial resistance on the part of a few army officers in the north-west, the imperial forces there had swelled in number as tens of thousands of troops arrived in Ling-wu and T'ai-yüan from the eastern front. These units were led by generals Kuo Tzu-i (697–781) and Li Kuang-pi (708–64), who, if not

[8] *TCTC* 217, pp. 6974–8, 6980–1. [9] *TCTC* 219, p. 7004.

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consistently the military geniuses that later writers made them out to be, were still able, experienced commanders. Furthermore, the absence of the horde of bureaucrats that normally would have staffed the central government was an advantage in itself. The army was able to meet much of its need for food and horses out of local requisitions, and in addition a modest flow of supplies was coming to Ling-wu from central China via the Han River route. Su-tsung's government in exile gained enough strength by the beginning of 757 to beat down the challenge of Prince Lin of Yung, one of the emperor's brothers, who had tried to establish a separate 'feudal' regime in the middle Yangtze region.

The decision to give absolute priority to the recovery of Ch'ang-an was taken by Su-tsung in the spring of 757, after a number of encouraging victories. With the help of Uighur Turkish cavalry from the northern steppe, led by no less than the son of the qaghan, the campaign was launched in the autumn. Ch'ang-an fell quickly, but difficulties arose when the Uighurs were asked to continue on to Lo-yang. Claiming that no one had told him of such plans beforehand, the Uighur prince publicly humiliated the new heir apparent of the T'ang. After the recapture of the city, furthermore, the government had to bribe the Uighurs handsomely over and above their stipulated reward in order to soothe their feelings. Nevertheless, that winter the ruling house savoured its triumph. The retired emperor once again blessed his son's accession to the throne, the officials enjoyed their rewards, and the people at least were free from rebel looting and terror.

But was the hurried return to the capitals a strategic mistake? Quite possibly, for all at once the court had thrown away its mobility, adopting fixed positions and thus the responsibility for their supply and defence. While the imperial forces had proven adequate to get as far as Lo-yang, they were still heavily dependent on the foreign cavalry for their striking power, and it was unlikely they could go much further by themselves. And, most important, the sense of urgency ebbed away after it appeared that the dynasty was going to survive. People's thoughts turned to their own futures; they no longer fought so hard; and so the war dragged on. It was not as if alternatives had been unavailable to Su-tsung at Ling-wu, or even later on the march towards Ch'ang-an. A first strike in the direction of the rebel heartland in Fan-yang, for example, was proposed to the emperor by the brilliant, if controversial, chief minister Li Mi (722–89). Rebel lines of communication seemed to have been over-extended, and a manoeuvre of that sort might have driven a wedge through enemy territory, outflanking the armies stationed in Lo-yang and Ch'ang-an. Links might have been established between the imperial forces and the enclaves of loyalist resistance in Ho-pei. Yet Su-tsung insisted that

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possession of the palace signified restoration, and that defeat of the insurgents was only a matter of time.

Time was precisely what the rebels needed most, however. They fell back to re-group near modern Anyang, and to try to work out the problems among their leaders. An Lu-shan had been murdered early in 757 at the instigation of his son, An Ch'ing-hsü, who was motivated, so he said, solely by the desire to protect the high rebel officials from his ailing father's fits of temper. But much of the cohesion of the rebel movement depended on personal ties between An Lu-shan and his followers, which were not transferable to An Ch'ing-hsü. Serious dissension arose between An Ch'ing-hsü and Shih Ssu-ming, the rebels' ablest general. In early 759 Shih Ssu-ming killed An Ch'ing-hsü, withdrew his forces to Fan-yang, and assumed the throne of the rebel 'Greater Yen' dynasty. For a year or so rebel fortunes looked better, and they managed to retake Lo-yang from imperial troops in the summer of 760. The military situation in Ho-pei and Ho-nan had essentially reached a stalemate at that point, however, and Shih Ssu-ming's thrust to the south, which brought the war to the Huai and Yangtze river valleys for the first time, was not notably successful. Perhaps for that reason, Shih Ssu-ming in turn was killed by his son, Shih Ch'ao-i, although the circumstances and excuses were remarkably similar to those of the first patricide. Three murders and four emperors within five years must have weakened the rebels terribly, but the movement persisted because the government did not take effective action.[10]

In fact, the court's prospects for winning the war diminished as time passed. The straightforward field command structure,[11] which had been established at Ling-wu when the emergency was very grave and which facilitated the recovery of Ch'ang-an, fell apart as the danger lessened. The generals did not follow orders from the heir apparent, who was a very ineffective commander-in-chief, nor did they cooperate readily with one another. The government found it exceedingly difficult to inspire and reward them; honours and titles had been dispensed too freely, and now hard cash was getting scarce. The court could not force its generals to be brave and resourceful, and active involvement in military affairs by civil officials, or by influential eunuchs (whom we shall discuss later) made matters worse. There were also many political intrigues in Ch'ang-an. For all these reasons, government strategy after about the beginning of 759 was confined by and large to a static, debilitating defence. The two biggest offensive manoeuvres in this period, led by Kuo Tzu-i (in 759) and Li Kuang-pi (in 761), were utter fiascos.

[10] *TCTC* 219–21.

[11] *THY* 78, pp. 1422–3.

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This pattern was not broken until after the deaths of Hsüan-tsung and Su-tsung in the spring of 762. The heir apparent, then enthroned as Tai-tsung (reign 762–79), was not the sort of man capable of producing a dramatic improvement in the court's position, but he did act wisely after receiving a very important piece of information. An envoy sent on a routine goodwill mission to the Uighurs reported that the nomads had been in contact with Shih Ch'ao-i, the rebel emperor, and had been persuaded to change sides; at that same moment, the envoy said, the Uighurs were mobilizing a huge army. Tai-tsung quickly dispatched the one man who had the ability to calm them, P'u-ku Huai-en (d. 765), an important general of Turkish ancestry whose daughter had been given in marriage to the Uighur qaghan several years earlier.[12] With the help of a large bribe, P'u-ku convinced his royal son-in-law not to turn on the T'ang but instead to join him in an attack on the rebels at Lo-yang.

Just as the expedition was getting under way, however, an incident much like that of 757 arose between the new Chinese heir apparent – the future Te-tsung (reign 779–805) – and the Uighur qaghan. The heir apparent, commander of the Chinese forces, offended the qaghan by neglecting to pay him what the nomads felt was proper homage. As a result, several Chinese officials in the heir apparent's retinue, who had advised him to stand on his dignity as the imperial scion, were whipped to death by the Uighurs as punishment. Naturally this was a severe humiliation for T'ang dynastic prestige. The Uighurs, who had been spoiling for a fight and saw this episode as a pretext for plunder, went on a rampage of killing and looting after the recapture of Lo-yang, not against imperial troops but against the defenceless common people. In fairness it must be added that the Chinese armies thought of Lo-yang as rebel territory and did their share of pillage as well. After three months the violence finally died down, but not before extensive damage had been done to the economy of the area.

Neverthless, the Sino-Uighur campaign put Shih Ch'ao-i to flight and caused his generals to consider saving themselves by surrendering to the T'ang. The government encouraged them to defect with offers of confirmation in the positions of military leadership they currently held. After a few more severe defeats had been inflicted on Shih Ch'ao-i, he was betrayed and murdered as he tried to escape to safety among the border peoples. The court then granted four of his chief lieutenants the title of military governor, with jurisdictions – provinces, in fact – at Yu-chou, Hsiang-chou, Ch'eng-te and Wei-po in modern Hopei and northern

[12] *CTS* 121, pp. 3479–80; *THY* 6, p. 75.

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Honan.[13] Thus without actually winning the war, or even conclusively proving that it could be won, the T'ang government stumbled through its gravest crisis and arbitrarily declared the great rebellion at an end.

As later events showed, however, the conflict between the court and the north-east was not over. Notwithstanding the presentation of Shih Ch'ao-i's head in Ch'ang-an and the government's other acts of conventional self-congratulation, the fact was that the north-east had become autonomous. The post of military governor had always carried with it extensive authority in the civil sphere, and as far as we know the newly-recognized incumbents in Ho-pei simply extended their quite legal prerogatives over the civilian population in the respective areas their armies controlled at the end of 762, assuming *de facto* sovereign powers in the process. In several ways Ch'ang-an was forced to treat these provinces as important semi-foreign states, despite the damage to its prestige or, more accurately, to its self-esteem. The emperors of the late eighth and early ninth centuries never ceased to worry about how to reconcile their own claims of empire-wide supremacy with the political reality of the times, as we shall see in greater detail later in this chapter.

The court had very little leisure to celebrate anything in 763 before a new menace appeared, this time from the west. Relations between China and the kingdom of Tibet had never remained cordial for any extended period, and by the mid-eighth century the temporary improvement caused by the Sino-Tibetan dynastic marriage of 710 had been forgotten.[14] Fighting along the border was endemic in the 730s and 740s. After the outbreak of the An Lu-shan rebellion, the Tibetan king Khri-sroṅ lde-brtsan (reign 754–97) decided to take advantage of China's internal troubles.[15] He ordered his cavalry forward in a gradual advance through the T'ang circuits of Lung-yu and Ho-hsi, which lay in what are now eastern Kansu and Tsinghai provinces. Each year after about 760 the Tibetans conquered a few more outlying prefectural towns, until by 763 they were entrenched within the western border of the Kuan-nei circuit (modern Shensi). The T'ang court did not take the Tibetan threat seriously enough, probably because China was also under foreign pressure from border tribes in the Ordos area[16] and, at least psychologically, from the

[13] The term 'provinces' is used for the fifty or so sizeable local civilian and military-civilian administrations (*kuan-ch'a shih*, *chieh-tu shih*, etc.) of late T'ang times.

[14] Yamaguchi Zuihō, 'The matrimonial relationship between the T'u-fan and T'ang dynasties', *MTB*, 27–8 (1969–70).

[15] Names and dates of the Tibetan kings follow Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū* (2 vols., Kyoto, 1958–9).

[16] Viz. the Tanguts; Okazaki Seirō, 'Tōdai ni okeru Tangūto no hatten', *Tōhōshi ronsō* (Nara), 1 (1947) 57–205.

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Uighurs as well. As a consequence, during the early 760s nothing was done to prepare for a Tibetan attack on Ch'ang-an.

In late 763, the prefect of Pin-chou opened the gates of his city to the Tibetans; they were thus only 125 kilometres from Ch'ang-an. Tai-tsung was suddenly shocked into action. He and the court fled to the city of Shan-chou, about halfway to Lo-yang, while once again the great families and commoners scattered in search of safety. A defence force of local troops, hastily organized under the direction of the heir apparent and Kuo Tzu-i, also retreated in order to consolidate its position. The Tibetans swept into Ch'ang-an in the eleventh month of 763 and remained there for two weeks, looting and burning the city that had been rebuilt so recently. As a puppet emperor, the Tibetans chose an aged brother of the Chinese princess who had been married off to the Tibetan king fifty years earlier.

T'ang forces soon re-entered the city, the Tibetans being quite content to withdraw with their booty. Tai-tsung returned early in 764 and had the pretender executed, but that must have been small comfort. Undiminished in strength, the Tibetans retired only as far as their base camp in western Shensi, the same place from which they had set out six months before. For the next thirteen years, until 777, the Tibetans attacked almost every autumn, which was the usual nomadic campaign season. The size of their cavalry varied from one engagement to the next. Occasionally they came with as few as five thousand men, and yet, as Kuo Tzu-i lamented, against the might of the Tibetans the Chinese forces were nothing but an easily frightened mob. Two feeble peace initiatives in 767 and 774 proved fruitless. Not only were the Tibetans aware of China's continued weakness, but in 768 their most bellicose general was recalled from the battlefield and made *blon chen* (first minister), after which Tibet pressed the Chinese still harder. It took years for the T'ang defence to become effective. As late as 774, Kuo estimated his troops at only a quarter of the number the Tibetans were able to deploy, and the horses at his disposal a tiny fraction by comparison.[17] We have no precise information about how much the Tibetans stole in the 760s and 770s, but it would be hard to exaggerate the disruptive effect of their raids on the halting process of T'ang recovery. An especially hard blow was the loss of the empire's best horse pasturages in Lung-yu to the Tibetans, which made China more dependent upon Uighur horses and cavalry support.

The ultimate indignity for the court in the aftermath of the An Lu-shan rebellion was the revolt of one of its own generals, P'u-ku Huai-en, the man who had rendered invaluable service to the dynasty by restraining

[17] *CTW* 332, pp. 12a–13a.

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the Uighurs in 762. As part of the general demobilization of auxiliary forces in 763, P'u-ku was ordered to escort the qaghan back to his homeland in the steppe. On the road north to rendezvous with the Uighurs, however, he clashed with the governor of Ho-tung province, who refused to extend him the customary courtesy of rations for an army in transit. The reasons for the governor's refusal are not entirely clear. Yet the widespread fear of another plot led by a powerful military man with foreign connections, in other words a second An Lu-shan, was surely in the governor's mind, leading him to accuse P'u-ku of intended treason. Tai-tsung's investigation of the matter, carried out by a eunuch, upheld the governor's charges. P'u-ku Huai-en sent in a long memorial of self-justification, to which the emperor did not reply.[18] P'u-ku interpreted his silence as rejection and, as An Lu-shan had done, decided to fight for his life. Early in 764 he sent his son with an army to attack T'ai-yüan. The son was defeated there and later killed by staff officers, but P'u-ku escaped to Ling-wu, where he gathered a new army. His principal allies were the Tibetans, who were ready to attack Ch'ang-an and needed only skilled leadership with inside knowledge of China in order to sweep to a great victory. Some Uighur mercenaries joined them as well. This nucleus grew into an enormous army that in the autumn of 764 terrorized the people living in the western approaches to the Chinese capital. The next year P'u-ku Huai-en was about to lead his troops in an envelopment tactic when he suddenly dropped dead in his camp. The attack disintegrated and most of his army surrendered. The central government later attributed those events to divine intervention. Kuo Tzu-i bribed the Uighur mercenaries to turn on the Tibetans, who withdrew to the west.

This revolt was the most serious of a number of such episodes, in which local officials and army commanders lost their positions or even their lives because of a mutual lack of understanding between them and the beleaguered T'ang court.[19] The emperor and his advisers had become justifiably wary of suspicious behaviour in the field, but at times their concern approached paranoia. Indeed the central government helped to cause problems of this sort, by allowing various private feuds to influence state affairs, and by ignoring the need for consistent policies on collaboration and treason. Despite the elaborate channels established to investigate and prosecute accused collaborators, it was quite clear that politics and not law was the deciding factor in a great many cases. When high rebel officials escaped prosecution and even received employment in the T'ang bureaucracy, loyal servants of the dynasty must have asked themselves

[18] *TCTC* 223, pp. 7147–50.
[19] E.g. the cases of Liu Chan (*TCTC* 221, pp. 7097–102) and Lai T'ien (*CTS* 114, pp. 3364–8).

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why they had remained loyal. The vicious circle of rumour, intrigue and precipitate action severely damaged morale and did as much as anything else to impair the T'ang government's capacity to rebuild after the rebellion.

The political spectrum in Ch'ang-an under Tai-tsung (762–79)

Eunuchs

The activity of eunuchs in court politics was undoubtedly one of the distinguishing features of late T'ang history. Their rise to prominence was gradual, however, and their role in the first half of the dynasty had been very limited.[20] Generally procured from among prisoners of war or children of the southern frontier regions (Fukien and Kwangtung), early T'ang eunuchs were assigned by the emperor T'ai-tsung to menial tasks in the harem and palace. He decreed that their status should be restricted in perpetuity to that of commoners and that they should not be permitted to hold office at the highest levels of T'ang officialdom, namely the third rank or above.[21] Before too long, however, these stringent early rules were under assault as the usefulness of the eunuchs became apparent to the various emperors. The Department of the Inner Palace (Nei-shih sheng), which eunuchs had staffed from the beginning of the dynasty but which had been concerned originally only with routine palace management, slowly expanded its sphere of authority until it became the biggest and most important of the offices concerned with the imperial household as a whole. The number of eunuchs increased to perhaps three thousand during the era of widespread supernumerary appointments under the empress Wu (reign 690–705).[22] As they were the only court personnel privileged with continuous access to the emperor, even in his private apartments, eunuchs began the practice of serving as intermediaries between him and the court bureaucracy. At first they simply looked after documents and relayed oral imperial instructions, but later they occasionally participated in important discussions. They were responsible solely to the emperor and totally dependent upon him. Hsüan-tsung used them as confidential couriers and intelligence sources.

Kao Li-shih (d. 762), the best known early T'ang eunuch, played a key role in securing the throne for Hsüan-tsung in the 710s and was personally influential at court thereafter until Hsüan-tsung's death during the rebellion. Kao was the first eunuch to be awarded a post of the third rank, thus

[20] J. K. Rideout, 'The rise of the eunuchs during the T'ang dynasty', *AM* (NS), 1 (1949–50) 53–72; 2 and 3 (1952) 42–58.

[21] *THY* 65, p. 1131.

[22] *THY* 65, p. 1131; Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1971), ch. 2.

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shattering T'ai-tsung's prohibition. From mid-century onwards, eunuchs were awarded titles of nobility as well. The crisis of the An Lu-shan rebellion provided a natural opportunity for highly-placed eunuchs to advance their own interests. The first of these, a keen-witted figure named Li Fu-kuo (d. 762), was part of Su-tsung's entourage when he was still heir apparent. At Ling-wu the new emperor recognized Li's considerable talents by making him chief administrator of the armies on campaign (*yüan-shuai* [*fu*] *hsing-chün ssu-ma*); under conditions of general mobilization, his power in this post came to rival that of the regularly appointed chief ministers. After the return of the court to Ch'ang-an, Li Fu-kuo was appointed to a large number of commissionerships simultaneously, and it appears that from this time forward the physical facilities, personnel and supply of the forbidden precincts were entirely in the hands of eunuchs. Li Fu-kuo's personal status rose still further as he assumed the duties of a secretarial chief-of-staff in the palace. Between 758 and 762, important memorials and memoranda to and edicts from the emperor passed through his office and needed his approval before being put into practice. In addition, his staff apparently usurped some of the investigating functions of the censorate and the Court of Justice.

Li Fu-kuo asserted himself in court politics far more vigorously and more often than had his predecessor Kao Li-shih. Li regularly interfered in the procedure for appointing provincial governors and generals, and at one point he even carried on a campaign to denigrate the Retired Emperor. With the help of his long-standing ally, Su-tsung's empress Chang, Li Fu-kuo was able to hold his own against courtiers of the most distinguished pedigree. The high bureaucrats eventually thwarted his desire to become a chief minister, but that rebuff was unusual. He was a chronic plotter who did not hesitate to turn against his former friends. After the death of Su-tsung, Li Fu-kuo foiled the empress Chang's plan to kill the future Tai-tsung and to replace him with her own son; alerted by his subordinate, Ch'eng Yüan-chen, Li led a detachment from the palace guards (*chin-chün*)[23] to crush the conspiracy and kill the empress.[24]

Li Fu-kuo's career set several important precedents: eunuch control of personal access to the emperor, participation in the business of the central government, involvement with provincial appointments, and intervention with armed forces in a dispute over the imperial succession. It is no wonder that literati historians, to whom eunuchs were anathema, castigated the mid-century emperors for allowing their evil influence to spread. But it is crucial to remember that at this time a eunuch's power still depended on his personal patronage by the reigning emperor, and that the institutional-

[23] *WHTK* 151, pp. 1322–3.

[24] *TCTC* 222, pp. 7123–5.

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ization of the authority of eunuchs was a prolonged process that lasted into the ninth century. Li Fu-kuo himself, despite his role in the palace struggle that led to the enthronement of Tai-tsung, was hated and feared by the new emperor, who arranged for his execution in 762 by a band of hired assassins. Another example of the derivative position of eunuchs is to be found in the career of Ch'eng Yüan-chen (d. *c*. 764), who enjoyed Tai-tsung's favour in 763, but because he reportedly tried to keep the emperor from learning of the imminent danger of the Tibetan attack, was exiled as a traitor after Tai-tsung returned to Ch'ang-an in 764. Although Ch'eng held many posts earlier filled by Li Fu-kuo, he did not do so as a matter of right, nor was he able to bequeath his high political status to a chosen successor.

Ultimately, as many scholars have pointed out, the acquisition of independent military power was the foundation of the eunuchs' great strength in late T'ang times.[25] Important first steps in this direction were taken in the 760s. When Tai-tsung fled from the Tibetans to Shan-chou in 763, he was received and protected there by the Shen-ts'e *chün*, or 'Army of Divine Strategy', commanded at the time by a eunuch named Yü Ch'ao-en (d. 770). The Shen-ts'e Army had been established by Ko-shu Han in 754 as a frontier garrison in the north-west, but it was sent east after the outbreak of the An Lu-shan rebellion. When its home base was overrun by the Tibetans, the unit was reorganized and stationed at Shan-chou to provide an inner line of defence during the Ho-pei campaigns. By 763 it had been tested several times and was known as a strong and reliable force.[26] After his return to the capital, Tai-tsung showed his gratitude and admiration by incorporating the Shen-ts'e Army into the palace guards and by leaving Yü Ch'ao-en in place as its commander. Inasmuch as the collapse of the *fu-ping* militia system, and the increasing concentration of the armies on the frontiers had severely weakened the palace guards in the first half of the eighth century, the addition of the Shen-ts'e troops made a dramatic difference in their fighting strength. Now for the first time in decades, the court could field a force under its own control and no longer had to rely exclusively on the good will of the loyal military governors. During the 760s Yü Ch'ao-en oversaw the installation of the Shen-ts'e Army in permanent bases just to the west of Ch'ang-an, where the troops would be immediately available to the emperor. As we might expect, the presence of a eunuch in such a powerful position aroused jealousy and apprehension among the courtiers from the very beginning. Yü amply fulfilled their expectations, flaunting his

[25] Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu*, pp. 53–70.
[26] *THY* 72, p. 1294; Obata Tatsuo, 'Shinsakugun no seiritsu', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 18.2 (1959) 35–56.

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new-found wealth and pushing his way into sacrosanct areas of the government, such as the Directorate of the State University, where his presence was regarded by officials as a grotesque irregularity. In time Tai-tsung too came to have misgivings about Yü Ch'ao-en's conduct, and so as the result of a complicated intrigue Yü was executed in 770. His associates were either killed or dispersed. A bureaucrat was appointed to head the Shen-ts'e Army, and it was not until 783, again in wartime, that eunuchs were placed in positions of military responsibility.

Financial specialists

The chaos let loose in the economic life of the empire by the An Lu-shan rebellion required urgent attention at the court of Tai-tsung. Government reserves had been depleted by the expenses of the war and by the peculation of corrupt officials. The fighting had devastated many parts of north China, spurring mass migration of peasants, especially in Ho-nan; the transport and communications systems had been subjected to severe strains; and the loss of Ho-pei had deprived the central government of its largest single source of tax revenue.[27] From the late 750s onwards, a newly emerging group of financial officials addressed themselves to these and other related problems. Although they were not completely successful at their work, they managed to keep the quite dismal economic situation from becoming disastrous, and at the same time they had considerable impact upon politics.

To understand the financial officials we must look back a bit. Changes in the characteristics of the T'ang empire had begun to occur in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. The large and complicated state of Hsüan-tsung's time had already experienced great growth in government expenditure and in the bureaucracy, along with constant evolution of patterns of land-holding, which in turn were connected with substantial social and economic dislocation at the local level in various parts of China. The relatively simple institutional structure of early T'ang government was no longer adequate, and not merely in finance. Hsüan-tsung did not, of course, reorganize his administration in general along more rational lines. Instead, government attempts were made to deal with the most pressing economic and political concerns one by one, through the appointment of commissioners (*shih*) on an *ad hoc* basis.[28] These commissioners, who became so important in late T'ang times, were not a part of the regular bureaucracy, though they were given sinecure posts, fre-

[27] Denis Twitchett, 'Provincial autonomy and central finance in late T'ang', *AM* (NS), 11.2 (1965) 211–32.
[28] *THY* 77–9; *Kuo-shih pu* (Shanghai, 1956–7 edn) *hsia*, p. 53.

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quently in the censorate, for rank and salary purposes. Unlike ordinary officials, whose legal spheres of authority were circumscribed very closely, commissioners were permitted to cut across the conventional departmental boundaries in order to coordinate government activity on a functional basis. They were allowed to recruit staffs of clerks and accountants. They were particularly useful for problems involving both court and provinces, the sort of thing that was too technical for the emperor's chief advisers but also too far-reaching to be within the discretion of an ordinary administrator. The best known among the early commissioners were active in the registration of vagrants, the collection and transportation of land taxes, and in frontier defence (the ten original *chieh-tu shih*).[29]

The loss of land-tax revenue during the rebellion presented an especially grave difficulty to the court. The registers of population and land allotment necessary for the proper functioning of the old *tsu-yung-tiao* system were then out-of-date and useless. In 758 a plan was proposed to enforce a monopoly on the marketing of salt, as a partial substitute for the land-tax revenues. A new post, that of commissioner for salt and iron (*yen-t'ieh shih*), was created to oversee the monopoly. (Note that the inclusion of 'iron' in this title was an allusion to a Han precedent and had no significance in T'ang practice.) The central government established regional offices of the salt monopoly, to which all salt had to be sold by licensed producers; from there the salt was resold with a huge tax to merchants, who passed the costs on to the consumers. Because the imperial regime controlled all the major salt-producing areas, and because as a necessity of life salt was assured of a minimum market, it was possible to create a relatively effective monopoly. Within a few years after its establishment, the salt monopoly provided over 50 per cent of total imperial cash revenue, which was a considerable supplement to the income from direct land taxation.

The Salt and Iron Commission was the vehicle for the political emergence of the financial officials. As more and more economic functions were integrated into the commission, lines of financial authority and titles of personnel were refined and elaborated. After 765 two financial zones were established: one (technically called the Salt and Iron Commission) based in Yang-chou and in charge of the finances of central China and the Yangtze valley, the other (under the Public Revenue Department of the Board of Finance) in Ch'ang-an, responsible for the north and for Sze-

[29] Tonami Mamoru, 'Tō no ritsuryō taisei to U-bun Yū no kakko', *Tōhō gakuhō* (Kyoto), 41 (1970) 263–88; Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 107–9.

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chwan.[30] The important point, however, is that after the first generation the officials who manned these posts can be characterized as financial specialists. Their employment as such was a major departure from the early T'ang model of the unspecialized administrator-politician. In the post-rebellion period, they developed the rudiments of professional standards and self-esteem, were permitted to recruit subordinates outside the regular system, and introduced thereby a new career track into the administration, one that remained in existence through northern Sung times.[31]

As the financial specialists expanded the scope of their activities to include such complicated tasks as the preparation of an elementary budget and the administration of taxes on property, it was inevitable that they should encounter obstacles. Some, like the failure to stabilize the currency, were a result of the inadequacy of contemporary economic theory and continued to plague the dynasty throughout its existence.[32] Others were political. For instance, during the rebellion large amounts of government revenue had been deposited into the emperor's personal treasury for safe-keeping, instead of into the state treasury, and this practice was continued after the end of the war. But control over receipts and disbursements at the imperial treasury (*nei-k'u*) had fallen into the hands of the emperor's personal servants, the eunuchs.[33] As a consequence, the financial specialists were restrained in a fundamental way from exercising full control over the economic affairs of the empire. They had no choice but to cooperate with the eunuchs, at great risk of being accused of corruption by their political enemies. The disrepute incurred by association with financial crimes, such as embezzlement, bribery, influence-peddling, usury or even consumption in excess of the sumptuary laws, was quite severe in T'ang times. Financial officials therefore were especially vulnerable to attacks from the substantial number of courtiers who were appalled at both their rise and that of the eunuchs.

Politicians

After the death of Yang Kuo-chung in 756, no politician of comparable stature appeared at court until Yüan Tsai (d. 777) became a chief minister in 762. Unlike many of the prominent men of the decades before the rebellion, Yüan Tsai was of undistinguished family background. Originally his family name had been the common 'Ching', but was changed as a

[30] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 109–20.

[31] R. M. Hartwell, 'Financial expertise, examinations, and the formulation of economic policy in Northern Sung China', *JAS*, 30.2 (1971) 281–314.

[32] R. M. Hartwell, 'Classical Chinese monetary analysis and economic policy in T'ang-Northern Sung China', *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan*, 13 (1968) 70–81.

[33] Muronaga Yoshizō, 'Tōmatsu naiko no sonzai keitai ni tsuite', *Shien*, 101 (1969) 93–109.

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mark of favour to Yüan – the surname of the ruling family of the Northern (T'o-pa) Wei dynasty – which was more acceptable socially. Yüan Tsai first entered officialdom by an unusual route, the special examinations on the Taoist classics held under Hsüan-tsung. Inasmuch as the senior politicians of the old regime had been ruined by the rebellion, younger men like Yüan had natural opportunities for rapid promotion. He had presented an outstanding performance as transport commissioner (*chuan-yün shih*) in the early 760s, and through his connections with Li Fu-kuo, came to the notice of Tai-tsung. In order to consolidate his position after being made a chief minister, Yüan Tsai married the sister of Wang Chin (700–81), a man of great wealth and impeccable lineage, whom he later installed as his colleague.

Despite his transparent ambition, Yüan Tsai deeply impressed the emperor. He was a shrewd judge of character and had a gift for using the abilities of others. He protected the brilliant financial officials Ti-wu Ch'i (*c.* 710–80) and Liu Yen (?715–80), advocated their innovations before Tai-tsung, and almost surely had a hand in arranging a compromise between them in the matter of jurisdiction. Yüan Tsai also looked at the problem of north-western defence with a fresh eye. In 773, after years of repeated attacks by the Tibetans, he proposed that while the Tibetans were off their guard at Kokonor enjoying the summer pasture, China should seize the walled town of Yüan-chou, an easily defended forward position in western Shensi and the key to the invasion route through the mountains. His daring plan had real merit, but at the time it was rejected by the generals, who called it the foolish notion of an armchair warrior. Another of Yüan's suggestions was to move the T'ang capital from Ch'ang-an eastward into Ho-chung province (the southern part of modern Shansi), where it would be both better protected from the Tibetans and more convenient to the grain supply route via the Pien Canal, yet not as exposed as Lo-yang, which was the traditional alternate capital. Although neither of these proposals was adopted, they suggest that Yüan Tsai had powers of analysis and vision beyond those of the ordinary bureaucrat. This is admittedly impossible to verify, since only a few of Yüan Tsai's writings are extant, but the frequency with which elements of these plans reappear in the 780s and 790s argues for his perceptiveness as a strategist and statesman.

At the same time it appears that Yüan Tsai was attempting to create a strongman regime like those of Li Lin-fu and Yang Kuo-chung. He was accused after his death of gross nepotism, stupendous greed, shameless receipt of bribes and uncontrollable jealousy, especially towards the few honoured elder statesmen who were beyond his reach. There is some

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truth in all of these charges. A typical ploy was his request in 766 that Tai-tsung allow his office to review the memorials and petitions of complaint that flowed from the bureaucracy, including the censorate, up to the emperor. His intention of course was to intercept criticism of himself and his policies, and he was successful for a time.[34]

Unfortunately we do not know much about the political opposition to Yüan Tsai, other than the fact that it existed and grew steadily as his exercise of power became more violent. After Yüan Tsai arranged for the murder of the eunuch Yü Ch'ao-en in 770, clearly pursuing a still more important role for himself, even Tai-tsung's enthusiasm for him began to wane. For years, however, the emperor was too afraid to move overtly against him. Yüan Tsai's eventual downfall was the result of a sudden high conspiracy, the immediate causes of which are obscure. Early in 777, Tai-tsung issued secret orders to his nephew, then in command of a palace guard unit, for the arrest of Yüan Tsai, who was condemned to death after a hurried trial. His corpse was mutilated, his opulent mansion was destroyed, his family were massacred, and several months later even his ancestral temple was razed to the ground. A ritual defilement of such severity, amounting to the ultimate liquidation of Yüan Tsai's personal significance, is our best witness to the passions his career had aroused. Of Yüan's closest associates, the emperor spared only his aged brother-in-law Wang Chin, who died shortly afterwards in exile.

There is little doubt that Yüan Tsai was less powerful than the dominant chief ministers of Hsüan-tsung's reign had been. Unlike them, he was limited by the new forces we have described, the eunuchs and the financial specialists, and even during his strongest period he had no personal access to military forces. Most important, although he was pre-eminent at court, his was a court whose effective power had been diminished markedly, both because of the provincial situation and because of a general lack of self-confidence in Ch'ang-an.[35]

Tai-tsung himself was in part responsible for this malaise. He was never a leader who could inspire his troops, and as emperor he never rose to the occasion in a manner that convinced the shaken courtiers of his strength, or of his hope for the future. On the contrary, all his wartime experiences had taught him to be suspicious of his supporters beyond reason; we have seen how the court barely survived his treatment of P'u-ku Huai-en. Curiously he then turned to Yüan Tsai and permitted him great latitude for fifteen years, but this may have been the result of a conservative unwillingness to abandon the political patterns of his grandfather's reign. His sufferance of the eunuchs and financial specialists

[34] *TCTC* 224, pp. 7189–90.

[35] But cf. Pulleyblank, *Background*, p. 162, n. 21.

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also had the appearance of hedging his bets, in contrast to his son's conscious and decisive use of them as instruments of power for the direction of the state.

On the other hand, it may well be that Tai-tsung, like Hsüan-tsung before him, had shifted his true interests from politics to religion. He was influenced profoundly by the monk Pu-k'ung (Amoghavajra, 705–74), last of the three patriarchs of the Tantric school (Mi-tsung) in China, who by the 760s was already famous as a scholar and transmitter of the scriptures of esoteric Buddhism. Tai-tsung followed both Hsüan-tsung and Su-tsung in receiving from Pu-k'ung the baptismal rite of *abhiseka*, an initiation into the mysteries and wisdom of Tantric practice that symbolically enrolled the emperor as the monk's disciple. Pu-k'ung responded to Tai-tsung's piety with frequent efforts at spiritual intercession on behalf of the imperial family and the state. These efforts included preparing translations of politically relevant texts like the *Sūtra of the humane king*, warding off natural disasters, and so on. Pu-k'ung was even given credit for the collapse of P'u-ku Huai-en's attack on the capital, since the monk had prayed for relief from foreign threats. This coincidence made Tai-tsung an even stronger believer in the value of Pu-k'ung's doctrine. Furthermore, the chief minister Wang Chin and the eunuch Yü Ch'ao-en, each in his own circle a munificent lay patron of Buddhism, strongly encouraged Tai-tsung's religious inclinations, as did Yüan Tsai. Construction of temples and support of Buddhist practice reached new heights of expenditure and enthusiasm. The affairs of the Buddhist church became tied more closely than ever to the T'ang government.[36]

It goes without saying that Tai-tsung was criticized for his spiritual leanings by the champions of secular morality. After the death of Yüan Tsai and the end of his pro-Buddhist ministry, the more conventional Confucian statesmen became prominent in court politics. Ch'ang Kun (729–83) was appointed a chief minister in 777; a *chin-shih* degree holder, he had risen in the bureaucracy during the 760s and 770s through a succession of important posts in which he was responsible for drafting the texts of imperial decrees. He had a reputation as an upright official and devoted himself to setting right some of Yüan Tsai's worst abuses, especially chaotic fiscal practices in the payment of official salaries. But he was also a pedant and a contentious man who often quarrelled in court audience with his colleague Ts'ui Yu-fu (721–80). Ts'ui came from a very distinguished family. He is remembered primarily for his attempts at giving official employment to a large number of his relatives and clients,

[36] Kenneth Ch'en, *The Chinese transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton, 1973), ch. 3; see the ch. by S. Weinstein in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4.

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and for doing so in the name of good government. These two high officials bickered interminably before the emperor over questions of propriety and ritual, which apparently interested Tai-tsung very little. Despite the reformist air attributed to the court between 777 and 779, it is clear that, without the active participation and support of the emperor, Confucian sentiments alone were quite inadequate to produce fundamental changes in politics.

Te-tsung's attempt at reform (779–81)

The atmosphere in Ch'ang-an underwent a pronounced change when Te-tsung ascended the throne in the summer of 779 as a vigorous man of thirty-seven. He took charge of the government with the firm intention of halting the steady decline experienced during his father's seventeen-year reign. In only a few months he issued dozens of decrees,[37] demanding economy in central government operations and setting limitations on the luxuries allowed to high officials. He abolished taxes on alcohol. He announced he would no longer accept 'tribute gifts' (*chin-feng, kung-hsien*)[38] from the provincial governors in lieu of their regular tax payments. Te-tsung pounced on insubordination among the eunuchs. He also decreed the end of governmental sponsorship of the ordination of new Buddhist monks and nuns, and of governmental participation in the building of temples, practices that had led to substantial corruption under his father. He installed his own men as chief ministers, the most prominent among whom was Yang Yen (727–81), a well-known financial official. As part of a general reorganization of personnel, Te-tsung forced the retirement of the senior general and elder statesman Kuo Tzu-i, who, despite his advanced age, was still posted to a large number of northern and north-western defence commissionerships. Here Te-tsung acted where Tai-tsung had long hesitated, awarding Kuo additional high honours but distributing his functional posts among several subordinates. Even though Kuo had never given so much as a hint of disloyalty, his prestige was too great, and he was too much a symbol of the old policies, to be permitted to continue in active service. Kuo's retirement was part of a deliberate policy designed to remove or placate all possible sources of trouble within the bureaucracy and high military establishment.[39] Internal reforms such as these were Te-tsung's first steps towards a new regime, which aimed at nothing less than the restoration of the initiative, authority and power of the T'ang central government.

[37] *CTS* 12, pp. 319–24; *TCTC* 225, pp. 7258, 7261–5.
[38] *HTS* 52, p. 1359; Sogabe Shizuo, 'Tō jidai no kōken seido', *Bunka*, 36.1–2 (1972) 1–32.
[39] Cf. *TFYK* 89, pp. 1a–3b.

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The most significant change brought about in this period was the administrative rationalization of taxation and fiscal accounting initiated by Yang Yen in 780, under the name *liang-shui fa*, or 'two-tax system'.[40] This term is somewhat misleading, since the collection of taxes twice a year according to the agricultural cycle was but one feature among several procedural simplifications. In the first place, the *liang-shui fa* supplanted the old system of *tsu-yung-tiao* head taxes, as well as the jumble of special surtaxes that had accumulated during the first half of the dynasty. The reform eliminated the male adult (*ting*) as the foundation of tax computation, substituting instead a more efficient and equitable assessment on property and cultivated land. The intermediate role of provincial units in the tax collection process, an accomplished fact for some time past, was acknowledged by the allocation of varying tax quotas to the provinces, instead of the imposition of unwieldy uniform rates. At the same time, the regular financial offices of the central government were revitalized. Eunuch control of the palace treasury was temporarily curtailed, and state revenue was received at the government treasury. The *liang-shui* tax reform turned out to be an immediate practical success. In 780 more tax revenue was collected through the new system alone than from all sources in the previous year.

All these measures were promising, but they were still only a beginning. The long-postponed tasks of adapting the political and economic structure of the central government to the radically different post-rebellion conditions were not the sort of thing that could be accomplished solely by fiat. The political impact of Te-tsung's ministers, the ideas-men like Yang Yen in particular, was in some ways too strong. While doubtless a near genius at the technicalities of finance, Yang Yen was temperamentally unfit to be a chief minister. He was not conciliatory by nature, but quarrelsome, vengeful, even vicious to those who did not agree with him. He had little sense of his own limitations. He ruined several government projects with fits of pique, and he meddled disastrously in delicate provincial negotiations.[41] His worst altercation was with an old and implacable enemy, the former salt and iron commissioner Liu Yen. This dispute dated from 777, when Liu Yen had served on the panel of inquiry that condemned Yüan Tsai, Yang's old patron, and sent Yang Yen himself into exile. In early 780, when Te-tsung removed Liu Yen from office, Yang saw his chance. Not content to replace Liu's financial policies with his new *liang-shui* tax scheme, Yang Yen pressed home the attack and drove Liu Yen to exile and eventually to his death. Yang then rather

[40] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, ch. 2.
[41] *CTS* 118, pp. 3422–3.

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stupidly tried to attribute the drastic persecution of his personal enemy to the emperor. This act of *lèse-majesté* brought about his demotion in mid-781. In his turn Yang Yen was attacked fiercely by the newly-appointed chief minister Lu Ch'i, and he too suffered exile and death. This political turmoil was one of the costs of the attempt to make a new beginning. Te-tsung's powerful personality and openness to innovation intensified his impatience for quick results and placed a great strain on those who worked for him. As events soon showed, he did not allow sufficient time for the process of internal reform to mature before tackling his problems with the autonomous north-east.

The war with the Ho-pei governors (781–6)

The governors of the Ho-pei provinces took advantage of the period of respite after the end of the An Lu-shan rebellion to consolidate their rule and further enlarge their armies. The details of how they did this need not concern us here,[42] but it is significant that many of the prerogatives formerly reserved for the central government, such as the imposition of taxes, were then exercised by the autonomous provinces with little concern for the reaction in Ch'ang-an. This sort of regime was found by 780 not only in Ho-pei proper, but also in the large and important provinces of P'ing-lu on the Shantung peninsula, Hsiang-yang in the lower Han River valley, and Huai-hsi on the upper Huai River in the south of modern Honan. There were occasional skirmishes among these governors, especially over the location of borders, but most of them perceived the strategic advantage of forming a loose alliance of mutual support against the T'ang central government. The key point, on which they all agreed, was that the right of succession to the governorships was theirs to determine; the idea was to ensure hereditary succession, of course, but even internal struggle for the post was preferred to court interference. Routine confirmation of the locally-chosen candidate was the only role these provinces permitted Ch'ang-an to play.

As we have seen, the central government under Tai-tsung was in no position to force the issue with Ho-pei. The best it could do was to mount defensive operations, such as preventing the governor of Wei-po from enlarging his domain as much as he wanted in 775–6. Te-tsung's internal reforms, by contrast, signalled a new, aggressive posture on the part of the court. In mid-781, the emperor rejected the pretensions of the son of the recently deceased governor of Ch'eng-te, who wished to succeed his father. The three provinces of Ch'eng-te, Wei-po and P'ing-lu construed

[42] Hino Kaisaburō, *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu*, pp. 110–18.

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this as a clear challenge to their autonomy, and they commenced hostilities, in which they were promptly supported by the governor of Hsiang-yang.

From the court's point of view, the next five years were a nightmare, as one military crisis after another threatened to overwhelm it.[43] In spite of the increase in strength of the palace armies, they were not adequate for a campaign of empire-wide scale. The central government was still dependent upon the armies of loyal military governors, as it was during the An Lu-shan rebellion, and the same formidable difficulties of coordination and supply still had to be surmounted. The initial successes against the rebels, as the court termed them, were achieved largely with the help of the governor of Yu-chou, whose army put pressure on the separatists on their northern front. The self-appointed governor of Ch'eng-te was murdered in 781 by an officer in his own army, another hopeful sign. But Te-tsung decided not to reward the two loyalists according to their wishes, so they consequently declared themselves in rebellion too. In 782 a similar situation developed in the south when Li Hsi-lieh, governor of Huai-hsi, subdued his neighbour in Hsiang-yang according to his orders from the court, only to desert to the enemy himself a few months later. Li Hsi-lieh raided the Pien Canal and cut the main grain-supply route to the capital from the lower Yangtze valley. This economic blow was so severe that the court was forced to resort to drastic measures, proposed by the chief minister Lu Ch'i and others, to raise funds from the home provinces, especially from the area in and around Ch'ang-an itself. Since this was not primarily an agricultural region, the large urban population had to bear an unexpectedly large share of the costs of the war. New taxes calculated on the size of houses, exorbitant sales taxes, forced 'loans' from merchants, and a variety of commodity duties, led to considerable hardship in the city and to a resentment among the people that the government could scarcely afford.[44]

By this time the separatist governors had all assumed the title of king, but an even more serious threat was the proclamation of a new dynasty in mid-783 by Chu Tz'u (742–84). Chu Tz'u had been the commander of an imperial garrison stationed in the north-west, but because his brother Chu T'ao was already in revolt against the T'ang, Chu Tz'u had been relieved of his command and was living in Ch'ang-an. In 783 his old unit was called to the east to aid in the war, but the men erupted into riot when they learned, at the capital, that the court could provide them with only

[43] This account is drawn from *TCTC* 226–32, *CTS* 12, and biographies of the governors; cf. also Denis Twitchett, 'Lu Chih (754–805): imperial adviser and court official', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Confucian personalities* (Stanford, 1962), pp. 84–122.

[44] *THY* 84, pp. 1545–6; Chao I, *Nien-erh shih cha-chi* (Tu Wei-yün edn, Taipei, 1974), 20, pp. 432–4.

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bare subsistence rations. At that point Chu Tz'u came out of retirement to lead them. He found support for his rebellion among the common people of the city. Consequently, Te-tsung's position in Ch'ang-an became untenable, and he took refuge in a small north-western town called Feng-t'ien, and thus became the third mid-T'ang emperor to flee the capital in disgrace. The only bright spot for the court in its misery was that the Tibetans were temporarily neutral as a result of a truce negotiated in 783.

In some ways, then, this state of affairs was far more demoralizing than Su-tsung's earlier exile at Ling-wu. Only a few officials accompanied Te-tsung in his flight. He turned now to one of them, Lu Chih (754–805), who was not a senior minister, but merely a young Han-lin academician (*Han-lin hsüeh-shih*). Lu was a remarkably capable man, however, and as the emperor's chief adviser he soon assumed effective direction of the government. He showed uncommon skill at analysis of political and financial issues, and great endurance under the tedious production of state documents. It was Lu Chih who persuaded Te-tsung to abandon his plans to re-establish imperial control throughout the empire, and instead to offer amnesty to the Ho-pei governors. By doing so, Lu argued, the government would be free to concentrate its energies on crushing Chu Tz'u, the unpardonable arch-traitor; later, imperial armies could try to defeat the remaining rebels in detail. These suggestions were incorporated in Lu Chih's draft of an imperial Act of Grace (*ta-she*), which Te-tsung promulgated in 784 and which in fact became the basis for the eventual settlement of the war.

Trouble lingered on, however, as Li Huai-kuang, an imperial general in charge of troops from Ho-chung, became jealous of Te-tsung's solicitude towards Li Sheng (727–93). Li Sheng was a very distinguished general who had taken charge of the palace armies in late 783 and was to become the most stalwart of the imperial commanders. Together Li Sheng and Li Huai-kuang relieved the immediate danger of a rebel attack on the emperor at Feng-t'ien, but the ill will borne by Li Huai-kuang was so evident that the court moved once again, to Liang-chou on the Szechwan border, in order to forestall any possibility of harm should Li Huai-kuang act on his feelings. Shortly afterwards he did rebel, but because of the precautions already taken, Li Sheng was able to launch a vigorous offensive against him. Within a few months Li Sheng crushed both Li Huai-kuang and Chu Tz'u, victories that allowed the emperor to return to Ch'ang-an in mid-784. The rebel movement fell apart as the governors began to quarrel among themselves, but it took until 786 before the final defeat of the recalcitrant Li Hsi-lieh in Huai-hsi province brought a formal end to the war.

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The revolt of the 780s in fact was the concluding phase of the separatist movement begun thirty years earlier by An Lu-shan. The similarities between the two hot war phases are striking: provoked by political pressure from Ch'ang-an, hostilities were protracted by the inadequacy of government troops and resources, took decided turns for the worse because of defections from the imperial ranks, and were ended not by victory but by compromise. The big difference in the 780s was that the intervening two decades of peace had made possible the consolidation and entrenchment of separatist regimes over a much larger area than An Lu-shan's original territory in the far north-east. Apparently, too, the independent provinces' control over their own local populations was firmer than in the 760s, when pockets of T'ang loyalism could be found scattered throughout Ho-pei. In the interim, presumably, the new leadership intermarried to some extent with the pre-existing local elite, and the assimilation of the Chinese population with the non-Chinese northern border peoples living in the area probably continued as well. Unfortunately, the surviving information about the independent provinces is very scanty, and with only a few exceptions, scholars have not yet attempted the arduous task of coordinating the few pieces of evidence that do survive, so our statements about the social history of that region must be quite tentative.[45] Still, it is clear enough that the provincial opposition to the T'ang court in the 780s commanded sufficient respect among the common people to sustain a protracted struggle very creditably.

We have noted the confusion and bitter rivalry that developed among the generals in An Lu-shan's unwieldy chain of command. In contrast, by the 780s the various Ho-pei governors – self-styled kings, emperors and so on – in each case had built up an army and the rudiments of legitimacy in a given piece of territory. Although these new conditions did not make large-scale coordinated military operations easy for the rebels to undertake, they did prevent the rebel movement of the 780s from breaking up because of internal dissension, at least not before the late stages of the war. And when the movement finally did dissolve, the several provinces still survived more or less intact. The central government, on the other hand, could not be counted successful unless it put down the rebellion and also reincorporated an enormous section of the old empire again under Ch'ang-an's control.

While the disastrous results of the An Lu-shan rebellion might be attributed to perfidy, the imperial defeat in the 780s looked a lot more like the consequence of incompetence. This is perhaps why, in the histories, the revolt of the Ho-pei governors has been pictured as a humiliating

[45] See Matsui Shūichi, 'Roryū hanchin kō', *SGZS*, 68 (1959).

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interlude between the mid-eighth-century cataclysm and the resurgence of imperial pride during Hsien-tsung's centralization campaigns of the early ninth century. In any case, Te-tsung clearly had made a grave error in stirring up the conflict before he was certain he could win on the field. He had not found a solution to a number of basic strategic problems evident as early as the late 750s – for example, the ability of the north-eastern rebels to operate on short, interior lines of supply and command, as opposed to the central government's long, vulnerable lifeline between Ch'ang-an and the south-east. The more recent emergence of hostility on the part of the southern province of Huai-hsi was not taken into account at all, apparently. Ironically, once Te-tsung gave up the role of crusading general and accepted the division of the realm, no matter how painful it was, he proved quite adept at holding the line and extracting the maximum advantage for himself from a highly complex, decentralized political situation.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INNER COURT (786–805)

Even before the exile at Feng-t'ien during the worst stages of the war of the 780s, the T'ang court had been fragmented by political dissension. The financial measures of Lu Ch'i and his associates were very unpopular, and their unscrupulous methods of overcoming their political opponents aroused deep antipathy against them, which is clearly reflected in the orthodox histories and documents.[46] Scores of officials summoned up the courage to impeach them, and Lu was finally dismissed at Feng-t'ien. Te-tsung was forced to turn to someone who could solve his immediate problems, regardless of rank and age. As we have seen, he summoned his young staff secretary Lu Chih to direct the affairs of the exiled government and to repair the disarray in finance. The chief ministers and the regular bureaucratic apparatus were overshadowed by Lu Chih.

Similarly, the T'ang armies showed a poor performance during the war. Far from sustaining the dynasty in its darkest moments, the military establishment had produced traitors from within. Despite the presence of a few outstanding generals, the overall record of the loyal units was nothing to take pride in. The lowest point was reached as the court was being threatened by the popular revolt in Ch'ang-an late in 783. Te-tsung desperately called for the aid of the Shen-ts'e Army's capital detachments. But it turned out that many of the Shen-ts'e officers and troops had been killed earlier in the war, and that the bureaucrat then in command of the Shen-ts'e Army had filled out its ranks with merchants and shopkeepers, who disappeared at the first signs of real trouble. The only force that

[46] E.g. *HTS* 52, pp. 1352–3.

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rallied to Te-tsung's side immediately was a small band of men under the leadership of two palace eunuchs, Tou Wen-ch'ang (d. *c.* 801) and Huo Hsien-ming (d. 798). Although eventually rescued by larger armies, Te-tsung was so thankful to these eunuchs that in 786 he rewarded them, much as his father had rewarded Yü Ch'ao-en in 764, by giving them supervisory posts in the newly reorganized left and right wings of the Shen-ts'e Army.[47] This time, however, eunuch influence in the Shen-ts'e Army became permanent.

The appointment of Lu Chih and the two eunuchs to positions of great responsibility marked the beginning of the most important political development of the late eighth century, namely the growth in power of what is known as the inner court (*nei-t'ing*). (The outer court, of course, was the regular civil and military hierarchy.) The Han-lin secretaries and eunuchs were not only literally permitted access to various 'inner' imperial apartments, they also were intimately associated with the exercise of imperial power. At least initially, the inner court was controlled directly and closely by the emperor himself, as part of his personal establishment. The inner court proved to be useful in peacetime as well as in war. It was a convenient mechanism through which to bypass the cumbersome inefficiency of the ordinary bureaucratic procedures, both in the planning and execution of imperial policies, and as a source of confidential information and counsel.

It will be recognized immediately that the inner court was not a tightly-knit group having uniform interests. In many ways the eunuchs and the Han-lin scholars stood at opposite poles of philosophical outlook and social respectability. It was only natural that there were struggles for influence within the inner court. One can also call into question, from time to time, the usefulness of a distinction between inner and outer courts. Han-lin scholars in particular had political and emotional bonds with the outer court bureaucracy. The eunuchs too, though remaining a class apart from the rest of society, emerged from the shadows and made their presence felt in the outer court. Furthermore, the influence wielded by the inner court was not constant, or necessarily even constantly growing, throughout all of late T'ang history. Some emperors, such as Te-tsung and the mid-ninth-century emperor Hsiuan-tsung, made extensive use of the Han-lin scholars, but others did not. The eunuchs on the whole became more and more powerful as time went on, but the real high points of their political influence were reached in two separate periods: the 820s and 830s, and the last quarter of the ninth century. We shall pursue all these matters in detail below.

[47] *WHTK* 151, p. 1322.

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Even with such reservations, however, the concept of the inner court is useful in the analysis of late T'ang court politics. First, there is no doubt that the regular, run-of-the-mill bureaucrats viewed the private secretaries and eunuchs as an alien body, intruding itself between their own chiefs and the emperor, and thus as a grave threat to their own power. Second, and conversely, there is every indication that Te-tsung and Hsien-tsung (reign 805–20), at various times and in various ways, did not entirely trust the high officials of the bureaucracy. From the imperial point of view, the two segments of the inner court had the common property of greater reliability. Finally, the development of the late T'ang inner court was an example of a recurrent phenomenon at the imperial level in Chinese institutional history, namely the creation of personal imperial staffs to expedite government work. After a time, these staffs ossified and were absorbed into the bureaucracy, to be replaced in their turn by a new personal staff. Much the same process can be seen in the evolution of the three central ministries of the T'ang government,[48] and in that of the Grand Secretariat under the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

The late T'ang inner court, as we might expect, caused controversy right from the beginning. The intense hatred felt among the courtiers of Te-tsung's time for the eunuchs, in particular, was transferred to some extent to the emperor himself; this theme was taken up by the literati historians of later times and magnified enormously. For allowing the inner court a place in court politics, Te-tsung has never been forgiven.

It is not surprising that much of the *ad hominem* criticism of Te-tsung has been misleading. The conventional picture of him as an irascible, unscrupulous, secretive and compulsively greedy despot[49] is not easily reconciled with the equally widespread assumptions as to his credulity and weakness. Then too, the nonchalant indifference he is supposed to have demonstrated during the 790s in permitting the eunuchs and the separatist governors to act autonomously – a gross exaggeration of fact – flatly contradicts the record of energetic reformism established by him between 779 and 781, for which he has been praised. I believe, quite the contrary to such views, that Te-tsung's policies and behaviour in fact showed a considerable degree of internal consistency. First of all, his intentions to revive the power of the central government had always implied a very prominent role for himself. Given the natural comparison of such a huge task with those of the 'restoration' emperors of the past, an attitude of self-importance was perfectly understandable and would

[48] Sun Kuo-tung, 'T'ang-tai san-sheng-chih chih fa-chan yen-chiu', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 3.1 (1957), pp. 17–121.
[49] E.g. Fan Tsu-yü, *T'ang-chien*, chs. 12–16 *passim*.

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inevitably cast the bureaucracy, opinion-makers and all, somewhat into the shadows. It is true that Te-tsung's depression at the failure of his grand design in the war turned him even further upon his own resources, creating the impression of aloofness and distance. But this was because his chief concern had become to retain as much as possible of the power still remaining to the central government. This was far from easy and required him to make necessary compromises with the provinces, even while insisting, in the court at Ch'ang-an, upon his right to direct central government affairs as he saw fit. Between about 786 and 794, he gave the government establishment several chances to prove its usefulness to him. The four prominent chief ministers whose careers we shall examine below provide interesting case studies of the ways in which the emperor found the bureaucracy unsatisfactory for his purposes. It should be remembered that Te-tsung's final disillusionment with the outer court, and the very rapid increase in the power of the inner court, occurred only in the final decade of his reign.

The bureaucracy loses ground (786–94)

The first of the post-war chief ministers was Ts'ui Tsao (737–87), who was a member of the eminent Ts'ui clan of Po-ling. The family was noted for its association with the highest standards of traditional Chinese culture, and Ts'ui Tsao himself had become known during the An Lu-shan rebellion for his philosophical interest in the ideals of government. Because of his later association with Liu Yen, he was swept up in Yang Yen's vendetta and spent several years in exile at Hsin-chou in Chiang-nan. During the 780s war, he raised a loyalist force of some two thousand men, an act that brought him to the emperor's attention and led to his recall. Before long he was made a chief minister ahead of senior candidates because, as the histories say, Te-tsung took his idealistic outspokenness to be the ability to manage government affairs.

For one year Ts'ui Tsao along with a group of like-minded colleagues attempted to put into practice a reaffirmation and consolidation of the power of the central bureaucracy.[50] During his residence in south-east China, Ts'ui had observed at first hand the abuse of power and corruption indulged in by the various financial commissioners. He persuaded the emperor to abolish virtually all of the *ad hoc* commissionerships established in the preceding thirty years, and to return their overall authority to the regularly constituted Board of Finance in Ch'ang-an. At the local level the functions of the commissionerships were to be taken over by the

[50] *CTS* 130, pp. 3626–7; *TCTC* 232, pp. 7467–8.

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civilian governors (*kuan-ch'a shih*, the one category of 'commissionership' he wished to retain) and the prefects (*tz'u-shih*). The local officials were to be permitted considerable freedom in the disbursement of funds for local needs. Ts'ui Tsao's intention, in accordance with his conservative outlook, was to check the expanding power of the financial specialists and their political hangers-on.

The most important of Ts'ui Tsao's proposals concerned the nature of the executive responsibility of the chief ministers at the capital. To understand this, a bit of background information may be helpful. During the early years of the dynasty, T'ai-tsung established an informal body of advisers known as chief ministers (*tsai-hsiang*), drawn largely from those who headed the three great ministries of the central government – the Secretariat (Chung-shu sheng), Chancellery (Men-hsia sheng) and Department of State Affairs (Shang-shu sheng). The chief ministers were also called collectively the Hall of Administrative Affairs (Cheng-shih t'ang), after the hall in the Chancellery where they met daily to discuss important matters of state. At this time, the post of *tsai-hsiang* was not in itself a regular substantive office (*chih-shih kuan*) with line administrative duties. Each of the chief ministers was seconded to this position and was expected to discharge his statutory substantive obligations during the afternoon. Provision was made for the appointment of officials not holding top ministry jobs by the use of the titles *t'ung Chung-shu Men-hsia san-p'in* and *t'ung Chung-shu Men-hsia p'ing-chang shih*, which conferred the privilege of attendance at the conferences with the other chief ministers, and with the emperor. The number of chief ministers varied from time to time but rarely exceeded five or six.

In 723, early in the reign of Hsüan-tsung, the prominent official Chang Yüeh (667–730) took cognizance of the growth in importance of the body of chief ministers. His proposal that their office be constituted as a formal government organ in its own right, with a separate budget and seal, was accepted. The chief ministers' office was to be known as the Chung-shu Men-hsia, after the Secretariat and the Chancellery, for by this time the high officers of the Department of State Affairs (Shang-shu sheng) had ceased to be chief ministers *ex officio*. The once informal advisory group now had a status more appropriate to its power. However, the chief ministers still were not charged with direct administrative responsibility. The executive organs of government, namely the six boards (*liu pu*) of the Department of State Affairs and the nine courts (*chiu ssu*), whose functions overlapped to a confusing degree, were formally separate from the purview of the chief ministers, except as the regular appointments of the chief ministers happened to bring them into contact with executive duties.

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Moreover, after the An Lu-shan rebellion, many of the central government offices became moribund as their functions were transferred to new *ad hoc* offices. By the 780s, therefore, the heads of the civilian government faced formidable organizational difficulties in putting policies into action.

Ts'ui Tsao's suggestion in 786 was that all executive power be centralized in the office of the chief ministers, and that individual ministers be given specific executive responsibilities – salt monopoly affairs; semi-annual tax affairs; military, documentary and miscellaneous affairs, for example. We know rather little about the details of his plan, but it is almost certain that he intended to amalgamate the small staff task forces (*t'ang-hou fang*, or 'back offices'), established in 723 to aid the members of the Chung-shu Men-hsia, with the appropriate parts of the regular executive departments. Presumably some rationalization of the central government as a whole would have taken place as well. This was a most significant proposal for planned structural change, and a distinct contrast to the slow accretion of uncoordinated bureaux, characteristic of Chinese government in the previous two centuries. Had policy-making and administration been realigned as Ts'ui Tsao suggested, the regular bureaucracy might have recovered enough power to direct routine affairs, and thereby the collective self-confidence to merit the emperor's respect.

This reform failed for several reasons. In the first place, it was a complex reorganization that involved a widespread shake-up of personnel. It was certain to provoke the antagonism of many bureaucrats anxious to cling to the privileges they already held. Furthermore, it may be doubted that Te-tsung could support a plan that, if carried to its logical conclusion, would have altered the formal structure of the government very substantially. One is struck time and again by how conscious the late T'ang emperors were of their debt to their ancestors in the imperial line. They were extremely reluctant to do anything that could not somehow be construed as fulfilling the mandate handed down to them from the past. Tampering with the governmental heritage was to be avoided if at all possible. For example, the use of commissioners was an ingenious way to supplement the time-honoured structure of government without changing it formally. In this sense Ts'ui Tsao's proposals were much more radical. In the precarious period just after the war of the 780s, sweeping changes in government must have appeared very dangerous indeed.[51]

The final and decisive cause of Ts'ui's failure was the opposition of those with vested interests in the financial world of the lower Yangtze valley. The prime mover was Han Huang (723–87), the powerful governor of Che-hsi province in the Yangtze delta and a former commissioner for

[51] Cf. *TCTC* 232, pp. 7490–1.

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salt and iron. Han had had long experience in the task of supplying the capital with grain. He was someone Te-tsung could not afford to alienate, especially because of his loyalty during the recent war. In the autumn of 786 there happened to be a bumper harvest in south-east China, and Han Huang's political fortunes soared. Han hated any interference in his operations, and he doubtless wished to take this chance to attack Ts'ui Tsao's policy of strengthening the central bureaucracy. Han Huang soon clashed with Yüan Hsiu, Ts'ui's close colleague who was scheduled to become the chief minister in charge of salt monopoly affairs under the new system. Ts'ui Tsao's regime collapsed very quickly as Te-tsung saw the political drawbacks it entailed. Within a few months Ts'ui was transferred from the chief ministership. Yüan Hsiu was sent into exile, and the reforms of 786 were rescinded.

Having had his fill of planners, Te-tsung turned next to the venerated former chief minister Li Mi (722–89). Li Mi was perhaps the most fascinating, unconventional figure to hold high office in the late T'ang. He had been a child prodigy in literature and at the age of seven had been examined in the presence of Hsüan-tsung on his ability to compose erudite rhymeprose. Later he spent years in the mountains, practising Taoist self-cultivation and searching for immortality. His political career was episodic. Recalled to court as a Han-lin academician and adviser when Su-tsung was still heir apparent, Li Mi soon offended both Yang Kuo-chung and An Lu-shan by his poems. For such indiscretions he was driven back into retirement. He was much more wary of Su-tsung's subsequent call for help at Ling-wu, but, as we have seen, he did briefly accept a position as a chief minister in the wartime court. He then retired once again, in fear of the powerful eunuch Li Fu-kuo. Later, Tai-tsung appointed him a second time to the Han-lin Academy, but he fell foul of Yüan Tsai and was demoted.

Despite a strong rationalist bent, Te-tsung while heir apparent had been a pupil of Li Mi at Li's famous 'Isles of the Blest Academy', a Taoist retreat in the country to the west of Ch'ang-an, and thus the new emperor was even more susceptible than his predecessors to Li Mi's great reputation as a sage. Incidentally, the interest in Taoism and alchemy that Te-tsung developed in his early years remained quite strong throughout his life. In fact, Taoist lore and proto-science, especially immortality drugs, were a family avocation for the imperial house, something that the orthodox histories take great pains to conceal or to deplore.[52] There is no doubt that Li Mi, in many ways a secular counterpart to the monk Pu-k'ung, was one of the most influential persons of his age. Very

[52] Nathan Sivin, *Chinese alchemy: preliminary studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), ch. 3.

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few politicians could boast that they had known four emperors and advised three.

The strong identification of Li Mi with Taoism has concealed the fact that he was also a truly capable and imaginative official. From 785 to 787 he had served as governor in the Shan-chou region east of the capital, where he opened the road around the San-men rapids and put down a revolt of garrison troops. As chief minister, Li Mi urged further security measures in the Pien Canal area, including the establishment of a new province, Wu-ning, as a first line of defence against the independent province of P'ing-lu in Shan-tung. He was largely responsible for reaffirming the alliance with the Uighur Turks, discussed in detail below in connection with foreign affairs. He was also a persuasive advocate of the establishment of military-agricultural colonies (*ying-t'ien*) in substantial numbers, so as to reduce the cost of maintaining frontier armies. This idea was widely discussed at the time, but Li Mi's skilful presentation of the *ying-t'ien* colonies as an outgrowth of the old *fu-ping* militia system provided the requisite historical context for the new institution.

Li Mi further addressed himself to finance, the emperor's immediate concern. He saved a great deal of money through technical adjustments in taxation. He ended the practice of state support for upwards of four thousand foreigners – primarily Persians and Soghdians – stranded in Ch'ang-an by the Tibetan occupation of Kansu; this alone saved the government half-a-million strings of cash annually. He sponsored measures to raise the salaries of government officials, which had been quite inadequate over the previous twenty years. For all of Li Mi's ingenuity, however, there were some aspects of the worsening financial situation that he could not do anything about. The late 780s were the beginning of a period of steep monetary deflation following upon an inflationary wartime economy, which subjected the empire's finances to severe strain and confusion.[53] But in the meantime Te-tsung tended more and more to focus his attention on the short-term successes and failures in the affairs of the central government, exactly the wrong set of expectations when it came to difficult economic problems. For example, although in 787 Li Mi persuaded the emperor to refuse irregular 'tribute' gifts from the provincial governors, pointing out the infringements of imperial sovereignty they entailed, Te-tsung nevertheless resumed the practice covertly only six months later. The financial necessity driving him to accept these gifts, which in many cases were outright bribes for special favours, contributed to Te-tsung's reputation of corruption and double-dealing.[54]

[53] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 76–9.
[54] *TCTC* 233, p. 7510; *T'ang-chien* 15, pp. 141–2.

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A still more basic flaw in this regime was that it depended so much on just one man, Li Mi himself. Li had always played the role of a lone sagely adviser and apparently had never cultivated an extensive political following. There was no way for him to pass on his unique personal influence. The continuity of his policies was impaired as a result. The trouble arising out of the career of Tou Shen (733–92), the third of the important post-war chief ministers, is the best illustration of this. In the last months of his life, Li Mi asked Te-tsung to appoint Tou to head the financial offices of the government as a chief minister, Li being ill and no longer able to discharge his heavy responsibilities single-handed. The sources are not clear about what, if anything, the connections were between Li and Tou. But the important point is that Te-tsung agreed to Li's request only with great reluctance, having his own candidate in mind for the job, and that as a consequence Tou Shen's chances for survival in the office of chief minister were slim from the very beginning. There was a marked difference in style between Li Mi and Tou Shen, in addition, one that made it even less possible for Tou to take Li Mi's place. Though of distinguished lineage, Tou had made his name in the official world through a succession of legal posts, and he seems never to have acquired the literary polish associated with the more prestigious and seemly routes to high governmental office. He had risen to the top because he was a shrewd, tough-minded politician, who undoubtedly had gathered a great deal of useful information about the underside of court politics from his judicial investigations. And yet he was more than a run-of-the-mill Ch'ang-an bureaucrat. He had challenged influential south-eastern governors on more than one occasion, and his appointment as chief minister was noted with apprehension in those provinces.

For a time Tou Shen and Te-tsung were able to coexist. Tou frequently stayed behind after the chief ministers had finished their meetings with the emperor, so as to discuss matters in confidence with Te-tsung.[55] Almost certainly he was the emperor's willing partner in the drive to build up the revenue reserves under personal imperial control. Otherwise we know rather little about his three years at the head of the government, with the exception of the issues that caused his downfall. Tou Shen made a bad mistake in too openly appointing his relatives and clients to high bureaucratic positions, and in living in far too ostentatious a manner. This made Te-tsung suspicious, for he surely remembered the problems a similarly rapacious Yüan Tsai had caused his father. Tou Shen's enemies accused him of forming a predatory political clique (*tang*), and shortly afterwards some of its alleged members were implicated in bribery

[55] *CTS* 136, p. 3747.

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schemes and a plot to discredit Lu Chih. Tou Shen was dismissed from the chief ministership and exiled in 792. During his southward journey, he was foolish enough to accept money from various governors along the way, an act that Te-tsung interpreted as sedition. Only with great difficulty did Lu Chih, who was shortly to become chief minister himself, persuade the emperor not to execute all of Tou Shen's associates indiscriminately.[56] Tou's own fate was sealed, however, and after his death his extensive property in Ch'ang-an was confiscated and deposited into the emperor's personal treasury.

This episode made Te-tsung more determined than ever to exercise personal control over the government. His was a perfectly reasonable reaction. Under Tou Shen, political infighting had made orderly administration practically impossible. To meet this difficulty, in 792 the empire was once again split into two zones of financial authority, but the rivalry between the chiefs of these offices persisted and indeed became so intense that affairs simply ground to a halt. In the meantime, problems of supply and of deflation continued unabated. Floods and famine in central China, several mutinies in provincial army garrisons, and pressure from Tibetan attacks on the south-west frontier further increased the need for funds and for well-designed policies of recovery.

These were not auspicious times, consequently, for any bureaucrat to take charge of the government – not even the talented Lu Chih. We have seen how as a young personal confidant of Te-tsung he had been the architect of the political settlement of the war of the 780s. But in 792, when he was appointed chief minister, his past intimacy with the emperor was no longer sufficient to enable him to set affairs straight and re-establish the good name of officialdom. The reasons for this lay in the differences between his earlier post and his new responsibilities as chief minister.

From modest beginnings in the seventh century, the Han-lin academy had become a body of experts in various learned and practical arts, on call to the emperor for specialized consultation.[57] Under Hsüan-tsung, the academy (formally known as the Han-lin hsüeh-shih yüan) changed its character, dropping the purely technical staff in favour of men with outstanding literary talent. At the same time, the Han-lin academicians (*hsüeh-shih*) took part in drafting important state documents. According to well-established practices, ordinary documents were drawn up by the secretaries of the Secretariat, called *Chung-shu she-jen*, and by the several secretaries of the six boards, as appropriate. But from the mid-eighth

[56] Lu Chih, *Lu Hsüan-kung han-yüan chi*, 19, pp. 19b–21a.

[57] Yamamoto Tatsuyoshi, 'Tō-Sō jidai ni okeru Kanrin gakushi ni tsuite', *Tōhōgaku*, 4 (1952) 28–38; Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai ni okeru Kanrin gakushiin ni tsuite', *Shigaku kenkyū*, 50 (1953) 63–70.

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century, the academicians wrote many of the imperial edicts, brevets of appointment to high office, responses to petition, communications with foreign rulers, and so on. There was no fixed number of academicians, although the average was about six at any one time.

Under Tai-tsung and Te-tsung certain individual Han-lin academicians began to play roles in advising the emperor on policy. This was a natural outgrowth of their position as private secretaries with access to confidential political information and state secrets. The influence of a few academicians in time rivalled that of the chief ministers. Lu Chih, for example, was spoken of as an 'inner chief minister' (*nei-hsiang*). Under Te-tsung's grandson Hsien-tsung (reign 805–20), a young man elected to the Han-lin academy was singled out and could expect to have a very distinguished official career. A middle-aged academician had an excellent chance of being appointed chief minister directly.

But while there were obvious interconnections of class and intellectual persuasion between the Han-lin academy and the top levels of the regular bureaucracy, significant differences existed as well. An academician was responsible solely to the emperor, whereas the chief ministers were accountable publicly to one another and to the administrative bureaucracy as a whole, whose interests they frequently had to represent against those of the emperor. For anyone making the transition between the two offices, many difficulties were likely to arise over matters of propriety and style. In counselling the emperor, an academician could be candid, even blunt, or on the other hand he could adopt the confident manner and sermonizing tone of the Confucian advisers of antiquity, feeling free to speak his mind because such proceedings took place *in camera*. By contrast, an outspoken chief minister risked irritating the emperor in open court, putting pressure on him too openly, or even exposing him to ridicule.

Lu Chih was an example of a former academician unable, or unwilling, to make the necessary changes in his behaviour.[58] As chief minister, he continued to be just as self-assured and exacting as he had been during his long tenure (779–91) in the Han-lin academy. His remonstrances against the emperor's short-sightedness may have been well-founded, but the way he put them was hardly tactful. After all, what looked like boundless imperial greed and avarice from the point of view of the bureaucracy, was to Te-tsung fully justifiable. Embarrassments of this kind, which might have been avoided by a more pliable chief minister, nullified the memories of friendship between Te-tsung and Lu Chih. Lu's failure to adapt his deportment ruined his own regime and led to a period of real eclipse of the influence of the bureaucracy.

[58] Twitchett, 'Lu Chih', p. 106.

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Yet in no respect other than relations with the emperor was Lu Chih unqualified for his job as chief minister. His surviving papers contain many memorials which, while often long and complex, were addressed to the fundamental problems of his time and contained analyses marked by both skill and subtlety. The best known among them is the six-part memorial on finance presented in 794, on the subject of the current status of the two-tax system.[59] Despite the fact that Lu Chih was opposed to the tax system on theoretical grounds, feeling that it was not based on sound physiocratic principles, he did not give in to the temptation to urge that it be abolished altogether. Instead, he acknowledged it as an accomplished fact and urged that it be improved, offering practical suggestions to eliminate various technical inequalities in taxation. He argued further that the real cause of the dynasty's current economic troubles was the decline of political fortunes during and after the war of the 780s, and that without political recovery the current situation could not improve. This of course was a very risky opinion to air, since it reflected directly upon Te-tsung's conduct of affairs. The combination of forthright presentation of the issues and sensitivity to practical constraints was characteristic of Lu Chih. Ironically, although he was not by any means a complete success in politics during his lifetime, many of his suggestions were taken up by various people in the next century, and his reputation continued to grow under later dynasties.

At court Lu Chih found himself quite restricted. In financial affairs, to carry through with our example, he was forced to recognize the division of administration in 792, even though the authority of the central establishment was diluted by it. Then, only a few months later, when a vacancy suddenly appeared at the head of the Public Revenue Department, Te-tsung passed over Lu's protégé Li Sun. Despite Lu Chih's vehement protests, the emperor reappointed another man, P'ei Yen-ling (728–96). P'ei was an older man and a more experienced official who had also served as an aide to the emperor in an informal, personal way, but as a member of the Chi-hsien academy (imperial library and research bureau), not as a Han-lin academician. There must have been a natural rivalry between the men because of their backgrounds, but in any case the appointment of P'ei to the Public Revenue Department proved to be a real check on Lu Chih's freedom of action, for he undercut everything Lu tried to do. P'ei Yen-ling devoted himself to raising money for Te-tsung, both by sophisticated manipulation of the account-books and by blatant confiscation of goods belonging to the common people. He urged even more extensive use of the mechanism of a separate imperial treasury.

[59] *Ibid.* pp. 116–19; *Lu Hsüan-kung han-yüan chi*, 22.

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Needless to say, P'ei Yen-ling was very controversial during his lifetime, and he ultimately achieved a place among the blackest charlatans in the historical rogues' gallery. Thus Lu Chih was caught in a vicious circle: hemmed in by a desperate fiscal situation, he was at the same time deprived of the full authority he needed because of political circumstances; P'ei's elevation prevented him from working effectively with the authority he did have, which in turn was the key to financial and political success. Lu's learned but somewhat long-winded proposals found no sympathy with an emperor impatient for funds and disgusted with bureaucrats. In the end, Lu Chih forced the issue by attacking P'ei in a long, point-by-point indictment. The emperor chose to retain P'ei Yen-ling as chief minister, and in 795 Lu Chih was exiled to the far south. He escaped execution, but the fact that the punishment of death was considered at all for an official who had rendered such distinguished service was in itself an indication of Te-tsung's disenchantment with officialdom.

Te-tsung's last decade (795–805)

As we have seen, Te-tsung discovered during the revolt of the 780s that the Shen-ts'e Army had decayed under bureaucratic management. His solution was to give Tou Wen-ch'ang and Huo Hsien-ming supervisory jurisdiction over the two brigades of the Shen-ts'e Army in 786. A decade later, in 796, he took the decisive step of installing them in direct line command of the same units, with the titles of 'eunuch protectors of the army' (*hu-chün chung-wei*).[60] As a practical matter, this meant that Tou and Huo had extended eunuch command over the palace armies' entire force of ten brigades, since the Shen-ts'e was by far the most powerful contingent within the palace armies. Their control over these mobile and strong units, close to the capital, was the foundation of the power exercised by the eunuchs for the next hundred years.

It was in the interests of both Te-tsung and the eunuchs to secure the loyalty of this army by whatever means were necessary. Consequently, the troops were well and regularly paid – a contrast to the harsh terms of service in many of the expeditionary and border armies – and they received legal and financial exemptions on such generous terms that wealthy residents of Ch'ang-an bribed eunuchs to enrol them as nominal soldiers. The total muster of the palace armies accordingly soared into the tens of thousands, of whom only a fraction were legitimate troops. Before long, off-duty discipline became slack except in a few crack units quartered away from the temptations of the capital. During the 790s Shen-ts'e

[60] *TCTC* 235, pp. 7571–2; *TFYK* 667, pp. 2b–3a.

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troops often plundered the possessions of the common people. Meanwhile, eunuchs in the service of the imperial household cheated the merchants of Ch'ang-an in the so-called 'palace market' (*kung-shih*) system. The trouble-makers were secure from reprisal, even in the most notorious cases of fraud and extortion, and for centuries historians have used these episodes as illustrations of the evil of eunuch oppression during the late T'ang.[61] A few contemporary officials protested at court but merely brought a jail term or exile upon themselves.

The new military role of the eunuchs naturally increased their political influence. Quite commonly, for example, the court appointed governors to the loyal provinces from among former Shen-ts'e Army officers. In order to get these postings or to prolong them, the governors had to pay off the eunuchs, and they were even charged interest on their bribes if they did not have ready money to begin with. They were known as 'generals in debt' (*chai-shuai*). Furthermore, eunuchs, instead of civil officials, were now assigned to be army supervisors (*chien-chün*) on the staffs of both the military and civil provincial governors. They now acted as virtual political spies for the emperor. In 795 their status was raised when the emperor granted one of them a seal of office for the first time. For decades the institution of supervisorships had caused annoyance in the provinces, but from this time onwards the supervisors were feared. Te-tsung also used eunuchs as messengers. A eunuch courier was generally able to extort gifts at his destination before delivering the imperial edict of announcement, a practice known as *hsüan-so*. There were even a few heavily criticized instances in which eunuchs were given full authority to carry out missions of military pacification or civil administration in the far south. It is interesting that for some time eunuchs in high positions had attempted to perpetuate their individual political and economic influence in a family context, by adopting other, younger eunuchs as their sons. This practice gradually became quite elaborate and could include wives, daughters, and normal males (notably military men) as sons. In 791 formal approval was given to such adoption, probably more in order to try to limit it to one son per eunuch than to encourage its use, but adoption was by that time unstoppable. The families formed in this way played an important role in court politics. Enterprising modern scholars have reconstructed between two and three dozen eunuch families.[62]

For all these reasons, officials throughout the empire were gradually

[61] *TCTC* 235, pp. 7579–80; *THY* 72, p. 1295, and 86, p. 1582; Chao I, *Nien-erh shih cha-chi*, 20, pp. 420–3, 432–4; T'ang Ch'ang-ju, *T'ang-shu ping-chih chien-cheng* (Peking, 1962), pp. 102–4.

[62] Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai kangan kensei kakutoku in'yū kō', *SGZS*, 63.10 (1954) 34–48; Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu*, pp. 117–43.

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forced to learn to deal with the despised eunuch class. Eunuchs were no longer shadowy figures in the background but were becoming regular actors on the political scene.

What happened to the regular bureaucracy during Te-tsung's last decade on the throne? With the exception of Tu Yu (735–812), the compiler of the famous institutional history encyclopedia *T'ung-tien*, none of the chief ministers appointed between 795 and 805 appears to have been a man of the calibre of Li Mi or Lu Chih. It is difficult to pass a balanced judgment, however, before further research is undertaken on the men who staffed the high government offices during this little-known period. Their reputations were almost certainly slighted unfairly because of their willingness to subordinate themselves so completely to the emperor. In fact it was Te-tsung's quite conscious disregard of bureaucratic sensibilities, and his quite deliberate injection of his personal will into the choice of men to head the bureaucracy, that aroused the anger of diarists and historians and thus cast the whole period in an unfavourable light.

Te-tsung frequently closeted himself in his apartments during his last ten years, remaining inaccessible to government officials for long periods of time. Yet we know he was not idle because he also was criticized for picayune concern with administrative trivia. The routine of ordinary court activities was disrupted. The schedules of audiences and the duty-hours of the chief ministers were no longer kept, although there is some evidence that the bureaucrats as well as the emperor were responsible for such lapses. It seems clear that eunuchs went on to assume key positions within the palace handling the transmission of official documents and receiving oral imperial instructions. Their presence in these posts enabled them to influence much of the regular business of the central government after about 795.[63]

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to judge Te-tsung guilty of the historians' charges of abdication of responsibility and total surrender to the eunuchs. In the first place, throughout this period Te-tsung remained the supreme ruler. Eunuchs never harmed him, nor those whom he protected, in contrast to the excesses committed by eunuchs against some of the ninth-century emperors. Second, the depressed state of the outer court made the deeds of the eunuchs more prominent by comparison, and this probably exaggerated their influence in historical materials. Finally, it must be remembered that Te-tsung used the eunuchs for his own purposes, not to gain the approval of the bureaucrats. In finance, for example, Te-tsung's re-employment of eunuchs as the custodians of his personal palace treasury admittedly restored to them powers he had limited during

[63] *TCTC* 235, p. 7575, but cf. *THY* 24, pp. 466–7.

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his early reign, but it was perfectly consistent with his general post-war policy of bypassing red tape in order to spend money as he saw fit.[64] In particular, the association of eunuch servants with Te-tsung's cautious policy towards the independent provinces (a policy denigrated as *ku-hsi*, or 'lax') unfairly tarnished the emperor's reputation.

It is important to understand that while the advance of the eunuchs under Te-tsung did lay the basis for their later political power, their gains in the 790s were realized under an emperor who was no fool. On the contrary, he acted boldly according to his own understanding, however cramped this may have seemed to the bureaucrats who did not benefit from it. Te-tsung did withdraw from conventional court politics, but whenever the equilibrium of the empire was seriously threatened – as for example by the mutinies and rebellions in Ho-nan from 798 to 801 – he reacted quickly and sharply to restore order. No court figure and no eunuch was ever powerful enough to challenge him.

A failed coup d'état *under Shun-tsung (805)*

Some time around the turn of the ninth century, a small group of disaffected officials began to gather within the retinue of the heir apparent and future emperor Shun-tsung. Frequent discussions took place among them about the recent social and political disturbances, the outrages committed by eunuchs and the misery of the common people – in short, criticisms of Te-tsung's government and idealistic talk about how things might be improved. We are told that Shun-tsung himself participated in the interchange, being moved to sorrow by the disturbed state of the empire. The leading figure in this group was a long-time acquaintance of Shun-tsung, a minor official named Wang Shu-wen (d. 806), who was a native of Yüeh-chou in modern Chekiang and who first came to Ch'ang-an on account of his skill at the Chinese board game of *wei-ch'i*. Wang Shu-wen wisely cautioned his patron against speaking of his discontents too freely because of the ever-present danger of being accused of treason.[65] Shun-tsung took his advice, but within his own palace he continued to listen in fascination as Wang Shu-wen secretly laid out his plans for the next government – so-and-so to be a chief minister, that one an important general, and so on. Gradually Wang Shu-wen made contacts, some purely political and some rather more ideological, with perhaps a dozen to twenty men. The most important of these was Wang P'i, who like Wang Shu-wen came from the south-east (Hang-chou), though as far as we know

[64] Muronaga Yoshizō, 'Tōmatsu naiko no sonzai keitai ni tsuite', pp. 100–2.
[65] *TCTC* 233, pp. 7497–501.

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they were not related. Wang P'i was a very ugly man who spoke not in the refined manner of the Ch'ang-an elite but in the coarse Wu dialect of his native region. Although only a scribe by profession and something of a laughing-stock among the courtiers, Wang P'i nevertheless was appointed a Han-lin academician in 805 because of his intimate friendship with Shun-tsung. The clique also included a eunuch, Li Chung-yen, who was a personal servant to the heir apparent, a few officials in middle-level government posts, and, perhaps most interesting, the famous writers Liu Tsung-yüan (773–819), Liu Yü-hsi (772–842) and Lü Wen (*c.* 774–814), all of whom were at the time little-known young men in their thirties. A few other men were sometimes mentioned as participants in this group, but its core was quite small. These men were based in Ch'ang-an and did not have extensive provincial connections. They reportedly swore an oath of secrecy unto death with one another, which, along with the fact that none of the group was really prominent politically, probably saved them from being discovered and dispersed.[66]

Although the palace of the heir apparent had been the locus of intrigue before in T'ang history and was to be again in the future, the episode of 805 was far more complicated than the ordinary squabbles between factions of the imperial family over the right of succession. Upon Te-tsung's death and Shun-tsung's accession to the throne, the Wang clique set in motion their long-deliberated plot to take over the T'ang government. However, their prospects for success were dimmed from the outset on account of Shun-tsung's ill-health. He had suffered a mild stroke in 804, which had left him mute, or nearly so, and unable to conduct court business in the normal fashion. Already at the time of his enthronement there was concern about his suitability to become emperor, and it was only due to a few strong-minded Han-lin academicians (probably acting in the interests of his son, the future Hsien-tsung) that the testamentary decree of the old emperor Te-tsung was not altered to depose Shun-tsung and his line. Yet for a few months at least the Wangs actually turned Shun-tsung's disability into an advantage, by isolating him within his apartments. Shun-tsung was attended solely by the eunuch Li Chung-yen and a favourite concubine, Lady Niu. His orders and other communications passed through them to Wang P'i, who even for an academician had extraordinary freedom of movement into and out of the palace; the next link in the chain was Wang Shu-wen, also an academician but chiefly charged with control of state finance; and from him instructions were given to the chief minister Wei Chih-i, and so on out to other members

[66] One charge of clique politics against Wei Chih-i and Wang Shu-wen was beaten back in 803: *CTS* 135, pp. 3732–3.

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of the clique who had been placed in various key offices. This arrangement permitted the Wang party to do almost anything it wanted, since the rest of the court was excluded entirely from the conduct of state business. It quickly became dangerous to voice opposition to the ruling clique in public. The few older chief ministers who did so, resigning in reaction to the Wangs' heavy-handed methods, earned great respect for their courage.

It is significant, however, that for all their arbitrariness the Wang clique did carry through at least some of their original intentions, with a zealous attack on administrative problems during their first months in power. They strictly enjoined the eunuchs from crimes of fraud, and abolished the much-abused palace market in particular. No longer were the local townspeople to suffer at the hands of bullies working for the eunuch game supervisors (*wu-fang hsiao-erh*), who used to threaten inn-keepers and default their bills in the course of their riotous expeditions to catch fowl for the imperial table. The Wangs banished the notoriously corrupt metropolitan governor of Ch'ang-an, a man so hated that he only narrowly escaped being stoned to death as he left the city. Once again irregular tribute practices were outlawed, including the donations of 'surpluses' from the salt and iron commissioners' Yangtze valley offices. Practically a thousand court ladies and musicians were sent out from the palace either to Buddhist nunneries or to their homes. An enormous tax remission was granted, along with a general amnesty and recall of many of the court officials exiled for political transgressions under Te-tsung.

As early as the summer of 805, however, the political position of the Wang clique had begun to crumble. Its members had been quarrelling with one another for some time; Wei Chih-i, for example, grew to despise Wang Shu-wen for all the arrogant slights Wang had inflicted upon him. Shun-tsung's health took an obvious turn for the worse, and the emerging opposition to the Wangs demanded that Shun-tsung name his heir apparent without delay, lest the regime be perpetuated under another incompetent emperor. The Han-lin academician Cheng Yin (752–829) smuggled a single sheet of paper into the palace, on which he had scrawled a request for the establishment of the eldest son of the principal consort, namely the Prince of Kuang-ling, as the heir apparent. The future Hsien-tsung was known to be hostile to the Wang clique but, true to his father's example, he kept his own counsel, refusing to be sounded out by the spies appointed as his tutors. The ultimate blow against the Wangs came from outside the court. For several months Wang Shu-wen had been trying to infiltrate and take over the command structure of the palace armies, thus dislodging the eunuchs from their newly-won position of military power. The border generals who owed their jobs to the eunuchs resisted this on

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their own initiative, however, and the overall commander appointed by the Wangs was rebuffed at the main Shen-ts'e Army camp in Feng-t'ien. Once it was clear that the Wangs had failed to win over the army, it was all over. A temporary coalition, made up of most of the eunuchs, some of the Han-lin academicians, and several powerful military governors, successfully sought Shun-tsung's abdication in favour of the heir apparent.[67] Hsien-tsung, who was enthroned in the eighth month of 805, at once removed the remnants of the Wang clique from their posts. Wang P'i died of a cerebral haemorrhage, and Wang Shu-wen was executed the next year. The others directly involved were sent into exile, and most of them were kept there without pardon throughout the new emperor's reign.

The question of what lay behind this brief episode is exceedingly difficult to answer. The primary sources that deal with these events are few in number and full of problems.[68] It is obvious that many documents have been deliberately destroyed, and in almost everything that remains there is an undertone of hostility towards the Wangs, which makes any analysis of their motives necessarily a matter of conjecture. There are two conventional points of view about them. Most literati historians have felt they were 'small men' (*hsiao-jen*), political scoundrels out for themselves alone. A few writers, however, have given them a measure of credit as reformers reacting against the atrocities of the previous reign, and daring to try to destroy the hated eunuchs.[69]

There is some truth in both arguments. Disregarding moral judgments on them, we can be sure that the Wang clique wanted power. The offices they immediately moved to control – the Han-lin academy, the Salt and Iron Commission, the Department of Public Revenue, and the chief ministers' office – clearly reflect their grasp of the essential changes in the political power structure that had occurred in the previous half a century. They were also skilled in the manipulation of the prestige of the outer court, using figureheads where they could, so as to conceal their own activities. The venerated Tu Yu, for example, was made commissioner for salt and iron, while financial affairs were in fact under the control of Wang Shu-wen, his nominal deputy. Inasmuch as the Wangs appear to have had no previous power base other than their secret association under the heir apparent, it must be admitted that they became remarkably strong in a very short time. Their biggest blunders were those of inexperience. They

[67] *TCTC* 236, pp. 7616–17; *TTCLC* 30, p. 113.

[68] See Bernard S. Solomon, *The Veritable Record of the T'ang emperor Shun-tsung* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'The Shun-tsung shih-lu', *BSOAS*, 19.2 (1957) 336–44.

[69] Pulleyblank, 'Neo-Confucianism and neo-legalism', nn. 139–42.

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did not control the Han-lin academy fully, nor did they placate truly influential sections of the court with chief ministerships, nor did they enlist adequate military support to their cause – even a small force of guards might have tipped the balance and prevented their enemies from regaining the initiative. Then there were the financial indiscretions, the allegations of corruption and embezzlement. Wang P'i was so rich as a result of taking bribes for his services that, it was said, for fear of robbers he made his wives and concubines sleep on top of a huge chest containing his gold and silk. Even if such charges directed against individuals may be discounted as exaggerations, it is nevertheless likely that the clique did use state funds to secure allies, as for example in promotions in rank given to several influential independent governors, and the mass enfeoffment of the emperor's brothers, sons and grandsons, which entailed grants of real 'fiefs of maintenance' (*shih-feng*). Government posts were given to supporters of the Wangs and probably sold as well, but we have no way of telling how widespread the practice became.

The reformist elements in the attempted coup are still harder to appraise.[70] Nothing they did overtly was a radical reform, and measures to control the eunuchs, prohibit unauthorized tribute and so forth had precedents in the early reign of Te-tsung. Yet it can be argued that they preferred to solve problems by institutional change rather than to indulge in vague moralizing. They are supposed to have incited one another to greater efforts by invoking the names of I-yin, the Duke of Chou, Kuan Chung, and Chu-ko Liang, all of whom were regarded as 'activist' ministers of ancient times. In the T'ang intellectual spectrum, this is the sort of attitude scholars have associated with Tu Yu, who in the *T'ung-tien* (801) and the now-lost selection of essays from it, the *Li-tao yao-chüeh* (803), had stressed the value of using antiquity as a source of principle rather than as a rigid model for present society. He approved of an active, interventionist role for government, appreciated the usefulness of law, and saw the basis of a healthy society first and foremost in economic sufficiency. Tu Yu's position in the affairs of the Wang clique is not clear, but as Pulleyblank has said, 'even if Tu Yu was never personally in the intimate cousels of the group, his ideas were influential among them and he was looked upon as a source of leadership and inspiration.'[71] This was true particularly of Liu Yü-hsi, who had been a personal aide to Tu Yu, and of Liu Tsung-yüan. On the whole, however, the personal interconnections are too obscure and the relationship of this general outlook to actual policies too tenuous, to permit any firm conclusions about the ultimate goals of the Wang clique, at least until such time as we have

[70] *Ibid.* pp. 107–13. [71] *Ibid.* p. 110.

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a much more sophisticated knowledge of the intellectual history of this period.[72]

In an interesting study of this problem from a Marxist perspective, the Chinese historian Wang Yün-sheng views the efforts of the Wang clique as being genuinely reformist and as representing economic and social differences within the landlord class.[73] The Wangs, according to him, were fighting for the interests of the 'commoner-landlord group' (*shu-tsu ti-chu chi-t'uan*) against the eunuchs and other stalking-horses of the 'aristocratic landlord group' (*hao-tsu ti-chu chi-t'uan*), which included Shun-tsung's strong-minded successor Hsien-tsung. I do not believe he has proved his case for identifying the Wang clique's socio-economic origins. Nevertheless, he has brought together some significant material, and I feel it is important to keep an open mind on the question of economic distinctions among the members of the ruling elite.

In any case, the reaction against the Wangs was primarily political. The hostility of the eunuchs is easy to understand. So is that of the military governors, especially in the west, south-west and north, since they had an interest in seeing that their court connections (which often involved eunuchs) remained undisturbed. But if the Wangs' reforms meant anything at all, why did the vast majority of the bureaucrats fail to support them? To begin with, the Wangs' conspiratorial methods alienated much of the favourable response they might otherwise have expected. Then too, while the Wangs may have ostensibly aimed for a resuscitation of bureaucratic authority, above all they intended any such revival to be on their own terms and to reflect their own interests. Courtiers of the time knew this very well. It is interesting that, despite the large amount of political dogma that government bureaucrats had in common during the late T'ang, they very rarely united in opposition against the imperial establishment and its servants, such as the eunuchs. Obligations to friends and patrons inside small groups *within* the bureaucracy, rather than the bureaucracy as a whole, were the decisive elements in politics. As we shall see below in our analysis of factionalism in the 820s and 830s, by and large it was easier and more profitable for politicians to accommodate themselves to the political status quo, even if they suffered somewhat reduced prestige, than it was to attempt reform. For an individual official, the fear of falling behind on the climb up the ladder of government advancement was very great. After the failure of the Wang clique's attempted coup, it was not

[72] Esp. with respect to the elements of materialism discerned in the thought of Liu Tsung-yüan and Liu Yü-hsi. See Hou Wai-lu, *Chung-kuo ssu-hsiang t'ung-shih* (Peking, 1959), vol. 4.1, ch. 7.

[73] Wang Yün-sheng, 'Lun erh Wang pa ssu-ma cheng-chih ko-hsin ti li-shih i-i', *LSYC*, 3 (1963) 105–30.

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until the Sweet Dew plot of 835 that bureaucrats again attempted to change the political structure by force.

Foreign relations in the latter half of the eighth century

No aspect of T'ang life was changed more dramatically by the An Lu-shan rebellion in the 750s than China's relations with the other Asian powers of the time. Hsüan-tsung's armies had advanced into Mongolia in the north and southern Manchuria in the north-east, while a thin line of Chinese oasis outposts stretched around the Tarim basin and into Zungharia. His expansionist policies were all based on formidable military strength, and ultimately on a populace docile enough to supply the funds and a court eager to hear about the latest exploits of the emperor's forces in distant lands. An Lu-shan's revolt destroyed a great many ways of thinking, and such conceptions of a far-away empire were among the quickest to be abandoned. Suddenly the foreigners were on China's doorstep: the Tibetans seized Lung-yu circuit, and the Uighurs rushed in with offers of help, but at a high price.

As we have seen, this post-An Lu-shan period of maximum tension in external affairs lasted throughout the reign of Tai-tsung. Its economic effects were profound. The cost of maintaining frontier armies at a level adequate to slow if not to stop the Tibetan advance became a severe burden on the economy, which already had been thrown into a state of confusion by the rebellion and its aftermath. Supply expenses for the protection of Ch'ang-an in this period ran in excess of a million-and-a-half strings of cash annually, exclusive of the million lengths of silk required each year to purchase war horses from the Uighurs, now that the Chinese horse-breeding and pasture lands had been lost to Tibet. The system of military-agricultural colonies also had been destroyed in the frontier area, and efforts to adapt the system to new conditions took decades to come to fruition.

By 779 the long series of Tibetan raids in the north-west had left the forces of both sides debilitated. Te-tsung decided in 780–1 to approach the Tibetans with offers of peace. At first meetings took place between the parties on practical issues such as the return of T'ang ambassadors held captive in Lhasa. The Tibetans were suspicious of Chinese intentions, but the new Tibetan first minister Shaṅ-rgyal-btsan (Chinese transcription Shang-chieh-tsan) soon perceived that an agreement with China was far more advantageous at that moment than continued fighting. A treaty, negotiated in 783 and signed in 784, established a border and no-man's-land between the two states, following along the lines of current military

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control in Kansu and Shensi. It also provided for the exchange of prisoners and refugees. The treaty included formal concessions to the Tibetans of vast amounts of territory they already held. Te-tsung agreed to it primarily because of the outbreak of the revolt of the Ho-pei governors in 781. In fact, it was a substantial diplomatic achievement to have secured the empire's western border, releasing Chinese troops for service in the east, at the cost of simply recognizing an accomplished fact.

After the war crisis of 783–4, however, the truce was broken by both signatories. The Tibetans had pledged their help against the rebels, but in 784 one of their detachments sent to relieve the Chinese deserted to the rebel emperor Chu Tz'u instead. The T'ang government for its part abandoned an implicit promise to cede the Inner Asian colonies at An-hsi and Pei-t'ing to Tibet. As a result hostilities broke out again. Well aware of how internal war had weakened the T'ang, Shan-rgyal-btsan took the offensive, pushing deep into Shensi in 785 and 786. He had a remarkable understanding of T'ang court politics (which incidentally is an example of how widespread the spying and interstate intrigue must have been at the time), and he sent agents to assassinate the best generals in the Chinese army. Twice his schemes were successful, and in 787 a third general nearly died in a negotiating session that was really set up by Tibet as an ambush. This incident, known later as the 'false treaty of P'ing-liang', threw the Chinese court into an uproar. The incompatibility of Chinese and Tibetan long-term interests was now obvious. With regret Te-tsung was forced to abandon the idea of a Tibetan alliance, which he had considered seriously for some eight years altogether.

The Uighurs were China's natural alternative. Originally the Uighurs (Hui-ho and later Hui-hu in Chinese transcription) had been subjects of the great T'u-chüeh Turkish steppe empire of the mid-sixth to mid-seventh centuries, but from the 640s onwards, they themselves became the leaders of a new confederation of Turkic-speaking nomads, known formally as the Nine Clans (Toquz-oghuz in Turkish, Chiu hsing in Chinese).[74] The T'u-chüeh empire was revived in the east about the turn of the eighth century, but in 744 the Nine Clans overthrew it and became the dominant power in the northern Inner Asian steppe. Until 840 the Uighurs (to return to the name commonly applied to the Nine Clans as a whole) ruled from their capital, Ordu-balïq, on the Orkhon River in modern Mongolia, which was near the future site of Chinggis Khan's headquarters. During the period of their supremacy in the north, the

[74] Bertold Spuler, 'Geschichte Mittelasiens seit dem Auftreten der Türken', in *Geschichte Mittelasiens* (*Handbuch der Orientalistik*), pt 1, ch. 5.5, pp. 148–62; James R. Hamilton, 'Toquz-oghuz et On-Uyghur', *JA*, 250 (1962) 23–64.

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Uighurs gradually became semi-sedentarized. They were literate and cultured, and they built a splendid tent city to house their court. The Uighurs were converted to Manichaeism by Soghdian missionaries, who in time achieved great secular influence in the Uighur state, acting as political advisers and envoys for the qaghan and sponsoring the activities of itinerant Soghdian merchants.[75] The merchants attracted Uighur investors with promises of great profits to be made from commerce, especially the long-distance trade across Asia – from China north-west through Uighur territory, and thence to the T'ien-shan mountains and on to Samarqānd, Bukhara and eventually Persia and the Mediterranean. To support their new sedentary activities, the Uighurs took care to maintain their indispensable nomadic cavalry, which remained the strongest military force in east Asia well into the 830s.

As we have seen, Uighur cavalry detachments intervened on the side of the imperial house during the An Lu-shan rebellion, but Te-tsung had bitter memories of the insults inflicted upon him at that time by the overbearing Uighur commanders, and during the 780s he was in no mood to ally with them, regardless of the consequences. After the collapse of the Tibetan treaties, it required a supreme effort by the chief minister Li Mi in 787 and 788 to persuade him to put his personal feelings aside for the good of the state. Li Mi's plans for dealing with the Tibetan threat were pan-Asiatic in scale and to some extent echoed the mood surrounding the exploits of Hsüan-tsung's generals in central Asia. China could isolate and exhaust Tibet, Li argued, by forming an alliance with the Uighurs, the Tibeto-Burman tribal confederacy of Nan-chao in modern Yunnan, the 'Abbāsid Caliphate (Ta-shih, the 'strongest of the western countries') and India (T'ien-chu). Li Mi insisted that the participation of the Uighurs was fundamental to this proposal, and he overcame Te-tsung's stubborn unwillingness to discuss the matter by threatening to resign. The new Uighur qaghan, for his own reasons, was disposed to improve his relations with China. At length in 788 the Chinese and the Uighurs concluded the second of their three major marriage alliances (*ho-ch'in*). Te-tsung's daughter, the Princess of Hsien-an, was sent off to be the consort of the Uighur qaghan with a huge dowry of silk and luxury goods, in return for which the Uighurs promised to help China against Tibet. The projected contacts with the Caliphate and India never came to anything, but the reaffirmation of the Sino-Uighur alliance, which remained stable until 840, was of cardinal importance for late T'ang history. It was not a smooth relationship, to be sure. There were many tense incidents arising over the terms of the Uighur-initiated trade in horses for Chinese silk, and simply

[75] See V. Minorksy, 'Tamīm ibn Baḥr's journey to the Uyghurs', *BSOAS*, 12.2 (1948).

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at the level of human relations the Chinese took a strong dislike to the barbarous behaviour of the Uighurs resident in Ch'ang-an and other cities. The alliance constituted a large drain on the T'ang treasury, but at least China was safe from a devastating nomadic attack in the north, in contrast to the nearly constant T'u-chüeh and Khitan threats of early T'ang times.

Yet in the late 780s it was not immediately clear that Li Mi's overall strategy would prove successful. In 790 the Tibetans launched a major attack upon the Chinese military outposts at An-hsi (modern Turfan) and Pei-t'ing (Beš̌balïq), which were the remains of the protectorates-general (*tu-hu fu*) set up by the T'ang in the seventh century to supervise the southern and northern routes around the T'ien-shan mountains, respectively.[76] For nearly thirty years those distant towns had been isolated from China proper by the Tibetan incursions into Kansu, except for infrequent reports from the few travellers who made their way north across Uighur territory. In the meantime, for trade reasons the Uighurs had assumed a proprietary interest in An-hsi and Pei-t'ing. In 790 they joined the few remaining Chinese troops in a counter-attack against the Tibetan army, but the following autumn Tibet decisively defeated a large Uighur force. The year 791 saw the end of Chinese administration in eastern Turkestan for almost a thousand years.

The strategic balance of power in Inner Asia was tipped in the 790s in Chinese favour, with the return of the state of Nan-chao from the Tibetan to the T'ang sphere of influence. Nan-chao was a confederation of six large tribal groups, ethnically Tibeto-Burman, which ruled over most of what is now Yunnan province from about 650 to 900. Although Nan-chao had sent tribute to the T'ang from very early times, its ties to China were strengthened in the second quarter of the eighth century, when a patent of investiture was sent to the king of Nan-chao by Hsüan-tsung. The state gradually became more centralized, and a capital city was established called Ta-li on Lake Erh-hai north-west of modern Kunming. The Nan-chao rulers of the early eighth century consciously imitated Chinese political and cultural patterns. But not long before the An Lu-shan rebellion, the king of Nan-chao, perhaps bridling at the rapid growth of Chinese administrative units on his frontiers, attacked the nearby T'ang protectorate-general's yamen. The subsequent punitive expedition from China was crushed by Nan-chao with Tibetan help, and as the T'ang became more and more preoccupied with the revolt in Ho-pei, Nan-chao slipped into the Tibetan orbit. The Nan-chao ruler adopted

[76] Hilda Ecsedy, 'Uighurs and Tibetans in Pei-t'ing (790–791 A.D.)', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (Budapest), 17 (1964) 83–104.

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'younger brother' diplomatic status vis-à-vis Tibet, and some of his forces were incorporated into the Tibetan army.[77] Thereafter Nan-chao was a real threat to the T'ang province of Chien-nan West, which was located to the north of Nan-chao along the border between modern Szechwan and the Hsi-k'ang region of Tibet. Two very able Chinese generals, Ts'ui Ning (military governor from 767 to 779) and later Wei Kao (governor from 785 to 805), fought battle after battle on the south-west front against the forces of Tibet and Nan-chao. If their efforts to contain Nan-chao had failed, the T'ang dynasty would have been in grave trouble, for there was little to prevent a pincers attack on Ch'ang-an from the west and south-west once Chien-nan West had been overrun. Fortunately for China, however, in the late 780s Nan-chao's client relationship to Tibet began to weaken under the influence of its new king, I-mou-hsün (reign 779–808). Wei Kao sent a stream of messages to Ta-li, hoping to exploit I-mou-hsün's restiveness under the heavy Tibetan taxation and military conscription. By about 792 the pressure started to show results, and early in 794 Nan-chao formally renounced Tibetan sovereignty and renewed its former 'vassal' relationship with China.[78] The two states jointly attacked Tibetan forces near Kunming in 795, and under the leadership of Wei Kao, made a deep thrust into Tibet itself in 801. These important victories, along with the deaths of the implacably anti-Chinese Tibetan king and his first minister in 796–7 and the solid alliance confronting Tibet's northern and eastern frontiers, caused that country to abandon the battlefield and thus brought an end to half-a-century of foreign war for the T'ang. By 805 the new emperor Hsien-tsung was free to fix his attention on the internal state of his empire.

CENTRALIZATION UNDER HSIEN-TSUNG (805–20)

The emperor Hsien-tsung had been an infant when the revolt of the Ho-pei governors broke out, and was still a child when the fighting stopped. But by the time of his accession to the throne in 805, he was a mature young man of twenty-seven, who, while growing up, had observed at close range his grandfather's humiliation and his father's helplessness. As events in his reign amply demonstrate, Hsien-tsung combined a strong resolve to restore the prestige of the imperial house with a detailed and sophisticated knowledge of the political forces within his own court. He was the strongest emperor in late T'ang times.

The essential task of recovery was to show the power of the central

[77] Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū*, vol. 2, pp. 675–7.

[78] *Ibid.* pp. 677–86; Fan Ch'o, *Man-shu*, edn of Hsiang Ta (Peking, 1962), Appendix 4.

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government on the battlefield.[79] From 806 to 819 Hsien-tsung pushed forward successfully in seven major military confrontations against six of the most recalcitrant provinces in the empire. To supplement the territorial and political gains from war, the government put a variety of institutional reforms into effect. The result was a remarkable resurgence of Ch'ang-an's authority within a mere fifteen years. To be sure, Hsien-tsung failed to recreate the full empire as it had existed in Hsüan-tsung's day. In fact, three of the independent north-eastern provinces, subdued for a time in the 810s, broke away again and for good in the early 820s. A number of others were ruled by governors who, while loyal, had considerable freedom of action within their own areas. The important point, however, is that there was no longer any immediate danger of a general rebellion like those of the eighth century. Indeed, the revolt of Chao-i province in 843-4 was the only significant interruption to four decades of internal calm after Hsien-tsung's death. He worked out a new *modus vivendi* between court and provinces, which for all the qualifications we shall make was one where the court clearly had the upper hand. Moreover, the empire was reconstituted sufficiently so that the idea of it survived in men's minds through the great upheavals of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, until the establishment of the Sung dynasty. By any reckoning these were impressive deeds.

Hsien-tsung's initial confrontations with those who wielded provincial power were very cautious, because he was determined not to repeat Te-tsung's mistake of acting rashly before his forces were ready. In early 806, Governor Wei Kao of Chien-nan West province died, and a subordinate general named Liu P'i demanded the right to succeed him.[80] The emperor granted his request, feeling unready to meet an ultimatum so soon after his enthronement. A couple of months later, however, Liu P'i laid claim to all three provinces into which the T'ang had divided the area comprising the modern Szechwan. Chien-nan West had been a bulwark against the incursions of Tibet and Nan-chao for some twenty-five years, as we have seen above, and an arrogant challenge of this sort threatened to add a huge region to the list of actively hostile provinces. Hsien-tsung dug in his heels, rejected Liu P'i's second request, and launched a counter-attack with the palace armies. In the autumn of 806, central government forces achieved an unexpectedly easy victory over Liu P'i. Liu and his top aides were executed, and order was restored under a new governor of the court's choosing. There were sporadic troubles in

[79] C. A. Peterson, 'The restoration completed: Hsien-tsung and the provinces', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 151-91.

[80] The accounts of the wars are drawn from *TCTC* 236-41, *CTS* 14-15, and Peterson, 'The restoration completed'.

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this area in ensuing decades, but they arose mostly from the difficulty of applying Chinese administration over such an ethnically diverse region, not from provincial defiance of Ch'ang-an.

By the spring of 807, provincial governors all over the empire were beginning to see the signs of a new strength in the capital. Li Ch'i, governor of the rich, rice-producing province of Che-hsi in the Yangtze River delta, defied an order to attend a court levee, in an attempt to defy the new emperor before he became too powerful. A campaign to chastise him was organized swiftly under the direction of a neighbouring governor. Within a few weeks Li Ch'i's frightened underlings deposed him, and he was executed later in Ch'ang-an. As we might expect, the court officials were more than pleased, and there was talk of a real restoration of the dynasty's fortunes. In particular, the outstanding performance of the Shen-ts'e Army and of expeditionary forces drawn from loyal Huai-nan during these two engagements created a mood of general confidence to match the emperor's determination.

A far more difficult encounter occurred in 809–10, when the court challenged Ch'eng-te, one of the three strong autonomous Ho-pei provinces. This was the first time that Hsien-tsung himself provoked an incident, and just as in Te-tsung's challenge to the north-east in 781, the issue was succession to the governorship. The old governor of Ch'eng-te had died late in 8c8, and in the middle of 809 his son, Wang Ch'eng-tsung, asked the court to confirm him as a full military governor. On earlier occasions of transfer of power there after the war of the 780s, such confirmation from Ch'ang-an, though granted reluctantly, had become a routine procedure. This time Hsien-tsung, emboldened by his recent successes, decided to strike out at the practice of locally-determined succession before the opportunity was lost. He tried to extract concessions from Wang in return for confirmation, including the surrender of two of Ch'eng-te's subordinate prefectures, but the compromise agreement soon fell apart. War broke out in late 809. By the early spring of 810, however, the imperial expedition against Ch'eng-te had run into trouble. It was a very expensive operation, to begin with, and the problems of coordinating the disparate units sent by loyal provinces into a single effective force turned out to be insurmountable.[81] A further complication was Hsien-tsung's designation of a eunuch, T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui (d. 820), to be expedition commander, an act that while not unprecedented was regarded at court as highly irregular, especially in a campaign of such scale and

[81] Such problems were endemic in imperial military campaigns after the An Lu-shan rebellion, except during the 840s. See *TCTC* 238, pp. 7671–3; Peterson, 'The restoration completed', pp. 162–3.

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importance. The morale of the subordinate generals suffered because of T'u-t'u's incompetence. Eventually Hsien-tsung was persuaded that the campaign against Ch'eng-te was premature, and in mid-810 both sides backed away from the battle. Wang Ch'eng-tsung retained his position as military governor.

For the next several years there was a hiatus in military operations as Hsien-tsung and his chief advisers made various attempts to consolidate their political and fiscal position, in anticipation of future campaigns. T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui, implicated in a bribery case, was dismissed and exiled, 'as easily as I would pull a hair from my head', according to the emperor.[82] In 809 a major series of financial measures was sponsored by the chief minister P'ei Chi (d. 813), which we shall discuss in greater detail below, and there was talk of increasing taxes in 811–12. The relation both to one another and to court politics of Hsien-tsung's decrees in the fields of taxation, tax remission, regulation of the size and emoluments of officialdom and so on, has not yet been demonstrated in detail, although a good deal of information on these subjects is scattered throughout the historical sources. It is probably safe to say, however, that the emperor's drive for military centralization pushed the T'ang state – government and populace alike – near to the limit of its capacity. Certainly the court discussions of state finance became more and more vehement from this middle period of Hsien-tsung's reign onwards. The issues were far too complex to be solved quickly.

Any improvements in the economy realized between 810 and 814, then, were most likely less important than the sense of political momentum that had been achieved. In 812, for example, the new governor of Wei-po, another of the long-independent provinces of the north-east, voluntarily submitted to court authority, thus putting an end to a hereditary governorship, that had lasted for four generations. The possibility of marching on Wei-po to subjugate it entirely on Ch'ang-an's terms was discussed but ultimately rejected. Hsien-tsung responded to the submission with a large grant of money and with several acts of courtesy, such as permitting a flattering change in the governor's given name as a gesture of goodwill to a prodigal subject now returned. This effortless triumph seems to have been a turning point in the whole process of centralization, for all at once a major strategic and psychological obstacle was removed at no military cost to Ch'ang-an.

From 814 until 819, Hsien-tsung hit hard at the remaining recalcitrant provinces. The chief victory during this aggressive second phase of military action was the elimination of the sixty-year-old independence of

[82] *TCTC* 238, p. 7686.

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Huai-hsi province in the upper Huai River valley.[83] Although Huai-hsi's antagonism towards Ch'ang-an is perhaps not as well known as that of the Ho-pei provinces, it was quite important, because Huai-hsi posed a threat to both communications and grain shipments along the canal, and because its army was strong and tenacious. The imperial campaign against Huai-hsi began characteristically when Wu Yüan-chi, the son of the recently deceased governor, attempted to ensure his rights to succession. The court, reasoning that Huai-hsi was isolated among loyal provinces, turned him down quickly, and Wu opened the fighting. The Huai-hsi operation turned out to be a long, difficult war, however, lasting from 814 until the autumn of 817. Contingents of the central government's expeditionary forces converged on Huai-hsi from four sides, but for some time they were badly coordinated. None of the imperial generals wanted to risk an all-out assault. In 816, moreover, they were stalled by the distraction of a second front in the north-east, where the conflict with Ch'eng-te province had broken out again. Still another diversion was the terror instilled by guerrilla agents of the governor of P'ing-lu province (modern Shantung). P'ing-lu was interested in preventing imperial victory over Huai-hsi because it was itself an obvious future target for a central government attack. P'ing-lu terrorists assassinated an aggressive chief minister in Ch'ang-an, sabotaged grain reserves, and more than once started fires in the eastern capital of Lo-yang. The confusion and despair at court might have undone a lesser emperor, but Hsien-tsung held firm. At last, under the general direction of the emperor and of chief minister P'ei Tu (765–839) in mid-817, imperial resources were concentrated in an attack upon the single objective of Ts'ai-chou, the capital of Huai-hsi. The city and the province fell three months later in one of late T'ang history's most crucial battles. Afterwards imperial troops were ordered to treat the defeated population of Huai-hsi leniently, in line with Hsien-tsung's general policy towards subjugated provinces. Sentences of death were passed only on the ring-leaders of the rebellion. Huai-hsi was legislated out of existence in 818, and its people were peacefully ruled from neighbouring provinces thereafter.

After the defeat of Huai-hsi, Ch'eng-te province soon came to terms. To forestall an attack, the worried governor sent two of his sons to Ch'ang-an as hostages guaranteeing his good behaviour. Since Heng-hai, the smallest Ho-pei province (created after the revolt of the 780s), had also submitted to the court a few months earlier, there were now only two

[83] C. A. Peterson, 'Regional defense against central power: the Huai-hsi campaign of 815–817' in F. A. Kierman Jr and John K. Fairbank, eds. *Chinese ways in warfare* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

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provinces still outside the control of Ch'ang-an: Yu-chou in the Peking area, and P'ing-lu. Yu-chou was never touched – in this period it was not among the most antagonistic provinces anyway. Hsien-tsung put down P'ing-lu in 819 with a minimum of trouble. Li Shih-tao, the governor, was killed by subordinates just as the carefully prepared expedition against him was getting under way. The court then studied the local conditions of P'ing-lu, and to ensure that rebellion would not recur there in the future, divided it into three smaller provinces. After this victory, Hsien-tsung could feel satisfied that he had returned almost the whole of China proper to direct imperial rule.

Institutional support for centralization

Three key, interrelated economic issues were brought out into the open by Hsien-tsung's policy of centralization: the marked monetary deflation, which had begun in the late 780s; the malfeasance of many provincial governors in the processes of tax collection; and the inadequacy of the revenue available to the government for its campaigns. The tax and finance decrees of 809, mentioned above, were the first important effort to deal with such problems since the reforms of Yang Yen in 780, so it may be helpful to say a word about them.

The initial impetus to deflation, namely the end of the wartime scarcities and consequent high prices of the early 780s, and the greater supply of grain following the resumption of shipments from the south-east, was accelerated by the government's difficulties in dealing with the chronic shortage of copper. To be sure, the inner workings of the T'ang exchange system, which for large-scale transactions had used mixed media – silk cloth and silver in addition to copper – and the bulk transport of grain, never had been fully controllable by the authorities, but the problem became especially acute during this period. First, silk had become relatively scarce. Much of the government's reserve stock had been destroyed in the rebellions; the independence of the Ho-pei provinces and of P'ing-lu had cut off the central government's best source of currency-standard silk.[84] The forced export of silk to the Uighurs accounted for a large percentage of the production of the lower Yangtze area. Furthermore, silver production, assaying and minting were carried on largely in the private sector, and the exchange ratios for it against copper and goods fluctuated outside the close control of the government. Meanwhile the demand for copper rose dramatically.[85] Supply could not keep pace with

[84] Twitchett, 'Provincial autonomy', pp. 224–5.
[85] Denis Twitchett, 'Merchant, trade and government in late T'ang', *AM* (NS), 14.1 (1968) 76.

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demand well into the ninth century, despite repeated efforts to stimulate mining, prevent hoarding of coin, and prohibit counterfeiting of debased coinage.[86] It is likely that the expansion of the commercial economy in the late eighth and ninth centuries increased the need for copper still further. The resulting steep drop in commodity prices – in 820, rice, for example, fetched as little as 10 per cent of its price at the height of the inflation of the 780s – had a direct effect on taxation. The original *liang-shui* tax quotas, although collected primarily in kind, had been assessed in terms of cash. The conversion rate was and continued to be pegged to copper cash at its 779 value, however, some time before the onset of deflation. Many peasants suffered as the prices of basic agricultural goods, used to pay taxes, fell in relation to the constant burden of the tax bill in cash. The danger was that, without the introduction of some flexibility into the system, more and more farmers would slip below the level of subsistence, and from the government's point of view, produce no tax revenue at all.

While deflation thus adversely affected the tax base, the tripartite division of received revenue introduced irregularities into the next higher step of the tax collection system. The tax quotas, which had been negotiated separately with each province by Yang Yen's commissioners, were divided up as follows. Counties and prefectures were allowed to keep a small portion of the revenue they collected for local expenses (*liu-chou*); a somewhat larger percentage was to be put at the disposal of the province (*sung-shih* or *liu-shih*); and the greatest share was supposed to be forwarded from the province to the central government (*sung-shang* or *shang-kung*). But it was easy for the provincial governors, who played the part of middlemen in this process, to cheat the central government, either by falsely reporting the current price levels of grain and cloth in their areas, or even, in some cases, by flatly refusing to send their full quotas to the court. Moreover, the prefectural and provincial officials, and especially their yamen underlings, often manipulated the conversion rates between in-kind receipts and cash tax quotas at the very outset, raking off extra funds for themselves and adding to the burden on the peasants. In this way the strongest governors accumulated great wealth, which was a major source of funds for the 'tribute gifts', and a net loss to the regular official system. This sort of abuse naturally went hand-in-hand with the increased powers of the provincial governors after the middle of the eighth century, as did the widespread imposition of totally illegal local taxes and duties without the knowledge of the central authorities.[87]

[86] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 77–83.
[87] Sogabe Shizuo, 'Tō jidai no kōken seido'; Hino Kaisaburō, 'Hanchin jidai no shūzei sambunsei ni tsuite', *SGZS*, 65.7 (1956) 646–66.

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It is no wonder, then, that the total revenue available to the central government was inadequate. While Te-tsung's frugality/miserliness is supposed to have produced surpluses sufficient for Hsien-tsung to undertake his early campaigns, these reserves obviously were not unlimited. This was the implication of the report of chief minister Li Chi-fu (758–814) in 807 that a mere eight provinces were rendering taxes regularly to the central government; compared to the last years of Hsüan-tsung's reign, only one household out of four could be counted as a reliable source of revenue.[88]

P'ei Chi's measures in 809 were an attempt to prevent the bad state of the economy from becoming irretrievable, and of course thereby to provide money for Hsien-tsung's wars.[89] His first basic point was to set and enforce a 'medium' price for silk, and to reintroduce silk as a medium of exchange along with copper, so as to mount a counter-attack on deflation. Certain fixed expenses, such as local officials' salaries and medicinal supplies for local troops, were converted from an all-cash basis to a mixed system of cash and in-kind payments, in response to the exceptionally high value of copper. Manipulation of the currency at the local level was strictly prohibited. His second basic idea was to bring the *liang-shui* tax receipts under a uniform system of standard conversion rates and reliable collection. This involved the significant political act of removing provincial units from their stranglehold on tax collection. Henceforth, provinces were supposed to provide the income for their own operating budgets from the resources of the capital prefecture (*hui-fu*) alone, relying on the other prefectures under their jurisdiction only in case of insufficiency. In return, the capital prefecture was excused entirely from its tax obligation to the central government. The rest of the prefectures, meanwhile, were no longer required to send revenue to their respective provinces, but were to return the former *liu-shih* portion directly to Ch'ang-an along with their own quotas.

These court pronouncements were not enforced with complete success, as the continued infractions mentioned in the supplementary decrees of 810 and 811 clearly show. The attempts at price stabilization were especially difficult to put into practice, and in any case were directed more at the symptoms than the causes of the rapid deflation, which continued for about another decade.[90] Moreover, it is difficult to know for certain whether total court income was increased substantially after P'ei Chi's reforms. Apparently, though, they at least temporarily lightened the

[88] *TCTC* 237, pp. 7647–8.
[89] Matsui Shūichi, 'Hai Ki no zeisei kaikaku ni tsuite', *SGZS*, 76.7 (1967) 1–24.
[90] *TCTC* 242, pp. 7799–800.

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actual tax load on the peasants of the Huai and Yangtze river valleys. Inasmuch as these measures came shortly after the important victory over Li Ch'i in 808, the subsequent tax relief gave the common people of Che-hsi a tangible demonstration of the benefits of imperial rule and an incentive to support it. Politically, while P'ei's reforms reaffirmed the emperor's right to control his prefectures directly instead of being separated from them by a hostile layer of provincial administrators, still at the same time there were many ways in which the provincial governors could continue to thwart the application of central laws.

A reform similar to that in finance was made in provincial military administration at the suggestion of a loyal governor, Wu Ch'ung-yin, upon the successful conclusion of Hsien-tsung's series of campaigns in 819. Command of the provincial armies was broken up. The provincial governors retained the right to control only the forts and troops of their capital prefectures. The prefects were to assume command of the outlying garrisons and troops located within the boundaries of their prefectures. Only frontier fortifications and those manned by non-Chinese mercenaries were excepted from this rule. The political significance of this decree was, as in the earlier financial reform, to bring the central government and the prefectures closer together at the expense of the provinces. In the late eighth and early ninth centuries, the foundation of any military threat or political feint on the part of a governor was his ability to mobilize the entire armed force of his province, which could easily amount to tens of thousands of men. Any prefect loyal to Ch'ang-an who balked at participating in such an insurrection could be crushed quickly by the governor's other forces. After 819, however, it became far harder for a discontented governor to coordinate the many prefectural units, each under separate command, into a swift joint surprise action. Thus even though a single prefect's forces seem to have been relatively few, perhaps two or three thousand men in exceptional circumstances and normally far less, still taken together they were a great loss to the provinces while being a net gain to the prefectures and, indirectly, the central government. We should note that it was still perfectly possible for a provincial governor to muster and lead the army of his whole province, provided he were under imperial orders to do so. In other words, the legitimate functions of the military governors were preserved in the reform, while their power to make trouble was curtailed. Our knowledge of how the decree of 819 was put into practice is sparse, unfortunately. It does appear that the restrictions were accepted in the loyal provinces of central and south-east China, but met resistance in the north and north-west, where there were large standing armies in essentially military provinces. It probably had no effect at all in Ho-pei.

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The institutional measures of 810 and 819 are the best understood of Hsien-tsung's attempts to give permanent shape to his military triumphs. There were a few others about which we know less. But while the central regime attained somewhat closer control over local administrations in the early and mid-ninth century, this process very likely was never carried through to completion. After Hsien-tsung, the weak emperors of the 820s and 830s were unable to do more than hold the line, and in a number of cases they could not do that. Different accommodations of power between province and prefecture took place in all parts of the empire, accommodations that will be difficult for us to reconstruct except in isolated cases.

Political transition in Hsien-tsung's early years

To some extent any enthronement in T'ang history was an occasion for redress and change of personnel in the central government, but in 805 the issues faced by Hsien-tsung were out of the ordinary. Over the previous ten years at one time or another, virtually every identifiable interest group had been slighted or excluded at least temporarily from access to power: the career bureaucrats were treated badly by Te-tsung, the eunuchs by the Wang clique. The whole political world looked to Hsien-tsung for the repair of eroded privileges. The claims upon him frequently contradicted each other, and the mood was tense.[91]

The obvious need for a reconciliation between the emperor and the regular bureaucracy was the most pressing political problem he faced. The new emperor made the expected gestures to demonstrate his probity – discharging extra palace musicians, refusing the gift of fifty women for the harem, and so forth. But while Te-tsung and Shun-tsung had been rather more spectacular in showing their zeal initially, only to disappoint the bureaucrats later, Hsien-tsung's decrees were understated and modest, laying emphasis on a return to proper, official procedures and the re-establishment of the moral climate at court. In refusing a gift of two ancient tortoises sent from Ching-nan, for example, not only did Hsien-tsung prohibit future presentation of exotic animal curiosities, but also he ordered that all such 'auspicious' gifts be handled by the appropriate bureaucratic authorities; he did not want to see them, to know about them, or to do anything but to devote himself to the pursuit of kingly virtue.[92]

As heartening as such acts must have been to straight-laced official morale, the new emperor's pronouncements on changes in the conditions of service and rewards to the faithful were even more eagerly awaited. In T'ang times these were contained in imperial Acts of Grace (*ta-she*,

[91] See *TCTC* 236, pp. 7614–15; *CTS* 14, p. 411.

[92] *CTS* 14, p. 411.

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she-yu, etc.), promulgated on important state occasions such as accessions, changes of reign-period, imperial birthdays and great military victories. The Acts of Grace are a neglected historical source, and a comprehensive study of them would be of great interest, for they frequently include general policy statements and summations of the state of the realm in addition to specific exemptions, amnesties, promotions and emoluments granted to the nobility, to categories of officials, to the common people and sometimes to individuals.[93]

The Act of Grace of 806 (on the change of the reign-name to Yüan-ho, 'Fundamental harmony') contained generous concessions indeed. It surely accounted for some of the early enthusiasm for Hsien-tsung; Te-tsung apparently had not issued an Act of Grace during the last thirteen years of his reign, an interval that was much longer than normal. The Act of 806 provided that all civil and military officials on current service, including generals and officers of the Shen-ts'e Army and the provincial armies, were given noble titles or honorific rank (*chüeh* and *hsün*) as appropriate.[94] The sons of those who had rendered especially meritorious military service at any time after the An Lu-shan rebellion were given official employment (*kuan*), and their grandsons were given the right of entry into officialdom (*ch'u-shen*). The deceased parents of high court and provincial officials were to be awarded posthumous offices. Further special honours were designated for all those who had held the office of chief minister since the An Lu-shan rebellion, and for those who had rallied to the side of Tai-tsung and Te-tsung in their periods of exile. All chief ministers and provincial officials with the status of the chief ministership (*wai-shih tsai-hsiang* or simply *shih-hsiang*), along with all other great officials of the third rank and above, were permitted to designate one of their sons for an immediate official posting; this was an exception to the ordinary requirement of success in a selection examination (*hsüan*). A hundred posts as 'scholar' (*hsüeh-sheng*) were created to absorb unemployed literati in the school establishment.

What all of this meant in practical terms is hard to say. Probably there were many cases of overlapping, and, on the other hand, some categories into which few people actually fell. But the important points are: (1) Hsien-tsung accorded almost every official some sort of recognition; (2) potentially forgotten and dissatisfied elements – such as the descendants of military heroes, who otherwise might not have held official posts – were placated; (3) those at the top of the bureaucracy were given especially favoured treatment; (4) hopes were raised for a resumption of the normal frequency of Acts of Grace.

[93] *TTCLC* 2–5, 9–10, 29, 68–74, 75, 79, 83–6, 123; *TFYK* 83–91.

[94] *TTCLC* 5, p. 29.

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This policy of reconciliation and reward was extended to specific individuals as well. Cheng Yin (752–829) is a case in point. Cheng was a Han-lin academician who had intervened in February of 805 to uphold Shun-tsung's right to inherit the throne, and later arranged for his abdication in favour of his son, Hsien-tsung. As a reward for loyalty, Hsien-tsung appointed Cheng Yin to a newly-created post of chief Han-lin academician (*ch'eng-chih*), and then to chief minister. In the latter office Cheng performed with no distinction whatever for three-and-a-half years. His appointment was clearly political, and there is little doubt that research would uncover other similar cases among appointments to high bureaucatic positions made at that time.[95]

Linked with these developments was Hsien-tsung's shrewd policy of controlled reprisals against the politically undesirable. The primary targets of course were the members of the Wang Shu-wen clique, who as we have mentioned were sent into distant exile. But it was significant that with the exception of the two Wangs themselves, Hsien-tsung did not execute anyone, as his grandfather Te-tsung probably would have. The scope of the purge, furthermore, was restricted very carefully to those who had actually taken part in the events of 805, and did not involve the customary disgrace for family members or personal associates of the guilty parties. Outside the Wangs' circle, Hsien-tsung was even more circumspect. He put a stop to some truly flagrant misbehaviour – such as the corruption and debauchery associated with salt commissioner P'an Meng-yang's tour of duty in south-east China[96] – but the emperor must have realized that a vigorous prosecution of all recent wrongdoing would have been unfair and divisive, as a result of the scores of personal grudges and special cases.

The new relationship between the emperor and the bureaucracy was developed still further during Tu Huang-shang's term as chief minister from late 805 to early 807. It is interesting to note that under ordinary circumstances Tu (738–808), being the father-in-law of Wei Chih-i – the former chief minister who was very closely associated with the Wang clique – would have had only dim prospects of promotion to the chief ministership: guilt by association was the usual rule. Tu Huang-shang had avoided active involvement with the Wangs, however, and he even encouraged his son-in-law's misgivings about them. Tu's appointment to the top of the official establishment is clear proof of Hsien-tsung's conciliatory political stance. Moreover, in contrast to the aged Tu Yu (who was retained in Ch'ang-an as a sort of honorary chief minister until his

[95] Data from Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang p'u shang ch'eng lang piao* (4 vols., Taipei, 1956).
[96] *TCTC* 236, p. 7621, and 237, p. 7630.

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death in 812) Tu Huang-shang, though equally elderly, was given real power. Tu Yu was well respected, but he seems to have been regarded as an intellectual maverick, whereas Tu Huang-shang was a representative of the mainstream of conventional statecraft. He was a *chin-shih*, a former protégé of the war hero Kuo Tzu-i, and a veteran of many of the choicest offices in the government, including that of vice-president of the Board of Civil Office – which was one of the most powerful posts in the Department of State Affairs during the late eighth century. He had directed the *chin-shih* examinations in 791. He had even had the right enemies. In the mid-790s he had fallen foul of P'ei Yen-ling and held no posts at all during Te-tsung's period of semi-seclusion. No clearer symbol of the bureaucracy could have been chosen.

Tu Huang-shang was the political catalyst of Hsien-tsung's programme of military centralization, the first official to ask in open court whether the emperor would follow Te-tsung's 'lax policy' or strike out in a new direction.[97] At this time Hsien-tsung was still wary of sudden military action, feeling that any move against the rebellious general Liu P'i in western Szechwan should be prepared with great care, but Tu insisted on the importance of the precedent and the need to go ahead. He persuaded Hsien-tsung to appoint Kao Ch'ung-wen, a subordinate Shen-ts'e Army general, to command the entire Palace Army force, on the grounds that the role of the eunuchs had been only to spread corruption throughout the military and provincial structures and that they were unfit to lead men into battle. However disingenuous these statements may have been – after his death Tu Huang-shang himself was accused of receiving bribes from Kao Ch'ung-wen – Tu was clearly risking his career on the outcome of this campaign, for he had also taken the lead in planning tactics. As we have seen, the Shen-ts'e Army's expedition against Liu P'i was a great success. Hsien-tsung was both grateful and impressed by Tu Huang-shang's courage.

These credentials earned Tu the right to be taken seriously in his more theoretical discussions with the emperor, on the well-worn topics of wise and just rule, and the proper functioning of government. His opinions were orthodox: the emperor ought to act as the link between heaven and earth, his ancestors and the present day, the people of the empire and the barbarians; he should acknowledge the distinctions between high and low, important and unimportant. Specifically this meant that Hsien-tsung should delegate real power to carefully chosen subordinates, especially his chief ministers, and should avoid the distractions of governmental detail. Ordinarily we might dismiss these sentiments as just another set

[97] *TCTC* 237, pp. 7626–7; *CTS* 147, p. 3974.

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of banalities. But unlike many other T'ang emperors, Hsien-tsung was sincerely interested in such questions, especially during the first decade of his reign,[98] and in this instance he was speaking with a tested man of action, not with an ineffectual Confucian remembrancer. All our sources stress the deep effect these discussions had upon Hsien-tsung. Some credence must be given to that interpretation. Hsien-tsung's attitude of political reconciliation with the bureaucracy was maintained well into the next decade. Until at least the mid-810s, the emperor consulted regularly with the chief ministers and revitalized a number of outer court institutions. As we shall see, Hsien-tsung's interests and those of the bureaucracy did not coincide completely, so there were inevitable limits on the degree of cooperation and harmony in the central government. But compared to the impasse that had existed under Te-tsung only five years earlier, the new atmosphere represented a great change for the better. There were many in official Ch'ang-an who hoped that the restoration period (*chung-hsing*) of the dynasty might finally be at hand.

Hsien-tsung's court at its height

The high period at Hsien-tsung's court lasted from the victories of 806–7 until 815 and the assassination of chief minister Wu Yüan-heng by provincial terrorists. In 807 Tu Huang-shang was almost seventy and, perhaps because a whiff of the later scandal over his finances had already touched him, was sent off to an honourable retirement as governor of Ho-chung province in southern Shansi, where he died the next year. To replace him, Hsien-tsung promoted Wu Yüan-heng (758–815) from the Censorate, and Li Chi-fu (758–814) from the Han-lin academy, to be chief ministers. They were the first of a series of men of outstanding ability to hold that office under Hsien-tsung – P'ei Chi, Li Chiang (764–830), and P'ei Tu (765–839) are especially worthy of mention among the later incumbents – and demonstrate that the emperor truly did intend to employ the best men he could find from the higher ranks of the bureaucracy. Compared with their immediate predecessors, there was a marked shift downwards in age among this group. They were for the most part in their late forties or fifties, men who had grown to maturity in the last quarter of the eighth century. While they were not exact contemporaries of the young emperor, still we may assume they were more compatible with his vigorous spirit than the older generation formerly in power, which had lived all its years in the midst of war and political turmoil. The chief ministers of Hsien-tsung's reign played an essential role in the campaigns

[98] E.g. *TCTC* 238, p. 7683.

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of centralization, roles which in turn helped to restore some of the influence lost by the outer court in the 790s. It will be convenient to give a brief sketch here of the three key figures of Hsien-tsung's court at its height: Wu Yüan-heng, Li Chi-fu and Li Chiang.

Wu Yüan-heng was a member of the clan of the empress Wu (reign 684–705), and nearer at hand was a fourth-generation office-holder. He took his *chin-shih* degree in 783. Thereafter he served in a wide variety of posts, including those of provincial staff member, examining censor, district magistrate, junior secretary in the Department of Judicial Control and in 804 vice-president of the Censorate. Late in Te-tsung's reign, he had resigned one of his posts in protest against the uproar caused by the Palace Army in the capital. Perhaps because of this he was solicited by the literati members of the Wang clique to accept a protocol position in 805, but he wisely turned them down. Hsien-tsung appointed him to the Censorate and to the Board of Finance before his elevation to the chief ministership in 807. During his brief first term as chief minister, having established a relationship of mutual trust with the emperor, he was charged with specific responsibilities in the crucial area of finance. In concert with his close personal and political friend Li Chi-fu, Wu Yüan-heng strongly urged the emperor to take a hard line against the recalcitrant Che-hsi governor Li Ch'i. They are generally thought to have provided the final spur to the successful campaign of 807. As a mark of real confidence, Hsien-tsung then appointed Wu to the difficult job of restoring order in recently conquered western Szechwan. Kao Ch'ung-wen, the Shen-ts'e general who had captured Liu P'i, was a good soldier but not an administrator. Wu replaced him in late 807, and in about three years' time he managed to stabilize the area.

Wu Yüan-heng was reappointed chief minister in 813, just before the beginning of the Huai-hsi campaign. By this time Hsien-tsung did not require convincing about the need for military action, and so Wu's new problems were chiefly practical ones of gathering intelligence and mounting an expedition. (Li Chi-fu had been given responsibility for these tasks initially but had died in the winter of 814–15, leaving Wu Yüan-heng to carry on alone.) At this period the governors of Ch'eng-te and P'ing-lu were beginning to discover that the imminent central government operation against Huai-hsi would place their own independence in jeopardy as well. In order to buy time, they sent a stream of contradictory requests, demands and promises, hoping to keep the court off its guard. In mid-815, however, Wu Yüan-heng flatly refused to grant the most recent petition from the governor of Ch'eng-te, who was asking that the court grant a pardon to the rebels in Huai-hsi. Wu's refusal set off a com-

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plex chain of events. A few days later, Wu Yüan-heng was assassinated by a gang of mounted guerrillas, as he was leaving his mansion in Ch'ang-an for the regular morning audience with the emperor. Some suspects, military men from Ch'eng-te then staying in Ch'ang-an, were arrested and charged with the crime on circumstantial evidence. The emperor was so furious that he could not be dissuaded from attacking Ch'eng-te in 816.[99]

Ironically, it was discovered later that the governor of P'ing-lu was the real instigator of the assassination.[100] Nevertheless, the daringly provocative act of terror in the long run worked against provincial interests. To calm the frightened capital in 815, Hsien-tsung made a great show of rededication to the suppression of provincial separatism. Wu's martyrdom in that cause led directly to the appointment of his able deputy P'ei Tu as chief minister, and eventually to the crucial victory over Huai-hsi.

Li Chi-fu, the second of the important chief ministers in this period, was the son of a well-known official of Tai-tsung's time. He entered the bureaucracy through the *yin* privilege in his twenties and rose high enough in the hierarchy to attract some attention for his knowledge of ritual and protocol. Although Li Mi and Tou Shen both thought highly of him, he did not find favour with Lu Chih and was demoted in the 790s to be a prefect in several Yangtze valley prefectures. (Lu Chih's enemies were able to appoint Li Chi-fu to be Lu's superior, after the latter's exile in 794, expecting that Li Chi-fu would wreak revenge for all concerned, but nothing of the kind happened, and Li Chi-fu's reputation for magnanimity was enhanced greatly.) For some six years around the turn of the century, Li Chi-fu was sick and held no post at all. However, he spent this prolonged period away from Ch'ang-an familiarizing himself with local conditions and problems in the south, and when he eventually returned to the capital he had become one of the empire's most sensible and practical administrators. Hsien-tsung appointed him to the Han-lin academy in 805 and to a high drafting post in the Secretariat the following year. Li Chi-fu was soon involved with the most important issues of the day. He was a learned military tactician, a rare accomplishment for a civil official, and gave the emperor detailed advice on the conduct of the campaigns in Szechwan and in Che-hsi. He was familiar with the intricacies of the negotiations with the Tibetans. He presented the throne in 807 with a statistical abstract of the empire (the *Yüan-ho kuo-chi pu*, of which only fragments survive), and in 813 with a full-scale gazetteer and maps (the *Yüan-ho chün-hsien t'u-chih*, most of which is extant), along with books on political history and a handbook of officialdom. Together with Wu Yüan-heng he put forward several procedural reforms, dealing with both

[99] *TCTC* 239, pp. 7713–15.

[100] *TCTC* 239, p. 7717, and 241, p. 7767.

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central government and prefectures, the principle of which was to continue building the prestige of the bureaucracy.

During his terms as chief minister (807–8 and 811 until his death in 814; he held this post longer than anyone else under Hsien-tsung), Li Chi-fu was well-known for advocating an aggressive military posture for the central government, i.e. the policy loosely called *yung-ping* (use of force) in the historical sources. His basic position was really one of vigilant preparedness rather than indiscriminate belligerence, as we can see from his proposals to reorganize northern frontier defence in 813,[101] but the distinction is sometimes difficult to maintain. He took an uncompromisingly hard line against Huai-hsi and, as mentioned above, was closely connected with the actual planning of the imperial expedition before he died. Li Chi-fu was allied with Wu Yüan-heng on these issues but came into frequent conflict with Li Chiang, the third of the important chief ministers of Hsien-tsung's middle period.

Li Chiang was also a fourth-generation official, and a descendant of the same eminent clan that had produced Li Chi-fu, but his immediate forbears were somewhat less prominent. He had passed both the *chin-shih* and the higher doctoral *hung-tz'u* examinations, and apparently began his career using these qualifications instead of attempting to secure *yin*-privileged entry at a higher rank.[102] We know rather little about his early employment except that he made a special point of calling the practice of 'rectifying criticism' his métier. From 807 until 811 he was a Han-lin academician, and along with the young omissioner Po Chü-i, he ceaselessly exercised his right of remonstrance on a wide variety of topics. While he was in the Board of Finance, he pressed for an end to irregular fiscal practices and for the return of full control to the legally constituted channels.

Li Chiang differed greatly in temperament and style from Li Chi-fu. Hsien-tsung was well aware of this, but in order to encourage diversity of opinion at court the emperor made Li Chiang a chief minister in 811, about six months after reappointing Li Chi-fu to that position. In fact, on a number of issues the views of these two men were not really far apart, but their sharp conflict on the conduct of the provincial wars has overshadowed everything else in the historical record. In 812 the question of handling the voluntary submission proffered by the governor of Wei-po came to a head. Li Chiang, who had already counselled against the use of force in the Ho-pei area, feeling that it was too dangerous, offered the opinion that Wei-po should be coaxed by a soft policy of rewards and

[101] *TCTC* 239, pp. 7700–1.

[102] See the ch. by Denis Twitchett on governmental institutions in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 4; Ikeda On, 'Chūgoku ritsuryō to kanjin kikō', in *Niida Noboru Hakushi tsuito rombunshū, I: Zenkindai Ajia no hō to shakai* (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 151–71.

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forgiveness. Li Chi-fu, on the other hand, wanted to put pressure on Wei-po with a show of force. In this case Li Chiang prevailed. Wei-po authorities received the court envoy enthusiastically, not to mention the large bonus from the palace treasury.[103] The Huai-hsi crisis of 814 was a different matter, however, and more suited to Li Chi-fu's activist mentality. By that time, moreover, Hsien-tsung himself had adopted a tougher attitude towards the independent provinces, and Li Chiang had been demoted from the chief ministership to the Board of Rites, from which post his protestations carried less weight. In 819 Li Chiang was made governor of Ho-chung province. During the 820s, interestingly, he acquired a reputation as something of a crank; he was killed eventually by mutineers in western Szechwan after badly mishandling a riotous garrison there.

In spite of their various differences, the careers of these and other high officials of the Yüan-ho period were much more regular and predictable than those of bureaucrats during the reigns of Tai-tsung and Te-tsung. The process of rebuilding official morale was not limited to the capital, either. Hsien-tsung wanted to reintegrate the high provincial positions, especially the governorships, into the normal course of political appointment. This would not only break the grip of military men on such strategic posts, but would also check the court politicians' habit of regarding posts in Ch'ang-an as the only worthwhile offices to occupy. The details of how this was begun have not yet been clarified, but the effort must have involved the rotation of many provincial governorships at fixed intervals, a statutory procedure that had fallen into disuse under Te-tsung. At the very least, it is safe to say that from Hsien-tsung's time until perhaps the 870s, former chief ministers could expect to receive appointments as governors on completion of their service in Ch'ang-an. There were a few provinces – Ho-tung, Ho-chung and Shan-nan, for example – whose governors were very likely to be recently-retired important bureaucrats from the capital, or officials hoping for an early return to Ch'ang-an.[104] In this matter, the interests of centralization and bureaucratic predictability converged and may well have contributed to the period of political stability in the provinces in the mid-ninth century.

On the whole, Hsien-tsung deserves his reputation of having presided over the nearest re-creation of the legend of T'ai-tsung's court in late T'ang times. The emperor took obvious pride in being the patron of an exalted forum, saying that he wished he could spend more time in discussion with his chief ministers instead of being absorbed so often in

[103] *TCTC* 238, pp. 7692–4, and 239, pp. 7695–6.
[104] See Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai fan-chen yü chung-yang kuan-hsi chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1969), tables, pp. 658–69; 672–83; 730–40.

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workaday matters.[105] He encouraged the courtiers to speak out and was displeased if they shrank back from participation in important debates. At its best, the atmosphere he tried to promote stimulated self-confidence and a sense of participation among the courtiers. To those who had experienced the turmoil of late eighth-century Ch'ang-an, the transformation must have seemed incredible.

Disharmony at the end of Hsien-tsung's reign

There were limits upon the degree to which Hsien-tsung and his ministers were able to cooperate, in spite of the great improvement we have just described. We should not underestimate the strain under which the emperor laboured. His flashes of moody petulance, discernible in the records of court affairs, doubtless reminded the courtiers that no emperor, least of all one preoccupied with such a grand political design, should be trifled with. His personal life, including inner palace matters and his role as leader of the imperial clan, was especially dangerous ground for members of the outer court to tread upon.[106] But even in areas of proper governmental concern, although Hsien-tsung repeatedly requested and accepted frank criticism, there was a limit to what he would tolerate. Already in the early part of his reign, this had resulted in a familiar dilemma for the remonstrating officials – censors, remembrancers and omissioners – whose responsibility it was to draw the emperor's attention to irregularities. They took grave risks if they carried out their mandate faithfully in sensitive matters. The poet Yüan Chen (779–831), for example, was praised and accorded an imperial audience for his memorials of 806 on the need for more openness at court, which doubtless encouraged him to undertake a very vigorous prosecution of scandals in eastern Szechwan during his tour there in 809.[107] Throughout this period he accumulated a number of powerful enemies, and after the resignation of his patron, the chief minister P'ei Chi, in 810, Yüan was banished for exceeding his authority as inspecting censor in an incident involving the influential mayor of Lo-yang.

This sort of tension began to enter the main political arena in the mid-810s. While Hsien-tsung on occasion still suffered one or another of the chief ministers to play the role of the honest man,[108] it became clearer that he wished to keep debate on key state issues well-controlled, and

[105] *TCTC* 239, pp. 7697–8.
[106] E.g. *TCTC* 239, pp. 7704–5; Li Chiang, *Li Hsiang-kuo lun-shih chi (i-wen)*, 4.
[107] *TCTC* 237, pp. 7630–3; C. A. Peterson, 'Corruption unmasked: Yüan Chen's investigations in Szechwan', *AM*, 18 (1972) 34–78.
[108] Li Fan, for example. Biographies in *CTS* 148; *HTS* 169.

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within the circle of the highest officials. As his vision of centralization took shape, ministerial dissent was more frequently construed as an insult to his imperial will. After the assassination of Wu Yüan-heng, in particular, Hsien-tsung could not be dissuaded from opening a second front in the north-east against Ch'eng-te province, despite the military complications this introduced into the fight against Huai-hsi in the south. Those who questioned the effectiveness of the strong approach to the provinces were well-advised to suppress their opinions; chief minister Chang Hung-ching (760–824), for example, resigned his post in early 816, knowing that Hsien-tsung would not listen to his counsel of moderation.

This strong-minded emperor came into conflict even with the most talented, most loyal members of the high bureaucracy. A good example may be found in the career of P'ei Tu (765–839). Some background on his career will be useful.

P'ei was a third-generation official and a member of the great P'ei clan of Ho-tung, which had been closely connected with the T'ang from the very beginning, and which produced seventeen chief ministers over the course of the dynasty, more than from any other but the imperial clan itself.[109] He was a graduate not only of the *chin-shih* examination of 789, but also of two imperially-ordered higher examinations (*chih-k'o*) in 792 and 794. After holding various posts in Ho-nan and in the Censorate, he served on Wu Yüan-heng's staff during the stabilization of western Szechwan in 808–9. He was not tied irrevocably to any single point of view on war policy at that time, however, and was responsible for the delicate negotiations to implement Li Chiang's plan in Wei-po in 812. He again became an aide to Wu Yüan-heng and was at his side in the assassination fracas of 815, during which he was wounded. Hsien-tsung defiantly promoted P'ei Tu to the rank of chief minister shortly afterwards (in spite of the cautious court officials who wished to avoid antagonizing the provincial governors further) as a symbol of his determination to press forward with the policy of centralization. P'ei Tu's bravery in refusing to seclude himself against another assassination attempt won the emperor's deep respect.

As the war against Huai-hsi and Ch'eng-te dragged on through 816 and into 817, court opinion became increasingly fragmented as to what was wrong and what to do about it. There was a constant reshuffling of generals, but quite apart from the tenacious defence mounted by the governor of Huai-hsi, mere changes in personnel were never likely to improve an effort that was strategically questionable and very badly coordinated from the imperial side. Many courtiers were deeply pessimis-

[109] *HTS* 71A, pp. 2179–244. See also the Changs in *HTS* 73C.

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tic, and there was a growing feeling that abandonment of the war was the only way to prevent the central government's utter ruin. The emperor stubbornly clung to the hope that better tactics were the answer. He was finally persuaded in 817 to give up the second front against Ch'eng-te for the time being in order to concentrate on Huai-hsi. A few months later, chief ministers Li Feng-chi (758–835) and Wang Ya (*c.* 760–835), once again citing the immense cost of the war and the continued lack of success, led one wing of the court to urge the cessation of all war activities. At that point P'ei Tu persuaded Hsien-tsung to let him take personal charge of imperial forces in the south and make a dramatic trip into the war zone, in order to stop the bickering among the generals and organize the troops for a final effort. This was desperately necessary, for the Huai-hsi campaign had exhibited all the worst characteristics of disparate field commands common in imperial operations ever since the An Lu-shan rebellion. Much doubt remains as to how this mission was carried out because the accounts written about it represent different vantage points. The noted general Li Su (773–821), son of the hero of the 780s war, Li Sheng, must be given credit for the decisive, sudden attack that took the capital of Huai-hsi, but it is reasonable to assume that P'ei Tu had prepared the way in the political and organizational spheres.[110] He was certainly responsible for applying Hsien-tsung's customary policy of leniency to the defeated population of Huai-hsi (as opposed to the leaders of the rebellion, who were executed). This policy was responsible for calming the area once the war was finally over. To Hsien-tsung, P'ei Tu was the hero of the hour, and he was showered with honours. The less aggressive chief ministers were in disgrace. Shortly afterwards, P'ei Tu went on to coordinate the final campaign of the reign against P'ing-lu province.

P'ei Tu's well-deserved political eminence was the high point in this period of the trend towards a stronger and more self-assertive bureaucratic establishment. But, as we have suggested, there were limits beyond which emperor and bureaucracy were likely to come into conflict. What was to prevent P'ei Tu's successors from emulating not his example, but that of Yang Kuo-chung or Yüan Tsai? Hsien-tsung could not help but be concerned that the high civil authorities would regard, say, the direction of military operations on a large scale not as a special arrangement made to cope with a specific situation, but as something they had a right to undertake. His fears had been anticipated by his predecessors, who had tried, with varying degrees of success, to separate and restrict the scope of delegated authority. The object of this was precisely to prevent the

[110] *CTS* 170, pp. 4416–18.

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bureaucracy from combining powers in such a way as to challenge imperial supremacy. Although Hsien-tsung was more willing than Tai-tsung or Te-tsung to sponsor a revival of bureaucratic prestige and morale, he was no less determined than they to retain ultimate control of the state.

The clash occurred very soon, in fact, in the civil sphere. Hsien-tsung wished to appoint two men, Huang-fu Po (*c.* 755–820) and Ch'eng I (d. 819) to the chief ministerships in 818. P'ei Tu and a number of other high officials objected vigorously to his plan, even though it was the common practice for the emperor personally to appoint bureaucrats of the fifth rank and above, as distinguished from those of the sixth rank and below. The lower-ranking officials, who constituted the vast majority of those in the service, were routinely named by the Board of Civil Office. As the power of the chief ministers grew, however, it was only natural that they should want to influence the choice of men for the empire's highest posts as well.

Huang-fu Po and Ch'eng I presented an interesting case. Both men were financial officials, or more precisely, had been associated with the efforts of the government to raise money in the midst of the Huai-hsi campaign, when it was very badly needed. Their revenue measures, undertaken quickly and expediently, were probably harsh, but the extreme bias of the historical record against them makes such a characterization difficult to evaluate.[111] (Huang-fu Po was known primarily for his stringent actions to improve the efficiency of grain transport, while Ch'eng I was linked with a financial tour to the south-east in 817 that netted almost two million strings of cash for the prosecution of the war.) But perhaps more important were the facts of their social background. Unlike the distinguished P'ei clan to which P'ei Tu belonged, the Huang-fu clan of An-ting was not one of the very highest T'ang aristocratic lineages, but was in the second rank of clans, commonly known as *chün-wang*.[112] Ch'eng I's origins are less clear, but we know that he did not come from the highest stratum of the upper class either. A further mark against Ch'eng was his earlier association with the parvenus in the Wang Shu-wen clique.

The rapid elevation of these men to the summit of the bureaucracy produced an uproar in the capital over their political and social qualifications. P'ei Tu and his colleague Ts'ui Ch'ün (772–832), an equally high-born official, led the attack against them, saying that the court would be made a laughing-stock by the presence of such low characters.[113] P'ei also charged them with incompetence and dishonesty, arguing that their

[111] *HTS* 54, pp. 1379–80.
[112] See Ikeda On, 'Tōdai no gumbyō hō: kyū-jū seiki no Tonkō shahon o chūshin to shite', *Tōyō gakuhō* (Tokyo) 42.3–4 (1959–60), pp. 80, 88.
[113] *TCTC* 240, pp. 7752–3.

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schemes had already infuriated the campaign troops and would doubtless stir up more trouble in the future.

Hsien-tsung no doubt understood the real reasons for P'ei's antagonism, and the objections voiced against Huang-fu and Ch'eng had no effect, in the end, on the emperor's determination to establish his own criteria for appointing high officials. P'ei Tu unwisely forced the issue to a resolution, however, linking the employment of Huang-fu and Ch'eng to the possibility that Hsien-tsung's entire political achievement might collapse from moral failings. He laid his own prestige against the emperor's, a stand that was very close to *lèse-majesté*, and Hsien-tsung had no choice but to dismiss him. As usual, the dismissal was to a provincial governorship, the important province of Ho-tung in fact, and the affair was smoothed over for public consumption. Yet this episode reveals much about the power relationships at the late T'ang court.

The same holds true in the perennial struggle over the use of eunuchs. It is true that Hsien-tsung made sure that there were fewer eunuch scandals of the type that had been common under Te-tsung. Partly because of various reforms of court procedure, furthermore, the eunuchs must have seemed less prominent in court affairs for a time early in Hsien-tsung's reign. In short order, however, these concessions to the more orthodox anti-eunuch sentiment were revealed as being largely symbolic. For example, the private imperial treasury (*nei-k'u*), revitalized by P'ei Yen-ling in the 790s and staffed by eunuchs, was nominally abolished in 805, to the delight of officialdom. But after much of Te-tsung's accumulated reserve was spent on war needs by about 809, eunuchs again became active in finance, despite repeated protests from outer court officials.

The involvement of eunuchs in military affairs was a supercharged issue throughout Hsien-tsung's reign. Their activities had gradually expanded into a complex network of spying, influence-peddling and corruption, not merely in the Shen-ts'e Army, but in many of the provincial armies and among the would-be generals in Ch'ang-an as well. Occasionally Hsien-tsung seemed willing to yield to political pressure, as when he removed the eunuchs temporarily from the Shen-ts'e command during the Liu P'i incident, but in other cases he proved to be extremely devious. He fired T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui from the leadership of the Ch'eng-te expedition and later sent him away from court, but soon afterwards, T'u-t'u's arch-enemy Li Chiang was dismissed from the chief ministership in 813, and the eunuch was returned to an influential court position.[114]

We can only guess at the extent of eunuch political activity in the capital under Hsien-tsung, but one indication of its growing power was

[114] *TCTC* 239, p. 7703.

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the establishment of the position of commissioner of privy affairs (*shu-mi shih*) in 810.[115] The first occupant of this post was a eunuch named Liang Shou-ch'ien. During most of the ninth century, there were two such commissioners, and they headed an office called the Shu-mi yüan. The Shu-mi yüan was not, as in Sung times, a military directorate, but was an outgrowth of the role of eunuchs in the transmission of documents between the outer court and the emperor.[116] It became a coordinating body at the palace for the various other activities in which the eunuchs were engaged, and therefore it is perhaps suitable to translate the term Shu-mi yüan as the Eunuchs' Palace Council.[117] This council may have been an informal advisory body to the emperor as well. It certainly provided a link between the imperial domestic household and the eunuchs in supervisory positions at the Shen-ts'e Army. The Palace Council commissioners and the two protectors of the army became known collectively as the 'four dignitaries' (*ssu kuei*). In short, this council, invested with insignia and other perquisites to flatter its occupants and impress outsiders, became the focus of eunuch interests. Later in the ninth century the council commissioners acquired sufficient power to rival or dominate the chief ministers, but, as always, their power was a function of the control exercised over them by the emperor, and until the very end of his reign Hsien-tsung seems to have kept a tight hold on most eunuch activities.

This is not the view that many of the traditional historians have taken. They see an increase of all sorts of impiety in the period after about 818, culminating in the death of the emperor early in 820. It has been thought for many centuries that a palace eunuch named Ch'en Hung-chih murdered Hsien-tsung.[118] This can never really be proved, or disproved either, but the story raises some interesting questions. Was it in the interests of the eunuchs to get rid of Hsien-tsung, still only in his forties, before he turned from provincial battlefields to further reform in Ch'ang-an? The very great power of the eunuchs in the matter of the imperial succession, from that time until the end of the dynasty, obviously had political ramifications in each case, so it would be reasonable to assume that this violent incident was simply the first such political act. But on the other hand, why should the eunuchs as a group harm an emperor who had done so much for them already? Is it not more likely that, as in many of the later succession crises, the eunuchs had split among themselves and were playing out their own rivalries with the lives of imperial princes? We

[115] *TFYK* 665, p. 8b.

[116] *WHTK* 58, p. 523.

[117] Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu*, pp. 75–6. Translation proposed by Liu Yat-wing in his 'The Shen-ts'e armies and the palace commissions in China, 755–875 A.D.', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1970.

[118] *TCTC* 241, pp. 7776–7.

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know that Liang Shou-ch'ien, the eunuch who was so important in the reign of Hsien-tsung's son Mu-tsung (reign 820–4), survived this episode and that T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui did not; presumably T'u-t'u fell victim to the internal power struggle. Liang also had an imperial prince killed to settle the issue in Mu-tsung's favour, and he distributed rewards to the Shen-ts'e Army troops to cement their loyalties – circumstantial evidence that appears fairly strong.

Still another hypothesis is that Hsien-tsung died of a drug overdose, after which the eunuchs found they could not agree on the choice of a new emperor. Like most of the late T'ang emperors, Hsien-tsung delved into alchemy and was intensely interested in long-life elixirs, many of which contained poisons that produced precisely the opposite effect. Near the end of his life, he was said to have shown symptoms of mental instability, and the slow, cumulative effects of lethal substances might explain why such signs of illness took so long to appear. The eunuchs were undoubtedly involved in facilitating the emperor's alchemical experiments. But then again Huang-fu Po and other outer court figures actively sponsored thaumaturges and other adepts at court in this period, one of whom was even given an official post as the magistrate of the district around the holy Mount T'ien-t'ai,[119] an unprecedented act of favour that infuriated proper bureaucrats. The widespread 'Confucian' explanation of Hsien-tsung's bad end as the result of general moral decay covers the most ground, of course, but it does not help us to get at the more important political problems underlying the emperor's death. The later battles over imperial succession are not so hard to appraise, because we can reason backwards from the results, especially the triumph of this or that group of eunuchs, but ultimately the palace intrigues of T'ang times will remain obscure to us. Ssu-ma Kuang admitted that when all was said and done, it was impossible to distinguish truth from falsehood in the accounts of Hsien-tsung's death.

MID-NINTH-CENTURY COURT (820–59)

During the ninth century the palace eunuchs played a large part in almost every transfer of imperial power. Mu-tsung's accession after the death of Hsien-tsung was the first of these instances.[120] There are several reasons why the eunuchs were able to interfere so easily in this crucial process: the physical isolation of the imperial family within the two inner palaces

[119] *TCTC* 240, pp. 7754–5.
[120] One can include Hsien-tsung's accession also. See Wang Yün-sheng, 'Lun erh Wang pa ssu-ma cheng-chih ko-hsin ti li-shih i-i', pp. 112–15.

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(the main palace and the eastern palace, where the heir apparent lived); the growing control of the eunuchs over the internal transmission of documents, which enabled them to tamper with testamentary decrees (*i-chao*); the increased political strength of the eunuchs and their connection with the outer court factions, which are discussed in more detail below; and, ultimately, the ability of the eunuchs to enforce their wishes in the Ch'ang-an area by using the Shen-ts'e Army. There were also ambiguities in the selection of the heir apparent which were manipulated by the eunuchs. The upbringing and education of the heir apparent, not to mention his investiture as such and participation in the various ceremonies of state, were matters of the highest ritual importance and were regulated in great detail. But the designation of a particular prince as heir apparent, and his actual accession, were in the highest degree political. The general rule that the eldest son of the principal consort be named heir apparent was breached more often than it was honoured.

Obviously any emperor owing his throne to the intervention of eunuchs was to some degree beholden to them. However, the dismal picture painted of the ninth-century court in this respect by traditional historians is overgeneralized. Eunuchs clearly influenced Ching-tsung (reign 824–7) more than Wu-tsung (reign 840–6) or Hsiuan-tsung (reign 846–59). But once one tries to go much beyond such general statements, a host of difficulties arises. Mu-tsung's relationship with the eunuch Liang Shou-ch'ien, who secured the throne for him, is a good example. If the palace struggle over his accession was of long standing, as some accounts suggest, involving rival eunuch cliques that go back to the early 810s, then Liang Shou-ch'ien would have rendered a very great service indeed by battling for Mu-tsung's interest year in and year out.[121] But if the palace struggle was a flash in the pan, beginning only in 819 or so, Liang's efforts on Mu-tsung's behalf might have been transparently opportunistic. If basic facts such as these are unknown, how can we hope to understand the post-enthronement relationship between them? All we can say is that Liang's influence over Mu-tsung seems to have been considerable, and that it increased towards the end of his reign, although Liang then began to share his power with his colleague Wang Shou-ch'eng (d. 835). We shall discuss eunuchs frequently in the following pages, and our general approach will be to discount the time-worn charges of utter tyranny and depravity levelled against the ninth-century eunuchs, which may be found even in modern scholarly works on the subject.

In any case, the 24-year-old Mu-tsung faced other problems besides his personal indebtedness to the eunuchs. Hsien-tsung's sudden death had

[121] *TCTC k'ao-i*, p. 7691.

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broken the continuity of the programme of military centralization before the empire had been fully stabilized. As we have seen, the provinces of the north-east had been conquered in the 810s but not really reintegrated under central control. In the absence of a firm imperial policy, all the dissension and uncertainty at court over the proper handling of that sensitive region once again came to the surface. For example, the governor of Ch'eng-te, Wang Ch'eng-tsung, died in 820, after which his younger brother Wang Ch'eng-yüan took over his post with the support of the subordinate generals. This posed a familiar problem: should the court accede to the local choice for governor, or attempt to impose a new governor from without? Late in 820 the court made a bad compromise. A wholesale shift of all the governors in the north-east was decreed – Wang was sent off to I-ch'eng province, the governor of Wei-po packed off to Ch'eng-te, the older imperial general Li Su placed in Wei-po, and so on. Apparently the idea was to recognize the claims of the north-eastern governors to participate in politics, but not to let them do it on their home territory. Incredible as it may seem, there was little consideration of the political dislocation these orders would inevitably cause.

In 821 Mu-tsung dispatched a civilian governor of his own choosing to Yu-chou, the only north-eastern province that had remained neutral during Hsien-tsung's wars. For the better part of a hundred years, the governors of Yu-chou had been local military people. Suddenly they had to deal with an arrogant Ch'ang-an bureaucrat, who rode about in a sedan chair, neglecting his official duties and permitting his subordinates to abuse their prerogatives. This powder keg very soon blew up in the court's face. There was a mutiny in Ch'eng-te, and then a full-scale rebellion, in 821; the court campaign to suppress it was an expensive failure.[122] Then another mutiny in Yu-chou threw off the court-appointed governor, and the province simply had to be written off by the central government. Wei-po too rose against Ch'ang-an, allying itself with the regimes in Yu-chou and Ch'eng-te. By the middle of 822, the situation in the north-east was much the same as it had been before Hsien-tsung undertook the enormous trouble and expense of subduing the autonomous provinces in the first place.

There are many reasons commonly advanced for the military failures that contributed to this discouraging turn of events.[123] First of all, the campaigns against the Ho-pei provinces had been fought primarily with provincial forces of inadequate size, badly coordinated and insufficiently supplied. (Even the distinguished veteran commanders Li Kuang-yen and P'ei Tu, called in at a rather late stage, were unable to pull things

[122] *TCTC* 242, pp. 7796–9, 7807–9. [123] *TCTC* 242, pp. 7805–6, 7808.

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together.) Furthermore, eunuchs had been appointed to lesser field commands through the influence of the eunuch army supervisors, an irregularity that supposedly disrupted the chain of command. Attempts had been made to direct tactics from Ch'ang-an, where battle information was frequently out-of-date. Many of the best troops were reserved by generals as their bodyguards. This left the less skilled soldiers to bear the brunt of the fighting. These weaknesses were familiar ones, of course, visible time and again in the conduct of imperial expeditions ever since the An Lu-shan rebellion. A political scapegoat was sought to atone for them: chief minister Hsiao Mien (in office 820–1), who since the middle of Hsien-tsung's reign had been known for his reluctance to use force against the provinces. Hsiao was accused of misleading Mu-tsung into the belief that the empire was already at peace, and of having no long-range plans to complete the process of stabilization. However, the problem was very delicate indeed. Somehow the huge army establishment had to be placated with rewards and yet reduced in size and influence lest the civil government be overwhelmed entirely; and at the same time adequate precautions had to be maintained against the spread of provincial discontent, not only in the north-east but also in the south-east, where smaller mutinies occurred late in 822. Of course Hsiao Mien's dismissal alone did not solve this problem, and it was not long before the blame was transferred to the emperor himself. Like Te-tsung, Mu-tsung was reported to favour a 'lax' (*ku-hsi*) stance towards the provinces, with all its overtones of lack of moral courage.

In general, Mu-tsung was not accorded that mixture of fear and respect essential to the functioning of the T'ang imperial system. Part of the reason lay in his own personality. The heavy responsibilities of the emperorship and the demanding model of his dynamic father were thrust upon him before he was ready to undertake them. He seems to have been a fairly ordinary young man, full of life and eager for good times with his friends in the palace and the army. He loved hunting, wild games of polo, and lavish banquets with entertainments of singing and dancing. As the orthodox histories smugly report, he gave himself over to sexual indulgence. True or not, such stories damaged his reputation, and he was subjected to a barrage of criticism about his conduct.[124] The moral responsibility for correcting his behaviour was taken so seriously that chief minister Hsiao Mien and one of his colleagues were downgraded for dereliction of duty at the time of the annual assessment of performance in office (*k'ao*). Matters became much worse early in 823 when Mu-tsung fell from his horse during a polo match, an accident that left him an

[124] e.g. *TCTC* 241, pp. 7778, 7781–2, 7783–4, and 243, p. 7828.

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invalid. As a result he was unable to attend to state affairs, and many of his responsibilities were taken over entirely by the eunuchs Liang Shou-ch'ien and Wang Shou-ch'eng. Wang supplied Mu-tsung with a physician, but to no avail. Mu-tsung died at the beginning of 824, and as the result of a hurried decree of investiture promulgated just after his accidental injury, his fifteen-year-old son Ching-tsung ascended the throne.

But part of the reason for Mu-tsung's failure must be laid at the feet of the bureaucracy. Before his final illness, the young emperor had made some sincere efforts to perform his duties, but he did not receive whole-hearted cooperation from the high bureaucracy. Soon after assuming the throne, for example, he asked his former tutors to take up chief minister-ships, only to be refused. Mu-tsung was forced to turn from one sort of courtier to the next – young Han-lin academicians, old military heroes, politicians who had made their names under his father – but he seems to have been served only indifferently by most of them.[125] Many bureaucrats of the time were preoccupied with their own political rivalries, and to understand them a bit better we must discuss the question of factionalism, which is perhaps the thorniest topic in the history of the ninth-century court.

Factionalism

A case of alleged corruption and favouritism in the *chin-shih* examination of 821 marked the emergence of a lengthy, intra-class political struggle for control of the middle and higher ranks of the Ch'ang-an bureaucracy. Conventionally known as the 'Niu-Li factional strife' (*Niu-Li tang-cheng*)[126] after Niu Seng-ju (d. 847) and Li Te-yü (787–850), two of the protagonists, this controversy had roots in personal animosity that dated back to the reign of Hsien-tsung. During the 820s the animosity came out into the open, drawing more and more people into political involvement with one group of courtiers or the other. These groups were called 'factions' (*tang*), both at that time and also in subsequent historical accounts, but they were not what we think of as factions or parties in the modern sense. Rather than being closely knit, well-defined and well-disciplined pressure groups with a basis in common economic, political or ideological interest, the ninth-century Chinese *tang* were loose associations among politicians, arising from complex networks of personal relations that defy easy characterization. A *tang* did not solicit members on grounds of policy differences, as a political party might do today; it did not have a strong cellular structure; and its membership was not fixed. One man was likely

[125] See *CTW* 650, pp. 3a–4a.
[126] Also known as *erh Li tang-cheng*, after Li Tsung-min and Li Te-yü.

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to be linked to the next, in a never-ending chain of associations, for quite personal reasons. These included family connections, common origins, patronage relationships either in the examinations or in the course of an official career, colleague relationships, and simple instances of friendship and enmity.[127] Unfortunately, many of the details about the networks of relationships that constituted the two *tang* of the mid-ninth century are too obscure to be recovered. This is because our biographical information for T'ang times is limited to a small segment of the ruling elite, and because even in this material there are many contradictions and omissions that make it difficult to trace factional alignments very far. When we interpret ninth-century factionalism, then, we are really talking about a few leaders on both sides – what they did, with whom they were allied, and with whom they were at odds. As we shall see below, the poor quality of the evidence severely constrains any effort to discover a deep significance in the Niu-Li controversy. It especially undercuts the various attempts to identify ideological positions or sociological differentiation as causes of the formation of the factions.

In my opinion, the 'faction' leaders were in pursuit of political power, and they attracted followers who hoped to share in the spoils. This should be evident from the story of the disputed examination of 821. In the spring of that year, when the results of the tests held the previous winter were posted, a former chief minister named Tuan Wen-ch'ang (773–835) was quick to notice that the list of those who had passed contained a suspiciously large number of 'sons and younger brothers' (*tzu-ti*) of prominent court figures.[128] One of the successful candidates was the son-in-law of Tuan's enemy Li Tsung-min (d. 846), another was the younger brother of the assistant chief examiner, a third was the son of the prominent former chief minister P'ei Tu, and so on. Tuan Wen-ch'ang sent in an angry memorial, protesting that favouritism and 'connections' (*kuan-chieh*) had prejudiced the outcome of the examination. Han-lin academicians Yüan Chen, Li Shen (d. 846), and Li Te-yü joined in the protest, since each of them had a special reason to be upset about the way the examination had turned out. Mu-tsung could not ignore their objections. He ordered Po Chü-i and another courtier to conduct a second examination. This time all but one of the previously successful candidates were failed, and the original examiners fell into disgrace.

In fact, however, the *chin-shih* examination of 821 was not unusually corrupt or subject to outside influences, except perhaps in the number of candidates caught short. We must remember that the examination system

[127] E.g. between the Li and Lü families. *CTS* 137, p. 3769.
[128] *TFYK* 337, p. 21b.

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was still at an early stage of development under the T'ang. It did not begin to meet the standards of objectivity associated with the examination system under the Ming and Ch'ing. By and large, a candidate's success depended as much on establishing a receptive mood in the examiner's mind as it did on his actual performance at the time of the written test. It was a regular practice, for example, to send 'warm-up compositions' (*wen-chüan*) ahead of time to the chief examiner, as a means of demonstrating one's literary talent. The examiners were not indisposed to consider such self-advertisement, since one of their primary motivations in conducting the tests was to pass an outstanding group of young men whose career prospects were bright and who could be counted upon for future political support. It was assumed, of course, that the officials who were accorded the great honour of administering the examinations would feel moral compunctions against flagrant abuse of their trust. In practice this informal means of control worked fairly well. But, despite righteous rhetoric to the contrary, the family and other connections of the examinees were never ignored. On this occasion, Tuan Wen-ch'ang and Li Shen in particular were disingenuous in complaining of the examiners' favouritism, for each of them had approached the examiners earlier to urge the merits of his own pet candidate.[129]

In 821 the young examinees were mere pawns. The men standing on the sidelines transformed the examination into a political event. All of them were in the crucial middle stages of their careers. Either they had known power briefly and hungered for it again, or they were just at the point where they might hope to attain it for the first time. We know that there were two very important lines of demarcation on the long climb up the ladder of T'ang officialdom: that between the fifth and sixth rank, and that between the third and fourth rank. Those who had passed the first dividing line, in other words those who had emerged from the faceless bureaucracy to join the two thousand or so officials of the fourth and fifth ranks, could congratulate themselves on their eminently respectable success. They were admitted to the society of the capital, were permitted to attend certain court audiences, and were given distinctive financial and sumptuary privileges, the most important of which was to be allowed to designate one son for entry into the officialdom (the *yin* privilege). At the same time, though, many of the fourth- and fifth-ranked posts were still concerned largely with routine matters. Those who aspired to real power in the T'ang state had two ways of getting it: they could try to become close to the emperor in one of the special offices we have discussed before – Han-lin academician or commissioner for salt and iron – and take their

[129] *TFYK* 337, p. 21b; *TCTC* 241, pp. 7790–1.

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chances on length of tenure; or they could try to move up into the very top ranks of the regular bureaucracy, the third rank and above. These pre-eminent posts included the positions normally carrying chief ministers' duties, and naturally they were far fewer in number. The effect of ambitious men 'looking forward to a chief ministership' (*wang-hsiang*) was brutal. It was just as important for these hopeful chief ministers to thwart possible rivals as to draw attention to themselves. The recriminations over the examination affair of 821 were designed to serve these purposes.

It is hard to imagine that a strong-minded emperor like Hsien-tsung would have permitted such political abuse of an examination, or, for that matter, allowed the courtiers to engage in blatant political infighting at all. As many scholars have pointed out, the idea that a true gentleman should not have a selfish motive for associating with others had great authority in traditional China. It had solid backing in a variety of classical texts of the pre-Ch'in period. Later it was generalized to construe any alliance for political purposes as a violation of the all-important relations between the ruler and his subject-officials. Chinese political theory generally held that if 'factions' were allowed to form at court (factions being the logical result of extensive political activities) then the desired harmony of the moral and social order would be harmed grievously. Strong emperors throughout Chinese history therefore took pains to efface the stigma of factionalism from their courts, out of concern both for the protection of their own political interests and also for the judgment to be rendered upon them by future historians.[130] Naturally, officials did not stop building political alliances and did not stop contending with one another, despite the sanitized descriptions of ideal, strife-free reigns held up to them as models. What powerful emperors really accomplished was to make it very dangerous to carry on 'factional' activities in public. Under such circumstances it was foolish to reveal the extent of one's connections or influence, even while employing them to the full in the upward scramble. It was disastrous to flaunt them, for the suspicion of factionalism was easy to awaken. Frequently, officials tried to manipulate the prejudice against factionalism to their own advantage, but this too had its risks. The overtones of moral decay in the word *tang* were so strong that accuser, as well as accused, might find himself on the road to exile.

A very different situation took shape under the weaker emperors of the 820s and 830s. Mu-tsung, and his sons Ching-tsung and Wen-tsung in

[130] See David S. Nivison, 'Ho-shen and his accusers: ideology and political behavior in the eighteenth century', in David S. Nivison and A. F. Wright, eds. *Confucianism in action* (Stanford, 1959), pp. 220–32.

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their own ways too, were incapable of overawing the officials of the capital. This lack of general control meant that they were unable to crush factional behaviour as Hsien-tsung and Te-tsung had done countless times, or, what is the same thing, to prevent the intense political struggle for power in the upper strata of the post-Hsien-tsung court from coming out into the open and from becoming increasingly acrimonious. Furthermore, factionalism had an undeniably cumulative effect. It became progressively harder for these emperors to suppress it. The one determined attempt to put an end to factionalism before it had run its course – the so-called Sweet Dew plot of 835 – was an utter fiasco, as we shall see. It is certainly possible to speculate that had Hsiuan-tsung (reign 846–59), a man of iron will and fierce jealousy, succeeded his father Hsien-tsung directly, the factional strife of the mid-ninth century would have been far less intense, perhaps unrecognizable to Chinese as factionalism at all.

Another reason for the unusual intensity, and subsequent notoriety, of the Niu-Li controversy was the participation of eunuchs in factional politics. The growth of eunuch power and the creation of the various offices that were their special preserve, had on the whole been resisted by literati officials in the latter half of the eighth century. But after the failure of the Wangs to undermine the eunuchs in 805, a number of the shrewder bureaucrats must have realized that eunuchs were, like it or not, part of the political world of Ch'ang-an. To be sure, a dogmatic diatribe of the familiar sort was prolonged throughout Hsien-tsung's reign by some of the less adaptable, more orthodox bureaucrats, and we have noted the increased friction this caused between them and the emperor. But behind the scenes, accommodation was taking place. While officials no doubt detested T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui, for instance, they also had to collaborate with him and other important eunuchs on practical matters. In the meantime, the eunuchs had ceased to be a solid bloc; indeed the process of dissolution had probably kept pace with each gain made by the eunuchs, for as they achieved more power after the turn of the century, there was more for them to fight about among themselves. The internal politics of the eunuchs became quite complicated as eunuch 'families' proliferated. Eunuch-official contacts multiplied. The participants in court intrigue criss-crossed the line between the inner and outer courts, in search of the strongest allies they could find. After 820, in the absence of an emperor of Hsien-tsung's stature, there was no one to stop them from doing so freely and openly. By the mid-820s, then, the eunuchs were fully integrated into the highest T'ang political circles, and the entire court had become the arena for factional struggle. From that time until the end of the dynasty, it was virtually impossible for any politician (partisan or not)

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wishing to be effective in government affairs to avoid extensive contact with eunuchs.

The coalescence of contending individuals into two distinct groups took several years. Under Mu-tsung the Niu group, on balance, was more successful than the Li group in attracting allies and subordinates, and in moving to control the chief ministerships and appointments to the Han-lin academy, which were the most important of the central government offices. Here we shall look at just one stage of this exceedingly complicated process, in the hope that it will serve as an example of how factional politics worked in general at the highest level.

Through the early 820s the Niu faction was led primarily by a man named Li Feng-chi (758–835), not by Niu Seng-ju directly. Li Feng-chi was a member of a minor branch of the imperial clan and had had extensive experience in the T'ang diplomatic service early in the ninth century. As we noted above, Hsien-tsung appointed him to be a chief minister in 816. Soon, however, he came into conflict with P'ei Tu, the senior chief minister at that time, over the conduct of the Huai-hsi campaign. Their disagreements became so heated that Hsien-tsung dismissed Li Feng-chi from his position. This was the sort of long-standing animosity that came to the surface under Mu-tsung. Because Mu-tsung needed militarily experienced officials to deal with the Ho-pei problem, P'ei Tu's fortunes were again on the rise in the early 820s while the prospects for his by now implacable enemy Li Feng-chi were correspondingly bleak. Just in the nick of time, however, Li became the beneficiary, politically speaking, of a quite separate personal rivalry – an example of the unexpected effects caused by the intensification of political action under the new emperor. The poet Yüan Chen hated P'ei Tu just as much as Li Feng-chi did. In the early 820s Yüan was a Han-lin academician, highly regarded by Mu-tsung. Some time in the autumn of 821, however, he foolishly let himself become involved in a scheme to undercut P'ei Tu's effective military authority in the north-eastern campaigns. The following year their altercation turned very ugly; P'ei accused Yüan of trying to arrange for his assassination. Although a subsequent inquiry revealed no evidence of actual crimes, both Yüan and P'ei were demoted anyway. This left Li Feng-chi as an obvious candidate for promotion, and he received a chief ministership in 822. In turn Li used his influence to arrange for the elevation of his friend Niu Seng-ju, then in the Censorate, to be his junior colleague. These developments blocked Li Te-yü's hopes for a chief ministership, since already by this time he was on bad terms with Niu Seng-ju. Li Te-yü was sent out to be the governor of Che-hsi in the autumn of 823, and he remained outside the capital for some seven years. In 823 and 824 Li

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Table 9. *High leadership of ninth-century political factions*

Niu party
Niu Seng-ju (d. 847)
Li Tsung-min (d. 846)
Li Feng-chi (758–835)
Li party
Li Te-yü (787–850)
P'ei Tu (765–839)
Li Shen (d. 846)

Feng-chi wooed Mu-tsung and the influential eunuch Wang Shou-ch'eng, proceeding steadily to outmanoeuvre the associates of P'ei Tu and Li Te-yü over the course of the next several years. The result was a consolidation of power in the hands of the group we now call the Niu faction.

It would be tedious to recount all the details of such factional infighting, not least because of the kaleidoscope of names and events spanning two decades. Furthermore, the biographies in the T'ang histories, our primary sources, are filled with inconsistencies on these matters. The fortunes of many individuals are quite hard to follow, and at times one is not certain which faction a man actually belonged to, if either. Nevertheless, we can be fairly sure that the methods employed by Li Feng-chi were representative of what the leaders of both factions were doing, even though Li Feng-chi's activities are castigated in the historical sources that are biased in favour of Li Te-yü.[131] In particular, there seems to be no reason to accept the suggestions made by the modern scholar Ts'en Chung-mien that Li Te-yü did not have a faction, or the implication that he was a virtuous man beleaguered by evil opponents.[132] It is inconceivable that Li Te-yü, a very shrewd politician, did not pay back his adversaries in the same coin.

One reason the reputation of the Niu party has taken a battering in the history books is that it was in power under the dissipated boy-emperor Ching-tsung (reign 824–7). Although one is always inclined to question the evaluation of the several T'ang emperors as found in the standard histories, there is little hope of redeeming this one. Apparently Ching-tsung was nothing but an irresponsible adolescent with no interest in affairs of state.[133] While it is understandable that he should be under the control of the eunuchs who had brought him to the throne, he did go farther than any of his predecessors in catering for their more venal side.

[131] Esp. *CTS* 174.
[132] Ts'en Chung-mien, *Sui T'ang shih* (Peking, 1957), pp. 397–423.
[133] Note, however, that both Li Feng-chi and P'ei Tu had asked for him to be made heir apparent. *TFYK* 257, p. 16a; *TCTC* 242, pp. 7822–3.

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Ch'ang-an's eunuchs now numbered between four and five thousand, upon whom Ching-tsung squandered money from the palace treasury. The high life in the imperial apartments became scandalous, if we are to believe the anecdotes handed down to us, and the civil turmoil reportedly exceeded anything that had occurred before, even in Te-tsung's later reign. One famous case concerned a magistrate from a district near the capital who was severely beaten and humiliated merely for trying to stop the casual brutality of eunuch thugs. Security grew lax. In mid-824 an armed insurrection occurred in Ch'ang-an, led by a canal workman and a fortune-teller at the head of about a hundred common labourers.[134] This ragtag force somehow succeeded in battling its way into the very throne room of the palace. Ching-tsung managed to escape from their clutches, and eventually the Shen-ts'e Army put down the tiny revolt, but the eunuch guards in charge of the inner palace were punished only lightly for their gross negligence. In fact the eunuch Left Protector of the Shen-ts'e Army was rewarded richly for valour, and this strange incident apparently was swept under the rug. Before long even chief minister Niu Seng-ju had become wary of the reckless young emperor. He requested a governorship in the middle Yangtze region as a place of temporary refuge. When at last the more responsible high eunuchs had had enough of Ching-tsung, they ordered their underlings to kill him on his return from a drunken night-time excursion.

Ching-tsung was followed to the throne by his younger half-brother, the seventeen-year-old Wen-tsung (reign 827–40). Wen-tsung's enthronement was the second break in the strictly father-to-son succession in the T'ang imperial family, not counting the empress Wu, and, as we should expect, he owed his position to the intervention of eunuchs.[135] A group of eunuchs led by Wang Shou-ch'eng succeeded in enthroning him over two possible rivals. One of them, Ching-tsung's infant son, was obviously incapable of ruling, and the question of establishing a regency was never discussed. The other rival was Ching-tsung's uncle, Prince Han of Chiang, but the eunuchs who supported him were too weak to prevail over the well-entrenched Wang Shou-ch'eng.

After seven years of lack of leadership from the throne, many officials were hoping against hope that Wen-tsung would live up to the high ideals of the emperorship. And in fact, unlike his father and half-brother, the new emperor was devoted to reading, study and other serious, solitary pursuits. He began his reign by sending many palace ladies back to their families, abjuring luxuries, and reviving daily audience – the sort of frugal restraint that his great-great-grandfather Te-tsung had imposed

[134] *TCTC* 243, pp. 7836–7. [135] *TCTC* 243, pp. 7851–2; *CTS* 17A, pp. 522–3.

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half a century earlier.[136] But the knowledge of people that had sustained the canny Te-tsung in his darkest days was something Wen-tsung never acquired. Wen-tsung had plenty of advice, of course, probably too much. He was most influenced by the counsellor he had last talked to, and this was reflected in his changing political enthusiasms. During his reign there was an alternation of regimes between the Li and the Niu parties, at intervals of two and three years. In 827 Li Feng-chi was dismissed from the chief ministership and his power was assumed by P'ei Tu. In 830 P'ei was dismissed, and Li Tsung-min and Niu Seng-ju advanced to office. Late in 832 Niu Seng-ju was discredited, and Li Te-yü became chief minister for the first time.[137]

In each of these turnovers, a fair number of high-ranking officials rose and fell along with the leaders of the two groups. And, quite significantly, when men were demoted because their faction had lost power, as a rule they did not suffer real punishment, such as exile to the far south. Instead, Hsien-tsung's practice of sending ex-ministers to provincial governorships if they were important people, prefectships or lesser posts if not, was continued during the 820s and 830s. More than ever, provincial appointments functioned as extensions of the political life of Ch'ang-an. Some provincial appointments were prized, incidentally, because they offered opportunities to make vast fortunes while in the political wilderness. The governorship of Huai-nan province, perhaps the best-known case, often carried with it a concurrent posting as commissioner for salt and iron, which brought the incumbent substantial economic influence over the area around the rich city of Yang-chou. The eunuchs were heavily involved in the political traffic and continued to arrange specific appointments in the provinces in return for large bribes. All of this amounted to a system to provide for those out of power. It was understood, at least by the cooler partisan combatants, that turns of fortune were temporary, and that too vigorous persecution of a fallen adversary might invite far worse retribution.

It would be of the greatest interest to know how extensive the factions were during this period. There are many problems in trying to find an answer, however. Strictly speaking, we are justified in placing only a few top political figures unambiguously into one group or the other. The contemporary Japanese scholar Tonami Mamoru, in what is without doubt the most sophisticated attempt to deal with both the details and the larger implications of the Niu–Li struggle, compiled a list of some sixty-three people involved in factionalism, forty-one in the Niu party

[136] Cf. *CTS* 17A, pp. 523-4.
[137] *TCTC* 243, p. 7851, and 244, pp. 7866, 7869, 7871–2, 7880–2.

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and twenty-two in the Li party.[138] Even in his carefully drawn list, one may question the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of several persons. We simply do not have sufficient information to answer the very basic questions about marriage relationships and friendships of the people at the highest levels of government, let alone those lower down the scale. By definition, a man's connections, influence and loyalty to his patrons and peers were the building blocks of factionalism, and we cannot describe the make-up of the two factions at anything beyond a crude level of generalization since we lack information on these matters.

But, all the same, what about an estimate of their numbers? Occasionally we do have hints from the sources. We know of the existence of the so-called 'eight important figures and sixteen gentlemen' (*pa kuan, shih-liu tzu*) in the retinue of Li Feng-chi, for example, but most references to the men in the ranks of the factions are much vaguer. In 825 Yang Ssu-fu (a fellow *chin-shih* graduate with Li Tsung-min and Niu Seng-ju and a Niu-party chief minister in the late 830s) selected some sixty-eight examination candidates, many of whom attained office thereafter, but we do not know anything more about them, not even whether they had Niu-party sympathies. In 833 Li Te-yü claimed that one out of three courtiers was a member of a faction – a plausible figure, but at the same time an estimate that was polemical in origin. It is unlikely that we shall ever have a more precise idea from the standard sources of the total number of people caught up in factional activity.

Tonami Mamoru has drawn attention to another important if unquantifiable factor, namely the acquisition of staff retinues by important political figures through informal recruitment (*pi-chao*), in their tours of duty in the provinces.[139] Personal recruitment, unsupervised and unregulated by the capital bureaucracy, had roots in the institutional history of the Age of Disunion, when extensive private followings routinely attached themselves to the rich and powerful. After a period of suppression during the empire-building efforts of early T'ang, the practice of *pi-chao* reappeared frequently in the wake of decentralization caused by the An Lu-shan rebellion. It was quite important for the development of the independent bureaucracies in the Ho-pei provinces and the growth of the corps of financial experts. Conventional bureaucrats created staffs in this way to handle their official paperwork, hiring able young examination graduates who otherwise might have spent years in Ch'ang-an awaiting their first official appointments. At the big provincial yamens, which sometimes

[138] Tonami Mamoru, 'Chūsei kizokusei no hōkai to heki-shōsei – Gyū-Ri no tōsō o tegakari ni', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21.3 (1962) 1–26.

[139] *Ibid.* pp. 10–15.

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resembled miniature versions of the court, it was not unusual to find crowds of clansmen of the governor, relatives of local magnates, and other hangers-on eager for employment. These people were known informally as 'disciples and former subordinates' (*men-sheng ku-li*), an apt allusion to the phenomenon as found in the Age of Disunion. Tonami feels that the political factions at court swelled in great numbers as more and more of these subordinates attached themselves to high faction members. He also feels that the influence of factional alignments spread downwards, in pyramidal fashion, as former subordinates began to have subordinates of their own.

There is almost certainly some truth in his hypothesis, but many questions remain as to the ability of the lower-ranking staff officials to attract large followings, about their freedom of movement, about the possibilities of communication, and so on. To judge from the cases of high court officials who were marginally identified with one faction but who straddled the fence at times of crisis, we might well wonder about the loyalties of the lesser fry. Furthermore, we must ask why the effects of large-scale factionalism are not clearer in the sources. We ought to expect a total uproar to have occurred in Ch'ang-an if there really were mobs of officials and underlings coming and going at short intervals. At the very least, upheavals on that sort of scale ought to be correlated with extensive change-overs of personnel, or a rate of change that was out of the ordinary. The only body of information we have on the bureaucracy of that time which is large enough to test profitably is the tabulation of the occupants of the highest posts in the Department of State Affairs (Shang-shu sheng), compiled by Yen Keng-wang.[140] It is possible to show with these data that change-overs and fluctuations among Shang-shu sheng officials were not extraordinarily frequent during these years, when factionalism was at its height. In fact, with the single possible exception of the year 830, the movement in and out of the executive department was far less marked than at times of turbulence such as the An Lu-shan rebellion or the reign of Shun-tsung. Although these posts are not necessarily a representative sample of the capital officialdom as a whole, still at the present state of our knowledge it behoves us to be sceptical of the existence of huge vertical cliques dependent on the main actors in the Niu-Li struggle.

Several attempts have been made to discern an ideological basis for the division into factions. The most promising of these traces Li Te-yü's ill-will towards Li Tsung-min and Niu Seng-ju back to an earlier examination, held in 808.[141] This first examination was not a test for the *chin-shih*

[140] Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang p'u shang ch'eng lang piao*.
[141] *TCTC* 241, p. 7790; *Teng-k'o chi-k'ao* 17, pp. 11b–12a.

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degree, but one of the imperially-ordered higher doctoral examinations, of the category called 'the wise, good, true and upright express their searching criticisms [of government]'. On that occasion, candidates Niu Seng-ju, Li Tsung-min and another young man named Huang-fu Shih (b. *c.* 777) went somewhat beyond the bounds of a conventional response to the emperor's stylized request for advice, offering opinions on what they felt were the real defects of the current political scene. Their essays, though initially approved by their examiners, were later held to be too critical in tone. It has been assumed that the three had chosen this means to impugn the policies and character of the chief minister Li Chi-fu. Their attacks upon Li Chi-fu led his son, Li Te-yü, to retaliate against them thirteen years later.

Special scholarly interest has been awakened by the paper written by Huang-fu Shih in 808, which is the only answer to have survived.[142] Much of it is taken up with the pompous rhetoric associated with exhortations to imperial virtue and counsels of perfection, but from time to time the essay descends to more concrete matters. Its general orientation, within the Confucian tradition, is towards restraint and caution. Huang-fu Shih urged Hsien-tsung not to become involved in the petty reformism that was just then in vogue, but to allow the state to flourish naturally, by concentrating on the correct alignment of rewards and punishments and on the assiduous search for men of virtue to serve as his high ministers. Despite the reputation of this essay as being a sharp attack on Li Chi-fu, however, there is very little in it that is either doctrinaire or specifically critical *ad hominem*. Much of its philosophical background, including its borrowings from *Hsün-tzu*, and many of the political issues alluded to in it, such as the unchecked growth of militarism and pervasive economic difficulties, were common currency in the intellectual world of those times. Huang-fu mentioned no names, furthermore, and it has been pointed out that some of his less subtle language refers to the eunuchs, who were a perfectly ordinary target in such a context. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell what the other essays were like.

Since this examination answer is one of a very few papers on 'ideological' issues left by alleged associates of the Niu group, it has been regarded as expressing a stance common to the party as a whole. In fact, though, its usefulness is limited, not least because Huang-fu Shih himself faded from the scene afterwards and never took part in the political action of the 820s and 830s. If we are correct in interpreting Huang-fu as being opposed to collaboration between activist, pragmatic chief ministers and an equally

142 *WYYH* 489, pp. 8b–17b; Huang-fu Shih, *Huang-fu Chih-cheng wen-chi*, 3; *TTCLC* 106, p. 545; *Teng-k'o chi-k'ao* 17, pp. 14a–22b.

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active, reformist emperor, we can probably see in his essay an appeal for officials to adopt a more circumspect, morally-oriented attitude in general. But this does not tell us anything about Li Chi-fu's views, and, as the contemporary scholar Feng Ch'eng-chi has pointed out, the confused events after the writing of the essay call into question the identification of Li Chi-fu as the target anyway.[143] Most important, Huang-fu's examination answer had little predictive value; it is practically impossible to carry distinctions derived from it through to the heated political battles of later decades. It may reflect a difference in temperament more than in ideology.

The more reflective philosophical disquisitions (*lun*) written by several of the most important factional leaders (Li Te-yü, Li Tsung-min and Niu Seng-ju in particular) raise similar problems of interpretation.[144] In the light of our current understanding of T'ang intellectual history they show far more of a set of common concerns, both in terms of the topics addressed and the views expressed upon them, than they do any consistent differences of political philosophy. Many of these disquisitions are pessimistic about the prospects for any far-reaching improvements in society, taking the line that when the times are out of joint little can be done; yet the scholar cannot simply evade his responsibility for making choices in the hope of saving society. So models of behaviour culled from the past – some appropriate, some unconvincing – are cited, and traditional concepts such as that of *ssu*, 'private interest', are wrenched about in an effort to relate them to then-current problems.[145] The authors raise issues worth thinking about in a time of factional struggle and political insecurity. But nowhere is there any link established between philosophy and the alignments of politics, or any concrete indication of what views and attitudes divided Li partisan from Niu partisan.

The search for factional distinctions over actual issues of policy has been concentrated on the war issue under Hsien-tsung. Li Chi-fu, as we noted earlier, was a consistent advocate of firmness towards the separatist provinces, and he did not hesitate to advise the use of force. Li Chiang, on the other hand, argued against the idea of forcing Wei-po province to come to terms in 812, and indeed the voluntary submission of that area to court authority soon took place. The clash between these two chief ministers in the 812–14 period had all the elements of a classic confrontation, which was dramatically appealing to later historians. This limited series of incidents was generalized to picture the Niu faction as the party of peace, the Li faction as the party of war. But why should we equate

[143] Feng Ch'eng-chi, 'Niu Li tang-cheng shih-yin chih-i', *Wen shih che hsüeh-pao*, 8 (1958) 135–46.

[144] E.g. Li Te-yü, *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* (*wai-chi*). *CTW* 708–10. [145] *CTW* 682, pp. 10b–12a.

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the dispute of two men in the 810s with the Niu-Li struggle of more than a decade later? What grounds are there for calling Li Chiang even a spiritual adherent of the Niu group, in any case? So far as we know, he never attacked Li Te-yü directly, and never participated actively in Niu group affairs in the 820s. In fact, he was severely criticized by Li Feng-chi, the Niu party chief minister under Mu-tsung and Ching-tsung. As for the war–peace distinction, why should the involvement of Niu party members in various military issues of the ninth century, e.g. Li Feng-chi's advocacy of force against the Hsüan-wu rebels in 822, be ignored? Perhaps one could say that Niu-party chief ministers were somewhat more prudent in their approach to provincial opponents, but it would be an oversimplification to view them as pacifists; likewise to see P'ei Tu and Li Te-yü as being uniformly or unwarrantedly aggressive, just because they were able military leaders, would only confuse the picture. Furthermore, most of the really important military encounters with provincial power had already taken place when the factional struggle started to become intense in the mid-820s. It is hard to imagine that the differences of conviction concerning the minor mutinies of the late 820s and 830s were so deep as to bring forth full-blown factionalism. Probably all Ch'ang-an politicians of this period had an interest in a strong central government. Within this common concern, the shades of opinion on specific military and defence policies are difficult to evaluate, and we cannot dismiss the possibility of distortion created by special pleading or by spurious material introduced into the historical record after the fact.[146]

In recent years a sociological interpretation of the Niu-Li controversy has been advanced, built on the work of the Chinese historian Ch'en Yin-k'o.[147] His interest in charting the changes in the social background of the T'ang ruling elite, and especially the decline of the old aristocracy in favour of a new stratum of bureaucrats without pedigree, has focused attention on the role of the examination system as a means of upward social mobility. The Niu party, according to this interpretation, based its power on entrance to officialdom via the examinations, whereas the Li party was the stronghold of aristocratic privilege and hereditary access to the bureaucracy through the *yin* system. There are a number of superficial reasons that make this hypothesis attractive. Niu Seng-ju and Li Tsung-min, the most prominent Niu factional leaders, were both *chin-shih* graduates, and their association was all the stronger because they were

[146] See, for example, the Wei-chou incident of 831; *TCTC* 244, pp. 7878, 7880–1; and also *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 4, pp. 6b–7a.

[147] Ch'en Yin-k'o, *T'ang-tai cheng-chih shih shu-lun kao* (reissued Peking, 1956), pt 2.

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Table 10. *Summary of data on identifiable members of mid-ninth-century political factions*

Niu faction: total 41

A. Descendants of eminent clans (*chün-wang*): 20
  1. Graduates of both *chin-shih* and *chih-k'o* (imperially ordered examinations): 7
  2. Graduates of *chin-shih* only: 12
  3. Hereditary privilege (*yin*): 1

B. Not descendants of eminent clans: 5
  1. Graduates of both *chin-shih* and *chih-k'o*: 2
  2. Graduates of *chin-shih* only: 2
  3. Clerk (*hsü-li*): 1

C. Origins unclear: 16
  1. Graduates of both *chin-shih* and *chih-k'o*: 3
  2. Graduates of *chin-shih* only: 7
  3. Method of entry to officialdom unclear: 6

Li faction: total 22

A. Descendants of eminent clans: 12
  1. Graduates of both *chin-shih* and *chih-k'o*: 4
  2. Graduates of *chin-shih* only: 5
  3. Hereditary privilege (*yin*): 2
  4. Graduates of *chih-k'o* only: 1

B. Not descendants of eminent clans: 7
  1. Graduates of *chin-shih*: 4
  2. Military origins (*wu-jen*): 1
  3. Method of entry to officialdom unclear: 2

C. Origins unclear: 3
  1. Graduates of *chin-shih*: 3

Source: Tonami Mamoru, 'Chūsei kizokusei no hōkai to heki-shōsei', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 21.3 (1962) 24–5.

'same-year' graduates; they and a number of their colleagues almost surely had an emotional stake in the preservation of the examination system. On the other hand, Li Te-yü, the blue-blooded son of a chief minister and scion of an extremely eminent clan, was not a *chin-shih*; he derided the examinations for their encouragement of florid nonsense in official prose and their lack of attention to practical affairs; and he sponsored a temporary change in the character of the examination questions during his first chief ministership in 833. However, here again we have a hypothesis constructed on only scattered pieces of evidence, considering the views of only a few of the important partisans, and yet purporting to represent the interests held by the factions as a whole. Tonami Mamoru's research, summarized in Table 10, has shown conclusively that the factions, as far as they can be tabulated, were proportionately even both in numbers of examination graduates and in numbers of descendants of eminent clans.

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This invalidates any distinction between the two factions as to clear preference for or against the examination system. Serious doubt has been cast, in any event, upon the notion that large numbers of lower-class men rose to positions of very high political power through the examinations, and indeed upon the appropriateness of using the examination system and *yin* privilege as markers of social origin.[148] As a practical matter, it is frequently impossible to determine an individual's background – place of birth, wealth of immediate family, status *within* the clan, marriage connections – from the meagre information in T'ang sources. There is no guarantee that an examination graduate came from humble beginnings, or that use of the *yin* privilege necessarily identifies a man of high and mighty family. What we know specifically about the faction members does not permit an analysis of class or economic status. In fact, the many shared attributes, experiences and goals of the faction leaders argue that the highest levels of the struggle were essentially intra-class. While the use of *pi-chao* recruitment certainly made the rise of lower-class men possible within the lower factional levels, the case for a consistent sociological differentiation between the factions at the higher levels thus far remains unproved.

The Sweet Dew incident of 835

We have seen what happened when Wang Shu-wen and his group tried to change the course of T'ang politics in 805. A most interesting and equally ill-fated sequel to that episode occurred during the 830s. This attempt was initiated by the emperor Wen-tsung. In fact, he tried to strike at the eunuchs and factions twice: first with the help of a chief minister in 830–1, and then with the Sweet Dew conspirators themselves in 835.

The eunuchs who dethroned Ching-tsung must have understood that the government required an emperor of at least minimal competence, even as they tried to maintain their control over his successor. They were misled, however, if they believed that Wen-tsung was not sufficiently clever to do them harm. With a few exceptions,[149] the public outcry against the eunuchs was muted in this period because of their great power, and yet it is clear that Wen-tsung himself was much troubled about the shortcomings of his reign. He is said to have been irked es-

[148] The holding of a degree and the use of the *yin* privilege were not mutually exclusive. See Denis Twitchett, 'The composition of the T'ang ruling class: new evidence from Tun-huang', in A. F. Wright and Denis Twitchett, eds. *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven, 1973).

[149] *TCTC* 243, pp. 7856–8.

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pecially at his inability to control the eunuch Wang Shou-ch'eng and the physician who had treated Mu-tsung, a palace denizen named Cheng Chu (d. 835). In the emperor's mind, both these inner court magnates were symbols of political corruption. In 830 Wen-tsung began to discuss this problem in secret with Sung Shen-hsi (d. 833), who at the time was a Han-lin academician unidentified with either the Niu or Li groups, and thus one of the few officials the emperor felt he could trust. They decided to try to undermine the eunuchs politically.

Sung was promoted to become a chief minister and proceeded to make plans, but somehow word of what was afoot was leaked to the eunuchs.[150] They in turn counter-attacked, claiming to have proof that Sung Shen-hsi really wished to depose Wen-tsung on behalf of the emperor's favourite brother, the Prince of Chang. At the crucial moment Wen-tsung wavered, unsure of himself, isolated from reliable advice, fearing for his life. He ordered Sung Shen-hsi to be tried, along with some of the many suspects the eunuchs had rounded up from among his acquaintances and relatives. None of the Niu party chief ministers spoke up to rescue him save in the weakest terms, and only with great difficulty did a handful of middle-level government officials persuade Wen-tsung to move the investigation and trial out of the inner palace – in other words, out of the control of the eunuchs. Sung Shen-hsi was found guilty but was spared execution; he died about a year later in exile.

Quite apart from the shock of the Sung Shen-hsi episode, Wen-tsung was also becoming more frustrated with the behaviour of the factional leaders. Unseemly backbiting and pettiness were displayed frequently in his presence. He continued to vacillate between the two factions. After a transparently political court dispute over a relatively minor border incident in 831, Wen-tsung dismissed Niu Seng-ju and promoted Li Te-yü to the chief ministership for the first time. But Li's regime of 833–4 was as contention-ridden as any of its predecessors. To add to his troubles, the young emperor fell ill that year, and if we can believe the rather bizarre coincidence with Shun-tsung's medical history, suffered a temporary speech impairment. Thanks to the ministrations of the physician Cheng Chu, however, his condition improved slightly over the winter. He brooded over the state of politics for about a year thereafter, watching, almost as a bystander, Li Te-yü's fall from power and the return of Li Tsung-min. 'Getting rid of the outlaws in Ho-pei would be easy compared to getting rid of the factions at court', he complained in 834.[151] By then Wen-tsung seems to have regretted his mistakes in the Sung

[150] *CTS* 167, p. 4370; *TCTC* 244, pp. 7871–2, 7875–7.
[151] *TCTC* 245, p. 7899.

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Shen-hsi case, and to have recognized that factionalism and excessive eunuch power had to be defeated at the same time, or not at all. Despite all the risks, therefore, he launched another intrigue, which culminated in the ill-fated Sweet Dew plot of 835.

To build any kind of third force obviously required men who were not under the control of either court faction or their respective eunuch allies. This time, however, the emperor did not conspire with an official of conspicuous moral rectitude like Sung Shen-hsi, but instead with two old hands at palace politics, the physician Cheng Chu and newly appointed Han-lin academician Li Hsün (*chin-shih* 823, d. 835). Though a friend of Wang Shou-ch'eng, Cheng Chu had fallen foul of many of the other eunuchs, and an attempt had even been made on his life by a Shen-ts'e general in 833. Li Hsün was a younger clansman of the former Niu party chief minister Li Feng-chi, but he had lost his enthusiasm for Niu group politics after a period spent in exile during the 820s. Both of them were ambitious, of course, but neither was an utter rogue, as their opponents later charged; Cheng's medical skills were much sought after, and Li Hsün was a classical scholar of some ability. To break the fifteen-year-old pattern of factional dispute in court politics and replace it with a single new regime under Cheng and Li may not have seemed ideal to Wen-tsung, but because of the daring and resourcefulness of these two men, the emperor saw at least a possibility for change.

After skilfully exploiting the animosity among the key leaders of the Niu and Li groups, Cheng Chu and Li Hsün were promoted by the emperor within the official hierarchy and took over the power formerly held by the factional chief ministers. We noted before that the Wang Shu-wen clique had made a grave error in neglecting the role of military force in the attempted coup of 805. In contrast, Cheng Chu covertly assembled a reserve strike-force from among the troops he commanded after his specially-contrived appointment as military governor in Feng-hsiang, to the west of Ch'ang-an. Li Hsün, then a chief minister, secured the assistance of the various capital officials who were permitted to have guard detachments of their own on call. Their basic idea was to lure the eunuchs away from the protection of the Shen-ts'e Army and then to annihilate them quickly, a strategy that remained a well-kept secret until the last minute.

Cheng and Li stripped Wang Shou-ch'eng, their former patron, of his power, cast him into prison, and arranged for his assassination there. To do this, they had allied themselves temporarily with Wang's rival among the eunuchs, Ch'iu Shih-liang (781–843). Even as Wang met his death, however, Li Hsün and Cheng Chu were planning to close the net around

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Ch'iu as well. At a dawn court audience late in December of 835, the chamberlain reported to the emperor by pre-arrangement that 'sweet dew' (*kan-lu*), an auspicious heavenly portent, had descended upon a pomegranate tree in the outer palace during the previous night.[152] Fully aware that an ambush had been readied for the eunuchs, Wen-tsung sent Ch'iu Shih-liang and the other eunuchs out to investigate the miraculous phenomenon. Just as they reached the courtyard where the trap was to be sprung, however, a gust of wind blew aside a flap of the tent in which Li Hsün's armed men were hiding. The clank of their weapons alerted the eunuchs, most of whom were able to rush panic-stricken back into the inner palace before the gates were closed against them. Inside they forced Wen-tsung to return to the harem, beyond the reach of Li Hsün and the other government officials. Ch'iu Shih-liang and the other eunuchs immediately summoned the aid of the dreaded Shen-ts'e Army, whose detachments were sent to massacre suspected courtiers in the official precincts. In the government quarter alone, the soldiers reportedly killed more than a thousand people and destroyed many seals, documents and records. For weeks afterwards the troops rounded up not merely the chief conspirators and their underlings, but their entire families and many other people who were wholly innocent. Confessions of treason were exacted by torture. Three chief ministers and their families were executed publicly in Ch'ang-an's western market place. The eunuchs permitted the bloodbath to continue until an amnesty and limitation on further prosecution was proclaimed early in 836.

The eunuchs then concentrated on the realities of maintaining their power, which meant first and foremost exercising vigilance against palace coups and searching out conspiracies within their own ranks. They decided also to place troops from the Shen-ts'e Army as guards within the palace, but soon discovered that this was not worth the trouble; putting their forces in such a conspicuous position simply outraged conservative opinion for very little concrete gain.[153] The old ceremonial imperial guard units (*nan-ya wei*) were moribund, in any case, and should another dangerous incident have arisen, the Shen-ts'e troops were close at hand. Ch'iu Shih-liang and the other powerful eunuchs were able to achieve the objective of increased security simply by confiscating all the lances and swords owned by the skeleton staff of guards posted at the palace.

On the whole, once the uproar had died down, the eunuchs tended to exercise their power in their accustomed way, that is, out of the public

[152] *TCTC* 245, pp. 7910–22. See also Yokoyama Hirō, 'Tō no kanryōsei to kangan – chūseiteki sokkin seiji no shūen josetsu', in Chūgoku chūsei shi kenkyū kai, ed. *Chūgoku chūsei shi kenkyū: Rikuchō Zui Tō no shakai to bunka* (Tokyo, 1970), pp. 417–42.

[153] *TCTC* 245, p. 7923.

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view. In part this was because provincial governors discouraged an out-and-out eunuch dictatorship by hinting at military intervention.[154] But also the eunuchs found it much more satisfactory to reinstate a working relationship with the bureaucracy very much like the one that had existed before Li Hsün and Cheng Chu had come on the scene. One interesting difference was that members of both factions acted as chief ministers at the same time, whereas before, power had changed hands back and forth between the two factions. Furthermore, lesser faction members were actually appointed to the chief ministerships, while the better-known faction leaders were rehabilitated only very slowly, returning towards Ch'ang-an from their places of provincial service in carefully supervised steps. This probably reflects the greater strength of eunuchs in the inner councils of the government, as do the conditions of personal safety affecting bureaucrats of the time. The eunuchs persuaded Wen-tsung to remove the protection of bodyguards from the chief ministers (a practice that had been in force since the assassination of Wu Yüan-heng in 815), doubtless in order to make the chief ministers feel more vulnerable to pressure. The eunuchs did not hesitate to use violence when individual officials stepped too far out of line, as for example in the attempt on the life of chief minister Li Shih (784–845) in 838.

The failure of the Sweet Dew plot seems to have broken Wen-tsung's spirit. After the intentions of the eunuchs became clear in 836, he took less and less interest in political affairs. Listless and sullen, bored with court debate, prevented even from enjoying his taste for poetry, he drank heavily and regretted his past mistakes. He began to brood about his place in history. In 839 he demanded access to the daily court record (*Ch'i-chü chu*, the 'Diary of Activity and Repose') in order to see what was being written about him, but the officials in charge of compiling it rebuffed him. This confirmed his suspicions that he was destined for the worst sort of historical reputation.[155] In his cups the emperor sobbed to a young academician that the most inept monarchs of ancient times had been controlled by their feudal lords, but that he, far worse, was under the thumb of his household slaves, the eunuchs. That same year his old illness seized him again, and he died in the beginning of 840 at the age of thirty.

The succession crisis brought on as Wen-tsung's condition worsened was among the more complicated ones in late T'ang history. The original heir apparent, Wen-tsung's only eligible son, had been killed in 838. The circumstances of his death are obscure, but Wen-tsung was apparently willing to permit his execution, having grown indifferent to the heir

[154] *TCTC* 245, pp. 7923–4; *CTS* 161, p. 4232.
[155] *TCTC* 246, pp. 7940–1.

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apparent's mother and annoyed over some minor incidents caused by his son's youthful frivolity.[156] For a time after his death, a very young son of Ching-tsung held the title of heir apparent, but the situation was unstable on account of his age and sickly disposition. Two other candidates for the throne emerged in the palace, both of them younger brothers of Wen-tsung. The Prince of An was the son of a Lady Yang, a powerful figure among the imperial women, and his claims were supported by his mother's clansman, the Niu-party chief minister Yang Ssu-fu, as well as by a group of eunuchs. The other claimant, the Prince of Ying, was the candidate of the eunuch protectors of the Shen-ts'e Army, however, and they eventually carried the day. Wen-tsung himself had nothing to do with the final choice, as usual being unable to make up his mind on such an important matter; in any case, by 839 he was spending most of his time tormenting himself with guilt over the death of his son. Protector Ch'iu Shih-liang and his allies were able to forge a decree of regency on behalf of the Prince of Ying. After Wen-tsung's death, he ascended the throne, the third of Mu-tsung's sons to rule the T'ang empire. The victorious eunuch group quickly arranged for the execution of the two other princes, Lady Yang and their supporters within the imperial palace.[157]

Li Te-yü at the court of Wu-tsung (840–6)

The political reprisals after the enthronement of Wu-tsung spread from the inner to the outer court. Among the first targets were the Niu-party chief ministers Yang Ssu-fu and Li Chüeh (785–853), who had struggled to the top of the bureaucracy in the last year of Wen-tsung's reign. Ch'iu Shih-liang wanted to deprive them of their heads as well as their jobs, because of their support for Wu-tsung's younger brother and rival. Wu-tsung had no objection to this idea and would have let the executions take place but for the intervention of a most unlikely advocate, Li Te-yü himself. With no regard for partisan advantage, Li, who had been named a chief minister in late 840, argued fiercely for the lives of his political opponents, petitioning the emperor on their behalf not once but three times and mobilizing court opinion to the cause. Finally Wu-tsung growled to Li Te-yü, 'I shall spare them, but only on your account.'[158] There are few better examples of the extraordinary favour enjoyed by Li Te-yü under this mercurial emperor and of Li's effectiveness in exploiting the role of chief minister.

In one sense Li Te-yü, then in his mid-fifties, had been preparing for this opportunity all his life. His biographies and epitaphs speak in more

[156] *TCTC* 246, p. 7935. [157] *TCTC* 246, pp. 7943–5. [158] *TCTC* 246, pp. 7949–51.

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than conventional terms about the strength of his ambition, discipline and drive. But quite apart from his personal dedication and self-reliance, he was an extremely shrewd politician who sought out and used any connection that seemed likely to advance his career. Of course he had had a considerable head start as the son of Li Chi-fu, the prominent courtier and chief minister under Hsien-tsung, but little else in his public life was the result of chance. Li Te-yü spent most of his early career, during the 810s, in staff positions in the provinces, primarily to avoid charges of favouritism being lodged against him because of his famous father. He took care, however, to ingratiate himself with a eunuch he met while on provincial duty, reportedly giving the eunuch a huge bribe to look after his interests. After the eunuch's return to Ch'ang-an, Li Te-yü was summoned by Mu-tsung to a position in the Han-lin academy, which was not the sort of post a young man achieved by accident.

In the Han-lin academy Li Te-yü formed his association with Li Shen and Yüan Chen, and as we have seen earlier, became involved in the spread of factionalism. To what extent Li Te-yü actually coordinated the political strategy of his group in this period is an open question. During the 820s and 830s, he spent far more time away from Ch'ang-an than he did in office at the capital. He was governor of Che-hsi twice, totalling almost eight years in that lower Yangtze province, and he also served in western Szechwan for three years, where he gained experience dealing with foreign affairs. He did have a brief term as chief minister under Wen-tsung in the early 830s, but he was banished to a prefectship in southern Hu-nan after the Sweet Dew conspirators concocted a story implicating him in a fictitious case of treason. He did not remain in exile for long, however. After the failure of the Sweet Dew plot, he was rehabilitated in a provincial governorship. Through his friendship with another eunuch, a subordinate of Ch'iu Shih-liang, Li Te-yü was eventually recalled to Ch'ang-an in 840 to become a chief minister under the new emperor. From that time until the death of Wu-tsung in the spring of 846, he was the dominant political figure in the T'ang capital.

Li Te-yü's political style as chief minister definitely tended towards the authoritarian pole within Confucian theory and practice. He admired both Kuan-tzu and the strong prime ministers of the Former Han. The heritage of his tough-minded, activist father and his long experience as the executive of several provinces made it natural for him to transfer the principle of one-man ministerial rule to the high administration. His role was encouraged by the emperor, and in that sense it differed from the strong-man regime of Yüan Tsai during the latter part of the reign of Tai-tsung. It was also a marked departure from the T'ang system, under which

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public issues were debated before the emperor by several chief ministers, all theoretically with equal power. In pointed contrast to the partisan bickering among the chief ministers in the last years of Wen-tsung's reign,[159] Li Te-yü was now given the practical power to make almost all important decisions on the government's behalf. His method, so far as we know, involved minimal consultation, a thorough review of pertinent information and intelligence, and then a period of withdrawal in his garden, where he produced his plans alone. This procedure was sufficiently unusual to merit the comments of his contemporaries. Through the corpus of his extant state papers, we know that Li Te-yü's reputation as an extremely capable administrator was more than just the product of sympathetic historians. His skill at comprehension of detail, use of other men with due attention to their talents and weaknesses, coordination of large-scale government actions, and presentation of complicated proposals to the emperor is illustrated time and again in his memorials and draft edicts. In these respects he rivalled Lu Chih, and in practical terms surpassed him. Chiefly because of Li Te-yü's efforts, the T'ang government was able to weather the crises of threatened foreign invasion, provincial revolt and domestic upheaval, which occurred frequently in the early 840s.

If Li Te-yü brought the Li party a victory when he returned to power it was a muted one. His steady pressure against his personal enemies Niu Seng-ju and Li Tsung-min did drive them out of high politics for good, but otherwise he does not seem to have been interested in excessively harsh partisan purges.[160] Likewise, he rewarded a few of his long-time associates with chief ministerships, notably the poet Li Shen (in office 842–4), yet these men were unquestionably in a subordinate status. Li Te-yü could not direct the T'ang government completely by himself, of course, but his choice of aides seems to have been designed more to reinforce his own prestige than to change the make-up of middle level officialdom.

Similarly, the minor reforms of government practice instituted by Li Te-yü were oriented to the convenience of a strong executive, in accordance with his principle that government directive should flow from a single source ('issue forth from a single gate') – the chief minister's office.[161] Procedural changes included the return of primary responsibility for routine matters (*ch'ang-wu*) to the chief secretaries of the Secretariat (*Chung-shu she-jen*). They were under the direct control of the chief ministers, and the reform thus attempted to exclude the Han-lin secretaries from

[159] *CTS* 176, p. 4557.
[160] This can be demonstrated with the data in Yen Keng-wang, *T'ang p'u shang ch'eng lang piao*.
[161] *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 10, pp. 9b–11a; *CTS* 18A, pp. 607–8.

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a function they had exercised independent of outer court supervision for well over fifty years.[162] There was a corresponding effort to involve the chief ministers' office in all important business, especially all issues of state security and communications with provincial governors, and to preserve records of such business in the separate files of that office. Apparently this had been only a haphazard procedure up until that time, dependent mainly on the issue in question.[163] Li Te-yü also attempted to control the basic record-keeping and history-writing process at court. He revived the compilation of the *Record of current administrative affairs* (*Shih-cheng chi*), a chronicle that was written daily by the chief minister 'keeping the seal' (*chih-yin tsai-hsiang*) but also co-signed by the other chief ministers. This was to preserve an account of state business conducted by the chief ministers in private, according to their particular point of view, totally freed from the influence of the Han-lin academicians, eunuchs or imperial favourites. He requested further that the *Diary of activity and repose* (*Ch'i-chü chu*), which was the basic record of the actions and decrees of the emperor and the foundation-stone of the mass of documentation that was eventually edited to form the Veritable Record (*Shih-lu*) of the reign, be subject to review and editorial change by the chief ministers, 'in case of errors or questions about the great affairs of state'. This concern about the court records was not entirely historical. Li was especially interested in winning the privilege of designating some matters as 'confidential' (*mi*), i.e. too sensitive for public knowledge or for inclusion in the court diary, and thus increasing his practical power to direct the government without interference.[164] Some of these procedural modifications appear to have been effective during Li Te-yü's tenure of office, but others, especially those attempting to place bureaucratically-inspired restrictions upon the emperor's use of the Han-lin secretaries, were resisted by Wu-tsung and ignored by his successor Hsiuan-tsung. On balance, then, it was Li Te-yü's personal performance in office, and not major structural changes in the administration, that shaped court politics in the 840s.

The relationship between Wu-tsung and Li Te-yü, which made possible all of Li's achievements, must have been fascinating. The chief minister was a man of charm, quick-tongued, knowledgeable and yet calculating, secretive and haughty as well – a fancier of rare plants who liked nothing better than solitude in the splendid gardens of his estate, but at the same time a man who could never tear himself from the excitement of politics.

[162] *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 11, pp. 6b–7a.
[163] *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 11, pp. 3b–4a; T'ang Ch'eng-yeh, *Lun T'ang-tai hsiang-chih hsia ti Hui-ch'ang cheng-feng* (Taipei, 1973), p. 105.
[164] T'ang Ch'eng-yeh, *Lun T'ang-tai hsiang-chih hsia ti Hui-ch'ang cheng-feng*, p. 105. See also *THY* 64, pp. 1112–13.

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He scorned the pretensions of court poetry and the airs put on by examination graduates, but he was a fair poet himself and a masterful essayist, able to adopt conventional attitudes and feign emotion when the occasion demanded. In contrast, the emperor was brash, quick-tempered and stubborn. But, unlike his elder brother Wen-tsung, he was also shrewd and decisive. Like a number of his predecessors, religion gripped him as much as politics. To the family weakness for alchemical experimentation in search of immortality, he added a genuine interest in Taoism. In the last year or so of his reign, though, the drugs he was taking caused him to lose full control of his faculties. Our sources describe symptoms both of depression and, in connection with the persecution of Buddhism, outright mania.[165] Nevertheless, there was never any confusion between Li Te-yü and Wu-tsung over their respective spheres of action. Although Li prepared his proposals meticulously and urged them strongly in preference to other suggestions, he was consistent in presenting them to Wu-tsung as real decisions for him to make at his pleasure. Li never made the mistake of patronizing the emperor. For his part, Wu-tsung did not neglect to exercise power independently of Li Te-yü from time to time, to reinforce the general appreciation of the difference in status between them. Apparently their relationship remained unimpaired in any significant way throughout Wu-tsung's reign.

Li Te-yü's dealings with the eunuchs were no less delicate. On the one hand, he had to pay attention to their wishes, especially to those of Ch'iu Shih-liang, who was still the most powerful eunuch in Ch'ang-an. In 840, for example, to the disgust of many officials Li arranged for the demotion of a Chancellery officer who had tried to prevent the use of the *yin* privilege on behalf of Ch'iu Shih-liang's adopted son, another usurpation of bureaucratic prerogatives by the eunuchs. And yet Li Te-yü was also interested in restricting eunuch power relative to his own. Sometimes Wu-tsung helped him to do so. In 842, for example, the courtiers proposed that Wu-tsung adopt a new honorary title, which would of course be the occasion for great celebrations and the promulgation of an imperial Act of Grace. Ch'iu and the other high eunuchs began to suspect that Li Te-yü was planning to use the Act of Grace to eliminate certain of their privileges and sources of economic support. The eunuchs demonstrated against this in the palace, but in a climactic scene Wu-tsung rebuked them, thundering that he was the master of his own court and the sole author of the Acts of Grace. Before long the emperor forced the humiliated Ch'iu into retirement. After the death of this key eunuch in 843 and the elimination of his chief henchmen, Li Te-yü chipped away at the eunuchs'

[165] *TCTC* 248, p. 8020.

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various bases of power. He removed them from line military command except in the Shen-ts'e Army, attempted to bypass their control of the imperial treasury, and so on.[166] It would be a mistake to see his moves as a full-scale crusade against the eunuchs, however. They were intended to achieve limited, practical gains. Yet during the latter part of Wu-tsung's reign, and through most of Hsiuan-tsung's reign, the power of the eunuchs was at least less overt than it had been during the 820s and 830s.

An equally important reason for Li's success as chief minister was the rapid sequence of events after he assumed office, and the crisis atmosphere that favoured a man of action.

Quite suddenly, in the autumn of 840, large advance parties of Uighur Turks began to arrive in the T'ang borderlands along the great bend of the Huang-ho in modern Inner Mongolia. The governors in that area could only watch in the ensuing months as perhaps one hundred thousand Uighurs congregated in the shelter of the low Yin-shan mountains – the most spectacular nomadic movement seen in the north for several centuries.[167]

Why were they there and what did they want? After several diplomatic missions were sent by Li Te-yü from Ch'ang-an, the Chinese learned the details of the fierce internal dissension that had divided the Uighur leadership during the 830s. In mid-840, one of the Uighurs' subject peoples, the Qïrqïz (Kirghiz), decided to take advantage of Uighur weakness. Sweeping down from their base area in southern Siberia, the Qïrqïz routed the Uighurs out of their comfortable capital, killed the qaghan, and set themselves up as the new masters of the steppe. The terrified Uighur survivors fled in two large groups. One of these proceeded south-west, and its members eventually settled at Qočo (modern Karakhoja) near Turfan, where their descendants produced a distinguished sedentary society lasting as an independent entity until the thirteenth century. The other group moved directly south from their capital, Ordu-balïq, to confront the Chinese. Li Te-yü's messengers to this second Uighur refugee horde discovered in 841 that their ruler, the self-proclaimed successor to the title of qaghan, had no intention of trying to recapture their homeland, a plan Li had urged them to follow. Instead the qaghan demanded a Chinese walled border fort to use as his headquarters. There the Uighurs apparently planned to continue in their semi-sedentary way of life as best they could, trading and raiding and waiting for better days.

Such a notion was the antithesis of China's traditional strategic interests,

166 *TCTC* 248, pp. 8009–10, 8020. Muronaga Yoshizō, 'Tōmatsu naiko no sonzai keitai ni tsuite'.

167 *TCTC* 246–7; *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 13–15; cf. Yamada Nobuo, 'Yūboku Uiguru-koku no metsubō', in Ishimoda Shō *et al.*, ed. *Kodai shi kōza* (Tokyo, 1965), vol. 11, pp. 199–228.

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and a threat no government in Ch'ang-an could tolerate. Action was necessary, but there were grave dangers in this situation. During the long period of peace with the Uighurs after 788, border security in the north had not been maintained consistently. In the beginning of 842, therefore, Li Te-yü began an emergency programme of defence preparations, meanwhile stalling off the Uighurs with gifts of food and clothing. Fortresses had to be rebuilt, communications restored, and troops reinforced. Under the circumstances, the Chinese made remarkably fast progress.

When war finally broke out between the Uighurs and the Chinese forces, Li Te-yü assumed the position of commander-in-chief, combining civil and military responsibilities more skilfully than any other late T'ang chief minister. He supervised strategy, major tactical decisions, and supply from Ch'ang-an, but he left the tactical details to his hand-picked generals in the field. An *ad hoc* expeditionary command was formed in the customary way, but in contrast to most other imperial campaigns of the post-An Lu-shan period, it was well coordinated. Reinforcements for the border troops were drawn from a number of interior provinces. The independent province of Yu-chou also participated in the campaign, an indication of Li Te-yü's ability at political persuasion outside the sphere of his direct control. The climax came early in 843, when a Chinese detachment took the main Uighur camp by surprise. The Chinese pursued the Uighurs relentlessly; ten thousand Uighurs died at a place in the south Gobi known later as 'Kill-the-Huns Mountain' (Sha-hu shan), while twice that number surrendered. The qaghan escaped the disastrous defeat, but he was hunted down in the desert a few years later.

The foreign danger had scarcely eased when a serious domestic problem arose over the governorship of Chao-i province.[168] Chao-i lay astride the T'ai-hang mountains of eastern Shansi. It was a home for merchants living off the trade that passed from the independent provinces of Ho-pei through to the T'ang heartland of Ho-tung and Kuan-nei. Unlike the more familiar Ho-pei provinces, however, Chao-i had remained loyal to the dynasty since its establishment in 757. In 825, Ching-tsung's ministers for the first time permitted the governorship to pass from father to son, although loud objections were raised against this at court. Liu Ts'ung-chien (803–43), the new governor, became more and more influential in the 830s, playing an important role in preventing the eunuchs from exercising power in public after the failure of the Sweet Dew plot. To no one's surprise, after his death in 843 his nephew Liu Chen signalled a wish to inherit control of the province. Most of the officials urged that, because of the still unresolved Uighur situation, Liu Chen be granted the status

[168] *TCTC* 247–8; *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 15–17.

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of acting governor. Chief minister Li Te-yü felt that as a matter of principle Chao-i ought not to slip permanently away from Ch'ang-an's control.[169] To chastise Chao-i, the government formed another expeditionary command, the most remarkable feature of which was the unprecedented cooperation of forces from Ch'eng-te and Wei-po, the hard core of independent Ho-pei. Li Te-yü persuaded the governors of those provinces to do this with promises of rewards and gains in territory. Their participation, if less than whole-hearted, still served to cut off Liu Chen's retreat and to forestall any repetition of the disastrous spread of revolt during the 780s. Liu Chen and his clan were murdered by their underlings in the late summer of 844, after which the court appointed a new governor. Wu-tsung thought so highly of Li Te-yü's achievements in meeting this second crisis, the gravest provincial threat of the mid-ninth century, that he ennobled Li as Duke of Wei in 844.

The third major event of Wu-tsung's reign was the 'Hui-ch'ang persecution' of Buddhism, so called because of the current reign title. As we know from the diary kept by the Japanese monk Ennin (793–864), who was travelling in China at that time, pressure against the Buddhist church had been building up gradually, and this broadened into a full-scale programme of repression by the government in 845.[170] Wu-tsung issued successive orders to shut down and destroy the tens of thousands of small country retreats, shrines and monasteries, and then he turned his attack on the enormous temples in the cities and the capitals. A mere handful of exceptions were granted; the superior prefectures were to be allowed one temple apiece, and Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang were each permitted to retain two, manned by only thirty monks per temple.[171] This shocking decree forcibly returned to lay life perhaps as many as a quarter of a million priests and nuns. Large numbers of them were killed or injured. The devastation of Buddhist property, scriptures and sacred objects was severe. Although the most violent phase of the persecution ended about nine months after the death of Wu-tsung and the accession of his uncle Hsiuan-tsung, the Buddhist church as an established institution had been maimed just as it was experiencing one of its greatest periods of growth. Never in later Chinese history was it in a position to challenge, or even to rival, the power of the state.

The persecution of Buddhism was undertaken for mixed motives, the most important of which were economic.[172] After about 820, China's

[169] *TCTC* 247, pp. 7980–1.
[170] Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's travels in T'ang China* (New York, 1955), pp. 237–57.
[171] *CTS* 18A, pp. 604–5.
[172] Kenneth Ch'en, 'The economic background of the Hui-ch'ang suppression of Buddhism', *HJAS*, 19 (1956) 67–105.

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drastic monetary deflation had eased somewhat, but financial stringency was nevertheless prolonged by more direct claims on the state treasury: the increased cost of harem luxury and the eunuch establishment, for example, and later the expensive wars against the north-east, the Uighurs and Chao-i province. No fundamental progress was made during the 820s and 830s to encourage the mining of copper, either. In contrast to the state of the empire's finances, however, the Buddhist temples as a group were thriving. The ancient prohibitions in the *Vinaya* rules against economic activity by the clergy had been side-stepped in China for centuries, on the grounds that the religious community as a whole, rather than any individual person, benefited from the circulation of goods.[173] The temple wealth built up over hundreds of years was not confined to the splendid gold, silver and copper icons and Buddhist ritual implements, though precious metal reserves of such size in themselves were a very great strain upon the currency-starved economy, and a direct contravention of the government's anti-hoarding regulations. In addition, the larger monasteries had acquired land (generally known as 'temple estates', *ssu-chuang*), much of it in practice exempt from taxation. Enterprising abbots organized these lands so as to turn a profit on agricultural and forest products.[174] This development was parallel to the formation of large private estates (*chuang-yüan*) by the rich and influential in secular society, and indeed the systems often interlocked as wealthy donors retained interests for their lifetimes in land nominally donated to the church. Even the construction costs of Buddhist buildings were frequently subscribed out of government funds. Perhaps most irritating was the fact that, having 'left their family' (*ch'u-chia*) and thus having escaped full civil control, monks and nuns were no longer obliged to pay their personal liabilities under the two-tax system. The resulting loss of revenue to the state had exercised civil officials for generations, and yet numerous attempts at government supervision of ordination generally turned out to be ineffective. The confiscations, laicization procedure and the other punitive measures of the mid-840s won the approval of many officials as being the only way to prevent the Buddhist church from securing a stranglehold on the economic affairs of the empire.

The political dimension of the Buddhist persecution is more complicated. Wu-tsung apparently was the main force sustaining the movement; he was an ardent Taoist whose personal beliefs were tinged with fanati-

[173] Jacques Gernet, *Les Aspects économiques du Bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du Vᵉ au Xᵉ siècle* (Saigon, 1956).

[174] Denis Twitchett, 'The monasteries and China's economy in mediaeval times', *BSOAS*, 19.3 (1957) 526–49; Denis Twitchett, 'Monastic estates in T'ang China', *AM* (NS), 5 (1956) 123–45.

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cism.[175] But apart from a few of his favourite Taoist monks, he does not seem to have fostered a true Taoist pressure group among the courtiers, one that was hostile to Buddhism as a matter of dogma. On the contrary, there is no evidence to suggest that the bulk of officialdom thought of magical Taoism as anything other than political poison – an interesting pastime, perhaps, but certainly no cause in which to enlist. Nor is it likely that the persecution of Buddhism was launched by Confucian ideological zealots. Han Yü's famous denunciation of Buddhism in 819 represented an extreme opinion, and it is important not to perpetuate the notion that he ushered in a full-scale swing away from Buddhism towards Confucianism. On the contrary, the great majority of late T'ang high officials, including Li Te-yü and Wu-tsung's other chief ministers, do not seem to have shared Han Yü's degree of personal outrage at the penetration of Buddhism into Chinese spiritual life. Of course the vulgar excesses of popular Buddhist practice may have aroused upper class hostility,[176] but, as is obvious from an examination of the surviving corpus of T'ang prose and poetry, the more elevated forms of philosophical Buddhist thought and ritual held great attraction for many among the ruling elite. As we have noted, furthermore, social intercourse between the higher clergy and those holding secular power had become a matter of routine. The caricature of Buddhism as a degenerate, alien cult was a purely polemical conceit, and in this case an attempt to justify the violence of the mid-840s rhetorically.

Buddhist historical writers have blamed Li Te-yü for carrying out the persecution, and they may well be right even though they supply no definite proof of his involvement.[177] There were a number of good political reasons for Li to support the persecution, beginning with the benefits it would bring to state finance. This was also an opportunity for Li Te-yü to promote the development of a more elaborate state ceremonial in support of his practical political activity, and especially to strengthen the cult of the great emperors and statesmen of the early T'ang. He proposed, for example, to establish a Shrine to Martial Glory (Chao-wu miao) in recently conquered Chao-i province, using funds confiscated from Buddhist temples, and he supported the use of former Buddhist buildings near Lo-yang to restore important imperial shrines destroyed during the An Lu-shan rebellion.[178] Moreover, the persecution may have been connected, particularly in its early stages, with Li Te-yü's efforts to curb

[175] *CTS* 18A, pp. 603–6.
[176] Ch'en, *Transformation*, pp. 254–5; Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1976), ch. 3.
[177] *TD* 49, pp. 386b–c, 637b–c; *Li Wen-jao wen-chi* 20, pp. 3a–4b.
[178] *CTS* 18A, pp. 606–7; *TCTC* 248, p. 8017; cf. *CTS* 18B, pp. 614–15.

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the power of the eunuch Ch'iu Shih-liang, who was both a pious Buddhist and the person in the government responsible for overseeing the Buddhist establishment (*kung-te shih*, 'commissioner of good works'). And finally, although the evidence is purely circumstantial, it would seem likely that the suppression of Manichaeism in China, which was carried out by Li Te-yü in 843 after his defeat of the patrons of that religion, the Uighurs, provided a model for the much more extensive attack on the Buddhist church.

The relaxation of the persecution under Hsiuan-tsung stopped short of permitting the Buddhists to regain their full former institutional strength. Thus while the new emperor sponsored a spiritual revival, patronizing Buddhist services and at one point forbidding the killing of cattle, his initial order of 847 allowing temples to be rebuilt without government interference was restricted subsequently in actual practice. At the urging of the chief ministers, a more prudent policy was adopted in the early 850s to curb excessive expenditure and to permit further temple construction only in heavily populated areas.[179] Although monks and nuns no longer had to fear for their lives and could in many cases return to their religious vocation, the government nevertheless took pains to forestall the resurgence of private ordination, decreeing that deficiences in the clerical ranks should be filled only under the supervision of the Department of Sacrifices (Tz'u pu) in the Board of Rites. Even as the big temples in Ch'ang-an were in the process of reconstruction, Hsiuan-tsung ordered changes in the names of practically all of them.[180] The Temple of Enlightenment (P'u-t'i ssu) became the Temple for the Preservation of the Dynasty (Pao-T'ang ssu), the Dharma-cloud Nunnery (Fa-yün ni-ssu) was renamed the Temple of the T'ang Peace (T'ang-an ssu), and so on – symbols of the new secular control over organized Buddhism, which lasted for many centuries after Wu-tsung and Li Te-yü had passed from the scene.

The reign of Hsiuan-tsung (846–59)

Wu-tsung died in 846 at the age of thirty-three, presumably from the effects of drugs. Hsiuan-tsung[181] was elevated to the throne by a group of palace eunuchs, like most of the other ninth-century emperors, but in his case there was no struggle over the succession. He was the only

[179] *TCTC* 249, pp. 8047–8.

[180] *CTS* 18B, p. 615.

[181] His posthumous title is written with the character meaning 'all-embracing', as opposed to that used in the title of his eighth-century predecessor, which means 'profound'. The letter 'i' has been added to the Wade-Giles' Hsüan to differentiate him from the eighth-century ruler: though their names are romanized identically, the Chinese characters are different.

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reasonable candidate. Wu-tsung's sons were all too young to become emperor, and as we have seen, Wu-tsung's remaining brother had been killed in the succession dispute of 840. The 37-year-old Hsiuan-tsung was a member of the previous generation. He was the thirteenth son of Hsien-tsung, half-brother to Mu-tsung, and uncle to the three emperors who had reigned just before him.

Uncle Kuang, as the courtiers of the 830s and 840s had nicknamed him, had been ignored politically and mocked in polite company before his unexpected elevation to the throne. He had been sickly as a child and susceptible to seeing strange visions. In his adult years he turned his afflictions into a source of self-protection. He feigned gloomy disinterest in anything that might draw him into the dangerous palace intrigues of the time, suffering abuse in silence and hoping to be taken for a harmless eccentric. After becoming emperor, however, he let loose his rage and resentment, especially over the mysterious circumstances of the death of his father Hsien-tsung, a memory so painful as to throw him into fits of uncontrollable weeping on his visits to Hsien-tsung's grave.[182] Hsiuan-tsung was convinced that his half-brother Mu-tsung and Mu-tsung's mother, the empress dowager Kuo, were somehow responsible for Hsien-tsung's fatal illness. When the elderly Lady Kuo finally died in 848, Hsiuan-tsung refused to bury her in a place of honour beside his father, and there were rumours that he had hastened the old woman's death. For five years afterwards, Hsiuan-tsung hunted down all those he believed to be accomplices in the affair. He even downgraded Mu-tsung and his three sons in the rituals at the imperial shrine, at what cost to the carefully cultivated prestige of the ruling house we can only guess. This preoccupation with the court as it had been forty years earlier persisted into Hsiuan-tsung's calmer moments. He sought out those who could tell him stories about his father's reign, and he showed a decided preference for hiring sons of high officials of the Yüan-ho era both for his personal staff and for positions in the government.[183]

As if to make up for his own ill-treatment, Hsiuan-tsung was very careful to provide for the welfare of his own mother and of his brothers who were still living. He also doted on his sister and his daughters, one of whom was so confident of his affection as to smash her chopsticks and soupspoon in his presence, forcing him to abandon plans to betroth her to someone she hated. Yet it is interesting that Hsiuan-tsung never faced up to the important issue of naming an heir apparent, despite constant nagging from nervous officials. He is supposed to have favoured his

[182] Wang T'ang, comp. *T'ang yü-lin* (Shanghai, 1957), 1, p. 7.
[183] *Tung-kuan tsou-chi* (TSCC edn), 1, p. 2.

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third son over his eldest son, but he never did anything about it; his hesitation ultimately led to still another palace struggle, in which a eunuch succeeded in enthroning Hsiuan-tsung's firstborn.[184] While he reigned, Hsiuan-tsung apparently wanted his personal primacy to remain unquestioned, particularly in the family circles where he had been despised for so long.

This curious, cranky man did more than simply nurse his grudges in private, of course, for he also had to deal with the court officials, very few of whom, one suspects, had come to his defence in earlier years. For the most part Hsiuan-tsung insisted on the strictest formality in his interviews with the high bureaucrats. He frequently humiliated them with acid personal comments, or with a display of detailed knowledge of the issue under discussion. His information for such formal court sessions, at which he grilled visiting governors and newly-appointed local officials mercilessly, came from his study of important data about the empire and from meticulous briefings prepared by his staff. His punctiliousness in matters of decorum and substance was so notorious that after ten years as a chief minister under Hsiuan-tsung, Ling-hu T'ao (*c.* 802–79) was on one occasion so unnerved by the emperor's questions that his clothes were soaked through with sweat even though the weather was cold.[185] At the same time, however, Hsiuan-tsung had pretensions like those of his father Hsien-tsung to recreate the spirit of T'ai-tsung's court. His aides read to him from the *Chen-kuan cheng-yao*, an informal history of T'ai-tsung's relationship with his ministers, and he occasionally showed extreme solicitude to a favoured official in the manner of the former emperors. He was more sincere than some of his predecessors in encouraging frank criticism from the appropriate offices of the bureaucracy. But the prevailing mood among the courtiers must have been one of uncertainty, respect and awe.[186]

It came as no surprise that Hsiuan-tsung's first important decision in 846 was to be rid of Li Te-yü, the powerful politician who was so closely identified with his hated nephew Wu-tsung. Li Te-yü was demoted in the customary stages, each post being more junior and more southerly, but the decisive stroke came as a result of a careful re-investigation of a disputed legal case in which Li had been peripherally involved. Hsiuan-tsung incorporated the findings as the basis of a long and detailed denunciation of Li's misdeeds, and he sent Li off to the nadir of Chinese officialdom as a district officer on Hainan Island in the South China Sea, where the former chief minister died early in 850. Even after this degradation,

[184] *TCTC* 249, pp. 8075–7.
[185] *TCTC* 249, p. 8073.
[186] *Tung-kuan tsou-chi* 1, p. 6.

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Li Te-yü's memory was so strong as to trouble Ling-hu T'ao in his dreams.[187]

In removing Li Te-yü from office, Hsiuan-tsung was supported by the many enemies Li had made by his heavy-handed methods of administration, and of course by the adherents of the Niu faction, who were eager to see that Li and his key associates suffered the full humiliation inflicted earlier on Niu Seng-ju and Li Tsung-min. To some extent, younger Niu faction members like Po Min-chung (d. *c.* 862), nephew of the poet Po Chü-i and chief minister from 846 to 851, fanned the old clique hatred. It would be misleading, however, to characterize this period politically as an unqualified final victory for the Niu faction. In the first place, many of the prominent members of both factions belonging to the older generation died in the late 840s. More important still was the emergence of Hsiuan-tsung himself as the strongest single political force in the empire, and the consequent decline of overt, large-scale factionalism in general. Although Hsiuan-tsung did rehabilitate a few of the older Niu partisans and did extend his favour to some of their younger relatives (including the son of Niu Seng-ju), there was only a limited turnover of high posts along strictly partisan lines, and even that phenomenon disappeared during the 850s. There was no change of régime in the manner of Wen-tsung's court. From this time onwards, the echoes of the great Niu-Li controversy were primarily literary and historical.

Hsiuan-tsung's reign appears to be divisible into three political phases. The first, from his accession until about 850, was clearly devoted to consolidation of his power, dismissal of Li-party members, resolution of the Buddhist problem, and reintegration of prefectures in the north-west that had surrendered after the break-up of the Tibetan kingdom, a subject to which we shall return later. Po Min-chung was the only one of seven chief ministers in this period to serve for more than about one year. The second period, covering most of the 850s, was marked by longer terms for fewer chief ministers, including Ling-hu T'ao and a well-known financial official, P'ei Hsiu (?787–860). The last period, from 857 to 859, during which Hsiuan-tsung showed signs of increasing irritability (and, uncharacteristically, became interested in Taoist long-life theories), showed a rapid turnover of chief ministers, most of whom had been Hanlin academicians in the past.

It is very difficult to appraise the later two periods of Hsiuan-tsung's reign in much detail, because of one of the deficiencies in the historical sources mentioned at the beginning of this essay. As a result of the destruction of basic court documents and disruption of government during

187 *Tung-kuan tsou-chi* 2, pp. 14–15.

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the revolts of the last quarter of the ninth century, 'not so much as one character' of a conventional Veritable Record for Hsiuan-tsung's reign could be compiled in the normal way, when the task was finally assigned in the early 890s.[188] One historian posted to that abortive project, P'ei T'ing-yü, did compile a three-chapter work of anecdotes and reminiscences of Hsiuan-tsung's court, entitled *Tung-kuan tsou-chi*. This book is our basic source for knowledge of the personal qualities of the emperor. It has practically no information on important political issues, however. The basic annals (*pen-chi*) and the few biographies of men of this period, put together in the mid-tenth century as part of the *Chiu T'ang shu*, share this defect, especially for the 850s, where as a rule they contain only bare lists of official appointments. The two vitally important documentary collections, the *T'ang hui-yao* and the *Ts'e-fu yüan-kuei*, show a similarly precipitous drop in entries for the later part of Hsiuan-tsung's reign. The remarks made below about the court of the 840s and 850s are necessarily tentative.

One has the strong impression that Hsiuan-tsung's reign was a time of stock-taking, reappraisal of the past, and organization of knowledge into usable forms. The number of large compilations, both public and private, undertaken during this period is strikingly high – a dozen or more. This is a great contrast to the sporadic interest in such writings shown during the preceding several decades. Among the administrative compilations were several digests of data on the central government and the provinces, made for the personal use of the emperor.[189] In addition, Yang Shao-fu presented a continuation of Su Mien's *Hui-yao* (*Essential regulations*) to the throne in 853, covering the decrees and memorials from after the reign of Te-tsung until his own time, a book later incorporated into the present text of the *T'ang hui-yao*.

Historical works included another continuation, the *Hsü T'ang-li* (compiled under Ts'ui Kuei-ts'ung in 851), a chronological history that began where the *T'ang-li* of the eighth-century genealogist Liu Fang had left off. This work was a key source for Ssu-ma Kuang's *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*. In 854 the history office presented the throne with the Veritable Record for the reign of Wen-tsung, in forty *chüan*. Moreover, an attempt was made to reinstate the original version of the Hsien-tsung Veritable Record, in place of the second edition, which had been compiled under the influence of Li Te-yü. Both an annalistic compendium on the administration of former monarchs, in ten *chüan*, and a related *Comprehensive History* (*T'ung-shih*), in three hundred *chüan*, were presented to Hsiuan-tsung in 851, the

[188] *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu* 51, p. 15b.
[189] *Tung-kuan tsou-chi* 2, p. 12; *TCTC* 248, pp. 8032–3.

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object of which was to provide him with 'all' the notable decrees, laws, and general policies from ancient times to the end of the Sui.

The examination system was treated in Yao K'ang's *Examination graduates' roster* (*K'o-ti lu*), which was still extant in Sung times and which was an important source for later compilations. Chao Chuan assembled a record of the set subjects for poetry composition on the *chin-shih* examinations, which had been culled laboriously from private sources. And finally, two very important legal works were written in Hsiuan-tsung's reign: a topical compilation of edicts subsequent to the regulations entitled *Ta-chung hsing-fa tsung-yao ko-hou ch'ih* (*851*) which brought officials up-to-date on imperial legislation since the reign of Wen-tsung, and a legal encyclopedia (*Ta-chung hsing-lü t'ung-lei*) in twelve *chüan*, following the divisions in the Code.[190] This list of books is probably not complete, but it is sufficient to show strong indications of a rationalizing spirit.

The stress on law was carried through in practice. Attempts were made to tighten definitions of criminal acts and to regularize legal procedure. The emperor seems to have been inclined to mitigate criminal punishments in general, both by statutory reduction of penalties and by acts of amnesty, but in cases of clearly wilful violation of the law he could be very harsh. Hsiuan-tsung also encouraged a more precise usage of precedent in administrative decisions; memorials on many subjects frequently referred to earlier legislation, specifically by date.[191] The emperor's attention to detail and the orderly conduct of public affairs, for which he has been praised extensively by traditional historians, provoked a favourable response from at least some of the central government officials, especially those in the Boards of Justice and Rites. But, probably because of Hsiuan-tsung's clear rejection of Li Te-yü's example of partnership between the emperor and a very strong chief minister, he had difficulty in delegating authority to any of the nominal heads of the bureaucracy. This actually may have discouraged officials from displaying initiative.

Hsiuan-tsung's reign is not noted for innovative economic or social reform measures, although there were many problems to be addressed. For example, by the 850s only about 30 per cent of the tax grain collected in the lower Yangtze region was in fact delivered to the storage granaries in the north. There was extensive pilferage and corruption along the Pien Canal, and a general lack of maintenance resulted in frequent losses of grain boats. In the early 850s the commissioner for salt and iron, P'ei Hsiu, issued a series of procedures to combat the decay in transport, but while grain receipts tripled for a time, the revival seems to have been

190 *CTS* 18B, p. 628.

191 *CTS* 18B, pp. 627, 629.

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shortlived. And despite attempts to reform the operation of the salt monopoly under Hsiuan-tsung, much of the salt production was diverted to the use of the provinces rather than the central government. Its yield to Ch'ang-an was only just over half the amount that had been received during Hsien-tsung's reign.[192]

The relationship between court politics and the first sizeable stirrings of popular discontent is a complicated subject, one that might not be fully understood even if we knew these years in greater detail. On the one hand, T'ang central authority had already lasted far longer than is suggested by the traditional, and superficial, view of the dynasty's decline after the An Lu-shan rebellion. Ennin's description of the extent of central control in the countryside during the 840s, even in the semi-autonomous Ho-pei, showed a remarkably stable and prosperous realm.[193] In general, the minimal amount of interference in local affairs by the district magistrates (the lowest level of T'ang authority) was tolerated into the 870s before explicitly anti-dynastic forces appeared to challenge the power of the state. On the other hand, important changes in late T'ang economy and society continued to take place, such as the growth of large landed estates in the hands of private individuals, and the corresponding dislocation in the lives of the peasants. Some of these changes the central government chose to ignore, and others it was not equipped to understand and act upon in more than a rudimentary way. The inherent weaknesses of central institutions revealed themselves, during the mid-ninth century stability, primarily at flashpoints – mutinies, tax-riots and so forth. Because these were relatively infrequent and isolated events, at least until the mid-850s, they could be suppressed by Ch'ang-an under the illusion that the old remedies of force were still sufficient. Many fundamental problems went undiagnosed and uncorrected.[194]

Late in Hsiuan-tsung's reign there were armed revolts in modern Kwangtung, North Vietnam, Kiangsi and Hunan, and two quite serious mutinies, those of K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai in Hsüan-chou (Anhwei) and Ch'iu Fu in Che-tung (Chekiang). They are conventionally seen as precursors of the cataclysmic rebellion of Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao (873–84), which finally struck at the heart of the T'ang. This period, when the fate of the dynasty began to slip away from the control of Ch'ang-an, marks an appropriate end to our story of court politics. Although the T'ang existed in name for somewhat more than four decades thereafter, the late ninth century is properly regarded as the beginning of the Five Dynasties period.

[192] Twitchett, *Financial administration*, pp. 57–8.
[193] Reischauer, *Ennin's travels*, chs. 4–5.
[194] See ch. 10 below.

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Foreign relations in early and mid-ninth century

As we noted above, Chinese victories in the south-west and the consolidation of the anti-Tibetan alliance with Nan-chao around the turn of the ninth century relieved very great Tibetan pressure on China's western borders. Thereafter Tibet turned upon the Uighurs. With the capture of the former Chinese outpost of Pei-t'ing in 791, Tibet began an attempt to enlarge its sphere of influence along its northern marches. Besides increased security, an important goal of Tibet's northward expansion was the lure of seizing control over at least a segment of the long-distance trade through central Asia, and of preying upon the Uighur-Chinese trade. The sporadic Tibetan raids after 800 against outlying Chinese walled towns in modern Shensi, although noted with alarm by the T'ang, were most likely incidental to the main goal of attacking the Uighurs. The Uighurs in turn were understandably upset. They responded to Tibetan harassment of their trade and tribute caravans with a major counterattack on Tibetan forces near Turfan in 813, but this battle does not seem to have been decisive.[195] In the late 810s, consequently, the two Inner Asian powers both extended diplomatic initiatives towards China, the Uighurs seeking reaffirmation of their Chinese alliance in the form of a third dynastic marriage, the Tibetans pressing for a tactical treaty of armistice with the T'ang.

Why Tibet approached China at just that time is not clear, although a plausible assumption would be that the T'ang under Hsien-tsung had grown much stronger internally, and therefore could exert more influence externally than it had in the late eighth century. Negotiations between the two states had begun as early as 808 on a variety of issues, in any case, and it is thought that the new Tibetan king, Khri-gtsug lde-brtsan (reign *c.* 815–36), was especially eager for peace. The heavy Tibetan attacks against the Chinese north-west in 819–20 were a pointed way of putting pressure upon the T'ang emperor to sign an agreement. A full treaty was negotiated at Ch'ang-an in 821, and made final at Lhasa the next year, which provided for an end to warfare, a freeze on territorial encroachment by either side, regulations on the travel of envoys, and investigation and repatriation of 'suspicious persons' apprehended near the border.[196]

Tibetan political history of the 820s was turbulent, marked by struggles between the Buddhist royal family and the powerful vassal clans, many of whom championed the indigenous Bon religion.[197] Doubtless this

[195] *TCTC* 239, pp. 7701–2.
[196] Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū*, vol. 2, pp. 690–4; Li Fang-kuei, 'The inscription of the Sino-Tibetan Treaty of 821–822', *TP*, 44.1–3 (1956) 1–99.
[197] Satō Hisashi, *Kodai Chibetto shi kenkyū*, vol. 2, pp. 696–9.

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debilitating internal dissension was an important reason why the Sino-Tibetan treaty of 821–2 was not breached soon after its establishment, as had been the case with the treaty of 783. On the whole, peace prevailed between Tibet and China in the 820s and 830s. Sometime around 840, the Tibetan monarchy declined very rapidly in power and came to an end with the death of king Dar-ma, who is portrayed in both Tibetan and Chinese historiography as a wicked, dissolute, 'bad last' ruler, at least in part on account of his antagonism towards Buddhism. The struggle among the princes for the right to succeed him tore Tibet into pieces. The military presence in the Kansu corridor collapsed. The Tibetan kingdom, which for so long had been the primary antagonistic foreign power in late T'ang history, played no significant role in east Asian interstate relations thereafter.

From about 795 to 835, the Uighurs were enjoying the height of their power. During those decades, their alliance with China grew ever more profitable, but became ruinously expensive for the Chinese to maintain. Originally, T'ang merchants had traded silk for Uighur horses as a normal economic transaction. But in the late eighth and early ninth century, the Chinese government required large numbers of horses for its provincial wars, and having lost its best breeding grounds in the north-west to Tibetan occupation, became dependent on the Uighurs as a source of supply. The Uighurs took advantage of this situation, sending inferior horses south to China in numbers far greater than the T'ang needed. For these the Uighurs demanded a high price (generally reckoned as forty lengths of silk per horse), under the implicit threat of reprisal. There was nothing the Chinese could do except 'count the carcasses, dead or alive' and pay up, or risk a sharp increase in border raids.[198] China's state finances suffered under this burden. In several instances of forced horse-purchase, as many as half-a-million lengths of silk changed hands. Although some of this silk was consumed at the Uighur court, most of it in fact constituted a subsidy for the Uighurs' Inner Asian trade. As we might expect, many Chinese officials greatly resented the spectacle of the weaving women of the lower Yangtze slaving over their looms to provide silk for government outlays to 'barbarians'. Such humiliation was compounded by the arrogance of the Uighur envoys to China and of their agents, the Manichaean priests and Soghdian merchants.

Nevertheless, friendly relations with the Uighurs were essential to the success of late T'ang foreign policy. The marriage of the Princess T'ai-ho to the Uighur qaghan in 821, however regrettable from the point

[198] Sechin Jagchid, 'Tui Hui-ho ma wen-t'i ti i-ko k'an-fa', *Shih-huo yüeh-k'an*, 1.1 (1971) 21–8.

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of view of Chinese prestige, was the great symbol of the importance of the alliance, and its significance was underlined by the mammoth dowry of the princess and by her high personal status. In fact, among the foreign powers in contact with the T'ang, only the Uighurs were granted true imperial Chinese princesses, i.e. daughters of emperors, as consorts for their rulers, and they on only three occasions. Other states received the Chinese emperor's more distant female relatives, if indeed they were favoured with marriage relationships at all.[199]

The Uighurs, like the Tibetans, were greatly weakened by internal power struggles during the 830s. It is an even more remarkable coincidence that in 840, as Tibet was in the process of collapse as a unified state, the Qïrqïz succeeded in overthrowing the Uighur empire. As we have seen, by 843 Li Te-yü had dispersed the huge group of Uighur refugees camping on China's frontiers. Thus the interstate politics of Inner Asia changed radically within a very short time. After the fall of Tibet and the Uighur empire, the T'ang government was able to disengage itself from extensive foreign involvement in the north and north-west, for the first time since the founding of the dynasty.

The crucial decision not to try to retake the former Chinese colonies in eastern Turkestan – An-hsi and Pei-t'ing – was arrived at by Wu-tsung at the urging of Li Te-yü.[200] Li argued that the expense and danger of refortifying such distant areas, even if they could be retaken from the native populations, were not offset by any potential gain. Already the Qïrqïz, the new rulers of the northern steppe, had shown their willingness to coexist with China, and even to adopt the status of nominal vassals in accordance with the conventions of T'ang ideology and diplomatic protocol. The attitude of mutual forbearance between the Qïrqïz and the T'ang in fact preserved the peace in the far steppe for many decades.

Closer to home, the Chinese confined themselves after the early 840s to the recovery of their former north-western territories and to the re-establishment of a natural defence perimeter in the northern frontier zone. This took place in several different ways, depending on the specific military situation and ethnic composition of the populations in the several outlying areas.

The Kansu corridor from Tun-huang in the west to Lan-chou in the east became the scene of fierce armed struggles after 840 among Tibetan leaders who no longer owed allegiance to the king in Lhasa. Before long a Chinese adventurer named Chang I-ch'ao raised an army of his own and enlisted the support of the 'Chinese' (many of whom were probably people of mixed Sino-Tibetan-Turkish background) living in the various

[199] *THY* 6, pp. 75–8. [200] *CTS* 174, pp. 4522–3; *TFYK* 994, pp. 7a–8a.

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towns along the trade route. By 851 he had driven the Tibetan overlords out. He sent a messenger to Ch'ang-an to announce his voluntary submission to T'ang authority, much to the delight of the court. He was awarded the title of military governor and leader of the 'Return to Allegiance Army' (Kuei-i chün). Chang I-ch'ao's colourful exploits later made him a cult figure in the Tun-huang area, of which he was a native, and he became the subject of stirring martial ballads.[201]

A number of important towns, including Yüan-chou and Ch'in-chou, located in the part of eastern Kansu that had been lost to Tibetan domination for almost a hundred years, surrendered directly to the dynasty in the late 840s. Imperial generals were able to reduce the remnants of Tibetan cavalry in that region with relatively little trouble.

The government had far more difficulty, however, in pacifying the area of steppeland skirting the Great Wall south of the Ordos Desert, some three hundred kilometres due north of Ch'ang-an. Here, along the border between modern Ninghsia and Shensi, lived the Tanguts (Tang-hsiang), a fairly large semi-nomadic tribal confederation of Tibetan ethnic origin. The Tanguts had been driven from their original homeland in north-east Tibet (modern Tsinghai province) by the expansionist Tibetan kingdom during the seventh and eighth centuries. They were buffeted about among the three great powers for many years. They finally settled in the Hsia-chou/Yin-chou area near the Wall in the beginning of the ninth century. This region was poorly suited for extensive agriculture but could be used for horse-breeding, and it was also ideally situated for trade purposes between Ch'ang-an and the Uighur capital. The Tanguts were political subjects of the T'ang and were divided up among several *chi-mi fu-chou* ('loose-rein prefectures') under Chinese-appointed governors. These governors (themselves often of Sino-foreign stock) were the original source of unrest in that area during the ninth century. They oppressed the Tanguts, cheating them of a just price for their horses and camels and profiteering at the expense of the travelling merchants. In the 820s and 830s the Tanguts began to retaliate with weapons they had smuggled out of China in defiance of a strict embargo. By Wu-tsung's reign the intermittent Tangut raids had become a real revolt, and, because of the support the Tanguts received from homeless Uighurs and Tibetans, a potential source of danger to Ch'ang-an. As a conciliatory gesture, Hsiuan-tsung removed the governors who had engaged in corruption, but because the raids did not cease, he then set up a full expeditionary command under a former chief minister to chastise the Tanguts. Hsiuan-tsung's policy of sending trusted civil officials into the field in the hope of instilling the

[201] Wang Ch'ung-min *et al.* eds. *Tun-huang pien-wen chi* (Peking, 1957), vol. 1, pp. 114-20.

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civil virtues among the nomads was not efficient militarily, however. It took well over five years, and cost an enormous amount, before calm was restored. The Tanguts remained strong after this defeat. Their cavalry participated on the side of the T'ang imperial house in the fight against the rebel Huang Ch'ao, and their merchants continued to grow more prosperous from trade in the late ninth century. During the Five Dynasties the Tanguts broke away from Chinese control and set up a regime that became the basis of the Hsi-hsia kingdom of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The affairs of China's southern colonial outposts in Annam (modern North Vietnam) became intertwined with the rising territorial ambitions of the Yunnanese state of Nan-chao in the mid-ninth century. This conjunction was a long time in the making. T'ang imperialist expansion into Ling-nan circuit (modern Kwangtung and Kwangsi) and further south into the Hanoi area had been pursued ever since the founding of the dynasty. That large tropical region was divided by the government into several military administrations and subdivided into prefectures, but this did not prevent continual conflict between the northern rulers and their native subjects; as Schafer remarks, 'The triumph of the Hua [Chinese] over the Man [southern barbarians] was never complete.'[202] After the An Lu-shan rebellion, Ch'ang-an bureaucrats seem to have viewed the far south still more as a backwater area, and for the most part they permitted local officials to abuse the people as they pleased, much as in the Tangut areas of the north. Imperial troops were sent to restore order when indigenous revolts seemed to have a chance of success.[203] In 858, following decades of inconclusive skirmishing, a large rebellion broke out in Annam, and its leaders took the unprecedented step of requesting help from Nan-chao.

Nan-chao, in turn, was then a much stronger state than it had been when it allied itself with the T'ang just before the turn of the ninth century. The Nan-chao rulers enthusiastically adopted many features of T'ang government and culture in the early 800s, initially under the tutelage of Wei Kao and other governors in Szechwan, who felt the traditional responsibility to civilize foreign peoples by exposing them to Chinese ways. The sons of Nan-chao dignitaries were sent to Ch'eng-tu to study, for example, and they introduced T'ang administrative techniques into their homeland upon their return. This peaceful interchange did not last long, however. In the 820s the Chinese garrison troops in Szechwan, restive because they were not supplied adequately by their military

[202] E. H. Schafer, *The vermilion bird: T'ang images of the south* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 61.
[203] See list, *ibid.* pp. 61–9. See also ch. 10 below.

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governor, turned to Nan-chao border tribes for their needs. Before long the Nan-chao leaders knew the strengths and weaknesses of Szechwanese defence better than their former teachers did. Nan-chao attacked Szechwan a number of times in 829–30, driving as far as the outskirts of Ch'eng-tu, ostensibly to save the Chinese population from their own officials. They were in fact supported by mutinies in the garrison. Although a truce was agreed upon and the discipline of the Chinese troops restored by subsequent governors, the T'ang could no longer count on Nan-chao to be a docile ally. The south-western border region remained tense for several decades thereafter.

Against this background, the T'ang colonies in Annam became a natural target for Nan-chao's military adventures, via the Red and Black river valleys, which drain the Yün-nan plateau south-easterly into the Gulf of Tonkin. The combined forces of the Annamese rebels and their Nan-chao allies inflicted heavy losses on the Chinese garrisons in the late 850s and early 860s, taking Chiao-chou, the administrative centre at modern Hanoi, in 863. A celebrated T'ang general, Kao P'ien, was able to subdue the large invasion force only after several years. After 868 the far south was quiet, but this peace had been purchased at a high price.[204] As we have noted, the T'ang was beset by numerous internal revolts at this time and was shortly to undergo the ravages of a mutiny, led by an army officer named P'ang Hsün, which severely disturbed much of the middle and lower Yangtze area.[205] Moreover, the beginnings of the great Wang Hsien-chih/Huang Ch'ao rebellion were only five years in the future.

[204] *CTW* 746, p. 17a.
[205] R. des Rotours, 'La révolte de P'ang Hiun, 868–869', *TP*, 56 (1970) 229–40.

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CHAPTER 10

THE END OF THE T'ANG

FISCAL PROBLEMS, RURAL UNREST AND POPULAR REBELLION

It was only after 884, at the very end of the dynasty, that the T'ang dynastic house finally abandoned its attempt to control all of China proper, and until then it never really lost its sovereignty over any part, however little actual authority it had in some areas. Even in the most obdurately independent provinces, T'ang titles were inevitably adopted, and formal court appointment to office was usually sought. Thus the T'ang continued to maintain a presence even in places it could not govern. But its frequent and costly efforts to reassert authority in 'rebellious' areas, the inescapable need to defend the empire from foreign invasions, and the maintenance of a large bureaucracy even after the central government's effective administrative power had been severely diminished, all put serious pressures on the resources actually at the dynasty's command. Those pressures led to a series of cumulative developments, each more serious and complex than the last: from 780 to 820 an increasing tax burden was loaded upon the peasantry, to support campaigns to restore dynastic unity; from 820 to 860 a growing pattern of disorder and local banditry emerged; from 860 to 875 broadly supported garrison insurrections broke out, coupled with a serious attempt to form an independent regional state in the lower Yangtze valley; from 875 to 884 a popular rebellion of immense proportions arose. The rebels captured the T'ang capital and held it for more than two years. The dynasty was now virtually destroyed and from 884 to 907 an array of regional states was established, one of which provided the *coup de grâce* to the T'ang dynasty.

Considering this series of developments the massive rebellions which brought down the T'ang seem inevitable, and by the middle of the ninth century well-informed officials were very aware of the seriousness of the situation and of its causes, and expressed their fears to the emperor. Many traditional Chinese scholars, and all serious modern historians of the period, see the origins of the late T'ang rebellions in the economic situation that had begun to take shape nearly a century before.

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Background of late T'ang financial policy

The two-tax (*liang-shui*) system, introduced in 780, did nothing to lighten the burden of the tax-paying peasant. It was originally intended to stabilize the peasant's economic situation, by consolidating his numerous tax obligations into two standard levies a year and abolishing all other imposts, and by abandoning monopoly taxation. But even after the two-tax system was implemented additional taxes continued to be collected. More seriously, the method in which the basic taxes were levied also worked to the great disadvantage of the peasant, for the regular taxes were assessed (though not necessarily collected) in cash, and set at very high levels, since the currency in 780 was seriously inflated. Unfortunately for the peasant, a long period of serious deflation set in during the 780s, at the end of which taxes paid in kind were in real terms three to four times the original quota. No remissions were granted, and no effort was made to reassess taxes in terms of commodities, for the simple reason that the government needed the additional revenues to finance the extensive and costly internal wars carried out under Te-tsung (780 to 805) and Hsien-tsung (805 to 820). The salt monopoly was also reintroduced almost immediately and continued to bring in a significant portion of central government revenues; this imposed a further burden on the peasant.[1]

In addition, the government found another major source of revenue in the tribute 'offerings' presented by regional officials to the emperor's personal treasury (*nei-ts'ang-k'u*) on fixed ceremonial occasions.[2] Such contributions had been abolished shortly before the institution of the two-tax, but were soon restored and became a source of further illegal tax obligations. These 'offerings' became a vital source of income for the government, and also means by which regional officials could curry favour with the emperor – one of the most assiduous sent 'offerings' to the court daily. But like all other sources of revenue, they were ultimately extracted from the hard-pressed peasantry.

These and other extraordinary impositions, together with the general tax increases, provided funds for Hsien-tsung's successful policy of re-centralization. But his efforts left the government financially exhausted, and his successor found it necessary to introduce a series of economies, including a major reduction in the armies maintained by the government.

[1] On these financial problems, see Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Sō no hanran – Tōmatsu henkakuki no ichi kōsatsu', *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 13 (1957) 28–9; *TCTC* 242, p. 7799; Denis Twitchett, *Financial administration under the T'ang dynasty*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 46–7; Denis Twitchett, 'The salt commissioners after An Lu-shan's rebellion', *AM* (NS), 4.1 (1954) 70 ff.

[2] Nakamura Yūichi has an excellent survey in 'Tōdai naizōko no henyō – shinpō o chūshin ni', *Machikeneyama ronsō*, 4 (1971) 137–68; see also Sogabe Shizuo, 'Tō jidai no kōken seido', *Bunka*, 36.1–2 (1972) 1–32.

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Growth of social unrest and resistance

Although Hsien-tsung's successors incurred nothing like the military expenditures of his reign, monopoly revenues continued to increase and included taxes not only on salt, but also on tea, malt and liquor.[3] Increasing numbers of peasants left their own lands to escape their tax obligations, to become tenants on the rapidly increasing estates (*chuang-yüan*) of rural landowners, who could protect them from government taxation, thus posing a serious social and fiscal problem for the government. Rather than reducing local quotas, however, the government simply followed a policy of 'apportionment' (*t'an-p'ei* or *chün-t'an*) by which the tax obligations of a peasant who had fled his land were assigned to his fellow villagers, a crude application of mutual responsibility which aggravated matters still further.

The 840s and 850s were relatively stable and peaceful, but there were signs that the government was falling into serious economic difficulties. Wu-tsung's suppression of Buddhism in 845 was in part an attempt to solve these pressing financial problems. During Hsiuan-tsung's reign (847 to 860) the government had average yearly revenues, including receipts from the two-tax, and the salt, tea and wine monopoly taxes, of 9,220,000 strings of cash. But that was a full 3,000,000 strings short of normal yearly expenditures – even during that generally peaceful period – so it became necessary to collect taxes due in future years to make up the deficit.[4] Monopoly taxes continued to be fully exploited, but abuse and organized evasion led to an actual decline in government receipts.

During the first half of the ninth century, the tax burden had fallen most heavily on the rich and economically advanced lower Yangtze provinces. The result was ultimately disastrous, as that region, so wealthy and secure, was exploited up to and finally beyond the breaking point. This was a most serious development for the T'ang. The lower Yangtze valley had normally been a 'safe' region secure from foreign enemies, rich in natural wealth, and above all it was a region loyal to the dynasty, and had enjoyed a long period of almost uninterrupted peace. The government's dependence on the region had increased in the post-An Lu-shan period, owing to the dynasty's loss of control of the productive North China Plain. During Hsien-tsung's reign it was the only area that contributed taxes on a regular basis and it was a region from which the government could always confidently extract extra revenues. It had suffered more

[3] Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Sō no hanran', pp. 40–1; Marugame Kinsaku, 'Tōdai sake no sembai', *Tōyō gakuhō*, 40.3 (1957) 66–112.

[4] *HTS* 52, pp. 1362–3.

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special increases in the two-tax quotas than other areas. The fiscal exploitation of the south-east was further accelerated during Hsiuan-tsung's reign.

The T'ang government had been given abundant warning that their policies were leading to discontent and disaffection in the south-east. In 835 a proposal to transplant all tea-shrubs to official plantations had provoked such strong resistance from the tea producers that the government was advised that to enforce its plan it would have to 'exterminate the population, or force them into resistance in the hills'.[5] The proposal had to be dropped. Civil disorder was already widespread by the early years of Wen-tsung's reign (827–40). In 831, the civil governor of O-Yüeh in the middle Yangtze kept a special force to attack the river pirates active in his territory. An Act of Grace of 842 drew attention to the alarming bandit activity in the Yangtze region, and instructed officials there to take strict precautions.[6] Another Act of Grace in 845 associated the bandits with the salt smugglers who operated throughout the region.[7] The income from the illicit salt trade was used to finance a higher level of illegal activity and to support the bandits, who were joined by many of the over-taxed and exploited rural poor.

In 845 Tu Mu sent a letter to the chief minister Li Te-yü giving detailed descriptions of the bandits and pirates operating in the Yangtze region, of the terror brought to the inhabitants and to merchants doing business there, and of the severe losses to national revenue which resulted from their activities. The groups of bandits often comprised one hundred men, including many who had come down from the north. Bandits from the provinces of Hsüan-wu and Wu-ning (in Ho-nan) raided the lower Yangtze area, while bandits from Chung-wu and Huai-hsi operated in the middle Yangtze basin. After collecting their loot, which it would have been dangerous to transport over great distances, they waited until the tea was harvested, then posed as merchants and exchanged the stolen goods for tea; the tea was then transported to their home areas, where it could easily be traded without arousing suspicion. Such bandit gangs feature in many stories and poems from the period which vividly fill out what little can be known from more formal, official sources.

The government instituted stringent measures in an attempt to contain banditry and illicit trade. Punishments for black-market selling were harsh, including the death penalty. The illicit merchants responded by arming themselves, and by the mid-830s were able to resist the government by force. A memorial of 840 from the Salt and Iron Commission, which controlled revenue collection in the Yangtze valley, advised the

[5] *TFYK* 510, pp. 10a–b.
[6] *CTW* 78, pp. 4a–b.
[7] *CTW* 78, pp. 17b–18a.

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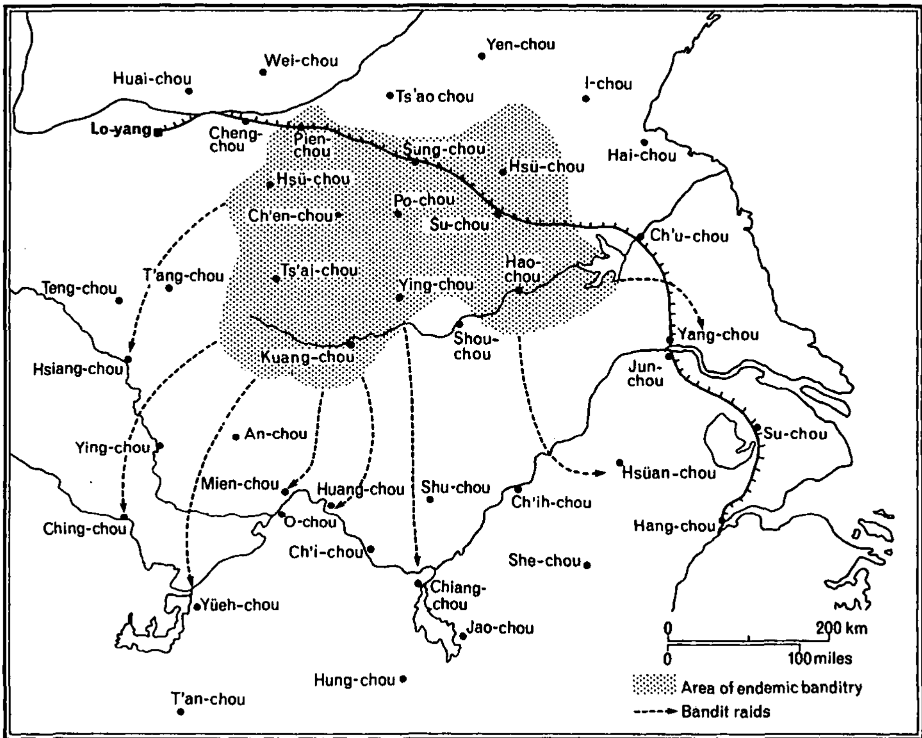

Map 18. Regions affected by banditry in the 830s and 840s

government that though the laws were strict, they would be hard to enforce, partly because of the close connections between the smugglers and the merchants and officials of the official markets (*ch'ang-p'u*).[8] The 'bandits', now armed and with an economic base to support their activities, were joined by increasing numbers of peasants. Nevertheless, the policy of tax 'apportionment' remained in effect, and ruined whole villages whose people swelled the ranks of existing bandit gangs or created new ones.

Outbreak of garrison revolts in south China

In spite of the mounting unrest and banditry in the lower Yangtze, the government intensified its efforts to extract all possible revenue from the region. In the seventh month of 858, Chang Ch'ien, one of the emperor's personal aides, protested against the government's policy of making the annual merit assessments (*k'o-chi*) and future appointments of the pro-

[8] *CTW* 967, p. 8a.

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vincial governors serving in lower Yangtze region dependent upon their building up large fiscal 'surpluses' (*hsien-yü*). Such 'surpluses' were paid into the emperor's personal treasury and amounted to another form of the 'tribute offerings' that had become a regular source of revenue in the late eighth century. The emperor's personal treasury had in fact grown so substantially by late T'ang that it was frequently necessary to divert funds from it into the regular state treasury. Chang Ch'ien warned that further open insistence on these additional revenues was bound to cause great unrest, both among the provincial garrisons, which would have to suffer cuts or reductions in salary, and among the common people, who would be required to bear an even heavier tax burden.

Events soon proved Chang right. During 856, south China experienced one insurrection after another and was transformed almost overnight from one of the most stable areas in the country into the most volatile. Between the fourth and seventh months of that year there were three garrison revolts in the Yangtze region. Other areas were also unpeaceful; in 858 there was a revolt in Annam, and the next year the Wu-ning garrison, located along the vital Grand Canal route at P'eng-ch'eng and a perennial centre of disaffection, revolted for the second time in ten years.

The garrison revolts were not the most dangerous element; they had occurred before, and the government had well-tried ways of dealing with them. More ominous were the signs of general social and economic unrest threatening the whole fabric of society. The government was well aware of banditry and piracy, but basic strategic problems made it very difficult to develop any long-term solutions.

The T'ang had long followed a policy of maintaining only minimal military forces in the south, fearing, with good reason, that larger forces might become independent and take over the vital economic resources of the region. Its basic strategy was still to concentrate its largest forces near the capital region and in important locations along the Grand Canal route. Large armies had several times been set up in the lower Yangtze to deal with specific crises; during the rebellion of Hsüan-tsung's son, Li Lin, the Prince of Yung, in 756 to 757; during the provincial revolts of the 780s, and during Li Ch'i's revolt of 807. But they had been disbanded as soon as the situation had improved. Otherwise the southern civil governors maintained only small forces to control minor disturbances. However, the process of militarization began again during the most serious of the 858 revolts, that led by K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai at Hsüan-chou, when the government was forced to re-establish the Chen-hai ('Garrison on the Sea') Army in neighbouring Che-hsi. This was the first military governorship established in the area for nearly fifty years.

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The rebellion of K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai is of special significance to the historian, for it reveals important aspects of the evolution in the structure of power at the regional level by late T'ang times.[9] K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai himself was a local petty criminal who had finally gained a position on the military staff of the civil governor of Hsüan-She. His name is given to the rebellion simply because he was coerced into leading it. The real instigators were members of the newly-risen local elite, referred to generally as 'families of substance' (*hsing-shih hu*), who had developed a close relationship with the local authorities. One was a wealthy and aged merchant, Li Wei-chen, who had bought a military staff position in order to gain immunity (*ying-pi*) from taxation and legal prosecution; purchase of local office for such reasons was common in late T'ang. Li had a stranglehold on local commerce, and had even 'organized the common people', probably as some sort of personal force. The other instigator of the revolt, a landowner, had been appointed a local punitive officer (*t'ao-chi shih*); he used that position blatantly to benefit himself, as when he sealed off a sluice gate to divert waters to his own lands, leaving one hundred and thirty families without irrigation. His son had openly killed someone, and though imprisoned had escaped execution. It was an attempt to free him that sparked off the rebellion. There is a clear pattern of corruption and abuse by which *sub rosa* payments could buy local military positions and general immunity. When such immunities were threatened, the links between influential members of local society and local military forces could easily lead to a revolt, as it now did at Hsüan-chou, where the civil governor was expelled. Order was restored at Hsüan-chou by late 858 though only after much of the district had been plundered and after troops had been brought in from the provinces of Huai-nan and Che-tung.[10] The general pattern underlying the troubles at Hsüan-chou could hardly have been unique, and was clear evidence of the deteriorating and delicate situation in which late T'ang local officials were forced to function. There was certainly good reason for contemporary statesmen to advocate reducing the numbers of provincial army officers.

The rebellion of Ch'iu Fu

K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai's insurrection proved to be only a prelude to a far more serious and complex revolt which followed in nearby Che-tung in 859. That revolt, led by Ch'iu Fu, a bandit leader of obscure origins, was the first in late T'ang times to weld, however briefly, a large number of rural

[9] On this revolt, see Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōdai kōhanki no Kō-Wai ni tsuite – kōzoku oyobi Kō Zentai, Kyū Ho no hanran o chūshin to shite', *SGZS*, 66.2 (1957) 23–4.
[10] *TCTC* 249, pp. 8072, 8074; *CTS* 18B, p. 644.

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bandit gangs into a unified military and political force, and to organize the oppressed rural peasantry into a fighting organization.[11] Although it was suppressed within a year of its outbreak, Ch'iu Fu's revolt helped to lay the basis for the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, which followed only fifteen years later.

Ch'iu Fu's name first appears in late 859, as the leader of a bandit gang operating in central Che-tung. For several months, the bandits – they could not yet be called rebels – raided over a large area of eastern Che-tung, from Ming-chou in the north down to the T'ien-t'ai mountain range of T'ai-chou in the south. By the first month of the next year they had returned north and captured Shan-hsien, just south of Hangchow Bay, and made it their headquarters; Shan-hsien was part of Yüeh-chou, where the provincial capital was located. The local garrison, which had itself mutinied about four years earlier, numbered less than three hundred very ill-equipped men, and could not possibly have dealt with Ch'iu Fu's forces, which then numbered over a thousand men. The government brought together all available forces in the region, including some from the coastline fortresses which guarded against seaborne attacks from Japan or Silla. But Ch'iu Fu's officers proved good soldiers, and the government troops were decimated in a single engagement. News of his victory spread quickly, and Ch'iu Fu was soon joined by 'bandits from the mountains and waters, gangs of toughs and refugees from other provinces; they came from all directions, gathering like clouds'. His loosely organized forces, still a conglomeration of independent gangs under Ch'iu Fu's general leadership, numbered over thirty thousand men. His movement became a focus for still more groups from other areas. In the fifth month of 860, an imperial adviser explained to I-tsung, who had been on the throne for only a few months, why the revolt had grown so rapidly: 'Since the fighting began, taxes have been collected indiscriminately; half the bandits are peasants who have abandoned their lands.'

Ch'iu Fu's successes gave him the confidence to take early steps towards establishing some sort of control over the region. He organized his thirty thousand supporters into thirty-two battalions (*tui*), and took for himself the title of grand generalissimo of the empire (*t'ien-hsia tu-chih ping-ma shih*). To establish an air of legitimacy, he declared a new reign period and issued seals, impressed with the words 'Heavenly Peace' (*T'ien-p'ing*). He stockpiled provisions, and hired craftsmen to make weapons, causing great alarm locally and even in northern China.

[11] Secondary studies of this rebellion include Wang Shou-nan, 'Lun wan-T'ang Ch'iu Fu chih luan', *Kuo-li Cheng-chih ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao*, 19 (1969) 283–308; Matsui Shūichi, 'Tōdai kōhanki Kō-Wai ni tsuite', pp. 94–122; Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Sō no hanran', pp. 25–50; these accounts are ultimately based on *TCTC* 249–50.

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The government's initial response was the same as that it had successfully adopted during K'ang Ch'üan-t'ai's revolt the previous year. Support was sent from Che-hsi in the north and Hsüan-She in the west, but lack of morale and discipline made it impossible to integrate the various provincial forces, whose demands for money and for guarantees of promotion only added to the general woe. The local civil governor, who had a well-deserved reputation as a coward, was recalled to the capital and given a sinecure on the heir apparent's staff.

The early months of 860 were a period of uncertainty, as each side planned its strategy. T'ang officials clearly understood the difficulties they would face in defeating the rebels. The complex terrain of Chekiang presented extreme problems: while its coastline, with endless coves and inlets, was difficult to patrol, the offshore islands of the Chusan Archipelago would offer refuge if the bandits needed it. To take this difficult region would require all the skills of an experienced military strategist. Since there seemed to be no such man among the officer corps in the capital, it was decided to appoint Wang Shih, at that time protector-general of Annam (An-nan *tu-hu*).

Wang Shih was without doubt the most important T'ang military commander during this period.[12] He had already established a formidable reputation both in the north, where his strict defensive arrangements at Chin-chou (central Shansi) had protected the capital region from invasions from Inner Mongolia, and in the far south, where he had been sent to pacify the revolts which broke out in 858 in Annam. Wang was now ordered to travel to Ch'ang-an to discuss how he would handle the situation in Che-tung. When the emperor asked his strategy, Wang simply replied: 'I only need [enough] men, and the bandits can certainly be crushed.' It was pointed out that a major campaign would be expensive. Wang's reply was simple, and undoubtedly correct: the long-term costs of not re-establishing control quickly would be far greater than any campaign expenses, and the loss of the region would be an incalculable set-back for the entire government, which would place in jeopardy even the salaries of the officials and soldiers in the capital. The emperor was convinced, and ordered that Wang be assigned troops from Chung-wu, I-ch'eng and Huai-nan as his basic force. Since Wang knew that the rebels had cavalry, he also had several hundred Tibetan and Uighur horsemen transferred to his command, the first time that such foreign troops had been employed so far south.

On the rebel side, one of Ch'iu Fu's officers, Liu Yang, who knew that

[12] Biography in *HTS* 167, pp. 5119–21; there is also a short notice in *CTS* 164, p. 4282, appended to the biography of his father, Wang Po.

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Wang Shih could arrive in as little as forty days, proposed a bold plan to take over the entire south-east. Yüeh-chou, the provincial capital of Che-tung, would first be captured; forts built along the Ch'ien-t'ang River could stop the advance of government troops, and give time to assemble a fleet of ships. They could then march across Che-hsi, cross the Yangtze by ship, and plunder Yang-chou, capital of Huai-nan and richest city in the entire region. The booty could be transported back to Che-hsi, where they could await further support from the other southern provinces. Meanwhile, their ships could move into Fukien. This was all apparently too much for Ch'iu Fu, who told his brilliant strategist, 'You're drunk. We'll talk about it tomorrow!' A far more prudent plan was offered by Wang Lu, one of the members of the local elite (he was a *chin-shih*) who participated in the planning and guidance of the rebellion. Wang insisted that since China was still generally peaceful it would be very difficult to carry through Liu Yang's ambitious plan; he defended his caution by pointing out that Sun Ch'üan had been able to establish the south-eastern state of Wu in the third century only because there had already been a general breakdown of the central authority of the Han dynasty. The safest plan, he argued, was to take a defensive position and occupy some strategic area where they could support themselves by farming and fishing, and retreat to the offshore islands when necessary.

As it turned out, Ch'iu Fu could not decide between the two plans, and was ultimately defeated, though not before a great deal of hard fighting had taken place. Wang Shih, as predicted, demonstrated great tactical and organizational abilities and was prepared for all exigencies. He demanded perfect discipline of his varied forces and punished infractions with the utmost severity. He organized the people into militia units, and decreed martial law for the provincial capital. Knowing that the rapid growth of the rebellion was in part the result of starvation among the peasantry, he opened up government storehouses in several counties to supply them with food. His powerful army, by now consisting of regular foot-soldiers and cavalry, as well as several thousand members of the newly-formed local militia (*t'u-t'uan*), surrounded the rebel forces, while his naval forces cut off their retreat to the sea. The rebel soldiers, and even their women, resisted bitterly, but were finally smashed. Ch'iu Fu was captured and sent to the capital in the sixth month of 860, no doubt for public execution.

Ch'iu Fu's rebellion grew out of a context of government exploitation and popular resistance, but resistance of a complex nature; it was obviously not simply an incoherent eruption of peasant distress. Ch'iu Fu's supporters were of various social classes, ranging from members of the

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local educated elite to impoverished peasants, ne'er-do-wells and members of his own gang. Basic strategy was carefully considered, the leaders of the rebellion were politically astute, and several at least were quite well educated. The rebellion is often cited as a precursor of that of Huang Ch'ao, and perhaps in some ways it was. But one must also point out the great differences between the two rebellions. Ch'iu Fu's rebellion had a clear geographical focus, and there is virtually no evidence that he or his followers ever thought beyond the lower Yangtze. Huang Ch'ao, following an entirely different pattern, took his forces on an epic march of many thousands of miles and several years' duration before setting his sights on the capital. Ch'iu Fu's rebellion was also a model of planning and organization, when compared to the early stages of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion. It is possible that an early decision to follow Liu Yang's plan might have led to success, though it is clear that Wang Shih was a formidable adversary. It is perhaps worth noting too that little more than a generation after Ch'iu Fu's rebellion was quelled, the first independent state of the late T'ang period was established in Chekiang, and took as its name Lo-p'ing (the holy bird of the lower Yangtze), which Ch'iu Fu had adopted as his 'reign-title'. That state (for which see below, pp. 753–4), at least as much as the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, had a genuine historical connection with the rising of Ch'iu Fu.

Frontier problems: Szechwan and Annam

At the same time as the outbreak of trouble in the Yangtze valley, the T'ang faced a serious external threat, nearly two thousand miles away on their south-western frontier, from the expansionist state of Nan-chao. Nan-chao was based in the Tali Plain, just east of the upper waters on the Mekong River in western Yunnan. At an elevation of seven thousand feet, that was an almost impregnable position, protected to the east and west by precipitous mountains reaching fourteen thousand feet and to the north and south by easily defended gorge entrances. The plain, which is flanked by Lake Erh-hai, is intensely fertile, but not large – only thirty miles long and never more than three miles wide. The area had been occupied by non-Chinese peoples at an advanced state of cultural development since pre-Han times.[13] By the T'ang period its population must have been considerable.

[13] There have been serious disputes over the ethnic identity of the Nan-chao peoples. Despite claims that they were ancestors of the Thai, recent scholarship has shown that their ties were if anything closer to the Tibeto-Burmese peoples; see F. W. Mote, 'Problems of Thai prehistory', *The Social Science Review* (Bangkok), 2.2 (1964) 100–9; Hsü Yün-ch'iao, 'Was Nan-chao a Thai kingdom?', *Journal of Southeast Asian Researches* (*Tung-nan-ya yen-chiu*), 4 (1968) 13–23. Michael Blackmore argues persuasively against attempts to identify the

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At the end of the seventh century, pressures from the newly-unified and aggressive Tibetan kingdom had pushed the local chiefs into a vassal relationship with the Chinese, and it was as a T'ang vassal that one of these groups extended its control over the others during the 730s and 740s and rapidly developed the well-organized state of Nan-chao. The T'ang attempted unsuccessfully to conquer the area during the early 750s. During the second half of the eighth century Nan-chao allied itself with the Tibetans, posing a serious threat to the T'ang frontiers until 794, when Nan-chao was persuaded to resume its status as a vassal of the Chinese, and this relationship was nominally maintained until the 850s. During the early ninth century, however, Nan-chao had begun a period of active expansion. By 800 it had reduced the Pyū state of upper Burma to vassal status and in 832 captured the capital of Śriksetra, on the lower Irrawaddy. It had also begun to mount invasions into Szechwan, the nearest area of Chinese settlement.

Szechwan suffered repeatedly from foreign attacks during the first half of the ninth century, first from the Tibetans, and then from Nan-chao itself. In 829, the provincial capital of Ch'eng-tu was sacked and large areas laid waste. The speed and scale of the attack alarmed the dynasty, and troops were moved in from central and northern China, including a major contingent from the capital, to prevent the ill-prepared and disloyal local garrisons from giving up the entire province. After this, the local defences were strengthened by Li Te-yü and the border between Yunnan and Szechwan remained stable for the next three decades.

Having been halted in Szechwan, and daunted by the powerful Tibetans in the north, Nan-chao began to look south, not only into Burma, but also south-east to the Chinese provinces of Annam and Ling-nan, though they were separated from those regions by extremely rugged mountain terrain. In spite of the difficulty of communications Nan-chao was able to move large numbers of men against Annam, which posed a serious problem for the T'ang. In Szechwan, the dynasty's concern was over the possible loss of a wealthy region which had close political ties with the ruling dynasty. Their concern in Annam was of a very different sort, having more to do with prestige and above all with trade – since the southern ports were centres of international seaborne commerce linked by a flourishing coastal trade with the lower Yangtze ports. Chinese control of the overland route to the west through central Asia was still very uncertain, and any possibility of losing the south had to be taken very

Nan-chao peoples with any present-day ethnic group in 'The ethnological problems connected with Nan-chao', in Frederick S. Drake, ed. *Symposium on historical, archaeological and linguistic studies on southern China, southeast Asia, and the Hongkong region* (Hong Kong, 1967), pp. 58–69.

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seriously. The main worry was the possible threat to Canton, the greatest centre of seaborne trade.

There is a record of minor tribal attacks in Annam in 846, which originated in Nan-chao. Local troubles became more serious after the mid-850s, largely because of the exploitation and harsh treatment of the native peoples by their Chinese administrators. As a result the Annamese actively sought help from Nan-chao, which soon began to launch large raids into the region.

By 859, Nan-chao's formal dependency upon the Chinese was clearly at an end. Its treatment of a Chinese envoy, sent to convey news of Hsiuan-tsung's death, showed that it was no longer willing to deal with the Chinese on unequal terms. When required to observe a mourning period for the deceased Chinese emperor, Nan-chao replied that it too had recently suffered the loss of a ruler, but the Chinese had not declared a mourning period on that account. After treating the Chinese envoy with the minimum courtesy, it sent him back to Ch'ang-an. Soon afterwards, the Nan-chao ruler declared himself emperor of the state of Ta-li.

The Nan-chao invasions came at a time when the Chinese defences in the south were in poor shape. In 858 there was a successful garrison insurrection in Ling-nan and the threat of a second. For the moment, however, the main concern was further south, in Annam. The government named Wang Shih as protector-general of Annam (this appointment of course preceded Wang's assignment in Chekiang mentioned above). Wang Shih's brief tenure in Annam (858–9) was completely successful, and he contained the problem, for the time at least; his fortifications of the provincial capital of Chiao-chou (modern Hanoi) proved so formidable that the Nan-chao invaders 'discreetly withdrew'. After Wang Shih was transferred to Chekiang to deal with Ch'iu Fu's rising, however, the Nan-chao attacks in Annam achieved more success and in 861 the invaders finally took Chiao-chou, which had foolishly been left undefended. Chiao-chou was regained by Chinese forces in the next year, but in the process the scale of fighting escalated alarmingly.

Large-scale warfare between T'ang China and Nan-chao continued for several years at great cost in money and manpower before the Chinese finally, if inconclusively, pacified their southern frontier. In 862, thirty thousand troops, selected from eight of the largest commands in central and northern China, were sent for a tour of duty in the south. These troops were placed under the command of Ts'ai Hsi, civil governor of Hu-nan, who had already had much experience of northern border defence.

Nan-chao launched another major offensive at the end of the year –

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large-scale fighting in the region was normally confined to winter, when the tropical climate was least oppressive – sending fifty thousand troops deep into Annam. Early in the next year (863) they recaptured Chiao-chou and forced the Chinese to withdraw into modern Kwangsi; the Nan-chao troops in this campaign included many conscripts from their Burmese vassal state of Pyū. The Chinese continued to send reinforcements drawn from increasingly distant regions.[14]

The T'ang campaigns in Annam and the establishment of strong defences in Ling-nan proved very costly to the Chinese but were in the end successful, in spite of these initial failures in the early 860s. The turning point came with the appointment in 864 of Kao P'ien to command the Chinese forces in Annam. Like Wang Shih and Ts'ai Hsi before him, Kao already had considerable experience in northern border defence. In 866 he scored a great victory over the Nan-chao forces and recaptured Chiao-chou, around which he built a great defensive wall. After 866 the southern borders were relatively quiet, though the T'ang garrison forces there cannot have been very large and repeatedly suffered from desertion and mutiny until the 880s. Nan-chao, thwarted in Annam, turned against Szechwan, and continued its attacks there until the mid-870s, when the defences of Szechwan were entrusted to Kao P'ien, who proved as effective there as he had been in Annam. After 875 Nan-chao ceased to be a serious threat to Chinese territory. In 880, after considerable acrimonious debate at court, it was decided to accept a marriage alliance with Nan-chao, though this was never actually carried out.[15]

The rebellion of P'ang Hsün

The near decade of wars between T'ang China and Nan-chao was very costly to the Chinese, in several ways. The human costs in casualties were obvious enough. But the economic costs were also serious, for the southern armies required both constant reinforcements from the interior commands and massive quantities of provisions if the border was to be held. The ever-increasing demands for manpower and supplies could not have come at a worse time, in view of the serious economic pressures and social unrest which beset the government.

Supplies for the troops in Ling-nan and Annam were first sent down by inland routes, mainly by the old 'Holy Canal' (Ling ch'ü).[16] But those inland routes were soon found to be inadequate, and in 862 the government

[14] *TCTC* 250, pp. 8101–9; *CTS* 19A, p. 656.

[15] For the court arguments over this issue, see *TCTC* 253, pp. 8204–5, 8227–8. For a general survey of T'ang–Nan-chao relations during this period, see Jui I-fu, 'Nan-ch'ao shih', in Ling Ch'un-sheng *et al.* eds. *Pien-chiang wen-hua lun-chi*, vol. 3 (Taipei, 1963), pp. 358–86.

[16] E. H. Schafer, *The vermilion bird: T'ang images of the south* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 27.

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accepted a proposal to move supplies to Annam by sea. The Salt and Iron Commission, which had general authority over revenue matters in the south, chartered ships in the Yangtze region to carry the supplies south. The grain needed was expropriated from the Huai and lower Yangtze provinces, which were already suffering serious economic distress, and also from the provinces of Ho-nan lying along the Grand Canal route further north.

These more northerly areas were certainly no wealthier than the Huai–Yangtze provinces, and not only suffered very heavy taxation, but were also particularly prone to devastating natural disasters. There had been very serious flooding throughout the great plain in the autumn of 858; Hsü-chou and Ssu-chou, two populous prefectures along the Grand Canal route, were disastrously inundated, and tens of thousands of families were drowned. In the summer of 862 there was widespread drought, coupled with plagues of locusts over much of Huai-nan and Ho-nan, resulting in extensive famine. Nevertheless, in that same year major requisitions for men and supplies to be sent south were made from those very areas. The following year there was another major flood of the Huang-ho, extending over an area of many thousands of square miles, from Lo-yang down to Ssu-chou in the Huai region.[17] These natural disasters, and the ill-timed requisitions of foodstuffs to supply the southern armies, undoubtedly combined to produce distress and unrest on a large scale.

Garrison troops sent from these regions to the south were also responsible for the most serious uprising of the 860s, the P'ang Hsün rebellion.[18] Although the rebellion began in the far south, in Ling-nan, its origins lay in Wu-ning province, a crucial strategic area located in the region where the four modern provinces of Shantung, Honan, Kiangsu and Anhwei come together. The Pien Canal, Ch'ang-an's lifeline to the much-needed wealth of the lower Yangtze valley, ran in a south-easterly direction through this province. To defend this supply line the province was heavily garrisoned.

Mutinies had broken out among the garrison periodically since the early years of the ninth century. The government always managed to restore order and continued to appoint Wu-ning's military governors but their authority over the local garrisons was not secure and the province remained a problem area throughout the first half of the ninth century.

17 On these natural disasters, see *TCTC* 249, p. 8072; *TFYK* 498, p. 26b; *CTS* 19A, p. 654.

18 The best accounts of this rebellion are Tanigawa Michio, 'Hō Kun no ran ni tsuite', *Nagoya Daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronshū*, vol. 11 (*Shigaku*, 4), pp. 27–42; Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Sō no hanran', pp. 50–3; R. des Rotours, 'La revolte de P'ang Hiun', *TP*, 56 (1970) 229–40. P'ang Hsün has no biography in the Standard Histories, but a full account of the rebellion can be found in the biography of K'ang Ch'eng-hsün: *HTS* 148, pp. 4773–9.

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Wu-ning suffered renewed garrison revolts in 849, 859 and again in the seventh month of 862. The government now decided that the only course left was to demilitarize the province completely, and place it under a civil governor. The army had already been reduced in 862 by the mobilization of two thousand of its soldiers for border defence duty in Ling-nan, and it seems possible that the remaining troops mutinied because of the decision to send so many of their number to the south. To put down the mutiny the government sent its strongest commander, Wang Shih, who was still stationed in Chekiang two years after putting down the Ch'iu Fu rebellion. Entering the provincial capital of P'eng-ch'eng with the same formidable army that had crushed Ch'iu Fu, he took severe measures at once, executing large numbers of the garrison troops and disbanding the rest. In the fourth month of 863, an Imperial Edict ordered that P'eng-ch'eng become a 'civilian city' (*wen-tu*), and placed it under the administration of Yen-chou to the north.

Far from settling matters, this simply produced a new and more difficult problem, for the soldiers who had fled or were banished from the city began to terrorize the surrounding area as bandits. The next year, 864, the court declared an amnesty in the region, and promised that all former soldiers who willingly re-enrolled would be sent for a tour of duty in Ling-nan, and then, presumably, returned to regular army service in the north. It is not clear whether the plan was then to reconstitute the Wu-ning army or to station the troops elsewhere. In the event three thousand men surrendered and were sent to the south to join the two thousand Wu-ning soldiers sent there two years before.

Any hopes that this would end the trouble proved over-optimistic. In 868, two years after the termination of hostilities with Nan-chao, a promise that the contingent from Wu-ning sent down in 862 would be allowed to return north at the end of their three-year tour of duty was broken for the second time. It was claimed that no funds were available to send the soldiers back home. In the seventh month of 868, eight hundred of the Wu-ning soldiers stationed at Kuei-kuan (north-western Ling-nan) mutinied and, led by their provisions officer (*liang-liao p'an-kuan*) P'ang Hsün, began to march back north.[19]

The court decided to pardon the revolt, and to allow the soldiers to return home under escort, provided they surrendered their arms in Hu-nan. Having done so, the soldiers, suspecting that the court's pardon was probably only a trick to get them off their guard and that they would be attacked on the way back to Wu-ning or else killed when they returned, took steps to re-arm themselves. They travelled by boat to the mouth of

[19] *TCTC* 251, pp. 8120–1.

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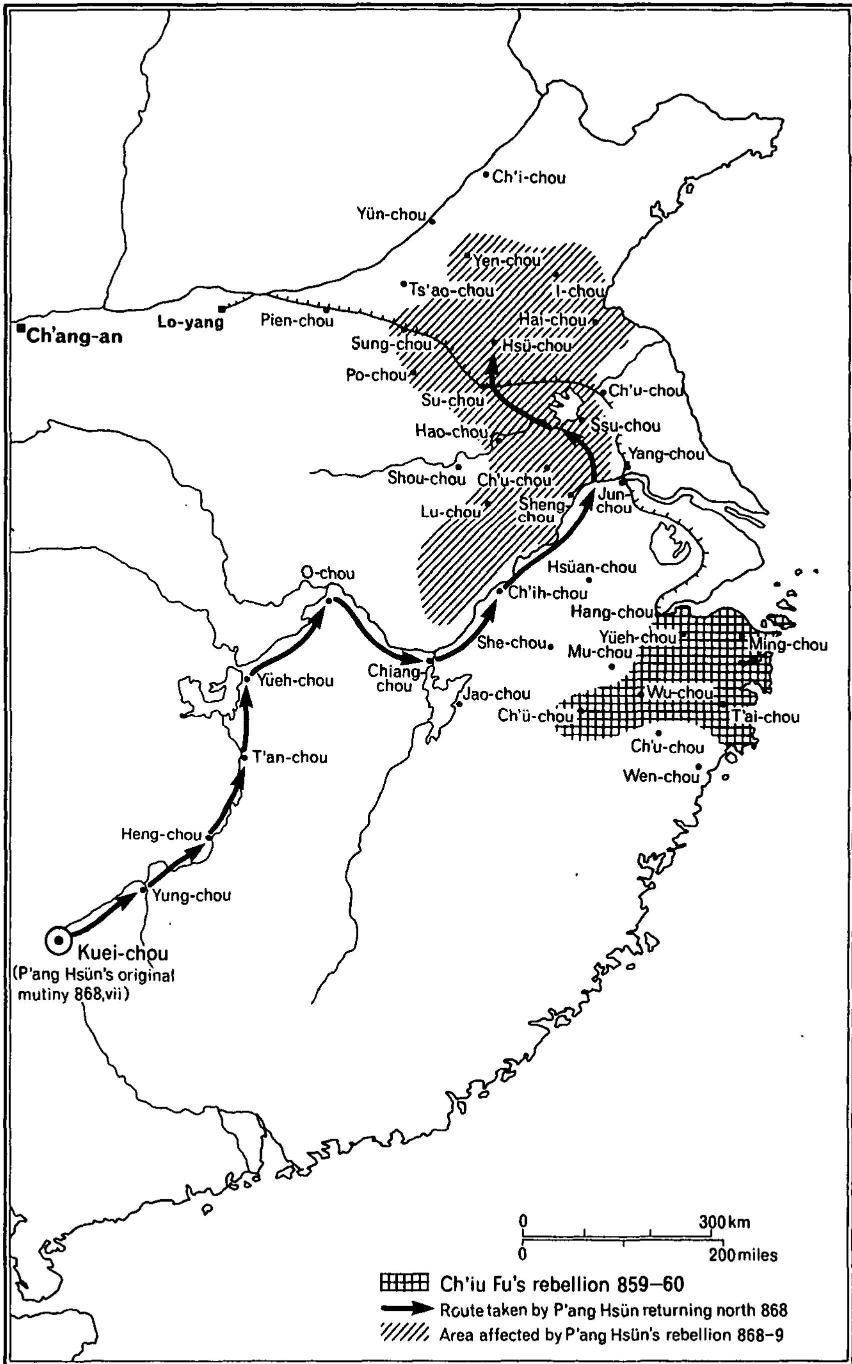

Map 19. The Ch'iu Fu and P'ang Hsün rebellions

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the Yangtze, and crossed into Huai-nan, which was then under the control of the military governor Ling-hu T'ao. He was urged by his officers to smash P'ang Hsün's band, which they thought would be fairly easy. But Ling-hu refused to take any action, saying that as long as P'ang Hsün caused no trouble 'south of the Great Huai' he was not concerned with what happened elsewhere; 'the rest is not our affair,' he claimed. He then sent envoys to P'ang Hsün to mollify the rebels, and even gave them food. Ling-hu T'ao's decision to let the P'ang Hsün group pass peacefully through his territory has been castigated by some later Chinese historians, who considered it an almost inconceivable dereliction of responsibility on the part of a former chief minister.[20] But in the context of the general unrest and tension in the lower Yangtze and Huai River region, and in view of Ling-hu T'ao's own strained relations with the court, his decision seems perfectly understandable.

P'ang Hsün moved into Wu-ning province in the ninth month of 868, gathering support from former members of the garrison forces and meeting little resistance. His forces soon numbered over one thousand men, but even now it remained a purely military revolt. P'ang Hsün demanded the removal of a group of hated officers, justifying his actions by reference to Wang Chih-hsing, whose rebellion in Wu-ning in 822 had begun the whole cycle of troubles in the province. The civil governor refused to have the officers removed, and a military confrontation ensued. In the tenth month, P'ang Hsün took the prefectural city of Su-chou, which his men proceeded to sack. Thousands of local peasants now joined the rebels. When P'ang Hsün reached the provincial capital of Hsü-chou, the peasants living outside it burned down the city gates. The rebels captured the civil governor, and killed the hated officers. After P'ang Hsün entered Hsü-chou he began to acquire a considerable following, and men rallied to his support from a wide area. He was joined by bandit gangs from modern Shantung, Huai-hsi, Huai-nan and even from as far south as Chekiang, by local peasants, and by some members of the educated gentry. One member of the local elite from a nearby area came to join him with three thousand of his own men whom P'ang Hsün referred to as his 'Righteous Army' (*i-chün*).[21]

The fighting extended into more than ten prefectures, north into Shan-tung, and south to Huai-nan. Although there was now a real possibility of a general rebellion, P'ang Hsün continued to think in more modest and conventional terms, hoping as a result of victory merely to

[20] The most outspoken criticism is in Sun Fu, *T'ang-shih lun-tuan* (*TSCC* edn, Shanghai, 1937), vol. 3, p. 65.
[21] *TCTC* 251, pp. 8123–44 *passim*.

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be appointed military governor of Wu-ning. Even with these limited aims it became necessary for him to press more and more peasants into his army, and to confiscate the wealth of local gentry and merchants, often with great brutality. His soldiers moreover were totally undisciplined, and once the T'ang armies began to mount an effective campaign against him the peasants quickly deserted the rebels, followed soon afterwards by P'ang Hsün's own officers and his gentry supporters.

The P'ang Hsün rebellion was finally quelled in the ninth month of 869, after a year of fighting. An important feature of the campaign against the rebels was the extent of government dependence on foreign military support. The commander of the T'ang forces, K'ang Ch'eng-hsün, requested and received the emperor's permission to employ foreign troops from the T'u-yü-hun, Ta-ta, Ch'i-pi and the three Sha-t'o Turkish tribes. Foreign leaders were also given important commands: Chu-yeh Ch'ih-hsin, the Sha-t'o chief, who supplied three thousand cavalry of his own, also led the troops of ten Chinese provinces which had contributed expeditionary forces. The Sha-t'o Turks played a particularly important role in the campaign, once even rescuing the T'ang commander, who had been surrounded by rebel forces. After the suppression of the rebellion Chu-yeh Ch'ih-hsin was honoured with the imperial surname, and given the Chinese name of Li Kuo-ch'ang.[22] His son, Li K'o-yung, later saved the dynasty during the Huang Ch'ao rebellion and went on to establish the Later T'ang dynasty.

The P'ang Hsün rebellion, much more than Ch'iu Fu's rising in the south, was the real precursor of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion. This is somewhat obscured by the fact that it began as a garrison revolt in the remote south of China. Many of the underlying problems and forces that combined finally to bring down the T'ang dynasty were, however, already apparent in the P'ang Hsün rebellion, and were shortly to reappear in a far more serious form in the massive popular rebellion led by Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao.

THE COURT UNDER I-TSUNG (REIGN 859–73)

In 859, in the midst of these sombre events, the emperor Hsiuan-tsung died. This was generally regarded as a great misfortune for the dynasty, for, in spite of his occasional severity and pettiness, Hsiuan-tsung had gained a wide reputation for intelligence, even-handed administration, a willing-

[22] On the employment of foreign troops to suppress this rebellion, see Gabriella Molè, *The T'u-yü-hun from the Northern Wei to the time of the Five Dynasties* (Rome, 1970), p. 194 n; Liu Shan-li, 'T'ang-tai fan-chen chih-huo k'o-wei wei ti-san-tz'u i-tsu luan-Hua', *Kuo-li Wu-han ta-hsüeh wen-che chi-k'an*, 1.1 (1930) 851–2.

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ness to accept ministerial advice, and for restraint and frugality. Many of his court regarded him, especially in retrospect, as a great emperor, almost a second T'ai-tsung, and as a man who might still have rescued the T'ang from the problems that beset China.

His death, at the early age of forty-nine, came as the result of alchemical poisoning caused by taking mineral elixirs prepared by the Taoist adepts who surrounded him. He was the fourth emperor in four decades to succumb in this way. His death was both sudden and unexpected, and was especially unfortunate, as he had not named an heir apparent, and the succession was left open.

The reason for this lay in Hsiuan-tsung's personality and his complex and even hostile relationships with his own family. He himself was illegitimate and scorned by his relatives, and his father Hsien-tsung had forced him to live in the 'Sixteen Princely Residences', a compound housing a great number of minor imperial relatives and less favoured princes, rather than in the palace.[23] He was far from the succession, and before he was himself enthroned, had been preceded as emperor by a half-brother and three nephews. During his long years in obscurity he was married to his first wife, from the undistinguished Ch'ao family, who bore him one son Li Wen, Prince of Yün, and a daughter. When after ascending the throne he married his daughter to a member of the influential Cheng clan, he specifically ordered her to stay out of state affairs to avoid the sort of disasters caused by the princesses T'ai-p'ing and An-lo in Chung-tsung's reign.

None of his wives was ever formally installed as empress, and he refused to appoint an heir apparent, although his ministers pressed him to do so as a matter of urgency. The reason he gave was that he feared to name an heir lest he should be 'made idle' – that is, pushed out of power. He had in all twelve sons, the eldest of whom, Li Wen, was the least favoured, and was forced to live in the 'Sixteen Princely Residences' as Hsiuan-tsung had done in his youth.

Towards the end of his life he became chronically ill from taking the elixirs produced by his entourage of esoteric Taoist adepts. In the eighth month of 859 he fell gravely ill, and remained in the palace inaccessible to his ministers, attended by the physicians and Taoists who were largely responsible for his condition, and accessible only to the palace eunuchs.

During the first half of the ninth century the eunuchs had controlled the succession. Four of the five emperors before I-tsung had been installed by eunuchs, and at least one, and possibly two, had been murdered by

[23] *TCTC* 249, p. 8075.

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them. With the death of Hsiuan-tsung rival eunuch factions attempted once more to engineer the enthronement of their candidates.

Shortly before he died, a group of three of Hsiuan-tsung's most trusted eunuchs claimed that he had communicated to them a secret order that his third and favourite son, the Prince of K'uei, should succeed. The eunuchs feared opposition to the Prince of K'uei from the officials of the court and from yet another prominent eunuch, the Shen-ts'e general Wang Tsung-shih, with whom they had long been at odds. Before Hsiuan-tsung's death was announced they emerged from the palace with an edict appointing Wang as army supervisor in Huai-nan – an important command, but far from the capital.

Wang was given the edict outside the palace to keep him from the inner apartments, where Hsiuan-tsung already lay dead. But such deathbed orders were naturally suspect. Hsiuan-tsung's condition was well known, and high officials would have remembered Wu-tsung's irrational and unpredictable behaviour before his death in similar circumstances, little more than a decade before. Wang Tsung-shih therefore realized that without seeing the emperor he had no means of knowing whether his appointment was valid. He secretly made his way into the palace and discovered the truth. The three rival eunuchs who had attempted to enthrone the Prince of K'uei were executed. Li Wen, eldest son of the deceased emperor, was quickly summoned, and although his father was dead, was formally installed as heir apparent, in preparation for his immediate enthronement. He was twenty-six years old, and since he had no experience of affairs Ling-hu T'ao, a respected senior chief minister, who had played no part in his selection, was appointed regent.[24]

The succession could hardly have been less auspicious. The authenticity of the 'Testamentary Edict', by virtue of which I-tsung came to the throne, was extremely suspect, and it has even been claimed that he was not really Hsiuan-tsung's son.[25] His personal authority was thus insecure from the outset. In addition he presided over an administration which was divided and faction-ridden. No one could seriously assert that I-tsung was an outstanding emperor. He was unstable, capricious, cruel and became senselessly extravagant. But, as we have seen, he inherited massive and intractable problems.

Not the least of these was the political situation at court. He inherited a long-standing problem in the bitter antagonism between the officials of the outer court, the regular bureaucracy, the inner court, the emperor's personal entourage, and his palace staff and eunuchs. It was against the

[24] *TTCLC* 12, p. 72.
[25] Lü Ssu-mien, *Sui T'ang Wu-tai shih*, vol. 1 (Shanghai, 1959), p. 449.

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eunuchs that the hatred and suspicion of the bureaucrats was focused. Since the latter years of the eighth century they had come to be employed in a wide range of posts.[26] They not only cared for the emperor's palaces, gardens and estates, but supervised the postal service, the imperial guest houses, and the Buddhist establishment at the capital. More importantly they had acquired deliberative responsibilities as imperial secretaries (commissioners of privy affairs: *shu-mi shih*), in the palace, and control of the emperor's privy purse. They acted as supervisors to the provincial armies, and as a channel of communication between the emperor and his provincial governors. But their supreme power was control of the Shen-ts'e armies, which were not only the emperor's personal troops, but also the main force at the disposal of the central government.[27]

They were themselves divided into factions, as we have seen in the succession itself, but the real tension in government lay in the hatred and distrust felt for them by the officials of the outer court. An obscure prince elevated to the throne by a eunuch faction was unlikely to win the allegiance of his bureaucrats and ministers easily, and for the first year of his reign I-tsung faced extremely stubborn resistance from his ministers at court. In an attempt to resolve the situation, and ensure the overt support of his highest ministers, in the second month of 861, the three most important non-military eunuchs went to the Secretariat, where the chief ministers met and conferred, and handed to their spokesman Tu Ts'ung an order requiring that those men who had been serving as chief ministers during Hsiuan-tsung's final illness – nearly eighteen months before – were now to concoct a back-dated memorial, requesting the Prince of Yün (I-tsung's title before his accession) to supervise the country's affairs during his father's illness. This would show publicly that the succession had the approval of the most senior officials, not only the eunuchs. Anyone who refused to sign would suffer severe consequences. The elderly Tu Ts'ung told the eunuch delegation that such an order was inappropriate at the beginning of a new reign, a time for hope and optimism, and said that it was desirable that the eunuch imperial secretaries and the chief ministers should 'participate together in the administration of the empire's affairs'. The order was soon rescinded, and when I-tsung met his

[26] For general surveys of the extension of eunuch functions and general growth of eunuch power during the late T'ang, see Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai kangan kensei kakutoku inyū kō', *SGZS*, 63.10 (1954) 920–34; Yokohama Hirō, 'Tō no kanryōsei to kangan – chūsei-teki sokkin seiji no shūen josetsu', in Chūgoku chūsei shi kenkyū kai, ed. *Chūgoku chūsei shi kenkyū – Rikuchō Zui Tō no shakai to bunka* (Tokyo, 1970), pp. 417–42; Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu* (Taipei, 1971).

[27] See Obata Tatsuo, 'Shinsakugun no seiritsu', *Tōyōshi kenkyū*, 18.2 (1959) 151–67; 'Shinsakugun no hatten', *Tamura hakushi shōju Tōyōshi ronsō* (Kyoto, 1968), pp. 205–20.

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ministers in open court, he 'was very pleased'.[28] This incident suggests that opposition to the new regime was so strong that it became necessary to elicit a formal show of support from officialdom. The back-dated memorial would have given the seal of approval from the highest officials for I-tsung's succession, but would have provoked a major political crisis if the former chief ministers had refused to sign it. Tu Ts'ung's response achieved the desired result in a more subtle way. By describing I-tsung's accession as 'a time of hope and optimism' he was clearly conveying acceptance of the *fait accompli*. By stating that chief ministers and eunuch imperial secretaries should participate together in the administration he openly acknowledged the eunuchs' overt political role in government.

Tu Ts'ung had never been a dominant political figure, though he had served briefly as chief minister late in Wu-tsung's reign (841–7). Yet he was in a unique position to act as spokesman for officialdom. He was undeniably an elder statesman, having already served six emperors before I-tsung, and had a well-established reputation for rectitude. He was also a grandson of Tu Yu, a chief minister of enormous prestige under Hsien-tsung, and was married to Hsien-tsung's favourite grand-daughter.

Tu Ts'ung, from his long experience, clearly perceived what was at issue, and his discreet and timely gesture of support for the new regime avoided a dangerous crisis and probably averted a bloodbath similar to that following the Sweet Dew incident of 835. But his open acknowledgment of the eunuchs' role in government could not have been easy and was bitterly resented by other officials. Half-a-century before, Hsien-tsung bragged that he could remove his most powerful eunuch T'u-t'u Ch'eng-ts'ui (who had helped put him on the throne) 'as easily as plucking a hair'.[29] During the following reigns, in spite of the steady growth of eunuch power, the ministers continually insisted on their own primacy in the formulation and administration of policy. It was essential, as Li Te-yü put it in 845, that all government policies should 'issue forth from a single gate' – the chief ministers' office.[30] But now in the early 860s the eunuchs were able openly to encroach upon this jealously guarded area of ministerial responsibility, and henceforth the senior eunuchs could arrogantly refer to themselves as 'policy-making elder statesmen' (*ting-ts'e kuo-lao*). Soon the four chief advisory and executive eunuchs – i.e., the two imperial secretaries (commissioners of privy affairs: *shu-mi shih*) and the two chiefs of the imperial household (*hsüan-hui shih*) – were being called the four

[28] *TCTC* 250, pp. 8092–3; Tu Ts'ung has biographies in *CTS* 147, pp. 3984–5 and *HTS* 166, pp. 5090–2.

[29] *TCTC* 238, p. 7686.

[30] See ch. 9 above.

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ministers (*ssu hsiang*), a public proclamation of their new powers as equals of the outer court since the number of chief ministers had long been stabilized at four.[31]

Relations between eunuchs and officials remained hostile throughout I-tsung's reign, though the two sides could occasionally act together to prevent the rise of an imperial favourite who was from neither of their groups. But the intensification of hatred and suspicion between them sometimes led to tragic and bizarre results, as in the case of Yeh Ching of Chien-chou (Fukien). Sometime in the early 860s Yeh met the eunuch army supervisor of the Hsüan-wu Army at a banquet given by the military governor. Yeh later passed the *chin-shih* examination and was out with his fellow graduates on the streets of Ch'ang-an, when he met the same eunuch. Yeh Ching and the eunuch merely exchanged greetings from horseback, but that trivial exchange of civilities was enough to ruin Yeh's reputation and mar his career.[32] What happened to Yeh Ching in the 860s would not have occurred half a century before, when well-known scholar-officials such as Han Yü and Yüan Chen enjoyed warm relationships with prominent eunuchs of their day without any damage to their own careers.

The outer court officials holding high office under I-tsung seem at first sight to have been a highly aristocratic group. Of the twenty chief ministers during his reign fifteen were, or claimed to be, members of 'famous clans' (*ming-tsu*), while one was from a 'ministerial' (*kung-ch'ing*) family; three belonged to the regional elite (*shih-tsu*), and only one was of non-elite (*han-tsu*) origin, though he too appears to have been from a family of some standing.[33] Eighteen of the twenty had been recruited by examination but that tells us little about their social standing since by this time both relative newcomers and members of the establishment elite alike tended to take the examinations for the sake of the prestige which they conferred.

A more careful examination of I-tsung's chief ministers shows, however, that the first impression of a small and exclusive group of clans dominating the highest levels of government is misleading. In fact, it seems to have been a cardinal policy of I-tsung's court that no influential family or powerful bureaucratic faction from a previous reign should continue to hold power. I-tsung's chief ministers, whatever their claims to exalted ancestry, were almost all men with limited political connections. A num-

[31] *TCTC* 263, p. 8597; Sun Kuang-hsien, comp. *Pei-meng so-yen* (facsimile reproduction of Pai-hai edn, Taipei, 1965), 6, p. 10b.

[32] *TCTC* 250, pp. 8093–4.

[33] These classifications are based on the groupings established by Sun Kuo-tung in 'T'ang-Sung chih chi she-hui men-ti chih hsiao-jung – T'ang-Sung chi chi she-hui yen-chiu chih-i', *Hsin-ya hsüeh-pao*, 4.1 (1959) 213–18, and his charts pp. 280 ff.

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ber were from families newly-risen in the central government – six of his twenty chief ministers were the only members of their clan ever to hold that high office;[34] another six claimed descent from great officials of the Sui and early T'ang period, but were all members of lines that had long since lost any significant political power;[35] the others were, almost without exception, from politically insignificant branches of important clans.[36] Clan organization and cohesion were relatively weak during the T'ang period, and obscure relatives of a distinguished lineage could expect little support from their distant connections. It was thus possible to recruit members of prominent lineages without employing anybody who could effectively oppose the power of the emperor or his household officials. Members of the greatest aristocratic families, who had furnished a high percentage of top-ranking officials during the course of the dynasty, were almost totally excluded from high office at I-tsung's court.

Not one member of the old Shan-tung elite – the Ts'ui clan of Po-ling and Ch'ing-ho, the Chengs of Jung-yang, the Lu clan of Fan-yang, and the Li clan of Chao-chün – ever became a chief minister under I-tsung, nor did any member of the P'ei clan of Wen-hsi (Shansi), which was perhaps more closely associated with the T'ang dynasty than any other. Whether this represents a deliberate policy of exclusion by the emperor or the refusal of proud aristocrats to serve a suspect regime is not easy to decide; no doubt both factors played some part. In any case, the result was a lack of political continuity with the previous reign, which had deleterious results on the administration.

The determination of I-tsung to remove recalcitrant officials from the capital is unmistakable. At the very beginning of his reign the new emperor, whose accession had come about so furtively, took firm measures to consolidate his regime. He immediately dismissed one of Hsiuan-tsung's chief ministers, Hsiao Yeh, a mediocre man descended from a politically obscure branch of the ruling house of the Liang dynasty (AD 502–57), and replaced him with Tu Shen-ch'üan, a nephew of one of Mu-tsung's (reign 821–5) chief ministers, who had already given several decades of government service, and had held high office under Hsiuan-tsung. His appointment would have helped to gain acceptance for I-tsung's regime among the bureaucracy. In addition, I-tsung temporarily retained as chief minister Ling-hu T'ao, who had already held that office for nearly a decade.

Once he had assisted in the transition to the new regime, however, it

[34] These were Hsia-hou Tz'u, Chiang Shen, Pi Hsien, Ts'ao Ch'üeh, Lu Yen and Po Min-chung.

[35] These were Ling-hu T'ao, Tu Shen-ch'üan, Yang Shou, Kao Chü, Hsü Shang and Yü Ts'ung.

[36] Examples include Hsiao Yeh, Hsiao Chih, Liu Chan, Liu Yeh and Chao Yin.

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was inevitable that Ling-hu T'ao would be removed from his position. Ling-hu had played no part in I-tsung's succession and was much too closely identified with the previous regime. Within a matter of months he was sent out to the provinces as a military governor. Ling-hu's dismissal from court was probably popular in some quarters, for he had aroused considerable animosity during his ten years as chief minister under Hsiuan-tsung, as had his corrupt son Ling-hu Hao. But the reason for his removal was almost certainly that he had been involved late in Hsiuan-tsung's reign in a plan, instigated by the emperor, to liquidate the eunuchs; the discovery of this plot had sharpened the distrust between ministers and eunuchs, and the eunuchs who now controlled I-tsung had every reason not to keep Ling-hu T'ao in office, once he had served his purpose.

Following Ling-hu T'ao's dismissal, his old political adversary Po Min-chung was reappointed as chief minister. Po had been the first important chief minister under Hsiuan-tsung (from 847–51), and his reappointment was obviously an effort to gain his support and influence for the new regime. Po was by this time too old and decrepit to pose any real danger, but since he showed no signs of cooperating with the new regime, he was dismissed in the second month of 861. He was replaced by the pliant Tu Ts'ung, who immediately made the vital concessions sought by the new emperor and his eunuch supporters.

For several years after Po Min-chung's dismissal, the court was led by a series of weak personalities, whose only common characteristics were a lack of access to real political power, and their acquiescence in inner court domination of the government. Typical of them was Yang Shou, whose career epitomizes the politics of this period.[37] Yang claimed descent from the great Sui minister Yang Su. He was a child prodigy educated by his mother, of the once-important Chang-sun family, after the early death of his father. As a young man he gained a reputation for absolute propriety and knowledge of ritual. He was the protégé of three of I-tsung's early chief ministers, Tu Ts'ung, Ling-hu T'ao and Hsia-hou Tz'u, but was eventually himself appointed chief minister not by the emperor or by his ministers, but thanks to the influence of the eunuch Shen-ts'e general Yang Hsüan-chieh, who had by this time replaced Wang Tsung-shih as the real power at court. Yang Shou, in spite of his earlier reputation for integrity, became one of I-tsung's most corrupt chief ministers. However rapid his rise, his career was abruptly ruined as soon as he attempted to take an independent stand in the political struggles at court. He was first sent out to the provinces as a civil governor, but was almost imme-

[37] Biographies in *CTS* 177, p. 4595; *HTS* 184, pp. 5392–5.

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diately thereafter demoted to be a minor functionary in Huan-chou, the southernmost prefecture in Annam, and finally ordered to commit suicide.

If Yang Shou's career characterizes the complex pattern of patronage and the political insecurity of the period, the career of Lu Yen suggests even more strikingly the instability of political life and the unrestrained abuse of power during the middle years of I-tsung's reign.[38] Lu Yen was descended from a family of successful officials. Using his father's political connection, he rose quickly to high office, and in 864 became chief minister at the astoundingly early age of thirty-five, continuing in office until 871. Taking advantage of the emperor's lack of close attention to affairs, he systematically abused his power and office, and he and some of his personal supporters grew fabulously wealthy. When a magistrate boldly urged the emperor to confiscate the wealth of Pien Hsien, one of Lu Yen's circle, saying that the man's ill-gotten wealth would be enough to support the government's armies for two years, the emperor merely upbraided the magistrate for his effrontery. Pien Hsien soon afterwards became a general in the capital army, and only when rumours began to circulate that he was planning a coup d'état were he and Lu Yen finally banished from court.

Lu Yen had clearly gone beyond Yang Shou in establishing a personal circle of supporters. The rapid rise of such figures clearly had a disturbing effect on court politics, although some degree of balance was maintained between these newly risen individuals and members of the old established clans. Although only comparatively obscure members of the older clans were chosen for office, they still provided some representation of their social group at court, even if they had no effective power.

Lu Yen's political demise was partly brought about by Wei Pao-heng, who had become his principal political rival during his last year as chief minister.[39] Wei's ascendancy resulted from I-tsung taking a greater, if hardly more responsible, hand in court affairs. From the late 860s the emperor began to indulge a series of personal favourites, some of whom were elevated to very high offices. The ministers were in no position to oppose him, and even the eunuchs seemed to have lost much of their previous hold over him. After years on the throne, it is hardly surprising that I-tsung began to assert himself. However, the domination of the court by irresponsible favourites like Wei Pao-heng had devastating effects on the fragile stability achieved during the first years of the reign.

Wei Pao-heng's ancestors, like those of Lu Yen, had passed the *chin-shih* examination, and served successfully as officials. Wei Pao-heng in his

[38] Biographies in *CTS* 177, p. 4602; *HTS* 184, pp. 5396–7.
[39] Biographies in *CTS* 177, p. 4602; *HTS* 184, p. 5398.

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turn became a *chin-shih* in 864, though only by special imperial intervention; his examiner and fellow graduates held him in contempt and despised his ability. Wei gained increasing influence over the emperor during the next few years, and in 869 was married to his favourite daughter, the T'ung-ch'ang Princess. They were given an extravagant wedding ceremony, five million strings of cash, and a sumptuously decorated mansion in an exclusive quarter of the capital.

Wei Pao-heng was only a low-ranking personal adviser to I-tsung at the time of his marriage, but he now gained the emperor's trust and rose rapidly in rank; within little more than a year he had become a chief minister. Wei was not the first of I-tsung's chief ministers to be connected with the imperial house by marriage, but this was a very recent development, and not one very widely accepted. Until the 840s it was almost unknown for an imperial son-in-law to become chief minister. Before that time, the politically prominent aristocratic families had preferred to marry within their own group, rather than with the royal family, largely to maintain their political independence, but also because of a lingering feeling that the T'ang ruling house was not their cultural equal. In the previous reign Hsiuan-tsung had ordered his chief ministers to select eligible young men from the great aristocratic clans as consorts for imperial princesses, but this had been strongly resisted and led to some permanent animosities, widening the rift between the old-established elite clans and the dynasty that appears so clearly in the political history of I-tsung's reign. No doubt Wei Pao-heng's domination of the government, based as it was on his marriage into the imperial family, was doubly resented for that reason.

Wei Pao-heng's marriage to the emperor's daughter proved to be shortlived, however, as the princess died in the eighth month of 870. The emperor was blinded with grief, and had her physicians savagely executed, and members of their families thrown into jail. Protests against these harsh acts only further infuriated the emperor, and Wei Pao-heng cynically took advantage of the situation to carry out a purge of his political opponents. The chief minister Liu Chan and eight other high-ranking and distinguished officials were banished from court for their protests; the mayor of Ch'ang-an committed suicide, and Liu Chan would have been executed but for the intervention of the military governor of Yu-chou. The victims of this politically motivated purge were almost all members of the same great clans that I-tsung had excluded from the highest policy-making offices, and relatives of high-ranking officials of both I-tsung's and the previous reign; one of Yang Shou's relatives was included. Factionalism was as strong under I-tsung as it had ever been before.

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After this incident, the power and influence of the Wei family was at its height, as was their greed and prodigality. Four months after the death of the T'ung-ch'ang Princess, her body was cremated in the courtyard of the Wei family mansion. The ceremony became notorious as one of I-tsung's most unbridled acts of imperial extravagance. The imperial storehouses were opened, and jewels of all varieties brought out, to be used as hair ornaments for the several hundred dancers; eight hundred lengths of cloth covered the ground, and by the time the dancing was over they were buried under pearls and jade pieces fallen out of the dancers' hair. Every kind of treasure was furnished for burial with the body, and it is said that when the ceremony was completed the members of the Wei clan carefully sifted through the ashes of the cremated princess, looking for precious ornaments.

Serving with Wei Pao-heng as chief minister was Yü Ts'ung, whose career followed similar lines, though it was less spectacular.[40] Yü was descended from some of the great ministers of the early T'ang period, including Kao-tsu's chief minister Yü Chih-ning and one of the empress Wu's senior ministers Yü Hsiu-lieh. Yü Ts'ung had hoped to use hereditary privilege to gain office, but no high official would appoint him. He finally managed to become a *chin-shih* through the intervention of an imperial son-in-law. Yü then responded to Hsiuan-tsung's call for members of the elite to offer themselves for marriage to his daughters, and subsequently rose to high office through his relationship with the royal family, serving as chief minister from 867 to 872. Yü, however, seems to have had no real power and was totally dominated by Wei Pao-heng. In 872 he and his supporters fell as victims of a major court purge.

The appointment in 869 of Wang To as chief minister is interesting because Wang was a member of the Wangs of T'ai-yüan, a clan of great prestige associated with the Shan-tung aristocracy.[41] He was the only member of that group to be appointed as chief minister during I-tsung's reign, and it seems likely that he was appointed at the insistence of his cousin, the general Wang Shih, whose victories against Nan-chao, and whose suppression of the Ch'iu Fu and P'ang Hsün rebellions, made him too powerful a man to be ignored. Wang To was appointed soon after the end of the P'ang Hsün revolt. His appointment could not have been welcomed by Wei Pao-heng, whom Wang To despised; as Wei's examiner in 864 he had refused to pass him until the emperor personally intervened. Wei treated Wang with considerable respect but he was unable to establish any sort of personal power at court, and finally asked for reappointment to the provinces.

[40] Biographies in *CTS* 149, pp. 4010–11; *HTS* 104, pp. 4009–10.
[41] Biographies in *CTS* 164, pp. 4282–5; *HTS* 185, pp. 5406–7.

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I-tsung's last appointments of chief ministers were the sons of men relatively newly risen in the government, and thus in no way representative of the older aristocratic groups. But they nevertheless were well connected with influential bureaucratic families, whose support was still important to the government. No matter how much actual power was monopolized by eunuchs, favourites or imperial relatives, these bureaucratic groups were always represented among the chief ministers. Usually two of the four chief ministers were chosen from such clans. They had a certain amount of patronage to dispense, and this prevented the total alienation of the dynasty's former supporters. But they never held real authority.

One indirect effect of the bitter political struggles at court became apparent in the provinces. During this period the most common way of removing a chief minister from office was to appoint him to a high provincial office, usually as a civil or military governor. Many of these appointments were of vital importance to the dynasty's very survival; yet in selecting for them men who bore the scars of vicious political struggles, the court could hardly expect the highest standards of loyalty. Ling-hu T'ao's indifference to what happened north of Huai-nan when he allowed the P'ang Hsün rebels to pass peacefully through his territory is an example of what might ensue. Hsia-hou Tz'u, after his dismissal as chief minister in 867, was sent to Szechwan where he proved disastrously inept at resisting incursions from Nan-chao. It was fortunate that more areas were not involved in insurrection during I-tsung's reign, for many of the governors in provinces around the capital, in the middle and lower Yangtze regions and in Szechwan, were former chief ministers whose loyalties to the dynasty could not be taken for granted.

Besides the political fragmentation of the ruling elite, and its effects on regional administration and on the morale of officialdom, it should be emphasized that the operation of the administration also degenerated. Years before I-tsung took the throne, there had been a flurry of reformist activity under Hsiuan-tsung, much of it aimed at restoring the traditional institutional structure. But the bureaucratic apparatus continued to break down, as offices split apart and orderly relationships were lost, and as some offices changed their functions, while others disappeared except in name. Moreover, such important basic functions as the selection of officials and the drafting of edicts no longer belonged to any specific office but were more commonly entrusted to individual officials on a temporary basis.[42] This development was not new, but the result of a

[42] See Sun Kuo-tung, 'Structural changes of the central government in the late T'ang', *Chinese Scholars (Chung-kuo hsüeh-jen)*, 3 (1971) 5.

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century or more of change. It seriously weakened the integrity, sense of purpose and cohesiveness of the bureaucracy, and reduced the effectiveness of their administration, steadily undermining what had once been a powerful and well-organized structure. The obvious signs of institutional breakdown must have increased the officials' sense of unease and insecurity.

Historians of this period stress I-tsung's personal extravagance, his irrational cruelty and his capriciousness. Some of the emperor's actions were quite irrational. On one occasion he even provoked the eunuchs and ministers to act together in an attempt to prevent the appointment of his favourite musician as a general in the Palace Army. No official was safe protesting against anyone close to the real centres of power. When one minister presented a memorial which warned the emperor of plots involving the brother of a favourite consort, I-tsung ordered the minister's execution and the removal of his entire family from the official register.

Looking beyond the arbitrariness and excesses of the emperor, the main feature of I-tsung's reign was its sharp break with the politics of the preceding reigns. In the emperor's use of favourites, in the arbitrary employment of power, his reign is reminiscent of that of the empress Wu, and left as strong a legacy of bitterness and division. But there were significant differences as well. The empress Wu rarely acted irrationally. Moreover, her politics had diluted the power of the older aristocracy and broadened the political base of the dynasty. I-tsung's policies clearly narrowed the political base of the central government, at least at its top levels. By eliminating from the highest offices members of the clans that had most strongly supported the dynasty in the past, and replacing them with eunuchs, parvenus and minor members of a small section of the aristocracy – mainly clans based in or near the capital, and sometimes married into the imperial family – his regime destroyed much of that flexibility and balance that had more than anything else preserved the dynasty for so long. The deep and widespread unrest in the provinces helped temporarily to reunite the dynasty's supporters under the next emperor, Hsi-tsung, but the relative political stability of earlier reigns was never restored during the last four decades of T'ang rule.

I-tsung's support of Buddhism

There is no indication that during his first few years as emperor, I-tsung took any real part in the affairs of government, his functions being limited to a constant routine of formal ceremonial. For the rest, he had little to do but wile away his time in whatever amusements he could find. He

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appears to have found such a life entirely congenial. He entertained lavishly, was tireless in listening to music and in watching his court entertainers. He was a regular visitor to Ch'ang-an's palaces and parks, and went wherever he pleased among the scenic spots in the environs of the capital, in the company of numerous imperial princes and a retinue which often numbered more than ten thousand persons; the costs of his extravagance were incalculable.

I-tsung's patronage of Buddhism has often been regarded as just one more facet of his extravagance and listed together with his various personal excesses. The restoration of imperial support for Buddhism after the severe suppression of 845 is, however, a matter of considerable historical interest.

Hsiuan-tsung's almost immediate reversal of Wu-tsung's far-ranging suppression of the Buddhist church has often been overlooked. In the third month of 847, an edict declared that all the temples destroyed during the Hui-ch'ang suppression could be rebuilt and the officials were ordered not to interfere with the restoration. This restoration was only one aspect of a general effort by Hsiuan-tsung and his ministers to reverse the policies of the previous reign.[43] Among his other acts of restoration of the faith was an edict of 848 ordering the building of new monasteries in Ch'ang-an, Lo-yang, Ch'eng-tu, Ching-chou, Pien-chou and Yang-chou. Splendid Buddhist festivities were once again held throughout the empire, and in the capital the emperor revived the traditional debates among the advocates of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. In the province of Fukien there was much new temple construction during the late T'ang and Five Dynasties period; there is little doubt that it was the same in other areas. Thus Hsiuan-tsung's reign marked the restoration of Buddhism to its traditional role in Chinese society.

I-tsung proved to be even more enthusiastic a patron of Buddhism than his father. His lavish public support of Buddhism and personal devotion to the faith were apparent almost from the beginning of his reign. In 862, after the emperor had ordered large-scale ordination ceremonies, and new facilities for monks and nuns to preach within the inner palace, there were protests at court, reiterating the traditional arguments against Buddhism. But the eloquence of his opponents was in vain.

During his later years, I-tsung's patronage of Ch'ang-an's Buddhist establishment increased. On his birthday, monks from the major metro-

[43] For a survey of the main events of Hsiuan-tsung's restoration of Buddhism, see Jan Yün-hua, *A chronicle of Buddhism in China: 581–906 A.D.* (Santiniketan, India, 1966), pp. 97–105; for new temple construction in Fukien, Wei Ying-ch'i, 'Wu-tai Min-shih kao chih-i (hsü)', *Kuo-li Chung-shan ta-hsüeh yü-yen li-shih-hsüeh yen-chiu-so chou-k'an* (Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she reprint edn, Taiwan) ser. 7, no. 76 (1929), pp. 3051–70.

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politan temples were invited to the palace to discourse on Buddhism. In 871 he visited the An-kuo Temple, located in the ward just west of the princes' compound where he had grown up, and made lavish gifts to the monks. Late in this same year he held a great feast in the palace to which ten thousand monks were invited.

I-tsung's interest in Buddhism was matched by that of many of his ministers, but above all by P'ei Hsiu, one of Hsiuan-tsung's most eminent chief ministers who continued to hold honoured office under I-tsung until his death in 870. P'ei was a devout Buddhist layman, who did not drink wine or eat meat. He wrote a number of scholarly works on Ch'an Buddhism, much admired for their precision, which became part of the Buddhist *Tripitaka*. Patronage of Buddhism was not limited to Ch'ang-an, but remained immensely popular in the provinces. During the following decades it received especially lavish support in Fukien, a great centre of Ch'an Buddhism. As one final indication of the popularity of Buddhism during this period, the oldest extant printed book in China, and one of the oldest in the world, is the *Diamond Sūtra* printed in 868, which was discovered early this century by Aurel Stein.

I-tsung's last act of patronage of Buddhism was his most spectacular. Early in 873 the emperor decided, against the strenuous protests of his ministers, to revive the ceremony of venerating the Buddha's Bone, which had not been held since 819, when it had been so memorably denounced by Han Yü. The ceremony of 873 was conducted with the utmost splendour and ceremony, even exceeding that of Hsien-tsung's reign, and was marked by a general Act of Grace covering the whole empire. The wealthy families of the capital competed for the most lavish display, and the members of the court all made huge charitable gifts.

Perhaps I-tsung's desperate desire to carry out this ceremony resulted from a feeling that his own end was near, for he fell seriously ill some months later and died in the seventh month of 873. He was immediately succeeded by his twelve-year-old son Li Yen, known to history as Hsi-tsung.

HSI-TSUNG (REIGN 873–88)

The emperor and the eunuchs

The succession of the twelve-year-old Li Yen to the throne in 873 went more smoothly than his father's accession in 860. The fifth of I-tsung's eight sons, he owed his elevation to the two senior eunuch generals of the Shen-ts'e Army, Liu Hang-shen and Han Wen-yueh.[44] Liu was from

[44] *TCTC* 252, p. 8166; *CTS* 19B, pp. 689–90; *HTS* 9, p. 263.

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a eunuch 'family' of long standing, several of whose members had won the respect of high court officials, and his support for Li Yen would have carried considerable weight. The new emperor took the throne on the nineteenth day of the seventh month of 873, the day of his father's death and only one day after his own installation as heir apparent in charge of military and state affairs. I-tsung's Testamentary Edict named his favourite, Wei Pao-heng, as regent, but in the event Wei was banished from the court together with the late emperor's other more notorious favourites, soon after Hsi-tsung's enthronement.

Hsi-tsung was still a boy and knew little of life outside the palace. He loved sports and games, and he was good at archery, riding and swordplay. He was especially proud of his prowess at football – a favourite T'ang sport. He also enjoyed mathematical computations, music and gambling of all sorts, particularly with dice. He loved cock-fights, and he and his brothers bet on matches between fighting geese. He seems to have had a sense of humour, but was rather dull-witted.

As Hsi-tsung grew older his preoccupation with games and diversions faded and he began to take a strong hand in court affairs. Unfortunately he proved to be a harsh and capricious ruler, unduly concerned with forms of punctilio, and liable to impose harsh punishments, even for justified criticism of his government. Hsi-tsung is sometimes described as having been utterly frivolous throughout the fifteen years of his reign, but it seems clear that as he approached twenty he was becoming a strong-willed, if decidedly capricious, inexperienced and ill-trained ruler. If there was much to criticize in the conduct and leadership of the court during his reign, it must be remembered that Hsi-tsung faced a crisis of such complexity and danger that it would have tested to the limit the wisdom and courage of any ruler, much less a young boy.

Even allowing for the historians' bias against the eunuchs, it is probably fair to put most of the blame for the failing of the court during his reign on Hsi-tsung's chief eunuch, T'ien Ling-tz'u, who quickly emerged as the dominant figure at court and earned a reputation as one of the most powerful and feared eunuchs of the late T'ang.[45] T'ien and his eunuch successors held such powerful control over the last T'ang emperors that they virtually reduced the emperor to a puppet. Although the emperor regained some measure of authority for short periods, during the last decades of the T'ang, imperial authority fell to an almost unparalleled low point.

T'ien Ling-tz'u had held only a minor post in the eunuch establishment during I-tsung's reign, and the key to his power lay in his very close

[45] His biography is in *CTS* 184, pp. 4771–2; *HTS* 208, pp. 5884–9.

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personal relationship with Hsi-tsung, who regarded him as a foster father. T'ien was well-educated and extremely clever, and managed to keep Hsi-tsung occupied while he gathered power into his own hands. His ascendancy was signified by his appointment in 875 as head of the Shen-ts'e Armies. He now began to make appointments and hand out rewards without consulting the emperor, who apparently trusted implicitly his capacity to handle court affairs. T'ien proposed various ways of raising money for the imperial treasury, including a plan to confiscate the wealth of merchants in the capital. Anybody protesting against his schemes faced execution, and even the government's highest ministers were afraid openly to oppose the eunuchs.

In addition to satisfying his own personal ambitions, T'ien sought generally to enhance the prestige of the eunuchs, and by 880 appointments to high eunuch posts in both the capital and the provinces were being made in solemn forms which had hitherto been reserved for the appointments of chief ministers.[46] T'ien's utter ruthlessness and his firm control over the emperor was of course profoundly resented by Hsi-tsung's outer court officials, and there is no doubt that his presence at court helped to destroy any sense of common purpose among the ministers, and to dash any remaining hopes for a recovery of T'ang imperial authority.

The only figure strong enough to challenge T'ien Ling-tz'u was another eunuch Yang Fu-kung, who, unlike T'ien, was a member of one of the most powerful eunuch 'families', his predecessors having served as senior generals in the Shen-ts'e Army for nearly a century.[47] His career was very similar to that of an ordinary court official. After his adoption by the imperial secretary, Yang Hsüan-i, he held a series of provincial posts as an army supervisor and had played a significant role in the suppression of the P'ang Hsün rebellion. He then returned to the capital where he first became chief of the Imperial Household and then in 869 succeeded his foster-father Yang Hsüan-i as imperial secretary. Yang Fu-kung represented a segment of the eunuch establishment which had been completely incorporated in the dynasty's institutional structure, and was loyal to the dynasty rather than to any single emperor. To him T'ien Ling-tz'u was as much a parvenu as I-tsung's favourites had been to the officials of that reign. T'ien posed a direct threat to Yang's position in the normal structure of government, and it is not surprising that a struggle for power began between them. T'ien Ling-tz'u's personal ascendancy over the new emperor and his command of the palace armies proved decisive, however,

[46] *TCTC* 253, pp. 8225–6.
[47] Biographies in *CTS* 184, pp. 4774–5; *HTS* 208, pp. 5889–92.

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and Yang was demoted and went into temporary retirement, returning to his estates much as an official might have done. He was well-educated, and seems to have had good relations with some outer court officials during the last years of I-tsung's reign, when eunuchs and officials joined in their opposition to I-tsung's favourites. Perhaps the loyal service to the dynasty, rather than to an individual emperor, shown by the Yangs and other great eunuch families helped ease the tensions between them and the officials of the outer court.

Just as Yang Fu-kung's career shows striking similarities with the career pattern of a senior civilian official, his 'cousin' Yang Fu-kuang held many of the responsibilities of a top military officer.[48] Like his cousin, Yang was quite well-educated and is described in his biographies as a man of great integrity and resolve. He had been driven from the capital during I-tsung's reign by the chief minister Yang Shou, who suspected Yang Fu-kuang of plotting against him. During the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, Yang Fu-kuang was entrusted with a series of extremely important military and diplomatic missions; he also greatly influenced government policy against the rebels and helped put it into action. His achievements during these years earned him considerable respect.

In spite of Yang Fu-kuang's services to the dynasty during the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, tension persisted between eunuchs and officials. Although the eunuchs' participation in the government was an accepted fact, the range of their power and influence had increased beyond tolerable limits. T'ien Ling-tz'u, who continued to dominate Hsi-tsung even after the government's return from exile, became the object of bitter attacks from officials in the capital and provinces alike, and his presence at court remained a major obstacle to any efforts to regain control of areas outside the capital. All three of the influential eunuchs of Hsi-tsung's reign – T'ien Ling-tz'u, Yang Fu-kung and Yang Fu-kuang – attempted to extend their personal power to the provinces by placing adopted sons in important regional posts. Yang Fu-kuang alone had more than ten adopted sons in positions at the level of prefect, provincial general or higher.[49] T'ien Ling-tz'u, whose experience outside the capital was considerably more limited than that of the Yangs, also attempted to establish his regional power base by the appointment of his brother Ch'en Ching-hsüan as governor of their home province. The eunuchs were only following the lead of the court ministers in establishing personal ties with provincial leaders, but the substitution of such personal bonds and alliances for a sense of loyalty to the government further undermined T'ang dynastic power.

[48] Biographies in *CTS* 184, pp. 4772–4; *HTS* 207, pp. 5875–7.
[49] *TCTC* 258, p. 8419; *CTS* 184, p. 4775; *HTS* 186, p. 5428.

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The outer court under Hsi-tsung: restoration of the aristocracy

The first months of Hsi-tsung's reign resembled the beginning of his father's reign, in that efforts were made to consolidate support for the new regime by appointing to the highest offices only minor members of great clans, or officials with little personal power or influence. Hsiao Fang, an elderly scion of the old Liang ruling house, was appointed chief minister in the last month of 873, to replace the corrupt and hated Wei Pao-heng, who was banished from the court.[50] Hsiao was a man of great integrity and frugality, who had constantly opposed I-tsung's lavish patronage of Buddhism. He had been a notable provincial governor and in 865–8 had undertaken extensive repairs to the dikes of the Huang-ho. His grandfather, uncle and nephew had all served as chief ministers, and his appointment was both conservative and safe. Hsiao Fang was soon joined as chief minister by a nonentity named P'ei T'an, a member of a minor branch of the great P'ei clan which had been closely associated with the T'ang ruling house throughout the dynasty. P'ei T'an died soon after his appointment. He was replaced by one of I-tsung's less prominent chief ministers, Liu Chan, who had been banished from court in 870.

The next appointment, however, suggests an important political change – a return to power of members of the established political and social aristocracy, whose position had been systematically curtailed during I-tsung's reign. In the eighth month of 874, after the suspicious death of the newly-appointed Liu Chan, the government appointed as chief minister Ts'ui Yen-chao.[51] Ts'ui, a nephew of Ts'ui Ch'ün who had been a chief minister under Hsien-tsung, was representative *par excellence* of the old 'north-eastern' aristocracy, a member of the Ts'ui clan of Ch'ing-ho and thus of the exclusive 'seven surnames' group of 'Shan-tung' (that is Ho-nan and Ho-pei). During the first half of the ninth century the political importance of this group had been profound, and among them the Ts'uis clearly had special importance. Their leading members had given leadership to officialdom during the bitter struggles between the eunuchs and officials in the 830s.[52] Three of Wu-tsung's chief ministers were Ts'uis, as were four of those who served under Hsiuan-tsung. The decision to appoint Ts'ui Yen-chao in 874 was therefore of great significance, after the deliberate eclipse of this group under I-tsung.

[50] *TCTC* 252, p. 8167; Hsiao Fang has biographies in *CTS* 172, pp. 4480–2; *HTS* 101, pp. 3959–60.
[51] *TCTC* 252, p. 8171; Ts'ui Yen-chao has biographies in *CTS* 178, pp. 4628–30; *HTS* 183, pp. 5380–1.
[52] See Wang T'ang, comp. *T'ang yü-lin* (Shanghai, 1957), 3, pp. 76–7; quoted in Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu*, pp. 40–1.

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Ts'ui Yen-chao not only had impressive family connections. He was also an intelligent, scholarly man who had demonstrated great practical ability in office, particularly as military governor of Ho-tung (from 870 to 873), which he had successfully defended against attacks by the Sha-t'o Turks. For all these reasons, his was a more positive appointment than had been made in many years. There is no way of knowing the precise motive for his appointment as chief minister. A general awareness that the dynasty faced crucial problems which demanded a strong and united leadership must have been one factor. In addition, the eunuchs who apparently controlled appointments during Hsi-tsung's childhood were perhaps more apprehensive of the rise of unpredictable imperial favourites like those who had dominated the court under I-tsung, than they were of the elevation of members of the older political elite.

The next appointment of a chief minister confirmed that the government had decided not only to reverse the political policies of the previous reign, but to restore to power some of the victims of those policies. In the tenth month of 874, Cheng T'ien, a member of another pre-eminent clan, was named chief minister.[53] Cheng, in spite of brilliant examination successes several decades earlier, had been passed over during Hsiuan-tsung's reign owing to his father's opposition to Po Min-chung and Ling-hu T'ao, who then dominated the court. It was not until Liu Chan's appointment as chief minister in the late 860s, that Cheng was given his first significant appointment as a Han-lin scholar. Cheng won a great reputation among his colleagues for his quick wit, incisive mind and dazzling literary style. But he had almost immediately suffered another set-back when in 870 Liu Chan and his political allies, including himself, were banished from the capital. Cheng was made prefect of an insignificant coastal prefecture in the far south.

Hsi-tsung's first full ministry of four chief ministers, which continued throughout the reign to be the standard number of chief ministers in the capital, was completed with the appointment of Lu Hsi, also in the tenth month of 874.[54] Lu came from an obscure line of the noble Lu clan of Fan-yang in Ho-pei. Lu was a very different figure from his colleague Cheng T'ien, the only link between them being their common membership of the north-eastern aristocracy. He had become a *chin-shih* in 855, and had served in a succession of increasingly important and high-ranking posts under Hsiuan-tsung and I-tsung. As a member of a minor line of a great clan he was no different from many of the high officials of I-tsung's court. But he was clearly aware of the general crisis that had been building up during the 860s, and of the dire situation in the provinces.

[53] Cheng has biographies in *CTS* 178, pp. 4630–8; *HTS* 185, pp. 5401–5.
[54] Lu has biographies in *CTS* 178, pp. 4638–9; *HTS* 184, pp. 5398–9.

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With his appointment, the government had a full complement of four chief ministers – Hsiao Fang, Ts'ui Yen-chao, Cheng T'ien and Lu Hsi – all of high standing, considerable experience, capacity and personal integrity. They formed a far more able group than any ministry under I-tsung, who rarely appointed chief ministers of such high stature, and never more than one or two at a given time. The immediate task of the newly-appointed chief ministers was to end the corruption that had grown rampant under I-tsung. Within a few months of their appointments the government was already operating with greatly increased honesty and efficiency, while some of the elaborate formalities of the previous reign were done away with.[55]

Social problems and the growth of banditry

The court's new leadership faced a daunting situation. Shortly after Hsi-tsung's accession at the beginning of 874, Lu Hsi, then a Han-lin scholar, addressed a moving memorial to the throne detailing the desperate situation that had been building up since the 860s.[56] It is a bleak picture indeed: the previous year had been one of drought and famine, with only half the crop harvested, almost no autumn sowing and few winter vegetables. The famine areas faced mass starvation, the people were reduced to eating berries and leaves. But even in the face of this catastrophe the government had found it impossible to remit any but supplementary taxes, and the peasants, to meet their regular taxes, were forced to sell the timbers from their houses, to sell their children into slavery, and to hire their wives out as servants.

Lu Hsi urged that relief measures be taken at once, and that the unremitting collection of taxes should be stopped before the people 'have no way to live'. The court decided to follow his advice, but the officials found it was impossible, and the imperial relief edict which was issued was regarded as a meaningless piece of paper.

This underlines the basic situation which faced the new ministers in dealing with the immense problems in the provinces; even the best-considered policies stood little chance of implementation in the face of such vast and intractable problems. But they certainly gave very careful thought to the country's condition.

In the first month of 875 a comprehensive policy edict was issued as part of an imperial Act of Grace.[57] This was by far the longest and most detailed edict ever promulgated during the T'ang. It is thorough and

[55] *HTS* 183, p. 5381, and 185, p. 5402.
[56] *TCTC* 252, pp. 8168–9; *CTW* 792, pp. 13b–14a.
[57] *TTCLC* 72, pp. 400–5.

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informed, discussing carefully many of the serious social, financial and institutional problems of the day, and giving detailed prescriptions for reform. It is strikingly optimistic, and might well have had a salutary effect had it not been issued at such an inauspicious time. It shows a clear awareness of the principal issues and problems confronting the dynasty, and is evidence that the late T'ang decline is not attributable solely to administrative incompetence. The government was, for the moment at least, in the hands of intelligent, able men, all of them experienced, well-informed and strongly loyal to the dynasty.

By the 870s brigandage was widespread. But its incidence was by far the greatest in the densely populated plain between the Huang-ho and Huai River, where incessant government exploitation, coupled with frequent natural disasters, had caused severe social dislocation that drove many into outlawry, taking refuge in the wild areas which offered a haven to bandits. To the west and south of the great plain were hilly areas where bandits could move freely but where government troops entered only at great risk. Along the coast were numerous major salt-producing districts in which an illicit salt trade had flourished as the cost of government monopoly salt grew increasingly exorbitant. Armed bandit gangs engaged in this illegal trade, and from time to time plundered merchants and settlements in the Yangtze valley, which lay within easy reach.

During the early years of Hsi-tsung's reign, bandit activity entered a new phase. Banditry had been a problem before, serious enough for high-level regional officials to address detailed memorials to the throne and to devise elaborate prevention measures. But the bandits had been a threat to commerce and government revenues rather than a danger to public safety and administrative stability. By the early 870s, however, bandit gangs, some as large as small armies, ravaged the countryside and even attacked walled cities, bringing them into direct confrontation with the government. Serious fighting between bandit groups and government forces, and large-scale campaigns for the suppression of bandits began in 875 and lasted for nearly a decade, during which the structure of power in nearly all parts of China was totally transformed. This conflict was not simply the result of a sudden and total collapse of authority, though demoralization among the officials made it difficult for the government to respond effectively to disorder. The conflict was also the final stage of a long period of social dislocation and widespread militarization that had begun many decades before.

Apart from banditry, there were many signs in the late 860s and early 870s that authority was insecure, and was being challenged in ways that a few years before would have been unthinkable. In 869 for example, the

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people of Shan-chou, only sixty miles east of Lo-yang, expelled and humiliated an arrogant and cruel civil governor who had refused to listen to their pleas for relief during a drought. The government, rather than punishing the people, decided to banish the official. Its caution in this instance was clearly dictated by the P'ang Hsün rebellion, which had been finally suppressed less than a month before, after a year of bitter fighting. The next year, the people of Kuang-chou, in Huai-hsi, expelled their prefect, and some officials urged that they should be punished severely to prevent further occurrences of the same kind. In the last month of 874, shortly after Hsi-tsung's accession, the people of Shang-chou, just south-east of the capital, took similar action against their prefect, Wang Shu. When he set low prices for their grain payments they beat him and killed two of his assistants. During ordinary times, such events would have been regarded as astonishing outrages against authority. By the late 860s and early 870s they were no longer uncommon.[58]

Incidents of this type, however embarrassing for the dynasty, were too easily quelled to become the focus of a major revolt; the responsible official could be replaced, a few companies of troops sent in, the ring-leaders isolated and executed. They were not so much dangerous in themselves as indicative of deeper and far more widespread trouble. The same desperation which found expression in such local urban riots transformed the bandit gangs, which in normal times were merely local groups of criminals, into large well-organized, heavily armed confederations able to act with relative impunity in the face of weakened authority.

The strength of the bandit forces and the suddenness with which they were able to field substantial armies depended, like the earlier rebellions led by Ch'iu Fu and P'ang Hsün, on the widespread support of an alienated population. The numbers of the dispossessed rural poor were steadily increasing, and for many the easiest escape was to join one of the ubiquitous bandit gangs.

Social composition and organization of the bandit gangs

Of the mass of supporters of the bandit gangs we have no details and can speak only in the broadest generalities. The histories refer to them as *wang-ming*, literally people who had 'abandoned their lot' in regular society, by leaving their family, if they had one, or their village. Such displaced individuals could become either simple vagabonds or members of a bandit gang. The bandit leaders 'gladly supported' these refugees from society, who swelled the ranks of their followers.

[58] For these incidents, see *TCTC* 251, pp. 8144–5, and 252, pp. 8158, 8174.

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There is no way of knowing what percentage of the bandits had ever tilled the land for a living and how many came from the petty, marginal or despised professions, or were without any regular livelihood. Social fragmentation and vagrancy had a long history in the T'ang. Displaced peasants had earlier often 'squatted' on vacant lands, or found employment on the growing number of large estates (*chuang-yüan*), as tenant-farmers or labourers. But really large-scale dislocation of the peasantry began after An Lu-shan's rebellion. For instance, in the late 770s, Tu-ku Chi reported that 90 per cent of the peasants of Shu-chou (Anhwei) were living from hand to mouth, 'without a penny to their name'.[59] It was the members of this landless, dispossessed rural population who were more likely to make the transition into banditry than the normal hard-pressed peasants. Some peasants, of course, were pushed into banditry, but the great majority, having managed to hold on to a piece of land, dared risk no drastic change.

Whatever the social background of the individual gang member, by joining a bandit gang he became a bandit, and we distort the nature of the challenge to the T'ang if we insist on labelling the dynasty's adversaries as 'peasant rebels'. This is not to say that the peasants were completely passive. During those years there were frequent rural riots in which peasants participated and then returned to their farming. But Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao led no such spontaneous peasant risings, nor were they accepted as 'peasant heroes'. Wang, Huang and their allies were at the head of an interlocking confederation of bandit gangs, not a peasant army; they terrorized the countryside, taking by force whatever could be had and they must indeed have posed an ever-present and terrifying threat to the ordinary peasant. They never sought to advance the interests of the peasantry, and proved only too eager to accept positions from the dynasty, once the terms were right.

Although we know very little about the rank and file of the bandit gangs, there is a substantial amount of information about some of their leaders, who came partly from the rural gentry and partly from the impoverished classes. Some of them had a degree or formal education, and had thus aspired to membership of the official class. Huang Ch'ao and such important confederates as Chu Wen and Li Han-chih all had more than a modicum of education and Huang Ch'ao himself had even been selected as a local candidate for the *chin-shih* examination.[60] Others of the

[59] *CTW* 386, p. 11b, quoted in Kurihara Masuo, 'Tōmatsu Godai no henkaku – sono sokyūteki kōsatsu o fukumete', *Rekishi kyōiku*, 12.5 (1964) 60.

[60] For Huang Ch'ao, *CTS* 225C, p. 6451; Chu Wen came from a family of scholars, as described in Wang Gungwu, *The structure of power in north China during the Five Dynasties* (Kuala Lumpur. 1963), p. 27n.; for Li Han-chih, see his biographies in *HTS* 187, pp. 5442–5; *CWTS* 15, pp. 4a–7b, and *HWTS* 42, pp. 454–6; also *Pei-meng so-yen*, 15, pp. 7a–b.

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bandit leaders came from what we might call the 'strongman' class of rural society: individuals who had personal means and local power but who had no close ties with local officialdom, and lacked the formal education that could lead them towards an official career. Chu Ch'ing, a formidable figure who lived by plunder in Sung-chou (Honan), was one such strongman. All the bandit leaders, whether they were from the relatively cultivated elite or from among such independent and lawless local strongmen, shared one feature: all were skilled in the martial arts, and to judge by their successes against government forces some of them were clearly excellent military tacticians.

It was inevitable that such a local 'counter-elite' would emerge in the late-T'ang period.[61] Access to official employment had steadily decreased. The government's heavy reliance on monopoly taxation had produced an extensive illicit trade in salt, which this counter-elite was quick to exploit; many of them built up solid fortunes. Such individuals also performed a crucial role as mediators between the individual villages and the larger society, and it is not surprising that we find them at the head of the largest bandit confederations.

To their own members, men who joined together to seize by force what they could gain in no other way, these strongmen were neither terrorists nor bandits, but exemplars of the code known as *jen-hsia* which stresses the ideal of mutual loyalty and protection. They were not negligible people, but could 'exercise power in their village or prefecture, and were strong enough to humble great lords'.[62] Some of the bandit leaders already had such local power before they entered into open conflict with the government. Later, however, they usually cut their ties with their home localities, and entered on a career of 'roaming banditry'.

Another group of bandit leaders had arisen from the depths of society. Although some were of peasant background, and most derived from peasant stock, they were not themselves peasants.[63] They are sometimes described as 'toughs' or 'riff-raff', individuals without regular occupations and with no part in the fabric of conventional society.[64] Such village

[61] The term 'counter-elite' is borrowed from Eric Wolf, 'On peasant rebellions', *International Social Science Journal*, 21 (1969) 288. For an excellent discussion of the formation and evolution of a local elite class during the T'ang, see Kikuchi Kideo, 'Setsudoshi kenkryoku to iwayuru dogōsō', *Rekishi kyōiku*, 14.5 (1966) 46–58.

[62] *TCTC* 251, p. 8129.

[63] The term 'peasant' is used precisely to describe the majority of rural dwellers who subsist through rural cultivation. According to this widely accepted definition, other rural dwellers are not peasants, though they are part of peasant society; see Sidney W. Mintz, 'A note on the definition of peasantries', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1.1 (1973) 91–106 and the literature cited there.

[64] For examples, see *CWTS* 133, p. 14b (Ch'ien Liu); *HWTS* 63, p. 783 (Wang Chien); *Chiu-kuo chih* (*TSCC* edn, Shanghai, 1937), vol. 3, p. 39 (Hsü Wen).

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toughs who organized their comrades into a sort of predatory army, ready to be called into action at a moment's notice, played a major role in the bandit armies of the late T'ang.

Some of the bandit leaders who became confederates of Wang Hsien-chih and later of Huang Ch'ao, or who operated independently elsewhere in China, began as leaders of minor rural gangs; others appear to have been simple criminals. Pi Shih-to, for example, came from the same locality as Wang Hsien-chih and was one of Wang's chief supporters. He led his own band, however, which was known as 'The Hawks'. Ch'ien Liu, who later established the state of Wu-Yüeh, was characterized as 'tough and brave when young', and was said to have been employed to 'resolve feuds and avenge grievances'. Wang Chien began as an idler who 'slaughtered cows, stole donkeys, and sold black-market salt for a living'. He eventually founded the state of Former Shu in Szechwan, where his court was filled with prominent former T'ang officials; however, people never forgot his old nickname 'Wang-pa the Thief'. Hsü Wen, who laid the foundation for the state of Southern T'ang, 'was an idler when young, and joined up with bandits to sell salt for a living'. And it was said of Chung Chuan, who established independent control over Chiang-hsi during the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, that 'he had never worked as a farmer, but always liked hunting'.[65]

Many others of the outlaw elite of the late T'ang had similar backgrounds, men without a regular livelihood living on the borders of the criminal world, and others who for one reason or another did not conform to any conventional social pattern. Some had taken up marginal occupations, becoming street entertainers, butchers or petty thieves. Others had become soldiers and a few became monks, though one we know of was rejected every time he attempted to enter the *samgha*.[66]

The organization of the bandit gangs is difficult to determine precisely. Chinese officials at the time may have had detailed knowledge of the bandit gangs, but the accounts preserved in the official histories show little comprehension of their internal structure, giving the impression of a well-organized army. The *Hsin T'ang shu*, for example, states that at an early stage in the fighting Wang Hsien-chih had more than ten 'staff commanders', seven of whom are named.[67] Several of these were, however, major independent bandit leaders in their own right. Pi Shih-to, for example, although choosing to support Wang Hsien-chih, had his own following. Another of those named, Liu Yen-chang, was a bandit leader

[65] *CTS* 182, pp. 4712–13 (Pi Shih-to); see Ch'ien Liu's biographies in *CWTS* 133, pp. 14b–20a and *HWTS* 67, pp. 835–841; for Wang Chien, *HWTS* 63, p. 783 and *TPKC* 224, pp. 1723–4; for Hsü Wen, *Chiu-kuo chih*, 3, p. 39; for Chung Chuan, *TPKC* 192, pp. 1441–2.

[66] *CWTS* 15, p. 4a.

[67] *HTS* 225C, p. 6451.

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operating in Chiang-hsi in 877, and there is no evidence that he was ever part of Wang Hsien-chih's group. A third, Liu Han-hung, actually took part in the campaigns *against* Wang Hsien-chih, seized Wang's supply waggons, and acted as an independent bandit; again, apart from the *Hsin T'ang shu* reference, there is not the slightest evidence that he was even a supporter of Wang Hsien-chih, much less one of his 'staff commanders'. Such confusion over the nature of the relationships among the bandit leaders is not surprising in a period of intensive strife. But it suggests that the T'ang government may well have misunderstood entirely the unfamiliar organization of the bandit gangs.

Wang Hsien-chih led no highly organized military machine, but rather a confederation of individual bandit gangs or clusters of gangs each with its own leader, to whom the members were tied by bonds of personal loyalty or mutual advantage. Wang Hsien-chih's own bandit confederation totalled three thousand men and was made up of smaller gangs, ranging in size from twenty or thirty men upwards. A hundred men was either an exceptionally large gang or a combination of several smaller groups coming together for a single raid. Wang Hsien-chih, Shang Chün-ch'ang and Huang Ch'ao seem to have been such effective leaders that they could extend their personal ascendancy over a cluster of individual gang leaders. Such highly personal leadership and such personalized links between small groups were characteristic of Chinese bandit or rebel confederations down to the twentieth century.

One way of strengthening such personal bonds was by the bestowal of the leader's surname upon his followers thus conferring 'paternal' authority on the leader. Each of the eight leaders under Huang Ch'ao's control shared the same surname, and are referred to as his 'brothers'. There is no evidence that they were not genuine blood relations, but the likelihood is that they were fellow bandit leaders who willingly accepted his surname and also his 'paternal' leadership.[68] Such fictive relationships were commonly used by the imperial clan, and more generally in rural society during periods of stress. During the late T'ang, fictive bestowal of surnames was also very common among top military commanders and their subordinates, not to mention the imperial family and its closest supporters.[69]

[68] Hori Toshikazu also questions the authenticity of the blood relationship in 'Tōmatsu shohanran no seikaku – Chūgoku ni okeru kizoku seiji no botsuraku ni tsuite', *Tōyō bunka*, 7 (1951) 83.

[69] See Yano Chikara, 'Tōdai ni okeru kashiteki no hatten ni tsuite', *Nishi Nihon shigaku*, 6 (1951) 86–97; Kurihara Masuo, 'Tō Godai no kafushiteki ketsugō no seikaku – shu to shite hanshiteki shihai kenkryoku to no kanren ni oite', *SGZS*, 62.6 (1953) 514–43; 'Tō Godai no kafushiteki ketsugō ni okeru seimei to nenrei', *TYGH*, 38.4 (1956) 430–57.

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Early stages of conflict: Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao

In 874, the first full year of Hsi-tsung's reign, there were clear signs that the threat from bandit gangs was becoming ominous. Late in that year the Kan-hua Army Command – the reconstituted Wu-ning Army in Ho-nan – reported bandit activity so serious that outside help was needed; the government ordered several commands in southern Shan-tung to send assistance. The bandits causing so much trouble for the Kan-hua Army seem to have been remnants of the forces that had supported P'ang Hsün.[70] The military governors in Shan-tung cannot have been eager to send troops to Kan-hua, for they too were at this time facing outbreaks of bandit activity and local unrest. The trouble soon spread: by the fifth or sixth month of 875 there was real danger not only to rural areas, but prefectural cities in the province of T'ien-p'ing (in western Shan-tung), which had been a centre of banditry for at least half-a-century. Bandit gangs led by Wang Hsien-chih and Shang Chün-ch'ang attacked P'u-chou and Ts'ao-chou in the fifth month of 875; they were soon joined by Huang Ch'ao, leading several thousand men of his own. The bandits kept well away from Yün-chou, the provincial capital, where the T'ien-p'ing Army was garrisoned, but bandit gangs from Yün-chou also joined them. The government's initial response was conventional. The bandit attacks were considered a local problem, to be handled by local forces. The military governor of T'ien-p'ing, Hsüeh Ch'ung, led his troops against the bandit gangs but was defeated.

The fighting escalated during 875. The bandits not only attacked prefectural cities, but they continued the process of confederation, and began to pose an unprecedented threat to imperial control of the country. Wang Hsien-chih now assumed the title of supreme general and issued a proclamation which was also sent to nearby provinces denouncing the government for its inequitable policies and corrupt administration. This proclamation was a declaration of intent similar to the 'public memorial' issued by P'ang Hsün late in 868 which had been circulated to the villages and fortresses in the rebellious areas with great success. It seems that Wang Hsien-chih intended this call for support primarily for other leaders of bandit gangs, rather than for the population at large. Later in 875 he refused to accept mutinous soldiers into his ranks, feeling presumably that their support was both unnecessary and dangerous. Gentry support, which had come quickly to P'ang Hsün after he occupied P'eng-ch'eng, was not forthcoming for Wang Hsien-chih, or for Huang Ch'ao until very much later when he had occupied Ch'ang-an. Few members of the settled

[70] For this identification, see *TCTC* 252, p. 8172.

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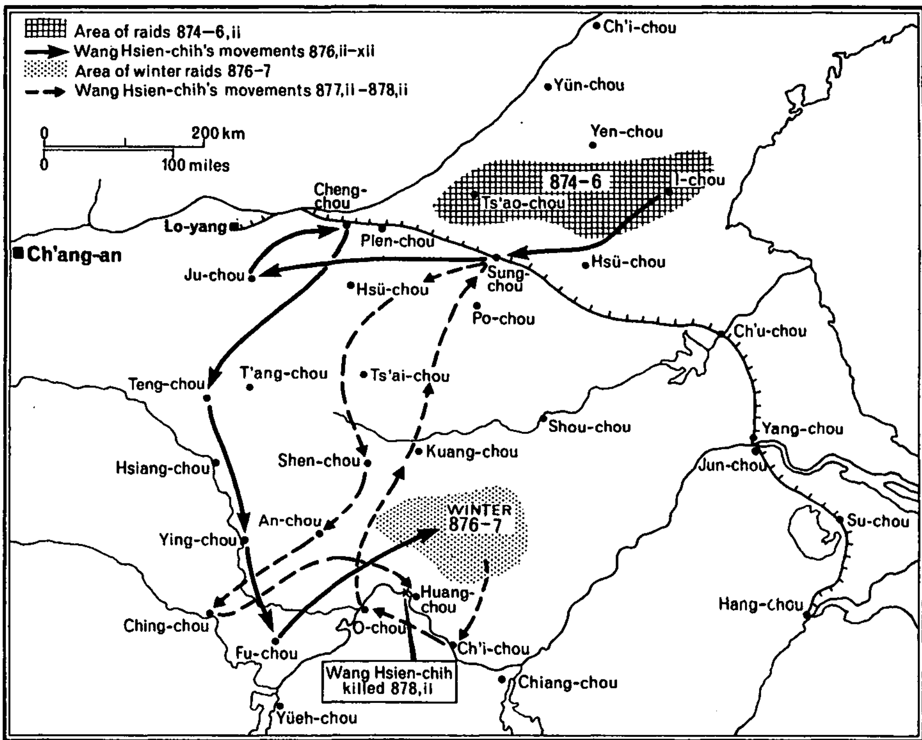

Map 20. Wang Hsien-chih's bandit confederation, 874–8

local elite were likely to cut their own local ties to support bandit leaders who raided one area after another, with no apparent intention either of territorial occupation or of political consolidation. They waited until there was hope of the emergence of a stable new regime.

As the year went on the situation rapidly deteriorated. Natural disasters added to the peasants' misery as further floods of the Huang-ho were followed by a devastating plague of locusts, resulting in famine and driving still more peasants to desperation and banditry.

By the second half of 875, major bandit raids had spread over an area of more than ten prefectures, reaching as far south as the Huai River. The bandits, most of them operating independently of the principal leaders, Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao, attacked in large groups, ranging from several hundred to a thousand men. The government attempted to respond with overwhelming force, ordering the military governors and army supervisors of five military provinces in Ho-nan and Huai-nan to pursue the bandits and pacify the affected region as quickly as possible. But this proved ineffective, and in the twelfth month of 875 the

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military governor of P'ing-lu, the Shen-ts'e general Sung Wei, urged that a central command be established to coordinate all forces in the region for a major assault on the bandits. The government agreed, and sent an additional three thousand troops and five hundred cavalry from the Palace Army as reinforcements. Although he was old and in ill-health Sung Wei was appointed commander-in-chief. He was an experienced soldier who had commanded Chinese troops against Nan-chao, and more recently played a major role in the suppression of the P'ang Hsün rebellion.

The government took further steps beyond the creation of a central command for their existing forces. In the first month of 876 all civil governors and prefects in Fukien, Chiang-hsi and Hu-nan were ordered to train soldiers, and all villages in the empire to 'ready archers, swordsmen and drummers to guard against the bandits'.[71] The emphasis on local preparedness in south China is evidence of the government's meagre military presence in the region, and a sign that banditry was becoming a universal danger. This was the first time during the T'ang that such militia for local self-defence were established formally by the central government. That it departed from its usual policy of keeping weapons out of the hands of the peasant population is evidence of how seriously the court viewed the crisis. With law and order and normal social controls dissolving locally, some action had to be taken at the local level.

The government, however, remained determined to smash the bandit armies in a decisive extermination campaign, led by Sung Wei. During 876, the bandits moved east, into Yen-hai, where they attacked the prefectural city of I-chou. In the seventh month of that year, after a major battle at I-chou, Sung Wei reported that the bandits had been destroyed and Wang Hsien-chih killed. Apparently triumphant, Sung disbanded the troops from other provinces under his command and himself returned to P'ing-lu. The court was overjoyed, and the ministers offered congratulations. But within a matter of days, it became apparent that far from being destroyed, the bandits were still as dangerous as before, raiding and looting throughout the region. The campaign troops, now themselves in a mutinous mood, were on the point of defecting to the bandits, but were rebuffed. Control over the soldiers was re-established and they were sent back into the field, reinforced with troops from Chung-wu. The court, shocked by the failure of the first major campaign against the bandit armies, now began to mobilize troops to protect the approaches to both capitals, Lo-yang and Ch'ang-an.

Sung Wei may have intentionally falsified his initial battle report in order to gain credit for Wang Hsien-chih's death and the destruction of

[71] *TCTC* 252, p. 8182.

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the bandit army, neither of which had actually occurred; as we shall see, he was capable of great deceit. But it is quite likely that Sung had simply misjudged his enemy. The court had no clear idea of the internal composition of the bandit army, or even of its size, which the court consistently exaggerated.

In the eighth month of 876 the bandits moved west, throwing the eastern capital of Lo-yang into a panic. In the ninth month they won a spectacular victory at Ju-chou, just forty-five miles south-east of Lo-yang where they took captive the prefect Wang Liao, cousin of Wang To, the senior chief minister. Wang Hsien-chih and his confederate Shang Chün-ch'ang were offered an amnesty, but responded by going back north, where they attacked Cheng-chou, and were repulsed only after reinforcements were sent from Chao-i province. Still holding Wang Liao captive, they began to move south, where the defences were weaker and the country more prosperous.

By the twelfth month of 876 the bandit gangs had reached the middle Yangtze valley, and launched a series of raids into O-Yüeh, Huai-hsi and Huai-nan. The garrison armies in this area were far more widely scattered than they had been in the north, and the bandits were able to operate with impunity. Liu Yeh, military governor of Huai-nan and a former chief minister, urgently requested additional forces; the government ordered several thousand men from the recently reconstituted Hsü-chou garrison, now called the Kan-hua Army, to move south to defend his province against the bandits. The fact that the government was forced to employ the very army that had caused it so many problems in the past and which recently it had tried unsuccessfully to disband, indicated how much the situation had deteriorated.

The sense of crisis was heightened by the unwillingness of Sung Wei, commander of the expeditionary army, to move his main forces south of Po-chou in central Hsüan-wu, close to the Grand Canal and hundreds of miles from the areas then under attack by Wang Hsien-chih. Sung may have wished simply to husband his strength, and to concentrate upon the defence of Ho-nan in order to establish a strong regional base for himself in the likely event of the dynasty's collapse. But his expressed reason was fear that he might suffer the same shabby treatment as the government had given several years before to K'ang Ch'eng-hsün, its top commander against P'ang Hsün. After suppressing the P'ang Hsün revolt, K'ang Ch'eng-hsün had been rewarded with an appointment as military governor of Ho-tung, with the formal status of chief minister. Since Lu Yen and I-tsung's favourite, Wei Pao-heng, feared that he would attempt to exert power at court, they accused K'ang of having wilfully avoided battle, and

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other irregularities. Although in 870 the dynasty was in no position to take harsh action against its top military commander, especially for political motives, it nevertheless removed K'ang from his office and demoted him to the post of tutor to the heir apparent, finally banishing him to the far south.[72] After this unwise humiliation of a successful general, the fear, mistrust and insubordination commonplace among civil officials began also, and more dangerously, to affect the dynasty's top generals.

After Hsi-tsung's accession in 873 K'ang was recalled to the capital, but there was no way of erasing what had been done. Sung Wei had also led campaigns against P'ang Hsün, and he had clearly not forgotten what had happened to K'ang, and feared a similar fate. He thus made an agreement with his deputy commander Tseng Yüan-yü, to leave the bandits alone so as to avoid being treated like K'ang and to ensure that if Wang Hsien-chih should by some mischance become emperor, they could give him their support. Tseng Yüan-yü then moved down to the middle Yangtze, but refrained from any attack on the bandits and awaited developments.[73]

The harmony and common purpose among Hsi-tsung's ministers, so notable at the beginning of the reign, was now destroyed by violent disagreements over the policy and strategy to be adopted against Wang Hsien-chih. As Sung Wei's treachery became apparent, Cheng T'ien vehemently demanded his replacement as commander-in-chief, so that a more aggressive campaign could be mounted against the rebels. He wanted the command to be turned over to Ts'ui An-ch'ien, military governor of Chung-wu. Ts'ui was the younger brother of a former chief minister, and a member of the same social and political elite as Cheng. He had already shown some military ability by vigorously attacking the bandits when they passed through his territory in the eighth month of 876. But others among the chief ministers were unwilling to put a civilian in supreme command. Lu Hsi, who had close ties with the prominent general Kao P'ien, violently opposed the appointment, and intense friction arose between the two ministers. In the end the appointment of Ts'ui never took effect, since Sung Wei simply refused to be replaced, and any attempt to remove him would almost certainly have pushed him into open rebellion.

The future of the T'ang looked bleak indeed during that winter of 876. Large parts of the north continued to be ravaged by growing bandit gangs, which met with only ineffective opposition. Sung Wei, the chief imperial commander, was unwilling to pursue the bandit armies and appeared more concerned with establishing his own regional power, and even serving a new dynasty established by a successful bandit leader. The internal situation with the bandit gangs was critical enough, but to

[72] *TCTC* 251, pp. 8051, 8054. [73] *TCTC* 252, p. 8186.

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make matters even worse there was now another mutiny of northern troops sent to Ling-nan for border defence – the very situation that had precipitated the P'ang Hsün rebellion only a few years before. There was also a major rebellion led by Wang Ying (see below, pp. 752–3) in Che-hsi, the same region where Ch'iu Fu had revolted in 859–60.

Just when the situation looked blackest, the government received an unexpected stroke of good fortune which briefly relieved the pressure. In the twelfth month of 876 the bandits attacked Ch'i-chou, on the middle Yangtze. Wang Liao, the cousin of the chief minister Wang To, who was still a captive of the bandits, wrote a letter on Wang Hsien-chih's behalf to P'ei Wu, the prefect of Ch'i-chou. Wang To had been P'ei Wu's examiner when he took the *chin-shih* examination, which established a strong bond between the two men. P'ei agreed to write to Wang To, requesting that Wang Hsien-chih be offered a position in the government. Astonishingly, when the chief ministers were called upon to discuss the matter some expressed the opinion that Wang Hsien-chih was merely 'a petty bandit' who could still be easily crushed, and that he represented less of a threat than P'ang Hsün, whose rising had been suppressed within a year. It is true that not one of the bandit groups had yet reached anything like the level of organization and broad support which P'ang Hsün had achieved. But the ministers should have been aware that the bandits were mobile, well-led and, most important, far more widespread than they were in P'ang Hsün's time. Split by internal dissension, they completely failed to see how seriously dynastic survival was threatened. However, Wang To's persistent pleadings, which we may imagine were made as much from concern for his cousin's safety as from a sense of public danger, finally succeeded, and Wang Hsien-chih was appointed as a staff officer in the Shen-ts'e Army with a concurrent post as examining censor.

Neither Wang nor the government anticipated that this would be inadequate to settle matters. The other main bandit leader, Huang Ch'ao, was furious that the government had not offered him a post as well, and attacked and wounded Wang Hsien-chih with his sword. The other gang leaders, fearing the possible consequences for themselves of their chief's appointment as an official, threatened Wang's life. In the end Wang Hsien-chih was forced to reject the court's offer of appointment and consoled his men by letting them sack Ch'i-chou, which they razed to the ground killing many of its people. P'ei Wu fled to O-chou, the nearest prefectural city with a large government army; the imperial commissioner sent to confer his posts on Wang Hsien-chih hurried back towards the capital; the unfortunate Wang Liao remained in the hands of the bandits.[74]

[74] *TCTC* 252, pp. 8187–8; *HTS* 225C, p. 6452; for Wang Liao, *CTS* 164, p. 4285.

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The most important result of Wang Hsien-chih's failure to accept a position from the government was that the main forces of the bandit gang now split into two large groups. Three thousand men remained with Wang Hsien-chih and Shang Chün-ch'ang as they continued to plunder the middle Yangtze, while two thousand more followed Huang Ch'ao back to Shan-tung. The significance of this break should not be overemphasized, since Huang Ch'ao was presumably withdrawing with only his original personal following, and it remained possible that the bandit leaders would reunite for large raids, which is precisely what happened the next year. But the immediate threat to the dynasty was temporarily averted.

The year 877 – the fourth of Hsi-tsung's reign – saw an unprecedented degree of rebel activity which spared few parts of China. Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao remained formidable. Confident that they could now strike anywhere with impunity, they even attacked provincial capitals, where the government's regional armies were garrisoned. In the second month of 877, Wang Hsien-chih attacked O-chou, the capital of O-Yüeh. Huang Ch'ao meanwhile captured Yün-chou, provincial capital of his own base area T'ien-p'ing, killing its military governor. He then moved east and attacked I-chou; when that city had been attacked little more than a year before, the government had mounted a full-scale punitive campaign under Sung Wei, but this time no serious attempt was made to protect the city.

In the fourth month of 877, the court issued an edict outlining the policies by which they intended to deal with the massive unrest in the provinces.[75] It proceeds from expressions of concern about the severity of the problem to confident assertions that all bandits would surely and quickly be quelled. This assurance of certain victory is then mitigated somewhat, as the edict goes on to offer surrendered rebels favourable terms of surrender and official appointments. The edict shows how widespread disorder then was: 'In Chiang-hsi, Huai-nan, Sung-chou, in Po-chou [the very prefecture where Sung Wei's expeditionary army was garrisoned !] and in Ts'ao-chou, the bandits have been plundering prefectures and counties, resisting government forces, robbing merchant caravans, and seizing tax shipments. They come and go just as they please.' The edict repeats the inevitability of defeat for such malefactors, and expresses the emperor's loving paternal concern for the people, wishing that he could 'equalize food and clothing, so that all might be prosperous'. But for those who continued their disruptions, the emperor vowed to 'use force, without regret'.

[75] *TTCLC* 120, pp. 638–9.

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The edict then focuses on its real object 'Wang Hsien-chih and the other chieftains of the rural bandits'. The government offered generous terms of surrender. The leaders would receive, on a special basis, office, title and rewards. Of course this meant only the formal ranks and titular offices which the court had conferred for nearly a century to maintain nominal ties with provincial officials they could not directly appoint. The surrendered bandit leaders would serve 'in the provinces where each would receive office and sustenance according to his ability'. The rank and file of the bandit gangs would be returned to the fields.

The last part of the edict instructs local officials on how to deal with any bandit gangs which refused to surrender. They were to choose valorous officers and troops and adopt flexible tactics against the enemy. Each commander who captured a bandit leader and three hundred of his men was promised a special appointment as a general, and a reward of one thousand strings of cash. Those who attacked and killed bandits, and recovered property and weapons or gathered information, would receive office and rewards according to their achievements. The government being all too aware of the lack of effort shown by its commanders, the edict also includes a severe warning that any who avoided battle would be 'investigated by the regional authorities and dealt with according to military law', which could only have meant execution.

One final section of this edict is perhaps the most significant for it instructs the country and village authorities to seek out men of talent and courage, who could lead the peasants to resist the bandits. They too were offered offices and rewards, and the edict mentions two outstanding examples of local militia leaders who had reached high provincial office.

The military situation was becoming so ominous that such a public statement of policy was an essential first step towards any hope of recovery. But its effect was minimal. The degree both of bandit confidence and of government weakness can be seen from the bandit's next target, Sung-chou, where Sung Wei's expeditionary army was garrisoned. Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao, now reunited, laid siege to the city, and withstood all attempts of the beleaguered army to break out until Chang Tzu-mien, a general sent from Ch'ang-an, led seven thousand soldiers from Chung-wu province against the bandit army, which suffered a serious defeat and heavy losses. But rather than using this victory to recover their sense of unity and purpose the government's chief ministers fell into bitter disagreement over how to proceed. Wang To and Lu Hsi wanted Chang Tzu-mien's troops to be transferred to Sung Wei's command, in the hope that Sung would at last begin to campaign actively against the bandits; Cheng T'ien vehemently disagreed, insisting that relations between Chang

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and Sung were so bad that Chang would be killed if he were forced to take a position under Sung Wei's command. Each of the chief ministers submitted his resignation over the issue, but these were refused. The debate continued throughout the year, growing increasingly acrimonious. When Chang Tzu-mien's victorious troops were put under the command of one of Sung Wei's generals, and Chang himself was slandered by Sung Wei, Cheng T'ien argued that Chang was being made to 'suffer humiliation because of his achievements', which had in fact enabled the government to maintain control over the Grand Canal. Moreover, Ts'ui An-ch'ien, whom he had unsuccessfully proposed the previous year to be commander of the expeditionary forces instead of Sung Wei, was receiving no credit for his numerous victories against the bandits. Cheng T'ien also asserted that Wang Hsien-chih had offered to surrender on no less than seven occasions, a fact that Sung Wei had concealed from the court. Cheng T'ien's charges against Sung Wei may have been well-founded, but the practical difficulties of removing him from his command remained insuperable.[76]

Late in 877 the bandits moved back into the middle Yangtze, where they suffered several serious reverses at the hands of Tseng Yüan-yü, Sung Wei's deputy field commander. The government again offered terms of surrender to Wang Hsien-chih. This time Wang's allies were also included in the amnesty offer, and some of his chief confederates, including Shang Chün-ch'ang, set off for the capital. Sung Wei, however, intercepted them and reported that he had taken them captive after a battle. This report was disbelieved, and a censor was sent to investigate. But it proved impossible to establish the truth, since Sung Wei had already had the bandit leaders executed by the time he arrived.

The battles of 877 were important in themselves, but equally important was the exacerbation of political factionalism at court and the increased tension and mistrust which arose between the political leaders in the capital and their commanders in the field. The T'ang's failure to reward Chang Tzu-mien for his crucial victory at Sung-chou fell into the same category as its humiliation of K'ang Ch'eng-hsün after his suppression of P'ang Hsün. Repeated failure to give proper credit to loyal and successful commanders lost for the government the dwindling goodwill and loyalty to the dynasty, which remained its most precious asset.

In the last month of 877 the T'ang court finally succeeded in mounting a more aggressive campaign against the bandits. After Huang Ch'ao sacked K'uang-ch'eng, the county where he had first risen four years before, the government restored Chang Tzu-mien to his field command,

[76] *TCTC* 253, pp. 8193–4.

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and sent him at the head of the north-eastern provincial armies in a major assault on Huang Ch'ao's forces. In that same month Wang Hsien-chih attacked Chiang-ling, the provincial capital of Ching-nan, and the strategic centre of the middle Yangtze. The government had foolishly put Ching-nan under the command of the incompetent Yang Chih-wen, who continued to compose poetry even after the bandits had reached the outer walls of his city. Yang finally sent for help to Li Fu, military governor of Shan-nan East province to the north. Li Fu moved quickly against the bandits supported by five hundred Sha-t'o Turkish cavalry from his command, destroying all he met. Wang Hsien-chih hastily sacked Chiang-ling, killing a third of the city's population, and fled.

Escape this time proved difficult, however. As Wang headed back towards Shan-tung, he was pursued by Tseng Yüan-yü, the deputy campaign commander, who after a year of inaction finally moved decisively against the bandits. In a major battle at Shen-chou, in southern Huai-hsi, Wang Hsien-chih's army suffered a terrible defeat with very heavy casualties. Tseng's victory enabled the government to appoint him in place of Sung Wei as commander-in-chief of the expeditionary army; Chang Tzu-mien was appointed his deputy commander. The government also transferred the very experienced general Kao P'ien, their commander in Szechwan, to Ching-nan, and he moved into the middle Yangtze region with fifteen thousand fully equipped troops.

The early part of 878 saw a major recovery by the government forces. Its most spectacular victory came after Wang Hsien-chih retreated south, and was destroyed by Tseng Yüan-yü's pursuing army at Huang-mei county in Ch'i-chou. Wang Hsien-chih himself was killed. Since Wang's principal confederate Shang Chün-ch'ang had been killed shortly before, there was no longer any leader capable of holding together the remains of Wang Hsien-chih's confederation. Shang Chün-ch'ang's younger brother Shang Jang led many of the remaining bandits to join Huang Ch'ao in Shan-tung, while the rest broke into small splinter gangs, operating independently in the Yangtze valley.

Huang Ch'ao's drive to the south

Huang Ch'ao thus finally became undisputed leader of the major bandit forces, albeit at a very low point in their fortunes. He now assumed the title of 'heaven-storming generalissimo' (*ch'ung-t'ien ta-chiang-chün*), perhaps to show his decision to wage all-out warfare against the dynasty. This was a complete change of policy: until this time the bandits had followed their old pattern of inter-regional raids, with seasonal movements from the Huang-ho plain down to the Huai and Yangtze valleys

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and back again. The attacks on major cities, which are sometimes regarded as the beginning of the 'rebellion' were not a serious attempt to overthrow the government. The bandits did not think in terms of establishing territorial control, and Wang Hsien-chih's repeated attempts to surrender suggested that the bandits had no long-term political aims.

Huang Ch'ao's initial skirmishes with government forces, after assuming general leadership of the bandit groups, all resulted in defeat, and any plans he might have had for a direct confrontation were put aside. He communicated with the military governor of T'ien-p'ing, asking him to negotiate terms of surrender. The government appointed Huang Ch'ao a general in the Imperial Guard, and ordered him to surrender at Yün-chou. But perhaps remembering the capture and execution by treachery of Wang Hsien-chih's chief confederates when they attempted to surrender to Sung Wei the year before, Huang decided not to risk surrender. The increasingly confident government, which at last realized the necessity of rewarding its generals adequately, awarded the status of chief minister to Li Fu, the military governor of Shan-nan who had moved so decisively against the bandits' siege of Chiang-ling and had begun the defeat of Wang Hsien-chih.

The government's recovery enabled it to set up effective defences against the bandit armies, beginning in the Huang-ho region. Chang Tzu-mien was appointed campaign commissioner for the South-eastern Front, and drove Huang Ch'ao westward through Ho-nan towards Lo-yang. Two years before, Lo-yang had been thrown into a panic by the approach of the bandit armies, but this time formidable defences were prepared, with an army of ten thousand soldiers and conscripts under a specially appointed defence commissioner. These preparations put an end to any thought the bandits may have had of attacking Lo-yang, and in a radical change of tactics Huang Ch'ao moved south, not this time to the middle Yangtze, but to the Yangtze delta. Even more surprisingly Huang Ch'ao crossed the river into Che-hsi. This was the first time that any major bandit group had penetrated south of the Yangtze, and the government had reason to claim that they had driven them south. Its top commander Tseng Yüan-yü moved his army into the lower Yangtze area to attack some of Wang Hsien-chih's erstwhile supporters still operating there, while Kao P'ien moved into Che-hsi to prevent Huang Ch'ao from returning north. The court must have felt with some justification that the situation was almost back under control.

The bandit gangs remained generally on the defensive during the remainder of 878, though they won some minor victories in the undefended area south of the Yangtze. However, they were now far from the capital

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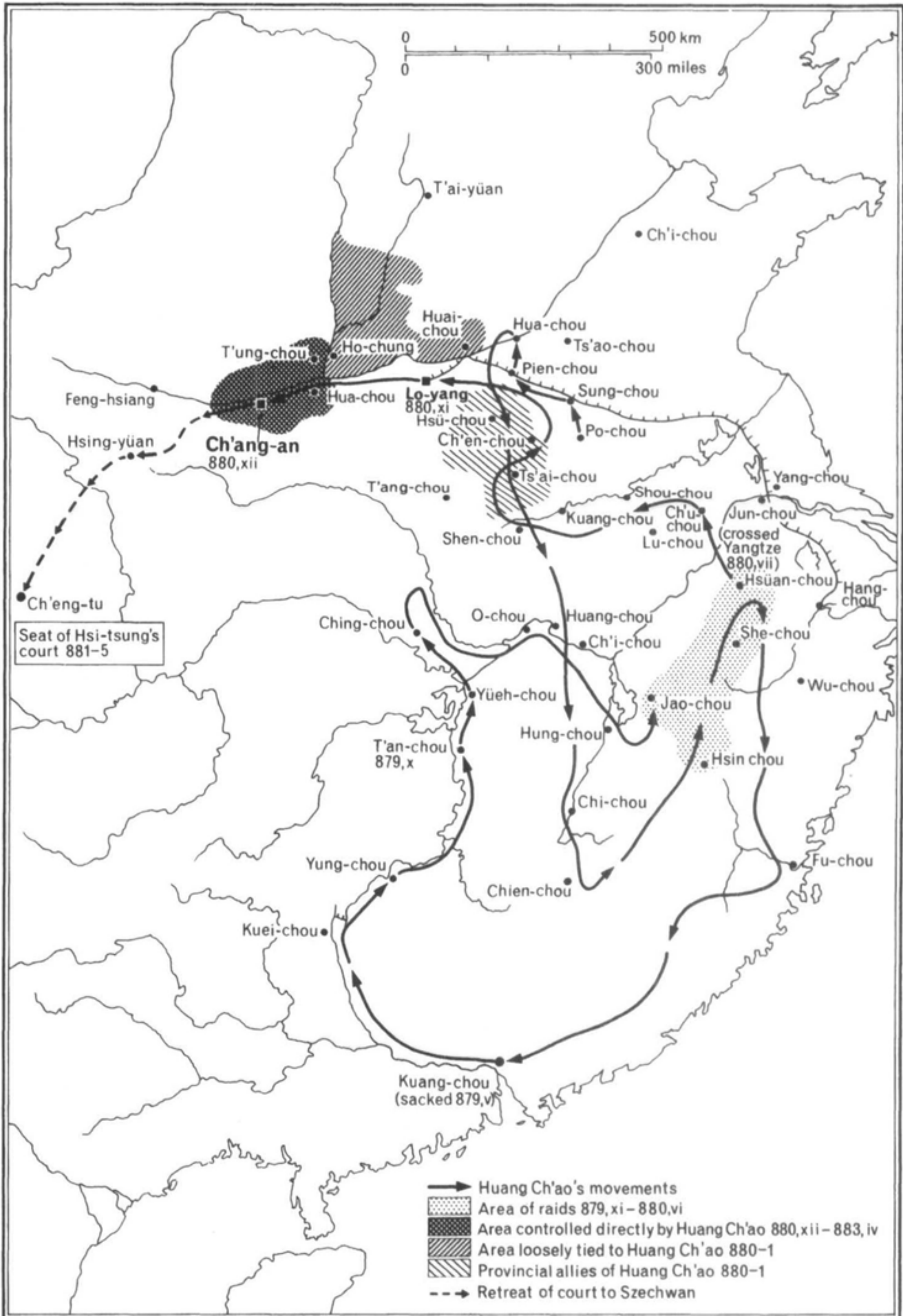

Map 21. Huang Ch'ao's movements, 878–80

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and Huang Ch'ao seemed a fading threat. The chief ministers now fell into bitter wrangles over foreign policy towards Nan-chao, which ended in the dismissal of both Cheng T'ien and his rival Lu Hsi, and were faced with a more immediate threat from the securely established and expansionist Sha-t'o Turks in the north. Huang and his bandit army continued to move away from areas of vital concern to the dynasty, passing through several hundred miles of wild and sparsely peopled mountains, towards the provincial capital of Fukien, Fu-chou. In the ninth month of 878 the government suspended its bandit-suppression campaign and appointed General Tseng Yüan-yü as military governor of P'ing-lu, in place of Sung Wei who had died shortly before.

Huang Ch'ao's arduous march through the Fukienese mountains was only the beginning of a much longer march through south China, which led eventually to the great port of Canton (Kuang-chou). This almost unchallenged movement appears impressive on a map, and has sometimes been taken as evidence of Huang Ch'ao's enormous power, which permitted him to move as he pleased over the length and breadth of China. It is however altogether more likely that what caused his march to the south was not the prospect of Canton's riches, but rather the government's successful campaigns against him and the formidable defensive arrangements in the north.

It was during these last months of 878, as he moved through the south, that Huang Ch'ao first began seriously to consider broadening his base of support. While crossing Fukien, he made efforts to recruit support from the local gentry, though with little success.[77] In the last month of 878 Fu-chou was sacked and the defenceless civil governor put to flight. But major campaign armies sent in pursuit from Che-hsi by Kao P'ien repeatedly defeated Huang Ch'ao's forces and captured many of his top confederates, driving him even further south.

Though clearly on the run, Huang Ch'ao still seemed a menace to the court, and the chief minister Wang To volunteered to lead personally an expeditionary army against the bandits. Wang was appointed military governor of Ching-nan, and campaign commissioner for the Southern Front. As his second-in-command he chose Li Hsi, an incompetent official of notable family and unquestioned loyalty, who was appointed civil governor of Hu-nan. Li was stationed at T'an-chou (Ch'ang-sha) to block Huang Ch'ao's anticipated return north from Ling-nan.

In the fifth month of 879, as he neared Canton, Huang Ch'ao continued his efforts to negotiate a favourable surrender. He communicated with Ts'ui Ch'iu, the civil governor of Che-tung, and Li T'iao, military

[77] *HTS* 225C, p. 6454.

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governor of Ling-nan East, seeking their help as intermediaries to arrange an appointment for him as military governor of T'ien-p'ing, his original base area in Shan-tung.[78] This request was refused, and Huang Ch'ao then sought appointment as military governor of Canton. This request was also refused, since the Canton trade was far too valuable to be turned over to a bandit leader. The court proposed instead a minor staff position in the Imperial Guard, an offer which Huang Ch'ao regarded as an insult. He then furiously attacked Canton, which fell to his forces in a single day. He seized the military governor Li T'iao, and attempted once more to arrange a favourable settlement, but Li refused, displaying a fierce and rare loyalty to the dynasty. Huang killed the brave Li T'iao and proceeded to sack Canton with a fury that left the great port devastated. Some estimates placed the number of dead – most of them foreign merchants from south-east Asia, India, Persia and the Arab world – as high as 120,000, out of a total population of some 200,000. Many of the Chinese people fled towards Fukien.[79] Contemporary Arab accounts, notably that of Abū Zaid, a merchant from the Arab seaport of Sīrāf, describe the savage destruction of Canton in lurid detail.[80]

It was clear to the court that Huang Ch'ao had no intention of remaining in the tropics. The government anticipated his return north, and hoped to trap and destroy him south of the Yangtze, far from his bases of support. After the sack of Canton, a major confrontation was inevitable.

Huang Ch'ao returns north

While ravaging Ling-nan, many of Huang Ch'ao's men died of malaria. The survivors demanded that they return north, 'to plan the great event' and so the bandit army began a roundabout return northward, plundering Hu-nan and Kiangsi as they went.[81] Crossing the watershed of the Nanling by the 'Holy Canal' they followed the valley of the Hsiang River, as P'ang Hsün had done a decade before. In the tenth month of 879 they reached T'an-chou. However, Li Hsi, Wang To's deputy commander who was in control there, refused to fight, and Huang Ch'ao was able to take T'an-chou in a single day. This disastrous cowardice by an incompetent military commander chosen not for his ability but on the basis of his family's ties with the dynasty, was a major set-back to the efforts to contain Huang Ch'ao. If Li Hsi had struck vigorously at Huang Ch'ao at

[78] *TCTC* 253, p. 8215.

[79] On the Chinese refugee communities, see Lo Hsiang-lin, 'T'ang-tai Huang Ch'ao pien-luan yü Ning-hua Shih-pi ts'un', *Shuo-wen yüeh-k'an*, 4 (1944) 265–8.

[80] For a discussion of these Arab accounts, see Howard S. Levy, *Biography of Huang Ch'ao* (Chinese Dynastic Histories Translations, no. 5, Berkeley, 1961), pp. 109–21.

[81] *CTS* 200B, p. 5392.

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this point when the bandit army was at its weakest, there would have been a real chance of a final victory.

Even more serious, however, was the abandonment of Chiang-ling (Ching-chou), the strategic centre of the middle Yangtze, by Li Hsi's superior, the campaign commander Wang To. Apparently heavily outnumbered, Wang retreated north, claiming that he wanted to unite his forces with those of Liu Chü-jung, the military governor of Shan-nan East province who was stationed at Ching-men, thirty miles to the north; but Wang in the event retreated all the way to Hsiang-chou, more than one hundred miles away. The city of Chiang-ling, which had been left under the command of Wang To's subordinate general Liu Han-hung, was looted and deserted by its government garrison well before Huang Ch'ao arrived.

Increasingly confident, Huang Ch'ao crossed the Yangtze and moved directly towards Ching-men, where Liu Chü-jung was waiting. Liu sent his own troops as well as five hundred Sha-t'o Turks against the bandits. Many of Huang Ch'ao's men were killed, but rather than pursue and eliminate the remainder, as he was urged to do, Liu Chü-jung simply let them go. His reasons reflect the loss of support for the dynasty in the provinces. 'The T'ang,' he observed, 'exploit people. In times of danger it gives generous rewards, but when peace comes so do punishments. The best plan is to let the bandits go and wait for later good fortune.'[82] Complaints about the dynasty's callous treatment of its military officers were common enough as we have already seen, and other governors had deliberately avoided confrontations with rebel forces. But this was the first case of a court-appointed military governor actively hoping that the dynasty would be destroyed – for that is clearly why Liu Chü-jung let the bandits escape. Liu's hostility towards the dynasty probably stemmed from the same cause as that of Sung Wei, for Liu and Sung had both been on the staff of K'ang Ch'eng-hsün during the campaign against P'ang Hsün, and Liu undoubtedly shared Sung Wei's fear that they could also become political victims after a successful campaign against Huang Ch'ao. Once the T'ang was destroyed, however, the military governors would simply be able to consolidate their authority over the regions to which they had been appointed, and either await the emergence of a new unifying dynasty or continue to rule independently.

Blocked from a direct route to Ch'ang-an, Huang Ch'ao moved east down the Yangtze valley, again following the route taken by P'ang Hsün a decade earlier, picking up strength from local bandit gangs, many of them formerly allied with Wang Hsien-chih. For a time they were hard pressed by Ts'ao Ch'üan-ching, a government commander stationed in

[82] *HTS* 225C, p. 6455.

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Chiang-hsi, but Ts'ao gave up his pursuit when the court decided, for unexplained reasons, to replace him. This permitted Huang Ch'ao to move unopposed down the Yangtze.

The lower Yangtze area, so long the government's main source of revenue, was now a crucial part of the dynasty's defences, and its importance was evident from the choice of Kao P'ien to defend it. Kao was unquestionably the senior T'ang military commander, with a tremendous reputation.[83] Members of his family, which had originated in Po-hai, had served loyally in the Shen-ts'e Army for generations. Kao P'ien had served on the northern border, as an outstanding commander against the Tanguts. He had organized defences against Tibetan incursions in the west, and conducted campaigns against Nan-chao invasions in the far south. As military governor of T'ien-p'ing from 869 to 875 he had controlled bandit activity in Shan-tung, which erupted on a serious scale only after his transfer to Szechwan. He had moved into the middle Yangtze region with powerful forces after Wang Hsien-chih's successful campaigns there in early 878, and his successful campaigns against Huang Ch'ao a year later in Che-hsi had pushed the bandit army south to Canton.

Huang Ch'ao entered the lower Yangtze region late in 879, and for a while raided over a large area of Hsüan-She, Che-hsi and Chiang-nan. But things changed early in the next year, when Kao P'ien finally moved in earnest against the bandits. In the third month of 880, Kao sent his top general Chang Lin south of the Yangtze, where he inflicted a major defeat on the bandit army. The government, sensing total victory, reinforced Kao P'ien's forces with troops from several northern commands and appointed him commander of the Joint Expeditionary Forces. Kao called for additional support from nearby commands and conscripted large numbers of local recruits, putting together an army of seventy thousand men. Huang Ch'ao's forces, though even larger, were no match for Kao P'ien's well-trained army, and by the fourth month of 880 the bandits seemed on the verge of total defeat. Wang Ch'ung-pa, one of Wang Hsien-chih's original confederates, surrendered to Chang Lin, and Huang Ch'ao lost another important confederate when Ch'ang Hung surrendered with several tens of thousands of his own men. Huang Ch'ao fell back to Jao-chou, in Chiang-hsi, and then to Hsin-chou, just north of the Fukien border. Everything appeared to favour the government forces, whose commanders repeatedly sent reports of victory to the capital.[84]

The situation changed totally during the fifth month of 880. The events of this crucial period have provoked intense speculation concerning the

[83] Kao has biographies in *CTS* 182, pp. 4703–12; *HTS* 224B, pp. 6391–404.
[84] *TCTC* 253, pp. 8219–25.

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conduct of the entire campaign against Huang Ch'ao, and many points will always remain obscure.[85] What is certain, however, is that Huang Ch'ao was able to escape what seemed almost certain defeat, to break through the T'ang defences on the lower Yangtze, and to begin his march towards the northern capitals. According to one account of these events Huang Ch'ao offered a huge bribe to keep Chang Lin from attacking him, then agreed to surrender to Kao P'ien on condition that an appointment to a military governorship be arranged. Kao P'ien, according to this version of the events, then accepted Huang Ch'ao's offer of surrender but was unwilling to share the credit with the commanders of other units taking part in the campaign. He therefore sent those units back to their home provinces. When Huang Ch'ao heard that those troops had been detached and were already north of the Huai River, he broke off his relations with Kao P'ien, and in a major battle which ensued Kao's top general Chang Lin was killed and his troops badly defeated. After this great victory, which was an indisputable fact whatever doubts remain about the events leading up to it, Huang Ch'ao and his remaining confederates launched a series of successful attacks in Che-hsi and Hsüan-She, and finally crossed the Yangtze at Ts'ai-shih in the seventh month of 880.[86] This was a major and quite unexpected turning point.

Kao P'ien's armies not only failed to prevent Huang Ch'ao from crossing the Yangtze, but also failed to send support north as Huang Ch'ao advanced upon Lo-yang. Kao's inaction quite naturally provoked the most intense criticism. It was one thing for inexperienced civil officials to desert their posts, as Li Hsi and Wang To had done. It was quite another for the government's most experienced general in command of a huge army to allow a badly weakened enemy to make a vital crossing of the Yangtze and then march unchallenged through his territory. Some historical commentators put the entire blame on Lü Yung-chih, a magician confidant who had enormous influence over Kao.[87] But it is unlikely that Kao's inaction can be explained in terms so simple as dereliction of duty.

Kao faced an extremely complex situation in his provincial base of Huai-nan, which by this time was the worst centre of banditry in China. Kao had to contend not only with local bands, but also with large bandit gangs raiding from the north, and mutinous army units which had deserted their posts further north than Huai-nan. Even before he arrived in

[85] For a thorough discussion of the issues, see Chou Lien-k'uan, 'T'ang Kao P'ien chen-Huai shih-chi k'ao', *Ling-nan hsüeh-pao*, 11.2 (1951) 11–45.

[86] This was a very important crossing. The T'ang had once established a garrison at Ts'ai-shih, but disbanded it in 811; see *TFYK* 507, pp. 4a–b.

[87] *TCTC* 254, pp. 8264–8.

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Huai-nan it had been necessary to grant official posts to bandit leaders, and Kao had continued this policy, appointing several as prefects.[88] These bandit leaders now served as Kao's commanders and helped him to extend his power into neighbouring provinces. Because Huai-nan was such a volatile area, Kao could easily have lost his position by campaigning too vigorously against Huang Ch'ao. Yang-chou was critically important to the dynasty, but had a long tradition as a base of independent power, and it is hardly surprising that Kao was unwilling to endanger his position there. Kao was also aware that he could no longer rely on firm support at court, since his principal political ally, the chief minister Lu Hsi, had fallen very ill. There were thus many reasons for him to consolidate his own position in Huai-nan, and he therefore sent a series of self-justifying memorials to the court, claiming that Huang Ch'ao had crossed the Yangtze with 600,000 men, a preposterous figure.[89]

Once past the government's defences on the lower Yangtze, Huang Ch'ao had a clear path towards the eastern capital. The T'ang attempted to establish a force strong enough to halt the bandit army at Yin-shui, in Chung-wu, a location which controlled the south-eastern approaches to Lo-yang. This failed miserably, not because of the strength of Huang Ch'ao's army, but rather because of the mistrust among the defending armies and an almost universal desire to avoid actual fighting on behalf of the faltering dynasty. The military governor of Kan-hua conscripted three thousand men on the assurance that they would be stationed at his provincial capital. When they were ordered to Yin-shui it nearly provoked a mutiny. When they arrived, the ambitious local general Chou Chi, fearing that these troops once stationed in his province would be a threat to his power, infiltrated his own men into the city in which they were quartered, and butchered them; the military governor from Kan-hua was pursued to Hsiang-yang and killed. Chou Chi then assumed power as military governor of Chung-wu. The other T'ang commander sent to join in the defence of Lo-yang, Ch'i K'o-jang, abandoned his commission and fled back to his own command in Shan-tung, rather than face the ruthless Chou Chi. Thus all the forces sent to protect the eastern capital were dispersed through mistrust and treachery among the generals, and Lo-yang lay open to the bandit army.

After Huang Ch'ao crossed the Huai River he began to show signs that he had ambitions to found a dynasty. He assumed the title of 'Heaven-conferred Generalissimo', and tried to discipline his troops and prevent

[88] For the earlier appointment, see *TTCLC* 120, p. 638. Kao P'ien's own appointments included Li Han-chih (*HTS* 187, p. 5442), Pi Shih-to and Ch'in Yen (*TCTC* 253, p. 8211; *CTS* 182, p. 4715).

[89] *TCTC* 253, p. 8229.

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them from plundering. When he entered Lo-yang in the eleventh month of 880, he was received by the officials of the city who had made no attempt to put up a defence. Ch'i K'o-jang notified the court that Lo-yang was lost and advised immediate efforts to strengthen the defences of Ch'ang-an.

The dramatic progress of Huang Ch'ao's army naturally attracts our attention. Yet what really indicated the collapse of the T'ang order was not so much the advance of the bandit army, but rather the desperate scramble among 'loyal' forces in the provinces for advantageous local positions. As long as the central government could deploy major armies it had remained a force to be reckoned with. The events of 879–80 – the failure of Wang To and Li Hsi to fight, the outright disloyalty of Liu Chü-jung, and Kao P'ien's defence of his own position – signalled the end of any hope of a recovery of T'ang power.

The government's efforts to extemporize effective defence of Ch'ang-an were doomed from the start. The palace armies had long ceased to be an effective fighting force, and service in the elite Shen-ts'e Army had become a sinecure for young men of wealthy Ch'ang-an families.[90] Most of them had no experience of fighting, apart from terrorizing the civilian population of the capital. When it became apparent that they might have to fight the rebels many of them went into the poor sections of the city to hire substitutes.

The defence of the capital had been entrusted to the emperor's chief eunuch and nominal head of the Shen-ts'e Army, T'ien Ling-tz'u, but there is no evidence that he ever left the capital to take command of the eastern passes, control of which was crucial to the defence of the capital. One of T'ien's lieutenants led several thousand totally untrained men to hold the T'ung-kuan Pass, but failed to provision them for more than a few days. When they saw the approaching rebel army they panicked and ran; the rebels swarmed through the T'ung-kuan Pass into the capital province Kuan-nei, where they were joined by mutinous soldiers of the Po-yeh Army, which had been sent to defend the capital. With the imperial forces totally routed and in disarray, the capital's defences collapsed.

Huang Ch'ao in Ch'ang-an

Ch'ang-an fell to Huang Ch'ao's forces on the fifth day of the twelfth month of 880. Hsi-tsung, accompanied by only a small retinue, fled furtively from the city with T'ien Ling-tz'u and five hundred Shen-ts'e soldiers to take refuge in Szechwan. The entrance of Huang Ch'ao into the city was by contrast extraordinarily impressive. General Chang Chih-

[90] *TCTC* 254, p. 8237; see also Tu Mu's essay from several decades earlier, describing the declining quality of the government's armies, in *CTW* 754, pp. 12b–14b.

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fang, accompanied by many officials, came out to greet the rebel army. Huang Ch'ao approached first, seated in a golden carriage. The army of followers – by this time several hundred thousand in number – all wearing brocade and with their hair uniformly tied with red silk bands, came behind. His cavalry marched directly into the city, while baggage waggons filled the roads for miles behind them. The residents of the capital, passive but unafraid, crowded into the streets to watch the takeover.[91]

Shang Jang, who had the year before joined Huang Ch'ao at the head of the remnants of Wang Hsien-chih's forces, now emerged as Huang's chief lieutenant and spokesman, and issued a proclamation urging the people to remain calm, saying that Huang Ch'ao had risen up on their behalf to rescue them from the T'ang rulers, who cared nothing for the people. This proclamation has been interpreted as evidence of Huang Ch'ao's 'class solidarity' with the common people, but in reality it was merely the same sort of self-justificatory document issued by all claimants to found a legitimate regime, regardless of their aims and background.[92] Its real significance is as the first clear sign that Huang Ch'ao intended to establish a permanent stable regime in Ch'ang-an. Such imperial aspirations, however, had no appeal for his men, who had followed him for plunder, and who now held the richest prize of all. The population of Ch'ang-an had itself begun looting days before Huang Ch'ao arrived. Huang Ch'ao was totally unable to control his men, and for several days they looted the world's most prosperous city. The markets were set ablaze and countless people were slaughtered in the streets.

Ch'ang-an's elite were victims alike of the rebel troops and the common people of the city. The most hated officials were dragged out and killed. Many others took flight, abandoning their possessions. The destruction which followed the occupation of the capital shows both the hatred that had long simmered among the commoners against the privileged, and the lack of common purpose between Huang Ch'ao and his own supporters. The common aim of the rebels was, by this time, the overthrow of the T'ang. But their different interests were becoming even more apparent – Huang Ch'ao wishing to organize and discipline his supporters into a stable army, while many of his supporters and the rank and file wished only to plunder the capital, and were content with anarchy.

It was in such inauspicious circumstances that Huang Ch'ao took the initial steps to establish his own dynasty. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of 880, he ascended the throne in the Han-yüan Hall and declared the establishment of the Great Ch'i dynasty (Ch'i being the ancient name of his native region Shan-tung). He revived the imperial system in

[91] *TCTC* 254, p. 8240.

[92] See Hori Toshikazu, 'Kō Sō no hanran', p. 64.

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all its complexity and appointed four chief ministers, who included members of aristocratic families as well as his own lieutenants.[93] Five hundred of his 'valorous officers' were chosen to be 'meritorious officials', the normal term given to the principal supporters of a dynastic founder. His principal officers were given top military appointments. Huang dismissed only the highest-ranking T'ang officials; those of the fourth rank and below were allowed to retain their offices, as long as they showed themselves willing to collaborate with the rebels.

Huang Ch'ao's attempt to establish a viable regime proved an utter failure. It was one thing to make a public show of legitimation and to imitate a sophisticated political system; it was quite another to make it function. His basic problem lay with his own men who were neither able nor willing to fill civil posts; while the former T'ang officials agreed to serve the new regime only because they saw no alternative or because they were coerced.

Huang Ch'ao's regime proved appallingly harsh. In the spring of 882 someone wrote on the main gate of the Department of State Affairs a poem ridiculing the regime. Shang Jang was furious, killed the officials serving in that department, plucked out their eyes, and hung up their bodies; he executed the soldiers who had guarded the gate, killed everybody in the capital who could compose poetry, and employed all other literate people as menials. In all, more than three thousand people were killed as a result of this incident. Apart from its sheer brutality, this massacre signalled the end of any hope of stabilizing the new regime with the support of the educated elite. It also ended all possibilities of gaining support in the provinces, except from those few independent governors who saw an alliance with Huang Ch'ao as a means of extending their own regional power.

The years of Huang Ch'ao's occupation had as devastating an effect on the T'ang capital as it had on the political order represented by Ch'ang-an. The city never recovered. Its tragic destruction is most vividly represented in the famous ballad written by Wei Chuang, one of the foremost poets of the day who was in the capital taking the examinations when the bandit army took over. The ballad is called 'Lament of the Lady of Ch'in', and has been characterized as 'a tale of arson, pillage, rape and cannibalism, of rustics masquerading as ministers, of aristocratic bodies sunk in mud and blood.'[94] Such was the 'new order' established by Huang Ch'ao.

[93] *HTS* 225C, pp. 6458–9; *TCTC* 254, p. 8241; according to *TFYK* 374, p. 14a, about one-third of the officials in the capital accepted appointment under Huang Ch'ao.

[94] E. H. Schafer, 'The last years of Ch'ang-an', *Oriens Extremus*, 10 (1963) 137–79 (p. 157).

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Exile of Hsi-tsung to Szechwan; the rebellion of Ch'ien Neng

It was always a disaster for a Chinese emperor to be forced to abandon his capital, but the circumstances of Hsi-tsung's flight were especially humiliating. When the bandit army came within striking distance of the capital and all defence had collapsed, the panic-stricken officials fled the capital in all directions. The chief eunuch T'ien Ling-tz'u, who was more importantly commander of the imperial armies, abandoned the defence of the capital and took the emperor from the capital in the dead of night. The entourage consisted of five hundred Shen-ts'e troops, four imperial princes and several consorts and concubines. No officials were informed of the decision to leave Ch'ang-an. Some cavalry soldiers of the Sha-yeh Army encountered the entourage a few miles from Ch'ang-an and appealed to the emperor to turn back to the capital. For their temerity, they were cut down by T'ien Ling-tz'u's troops.

As Hsi-tsung moved further west, he was met by Cheng T'ien, the former chief minister then serving as military governor of Feng-hsiang. Cheng urged the emperor to come to Feng-hsiang rather than take the grave step of completely abandoning Kuan-chung, the north-western plain that was the seat of Chinese government. Hsi-tsung replied that to avoid the fighting he was determined to withdraw to the impregnable region of Hsing-yüan, 250 miles to the south, beyond the Chin-ling mountains, where he would recruit troops and prepare for the recovery of the capital. The emperor urged Cheng to make an alliance with the Tibetans in the west and coordinate all the loyal forces remaining in the north-west. He was given permission to act independently, since it would be extremely difficult to communicate with the court once it had crossed the mountains into Shan-nan.

The emperor and T'ien Ling-tz'u were so anxious to get away from the capital region as quickly as possible that they decided to cross the Chin-ling mountains by the Lo Valley Road, a most difficult and arduous route across passes approaching nine thousand feet.[95] It was a route to be used only in emergencies, and this was beyond doubt an emergency. The emperor reached Hsing-yüan in less than two weeks, travelling night and day. But he stayed there for only a few days, and then decided to travel on to Ch'eng-tu in Szechwan, four hundred miles further on beyond a seccnd great chain of mountains, the Ta-pa-shan. This decision must have represented to most people the end of any hope of a T'ang recovery, at

[95] On the routes between Kuan-chung and Szechwan, see esp. Yen Keng-wang, 'T'ang-tai Ch'ang-an Nan-shan chu-ku tao-i ch'eng-shu', in his *T'ang-shih yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Hong Kong, 1969), pp. 611–26.

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least under Hsi-tsung. Szechwan was the provincial power base of T'ien Ling-tz'u, and by fleeing there Hsi-tsung showed himself totally dependent on his despised eunuchs. Moreover Szechwan, which had been spared many of the troubles and tensions that had spread over the rest of China, was now experiencing serious internal disorders.

The problems in Szechwan had been brought to a crisis by the government's appointment of Ch'en Ching-hsüan[96] as military governor of Hsi-ch'uan (Western Szechwan), the capital of which was the great city of Ch'eng-tu. Ch'en had originally been a mere seller of wheat-cakes, but had the good fortune of being the elder brother of the chief eunuch T'ien Ling-tz'u, and had consequently been given a high military rank in the Palace Army. Early in 880, anticipating that the government might well be forced out of the capital, it was decided to appoint someone close to the inner circle at court as military governor of Hsi-ch'uan, in place of Ts'ui An-ch'ien, who had held the post since 878. Ts'ui had once earned the hostility of T'ien Ling-tz'u by refusing to appoint his brother Ch'en Ching-hsüan to his staff, and he was also an old adversary of the powerful chief minister Lu Hsi. According to one account, the appointment in Hsi-ch'uan was given to the winner of a football contest, who happened to be Ch'en Ching-hsüan, but undoubtedly his relationship with T'ien Ling-tz'u clinched the matter.[97]

Problems arose in Szechwan even before Ch'en took up his appointment. Because he was an unknown figure of lowly background, a local holy man arrived in Ch'eng-tu claiming to be Ch'en Ching-hsüan and was not found out for some time. Once he took up his appointment, however, Ch'en proved to be formidable. His regime in Szechwan was corrupt and brutal and remained so, even after the arrival of the emperor and his entourage. Within two years of his appointment he had provoked a major rebellion. Part of the problem was caused by T'ien Ling-tz'u's favoured treatment of his own personal troops, to the disadvantage of the local forces, who had been among the dynasty's most loyal soldiers. The tensions became serious in the third month of 882, when Ch'en Ching-hsüan sent subordinates to places throughout his territory, supposedly to inquire about shortcomings among his officers, but in fact to collect bribes. The commanding officer at Tzu-chou, Hsieh Hung-jang, became fearful and joined a gang of bandits, but was finally enticed to surrender after all sorts of assurances had been given to him. But he was in fact sent to Ch'en Ching-hsüan, who had him tortured terribly.[98]

Ch'ien Neng was an officer serving in a neighbouring prefecture. When

[96] Biography in *HTS* 224B, pp. 6406–9; for his appointment, see *TCTC* 253, p. 8221.
[97] *TCTC* 253, p. 8222. [98] *TCTC* 254, pp. 8263–4.

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he heard of Hsieh's torture, he vowed vengeance against Ch'en Ching-hsüan. In little more than a month, he had ten thousand followers organized into military units. They carried out raids throughout Ch'iung-chou and Ya-chou in south-western Szechwan, attacking and capturing cities in that region.

Ch'en Ching-hsüan sent seven thousand troops to pacify the rebels. His pampered troops avoided battle, however, and demanded extra bonuses for any fighting they did. As the rebellion began to show signs of success, Ch'ien Neng was joined by several other bandit leaders from the region, each of whom brought several thousand more men with him. More bandit leaders rose in other parts of Szechwan, at one point completely cutting off communications between the province and central China. Ch'ien Neng's rebellion was finally pacified in the eleventh month of 882. He and his chief supporters were executed but Szechwan continued to swarm with bandit gangs.[99]

Coming at the height of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, the rebellion of Ch'ien Neng is much less known than it might be. Nevertheless, it deserves attention for several reasons. First, it began as a consequence of the extreme harshness and corruption of the agents of government in a province under direct imperial rule. But it also shows that banditry was by this time ubiquitous in China even in comparatively peaceful regions, and that the process of bandit confederation could take place anywhere and could easily pose a serious threat at the provincial level, particularly when allied with a military insurrection. Finally, however, we see that such a rebellion could still be contained at the provincial level, whereas the central government had been utterly unable to maintain order at the national level. Events in other parts of China, to which we now return, show this to be a standard pattern. Controls did not seriously break down below the provincial level, and at that level a new order began to form.

Establishment of regional militias and the militarization of the provinces

Ch'ien Neng's rebellion was by no means the only major uprising in Szechwan during the period when the court was at Ch'eng-tu. Late in 882 another substantial revolt broke out in Ch'ien-chou (in the north of modern Kweichow) and spread rapidly into southern and central Szechwan.[100] This rising was suppressed by a new type of local military force, the militia organization led by Wei Chün-ching.[101] Wei was a member of

[99] On Ch'ien Neng's revolt, see *TCTC* 254, pp. 8263 ff. [100] *TCTC* 255, p. 8275.

[101] The important studies of Wei Chün-ching and his militia organization are Kurihara Masuo, 'Tōmatsu no dogōteki zaichi seiryoku ni tsuite – Shisen no I Kunsei no baai', *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 243 (1960) 1–14, and Hino Kaisaburō, 'Tō I Kunsei hi no ōkan shochin sai setsu kyū ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu', *Wada Hakase koki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1961),

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the local elite in south-western Szechwan and in the late 870s he had begun to organize and coordinate the village defences in the area south of Tzu-chou, capital of Chien-nan East province. This organization was a local one, designed to control local disorder and banditry, and formed out of fear that Huang Ch'ao, or some of the substantial bandit gangs formerly allied with Wang Hsien-chih who still roamed the Yangtze valley, would strike into Szechwan.

In the uprising of 882 Wei Chün-ching led his organized militia forces to defeat the rebels, and he remained immensely powerful thereafter. In 890, when a large-scale military revolt broke out in western Szechwan, the military governor of Chien-nan East commissioned him to defend the province against invasion by the rebels. He was able to mobilize an army of twenty thousand militia and destroyed twenty-seven rebel strongholds. After this the government made him commissioner for the four prefectures of P'u-chou, Ho-chou, Ch'ang-chou and Yü-chou and his forces were incorporated as the Ching-nan Army. In 892 he built a massive fortress in Ch'ang-chou, and by this time had an integrated army 40,000 or 50,000 strong, formed of thirty-four militia armies.

Such local militia forces had of course been established on an *ad hoc* basis since the eighth century; for example in the wake of An Lu-shan's invasion of Ho-pei.[102] The need for local militia grew rapidly during the second half of the ninth century, as local communities were forced to protect themselves from the growing threat of bandits and roving bands of soldiers.[103] In the reign of Hsi-tsung, the government finally gave its approval for the formation of such militia on a large scale.

The nucleus of such a local defence system was normally a personal force led by a member of the local elite, usually a prominent landowner. Powerful landowners had great influence in local society, especially after the large-scale growth of estates employing numerous tenants and dependants in the eighth century, and were often able to defy the agents of local government. In a period when order was breaking down, such landowners had the most to lose in case of bandit attacks, and were also the natural leaders to whom the countryside turned to organize their local defences.

pp. 769–80. The latter essay is mainly a study of the commemorative inscription for the completion of a major fortress by Wei Chün-ching in 892; a facsimile reproduction of that inscription can be found in Liu Hsi-hai (1793–1853), comp. *Chin-shih yüan* (based on 1846 edn, Taipei, 1966), fasc. 3, pp. 189a–193a.

[102] See Tanigawa Michio, 'An-Shi no ran no seikaku ni tsuite', *Nagoya daigaku bungakubu kenkyū ronsō*, 8 (1954) 86–91.

[103] For discussions of the establishment of local militia organization in the late T'ang, see Hino Kaisaburō, 'Tōdai hanchin no bakko to chinshō', *TYGH*, 27.3 (1940) 341–6, and *Shina chūsei no gunbatsu* (Tokyo, 1942), pp. 229–35; Kikuchi Kideo, 'Setsudoshi kenryoku to iwayuru dogōsō', pp. 50–8.

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Larger local defence systems emerged in some market towns, and even larger systems, consolidating the self-defence forces of a substantial region, grew up around some garrison towns (*chen*, or *chen-shih*). Regional militia stationed in such garrison towns were known as *i-chün*, a term signifying a popular army as opposed to one officially organized by the province, and remained separate from the provincial armies.

Many of these higher-level popular forces were gradually incorporated into the command structure of the local military governor, their leaders being given such titles as garrison commander (*i-chün chen-chiang*), defence commissioner (*fang-yü shih*) or militia commissioner (*t'uan-lien shih*). Such titles gave the leaders of the regional militia not only military authority, but also a degree of legal and financial authority. The *chen* garrison town became an administrative centre at a lower level than the county, and its commander became an officer in the provincial military system rather than the head of the local defence organization.[104]

Significant numbers of militia troops had been used in 860 in the suppression of Ch'iu Fu's revolt. Local defence units were employed on an even larger scale during Hsi-tsung's reign to control the serious military insurrection of Wang Ying in the same region in 875–7.[105]

Wang Ying was a staff officer under the military governor of Chen-hai (Che-hsi). That post had been held since early 874 by Chao Yin, a former chief minister who had been sent out to the provinces after Hsi-tsung's accession. Chao had neither experience nor ability as a military commander, and failed either to recompense his men adequately for their loyal service or even grant them adequate basic provisions. Chao took no heed of the requests of his officers, and Wang Ying then led a group of them who broke into the storehouses, seizing weapons and provisions. He soon had a following of some ten thousand men, who raided all the northern prefectures of Che-hsi. The rebels also had a fleet and moved down the coast raiding wherever they landed.

With the government's top military commanders occupied north of the Yangtze against Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao, Kao Chieh, an official whose most important previous post had been as prefect of an obscure region of Kwangsi, was appointed commander of Coastal Forces in the seventh month of 876 and sent to attack Wang Ying. He appears to have had some success. At the end of 876 Wang tried to negotiate a surrender, demanding a local appointment in Che-hsi. Protracted negotiations ended in failure and Wang took Wen-chou, in Che-tung. The govern-

104 Kikuchi Kideo, 'Setsudoshi kenryoku to iwayuru dogōsō', pp. 56–8.

105 On Wang Ying's rebellion, see Hino Kaisaburō, 'Tōmatsu konranshi kō', *Tōyō shigaku*, 10 (1954) 17–19, and *TCTC* 252–3, pp. 8178–90.

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ment now put the campaign into the hands of one of its own generals from the capital, Sung Hao, who led an army of some fifteen thousand men against Wang Ying. Wang moved down the coast into Ming-chou and T'ai-chou in Che-tung, territory plundered by Ch'iu Fu fifteen years earlier. The rebellion was finally suppressed early in 877, after Wang Ying had lost half of his forces through defection.

Although it was not a major rebellion in comparison with those of Huang Ch'ao and Wang Hsien-chih, Wang Ying's rising was none the less a serious disturbance in an area important to the court. The most significant aspect of the campaign against him was the composition of the government forces which suppressed the rising. A large part of the government forces were conventional units, some local and others drawn from northern commands, including those from Wu-ning, Hsüan-wu and Chung-wu in Ho-nan. But the government also received considerable assistance from an organization of local militia units commanded by members of the regional elite. The most prominent of these commanders was Tung Ch'ang, from Hang-chou, who established himself as leader of the entire militia organization.[106]

After the suppression of Wang Ying's revolt, this militia organization was neither disbanded nor returned to local self-defence, but was integrated into the province's military command structure. Tung was appointed garrison commander of Shih-ching chen just south of Hang-chou. His second-in-command was Ch'ien Liu, formerly a young gang-leader from the same area. Known as the Eight Battalions of Hang-chou, they successfully defended the prefecture, and its major city of Lin-an, against the bandit armies of Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao.[107] In 879 they prevented a major raid on Hang-chou, and Huang Ch'ao thereafter avoided the area almost entirely. To begin with, Tung Ch'ang was completely loyal to the dynasty and was employed in several campaigns against independent military governors in Che-hsi in an effort to re-establish firm imperial control in the region. In 887 he became civil governor of Che-tung, his deputy Ch'ien Liu having taken over as prefect of Hang-chou. The two now began a bitter struggle for control of Che-hsi, Tung declaring himself emperor of the independent state of Lo-p'ing in 895. After Tung was killed in 896 Ch'ien took power in Che-hsi, and in the

[106] For Tung Ch'ang, see his biography in *HTS* 225C, pp. 6466–9; and also *CWTS* 133, pp. 14b–15b (biography of Ch'ien Liu).

[107] For a discussion of the Eight Battalions of Hangchow, see Tanigawa Michio, 'Tō no hanchin ni tsuite – Setsusei no baai', *Shirin*, 35.3 (1952) pp. 297–8. There is some biographical information in *Wu-Yüeh pei-shih*, showing that the leaders of these battalions were members of the local elite of the Hangchow area; see *Wu-Yüeh pei-shih* (Hsüeh-chin t'ao-yüan ts'ung-shu edn), 4, p. 6a. On the later state of Wu-Yüeh, see Edouard Chavannes, 'Le Royaume de Wou et de Yue', *TP*, 17 (1916) 129–264.

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early years of the tenth century was given the noble titles of king of Yüeh and king of Wu by the fading T'ang dynasty. By 921 he had established the independent state of Wu-Yüeh, one of the most prosperous and important of the Ten Kingdoms. Thus within a period of fifty years, what had begun as a local self-defence organization had been expanded and transformed into a large regional state that remained independent until 978, when it was finally conquered by the Sung.

We know much more about Wei Chün-ching's militia organization and the Eight Battalions of Hang-chou than we do about other comparable militia organizations. However, they were certainly not unique and they underline a fundamental feature of this period of collapsing authority. Unlike the provincial governments, which however independent they became were essentially the creation of government, these new militia organizations were the products of local forces, and served as one of the principal mechanisms by which an entirely new structure of power, rooted in local society, grew out of the unsettled conditions of this period.

The court in Szechwan

After Hsi-tsung's flight to Ch'eng-tu, he was practically a prisoner of his chief eunuch T'ien Ling-tz'u, who commanded the imperial armies in Szechwan, and controlled the province through his brother, the governor Ch'en Ching-hsüan. However, by degrees more and more prominent officials joined his court in exile, and tribute payments from the provinces and various loyalist expressions of support continued to reach him, even though few people can have still believed in the possibility of a real dynastic recovery.

The ministers at the court in exile were as quarrelsome and faction-ridden as they had been before Huang Ch'ao's victories. Some of the chief ministers, such as P'ei Ch'e, who served from 880–1 and again from 883–7, and Wei Chao-tu, who remained in office from 881 to 889, owed their position to their alliance with the eunuchs; Wei Chao-tu being T'ien Ling-tz'u's constant supporter.[108] The servile P'ei Ch'e had no real power, and was treated with contempt by his colleagues. On the opposite side were Wang To, who was sent as a field commander to Kuan-chung at the end of 881, and Hsiao Kou.

Hsiao Kou, who served as chief minister from 881 to 886, was the most effective of T'ien Ling-tz'u's political adversaries.[109] A man of great personal prestige, three of his direct ancestors, including his father Hsiao Chih, had been chief ministers. He had all the confidence of one born into

[108] Wei has biographies in *CTS* 179, pp. 4653–4; *HTS* 185, pp. 5410–11.
[109] Hsiao has biographies in *CTS* 179, pp. 4645–48; *HTS* 101, pp. 3960–2.

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a great family, and was fond of comparing himself with the great aristocratic chief minister Li Te-yü. He had been one of the many political victims of I-tsung's favourite, Wei Pao-heng, whom he openly despised, and spent most of I-tsung's reign in the provinces, before his recall to court under Hsi-tsung. Although he was adamantly opposed to T'ien Ling-tz'u and later attempted to eliminate eunuch power by force, he was helpless to take any positive action while the court remained in Szechwan.

Another influence hostile to the eunuchs was Cheng T'ien, who rejoined the court in 882 after playing an important role in containing Huang Ch'ao in the capital area. Cheng T'ien had been dismissed as chief minister in 878, together with his old adversary Lu Hsi, following bitter clashes at court over the command of the imperial armies, and over policy towards Nan-chao. There is no doubt that his strong views and acerbic character generated much friction at court. When he arrived in Ch'eng-tu he re-opened old wounds by a heated exchange of letters with Kao P'ien, in which he continued to support the need for civilian leadership in the campaigns against Huang Ch'ao. He was also hostile to T'ien Ling-tz'u, who had been closely associated with his rival minister Lu Hsi. He had much personal influence with Hsi-tsung, who clearly respected him, and he had proved himself a loyal and capable commander. But he proved an irritant, and when he retired after little more than a year in 883, he was replaced by the pliant nonentity P'ei Ch'e.

Two things are especially noticeable at court during these years of exile. Firstly, hostility between the eunuchs and the court officials continued to grow rapidly, and was particularly strong in 884–5. Secondly, for all their internal discord, members of the same old aristocratic elite (which had been systematically excluded from the highest office under I-tsung) continued to monopolize the highest offices. Even in these days of extreme crisis, every single chief minister was a member of the top level of the political and social elite. However, although they were representatives of a long-established and prominent sector of officialdom, and helped to some extent to give the court a degree of dignity and stability as the dynasty passed through its unprecedented crisis, they remained politically impotent while the eunuchs dominated Hsi-tsung.

Eunuch dominance at court also prevented the re-establishment of imperial authority in the provinces, for the military governors outside the capital were as staunchly opposed to eunuch control of government as were most members of the political elite. The brief political recovery at the beginning of Hsi-tsung's reign had degenerated into a desperate political situation, from which the dynasty could never recover.

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The collapse of the rebellion

The first test of Huang Ch'ao's capacity to conduct large-scale campaigns from a fixed base came some months after his occupation of the capital. The principal threat to the capital was from loyal forces in nearby Feng-hsiang, commanded by Cheng T'ien, the former chief minister who had been given responsibility for coordinating the loyal forces in the north-west, after his appeals to the emperor to remain in Kuan-chung had failed. Huang Ch'ao sent an envoy to Feng-hsiang, promising to spare the area if it would submit to him. Cheng T'ien himself was determined to fight, but some of his officers preferred to wait and see how the situation in Ch'ang-an developed, and it appeared for a time that Huang Ch'ao might neutralize Feng-hsiang, which would have been a great achievement. But Cheng T'ien was finally able to rally support for the dynasty, mainly by his own passionate display of loyalty. He sent a memorial written in his own blood to the emperor in Szechwan, vowing to organize loyal forces and recover the capital. In addition to the north-western provincial garrison, there were still many government troops left in the metropolitan region, and Cheng was soon able to assemble a substantial army in Feng-hsiang. The emperor restored him to the rank of chief minister, and named him Commander of the Joint Expeditionary Forces, with authority to appoint his own deputy commanders.[110]

In the third month of 881 Huang Ch'ao sent his top generals Shang Jang and Wang Po at the head of fifty thousand troops to attack the forces assembled in Feng-hsiang. They were confident of an easy victory, since Cheng T'ien was known to be a scholar, and was thought incapable of putting up a real fight. Huang Ch'ao's men, who had not met any real opposition since moving north of the Yangtze, advanced almost casually towards Feng-hsiang, not even bothering to move in ranks. Unexpectedly, Cheng T'ien proved a skilful tactician, and positioned his deputy, T'ang Hung-fu the military governor of Shuo-fang, to ambush the rebel army as they moved in. In a crucial and decisive battle, Huang Ch'ao's army was smashed, the government claiming that twenty thousand were killed.

This was an immensely important victory. Besides taking its toll on Huang Ch'ao's strength, it was the first sign for well over a year (since Kao P'ien's victories in the lower Yangtze), that government forces could defeat the bandits. The T'ang took advantage of its great victory to call for further support in regaining the capital, and sent envoys to Huang Ch'ao's luke-warm provincial supporters, who now quickly deserted the rebel cause. Chu-ko Shuang, who had surrendered to Huang Ch'ao at the

[110] *TCTC* 254, pp. 8242–7.

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end of 880 and had been appointed to hold the region around Lo-yang, now reaffirmed his loyalty to the dynasty, and was appointed military governor of Ho-yang. Two months later Chou Chi of Chung-wu was also persuaded to abandon his support for Huang Ch'ao and return his allegiance to the throne. Huang Ch'ao's last provincial supporter, Wang Ching-wu of P'ing-lu, continued to support Huang Ch'ao for the moment, but he was only a minor figure.

The events of the first months of 881 were decisive in reversing the momentum which had carried the rebels to their easy conquest of the capital. The weakness of the rebel regime in Ch'ang-an was now only too apparent. It had failed to establish a viable political structure, and had thrown away its support among the officials by the brutal and pointless reign of terror in the capital. It had now suffered a stunning military defeat, and finally it had lost all support among the provincial governors. In the fourth month of 881 the capital was briefly retaken by government troops, and recaptured by Huang Ch'ao only after a bloody battle, following which he again savagely massacred many of the inhabitants of Ch'ang-an for having welcomed the return of the government's troops. To make matters even worse, the capital began to suffer from a shortage of provisions, and Huang Ch'ao's efforts to requisition supplies from Ho-chung, whose military governor Wang Ch'ung-jung had been his erstwhile supporter, were rebuffed. Wang killed Huang Ch'ao's envoys, and formed an alliance against Huang Ch'ao with Wang Ch'u-ts'un, the loyal military governor of I-wu (then called I-Ting) province, in Ho-pei.

Deprived of revenues and with scant provincial support, Huang Ch'ao could do little more than continue his occupation of the capital, while troops acting on behalf of the dynasty began to close in. The capital region had never suffered such hardship during the T'ang. People abandoned their lands and livelihoods, and took refuge in the mountains to avoid the massing armies. The bandits sat in the empty city, cut off from all sources of supplies, in a grim and desperate situation. The price of grain soared to astronomical heights, and cannibalism became commonplace.[111]

In the tenth month of 881, Cheng T'ien lost control of Feng-hsiang to Li Ch'ang-yen, one of his junior commanders, and headed towards Szechwan to join the exiled emperor. The government replaced him with Wang To, who had joined the emperor in Szechwan after the loss of the capital. Wang was now named Supreme Field Commander for the T'ang counter-attack, in spite of his dismal failure during Huang Ch'ao's march north from Canton two years earlier. Ts'ui An-ch'ien, the loyal and able commander who had been repeatedly humiliated by the court,

[111] *CTS* 200B, p. 5394; *TCTC* 254, p. 8268.

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was appointed his deputy. The choice of Wang To and Ts'ui An-ch'ien to lead the campaign to regain the capital showed that the dynasty could now only depend upon those officials whose close political ties to the T'ang royal house would ensure their loyalty. There were few others to turn to, and nothing to lose.

As government forces began to consolidate their positions around the capital, Huang Ch'ao made several attempts to extend his power eastwards. His lieutenant, Chu Wen, was named prefect of T'ung-chou, north-east of Ch'ang-an within the passes, though Chu Wen had to capture the prefectural city before he could take up his post. Chu Wen's subsequent efforts to move across the Huang-ho into Ho-chung were repulsed by Wang Ch'ung-jung, and Huang Ch'ao was denied access to an area that could have supplied the capital and from which campaigns to the east might have been launched. By the fourth month of 882 the government had succeeded in establishing a semi-circle of allied forces, controlling the northern and western approaches to the capital. The effect was to cut Huang Ch'ao off from all sources of supply in the capital region. Besieged from the north and west, with the impassable Chin-ling mountains to the south and with access to Ho-chung denied to him, the government forces clearly hoped and expected that Huang Ch'ao would abandon the capital and move back to his old base in the east. No one was eager for a great battle.

The siege of the capital has several interesting features, all of which show clearly the extreme political and regional fragmentation of the period. First, no support arrived from the middle or lower Yangtze regions, particularly none from Kao P'ien, who continued to send repeated expressions of loyal support for the dynasty, but no troops. Kao attempted several times to persuade Hsi-tsung to move his court to the safety of his provincial capital, the great city of Yang-chou, but there was no real chance that the eunuchs controlling Hsi-tsung would put themselves in the hands of as strong a figure as Kao P'ien.[112]

Another important feature was the regional groupings that emerged among the loyal forces. While Wang To encamped government troops from Szechwan and Hsing-yüan at Fu-p'ing, north of the capital, and troops from Ching-yüan moved into the western approaches to the capital, the other attacking forces formed a series of alliances. Two strong military governors from the Ho-tung/Ho-pei region, Wang Ch'ung-jung of Ho-chung and Wang Ch'u-ts'un of I-wu (I-Ting), joined forces at Wei-pei; Chu Mei of Pin-Ning and Li Ch'ang-yen of Feng-hsiang moved to Hsing-p'ing, north-west of Ch'ang-an; T'o-pa Ssu-kung the Tangut

[112] See Ch'oe Chi-won, *Kuei-yüan pi-keng-chi* (SPTK edn), 2, pp. 11–12.

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military governor of the Ting-nan Army (from Hsia-Sui), and Li Hsiao-ch'ang's Pao-ta Army (from Fu-Fang), who between them controlled most of the eastern and northern Kuan-chung, joined forces at Wei-ch'iao; finally, Chou Chi of Chung-wu and Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan of Ts'ai-chou, both staff officers who had seized power in provinces in Ho-nan during Huang Ch'ao's march north in 879, sent troops to Wu-kung, north-west of Ch'ang-an.

None of these forces showed any wish to engage Huang Ch'ao's still formidable army in battle. All hoped that Huang Ch'ao would move back east, and no one was willing to lead an assault upon him. Wang To devoted his efforts to digging a series of earthworks which would prevent Huang Ch'ao from moving westward or southward, towards Szechwan.[113] The defensive attitude of the government's armies enabled Huang Ch'ao to launch several successful local attacks around the capital, but with little significant gain. Shang Jang led an attack upon Hua-chou, east of Ch'ang-an, but lost many of his men in an unexpected summer snowstorm.

Huang Ch'ao suffered a major set-back in the ninth month of 882 when the men he had made prefects of the key prefectures east of the capital, Chu Wen at T'ung-chou and Li Hsiang at Hua-chou, both defected. Chu Wen did so because of his failure to obtain support against Wang Ch'ung-jung; when his request was denied he knew that Huang Ch'ao's strength was ebbing, and so decided to surrender to Wang Ch'ung-jung. When Li Hsiang attempted to do the same Huang Ch'ao had him killed. But even after these set-backs none of the commanders around the capital was willing to move against Huang Ch'ao's army. In this state of deadlock the government finally agreed to call in the forces of the Sha-t'o leader Li K'o-yung.[114]

This was not the first time that foreign troops had been used to help suppress internal rebellion. Li K'o-yung's father had played a major role in the suppression of the P'ang Hsün rebellion, for which he had been rewarded with the imperial surname and given an important border command. But he had proved highly independent, and for much of the previous decade had been engaged in endless border warfare, much of it against a coalition of tribes supported by the T'ang.[115] The T'ang had established strong defences at T'ai-yüan to contain the Sha-t'o and to prevent them from invading Ho-tung, from which province they could easily have struck at the capital. But if the deadlock around the capital was to be broken, there seemed to be no alternative to bringing in foreign

[113] *HTS* 225C, p. 6461. [114] *TCTC* 255, p. 8277.
[115] See Liu Shan-li, 'T'ang-tai fan-chen chih-huo k'o-wei wei ti-san-tz'u i-tsu luan-Hua', pp. 851 ff.

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troops. In the first month of 883 Wang To was relieved of his command and the campaign was put in the hands of a coalition of commanders, among whom Li K'o-yung was clearly the dominant figure.

By early 883 Li K'o-yung had moved into Kuan-chung with a formidable army of some 35,000 men assembled from a number of border peoples. Li K'o-yung moved into Sha-yüan, a horse-breeding range south of T'ung-chou, where he defeated Huang Ch'ao's brother Huang K'uei in an initial battle. Huang Ch'ao decided to challenge Li K'o-yung in one climactic battle, and moved 150,000 men against Li K'o-yung's army, which had now joined forces with provincial troops from Chung-wu, I-Ting and Ho-chung. The opposing forces finally met on the fifteenth day of the second month of 883 in a great battle at Liang-t'ien Hill. Huang Ch'ao's army was utterly defeated, with countless killed or taken prisoner.[116] After a further series of defeats, Huang Ch'ao finally withdrew from the capital in the fourth month of 883, having first secured the road south across the mountains to Lan-t'ien. Huang Ch'ao's retreat from the capital was relatively orderly, in contrast to the rapid advance of the undisciplined provincial troops who looted and destroyed the remains of Ch'ang-an, reducing to ashes those palaces which were still standing.

Although he had lost the capital and in spite of his defeats, Huang Ch'ao's army remained quite strong. In the fifth month of 883 he sent his top general, Meng K'ai, to attack Ts'ai-chou, one of the few provinces outside Kuan-chung which had joined in the campaign to recover the capital. Its governor, Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan, surrendered as soon as the attack began, and joined Huang Ch'ao. The next target was Ch'en-chou, in central Ho-nan – part of the Chung-wu command – against which Huang Ch'ao nursed a strong hatred because it had taken a prominent part in many of the earlier campaigns against him, from those of Sung Wei and Chang Tzu-mien during the early years of the rebellion right down to the campaigns to recapture the capital. The prefect of Ch'en-chou, Chao Ch'ou, knew that his city was a likely target and made preparations. Fortifications were established all around the city, armour and weapons produced, wheat and grain stockpiled. All persons within a radius of twenty miles were moved inside the city walls. Large numbers of able-bodied men were recruited, and placed under the command of Chao's son and younger brother.

Chao Ch'ou's efforts were not wasted. Meng K'ai, who had won an easy victory at Ts'ai-chou, began advancing upon Ch'en-chou. Chao Ch'ou learned that Meng K'ai was weak and unprepared and sprang a

[116] *HTS* 225C, p. 6461; *TCTC* 255, p. 8288.

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surprise attack, killing or capturing nearly all of Meng K'ai's troops. Meng was himself captured and executed.

Meng K'ai's defeat and death stunned Huang Ch'ao, who now moved east with his entire army. He camped south-east of Ch'en-chou at Yin-shui, where the government had attempted nearly four years earlier to establish a defensive coalition to block his advance on Lo-yang. In the sixth month of 883 Huang Ch'ao and Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan, from Ts'ai-chou, joined forces and surrounded Ch'en-chou. Chao Ch'ou swore to defend Ch'en-chou to the death, and announced that anyone suggesting surrender to Huang Ch'ao would be executed. He selected his best troops, went out of the city, and made a successful raid on the besieging army. Huang Ch'ao was further enraged and committed his troops to a long-term siege of Ch'en-chou. He erected a headquarters and stockpiled provisions.

The siege continued throughout the autumn and winter of 883, interrupted only by constant skirmishes. Although each side had made elaborate preparations, supplies soon ran low. Within Ch'en-chou many of the citizens starved. Meanwhile Huang Ch'ao's men ravaged a dozen prefectures in Ho-nan in a desperate search for provisions and supplies for the besieging armies.

As the situation in Ch'en-chou grew desperate, Chao Ch'ou sent out urgent pleas for help from neighbouring prefectures. The armies which rallied to his aid were united not by any loyalty to the T'ang, but by hostility to, and fear of, Huang Ch'ao. Chou Chi, military governor of Chung-wu (which in ordinary times had included Ch'en-chou in its command) sent troops from the east, Shih P'u sent support from Wu-ning in the west, and Chu Wen, by this time military governor of Hsüan-wu, arrived from the north. Ironically enough, all three owed their positions to Huang Ch'ao, Chu Wen having risen to power as one of his officers, Chou Chi and Shih P'u having seized power during the chaotic conditions of Huang Ch'ao's march north in 879. But by this time the only important consideration was the maintenance of a local stronghold of one's own, and to these commanders – who were essentially local warlords – Huang Ch'ao's army posed a serious threat. Self-interest alone prompted them to join forces against Huang Ch'ao.

In spite of the additional forces now brought to bear against him, Huang Ch'ao's army remained too strong for any single commander to oppose, and no serious attempt was made to coordinate operations against him. It was again felt necessary to call for the support of Li K'o-yung, who moved east with an army of fifty thousand men. Li K'o-yung and the military governors of the region now engaged Huang Ch'ao's forces

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in a series of major engagements, most of which resulted in heavy losses for the rebels. Huang Ch'ao was finally forced to lift the siege of Ch'en-chou in the fourth month of 884, almost three hundred days after it had begun.[117]

In the fifth month, Huang Ch'ao suffered a series of serious defeats following the inundation of his main camp by a flash flood. Chu Wen won several decisive victories over the rebels, and a number of Huang Ch'ao's top commanders surrendered to him. Huang knew that the end was near when Shang Jang, who had been his most important ally for the last six years, surrendered with ten thousand of his men to Shih P'u at Wu-ning. Huang responded violently to this news, killing several of his other lieutenants. With scarcely a thousand men left he headed back to his old base area in Shan-tung, with Li K'o-yung following him remorselessly. But Huang Ch'ao knew this area well, and was able to elude Li, though he lost many of his men and all his provisions.

Li K'o-yung gave up the pursuit of Huang Ch'ao in the fifth month of 884 and turned back to Pien-chou. But Shih P'u sent several of his own generals, one of them the recently surrendered Shang Jang, to exterminate Huang Ch'ao's remaining forces. In the sixth month of 884 Huang Ch'ao was finally cornered in the Valley of Wolves and Tigers, about thirty miles south-east of T'ai-shan and very close to where he had first risen nearly a decade before. It is said that he cut his own throat rather than allow Li K'o-yung to receive the credit for his capture. His oldest supporters and his own family were killed by Huang Ch'ao's 'nephew', who was himself executed by the government troops. The heads of the rebel leaders were sent, first to Shih P'u, and then to the emperor in Szechwan, who ordered them to be presented in the Imperial Ancestral Temple.[118]

This was the end of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, but the complex pattern of intense local militarization that the rebellion had crystallized would continue for many decades. Nor did large scale banditry cease with the end of the rebellion. One of Huang Ch'ao's adoptive 'nephews' continued to lead a band of seven thousand men in raids throughout Hu-nan, until they were finally smashed by a local strongman some time about 901.[119]

NEW STRUCTURE OF POWER IN LATE T'ANG CHINA

The last two decades of the T'ang were a time of decisive change which took an independent course in every part of China. In the north-western capital region of Kuan-chung, the complete break-up of what might be

[117] For the siege of Ch'en-chou, see *TCTC* 255 *passim*; Chao Ch'ou has biographies in *HTS* 189, pp. 5473–5; *CWTS* 14, pp. 5b–8a; *HWTS* 42, pp. 460–4.

[118] *HTS* 225C, pp. 6463–4; *TCTC* 256, p. 8311. [119] *HTS* 225C, p. 6464.

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called the imperial coalition – the emperor and his personal supporters, together with the dynasty's closest provincial allies and its foreign mercenaries – which had since 880 kept the tottering dynasty on its feet, led to the overthrow of the T'ang dynasty in 907. This was an event of great historical significance, for the area would never regain the centrality it had during the T'ang and earlier periods, when it was for many centuries the undisputed locus of political power and authority in China.

In central and eastern China south of the Huang-ho (modern Honan, Shantung and northern Anhwei), a region which had once been the fulcrum from which the T'ang extended its power over the eastern half of China, a number of powerful and independent military governors fought during these years to add to or to protect their territories. One of them, Chu Wen (a former ally of Huang Ch'ao), who had been appointed by the T'ang in 883 as military governor at Pien-chou (Hsüan-wu), was able to outlast and outfight the others and steadily expanded his territories in all directions. In 907, he overthrew the T'ang dynasty, completed the destruction of Ch'ang-an, and established his own dynastic state of Later Liang, which lasted from 907 to 923, during which years Chu Wen and his successors contended with the Sha-t'o state of Later T'ang for the control of north China.

In north-central and north-east China (modern Shansi and Hopei), long-standing T'ang weakness permitted, and to a great extent encouraged, the foreign occupation of extensive territories. An array of foreign peoples from the north – Sha-t'o Turks, Uighurs, Hsien-pei, Tanguts, T'u-yü-hun and others, some of them long-settled within the Great Wall, others more recent and aggressive arrivals – occupied large parts of north China, leaving little of the area north of the Huang-ho under purely Chinese control. The dynasty of Later T'ang, established in 923 by the son of the great Sha-t'o leader Li K'o-yung, was the most notable result of the great power of these non-Chinese peoples. Most of the territory lost to foreign control was eventually recovered under the Sung dynasty, but the northernmost regions within the Great Wall, the so-called Sixteen Prefectures, were destined to remain under foreign domination for another four centuries.

Finally, in areas removed from the power centres of north China – in the south, the middle and lower Yangtze regions, Szechwan and the north-eastern and north-western corners of China proper – this period saw the growth of a number of independent and culturally diverse states, known collectively as the Ten Kingdoms.

Below the major developments in each of these regions will be discussed in turn. Map 22 and table 11 give a general idea of the distribution of

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Table 11. *The distribution of power after Huang Ch'ao's rebellion* (AD 885)

	Governor	Period of control
Imperial control		
1 Ching-chao (Ch'ang-an)	Direct imperial administration	
2 T'ung-chou	Direct imperial administration	
3 Hua-chou	Direct imperial administration	
Imperial suzerainty		
4 Hsi-ch'uan	Ch'en Ching-hsüan	880–9
5 Tung-ch'uan	Kao Jen-hou	884–6
6 Shan-Kuo	Wang Ch'ung-ying	881–7
7 Ch'ien-chung	Hsi Shih	885–90
8 Kuei-kuan	Ch'en Huai	885–94
9 Yung-kuan	Ts'ui Ch'o (?)	882–?
10 Jung-kuan	Ho Ting (?)	883–?
11 Ling-nan	Cheng Chi	879–86
12 An-nan	Hsieh Chao	884–?
Independent governors; T'ang allies		
13 Ching-yüan	Chang Chün	882–94
14 Fu-Fang	Tung-fang K'uei	882–6
15 Ho-chung	Wang Ch'ung-jung	880–7
16 O-Yüeh	Lu Shen-chung	884–6
Independent governors; former T'ang generals		
17 T'ien-te	Li Tang	875–?
18 Chen-wu	Wang Pien	885–8
19 I-wu	Wang Ch'u-ts'un	879–95
20 Yen-Hai	Ch'i K'o-jang	879–86
21 Huai-nan	Kao P'ien	879–87
22 Che-hsi	Chou Pao	879–87
Independent governors; former Huang Ch'ao commanders or bandit leaders		
23 Ho-yang	Chu-ko Shuang	881–6
24 Tung-chi (Lo-yang)	Li Han-chih	885–7
25 Hsüan-wu	Chu Wen	883–907
26 Shan-nan East	Chao Te-yin	884–93
27 Chiang-hsi	Chung Chuan	882–907
28 Che-tung	Liu Han-hung	880–6
Independent governors; non-allies		
29 Feng-hsiang	Li Ch'ang-fu	884–7
30 Pin-Ning	Chu Mei	881–6
31 Wei-Po	Yüeh Yen-chen	883–8
32 I-ch'eng	An Shih-jo	885–6
33 T'ien-p'ing	Chu Hsüan	882–97
34 P'ing-lu	Wang Ching-wu	882–9
35 Chung-wu	Lu Yen-hung	884–6
36 Wu-ning	Shih P'u	881–93
37 Shan-nan West	Shih Chün-she	885–6
38 Ching-nan	Chiang Huai	885–7
39 Hu-nan	Min Hsiang	881–6
40 Huai-hsi (Feng-kuo)	Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan	882–6
41 Hsüan-She	Ch'in Yen	882–7
42 Fu-chien	Ch'en Yen	884–91
Independent governors; non-Chinese		
43 Hsia-Sui	T'o-pa Ssu-kung	881–90
44 Lu-lung	Li K'o-chü	876–85
45 Ch'eng-te	Wang Jung	883–907
Non-Chinese occupation		
46 Ta-t'ung	Ho-lien To	880–91
47 Tai-pei	Li Kuo-ch'ang	883–7
48 Ho-tung	Li K'o-yung	883–907
49 Chao-i	Li K'o-hsiu	883–90
50 Nan-chao		Independent

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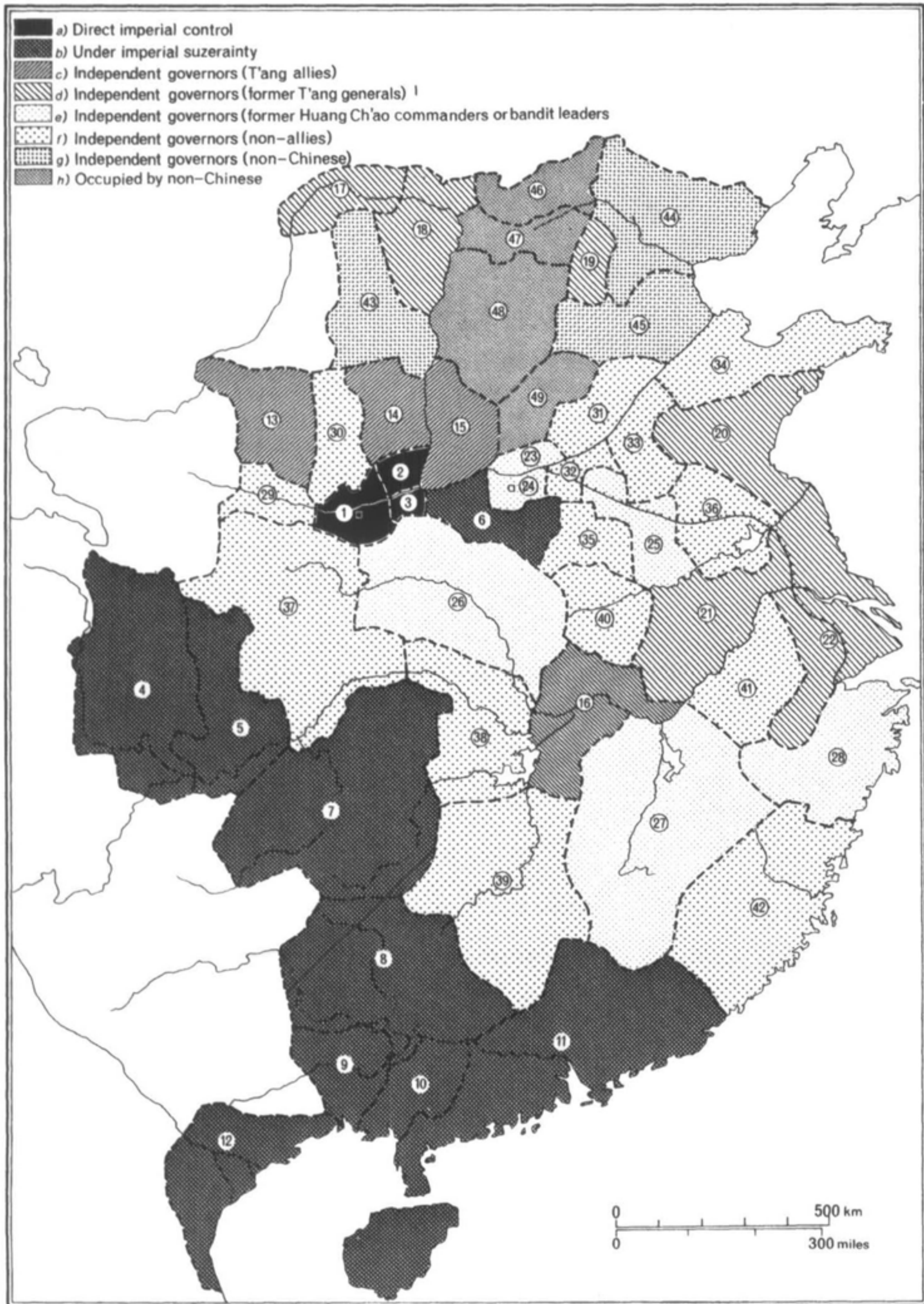

Map. 22. The distribution of power after Huang Ch'ao's rebellion, 885

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power in China after the end of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion. It should be kept in mind, however, that by this time the normal pattern of regional administration had broken down almost completely. The fifty or so military governors shown on this map had drawn most of their strength into their provincial capitals, a normal development in a time of intense civil strife, and it is uncertain how far their authority extended. Nevertheless, the great regional cities they controlled remained the major power centres in China, and the areas around them remained under their governors' sway, if not within their absolute control. There is thus some justification in retaining the province as a territorial division on map 22.

The imperial coalition and its break-up

Hsi-tsung returned to the capital in the third month of 885, after nearly four years of exile in Szechwan. Ch'ang-an, which had suffered years of fighting and looting, was utterly desolate: 'Thorns and brambles filled the city, foxes and hares ran everywhere.'[120] The emperor issued an Act of Grace and declared a new reign period (optimistically called Kuang-ch'i, or 'Radiant beginning'). The emperor brought into his devastated capital a full-scale army, formed by T'ien Ling-tz'u in Szechwan, of more than fifty thousand Shen-ts'e troops. This army was the sole hope for any revival of imperial power. But the soldiers were essentially mercenaries, their service depending entirely on the government's ability to pay. This posed an almost impossible dilemma for the court, whose reserves had long since been exhausted. While Hsi-tsung was in Szechwan, nearly all regions had gradually stopped sending any tax shipments either to the capital, or to the exiled court. The emperor could now expect support from no more than the handful of provinces closest to the capital, all of them within the poor province of Kuan-chung; there was no reason to believe that imperial proclamations would be heeded in the most productive areas of China – the North China Plain and the Huai and Yangtze valleys – and any attempt to re-establish some degree of control over those areas would have to wait until pressing financial needs were met.

The problem of supporting the Shen-ts'e soldiers was complicated by the fact that while they were the principal imperial force they were also the mainstay of the authority of the eunuchs, and in particular of T'ien Ling-tz'u, whose domination of the court was profoundly resented both in the capital and in the provinces. To complicate matters even further, many officials had returned to Ch'ang-an after its recapture, and their claims for emoluments put further pressure on any revenues received.

[120] *TCTC* 256, p. 8320; Schafer, 'The last years of Ch'ang-an', p. 168.

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It was an absolute necessity to obtain significant amounts of revenue as quickly as possible, but to do so posed daunting problems.

With the entire financial structure completely disrupted, and with minimal support from the provinces, the government attempted to resort to the emergency monopoly taxation of salt, much as Su-tsung's government had done a century earlier when the An Lu-shan rebellion had produced a comparable financial crisis. The nearest major salt-producing region was just across the Huang-ho in Ho-chung (the south-western portion of modern Shansi province), which had since 880 been under the control of the tough and independent military governor, Wang Ch'ung-jung.[121] The salt pools at An-i and Chieh-hsien in P'u-chou could easily have provided the needed revenues if the government had taken control of the region. That promised to be a formidable undertaking, however, for Wang Ch'ung-jung was a bitter enemy of T'ien Ling-tz'u and had repeatedly urged his execution. This produced the first major confrontation between the T'ang government and the military governors around the capital.

The court knew that it was impossible simply to dismiss Wang Ch'ung-jung, and decided instead on an elaborate series of reappointments involving Wang and two other military governors in north China, Wang Ch'u-ts'un of I-wu (central Ho-pei) and Ch'i K'o-jang of Yen-Hai (Shantung). Wang Ch'u-ts'un was from a family of Shen-ts'e generals from the capital, while Ch'i K'o-jang had been an imperial general commanding forces against Huang Ch'ao. They were the only two military governors in north China who would conceivably have heeded an edict ordering their transfer. The plan was for Wang Ch'ung-jung to move to Yen-Hai and be replaced in Ho-chung by Wang Ch'u-ts'un; the rotation would be completed by Ch'i K'o-jang moving from Yen-Hai to I-wu. Meanwhile, anticipating the recovery of imperial control in Ho-chung, T'ien Ling-tz'u assumed the title of Monopoly Commissioner for the Two Salt Pools.[122]

Had it succeeded, this plan would have been a notable achievement, for it would have confirmed the dynasty's power to transfer senior officials and would also have put three able and experienced T'ang appointees in areas of considerable strategic importance in north China. Wang Ch'ung-jung, however, refused the transfer, especially after T'ien's envoy treated him disrespectfully. Wang Ch'u-ts'un, who had earlier joined forces with Wang Ch'ung-jung to recover the capital during its occupation by Huang Ch'ao and who was wary of weakening his own position by taking any action against him, also declined the transfer and urged the court

[121] Wang's biographies are in *CTS* 182, pp. 4695–9; *HTS* 187, pp. 5435–41.
[122] *TCTC* 256, p. 8322; *HTS* 208, p. 5437.

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to reconsider its plan, lest it 'disturb the hearts of the other military governors'.[123]

Wang Ch'ung-jung's refusal to abandon his control of Ho-chung led T'ien Ling-tz'u to seek military support from other military governors around the capital, in preparation for an attack upon Ho-chung. T'ien's first ally was Li Ch'ang-fu, whose father Li Ch'ang-yen had several years earlier wrested power at Feng-hsiang from the former chief minister, Cheng T'ien. A second important ally was Chu Mei, military governor of Pin-Ning, just north of the capital. As a fortress commander in Pin-Ning, Chu Mei had killed one of Huang Ch'ao's generals who had been sent to take control of that province. This was an extremely important victory for the allied forces which led eventually to the recapture of the capital. Chu Mei afterwards assumed power as military governor of Pin-Ning, with full court approval.

To counter T'ien Ling-tz'u's alliances, Wang Ch'ung-jung joined forces with Li K'o-yung, the Sha-t'o military governor of Ho-tung in northern Shansi. Li K'o-yung was bitter over the court's failure to support him in a conflict with Chu Wen, and showed little hesitation in turning against the dynasty. This pitted the major armies of Kuan-chung (modern Shensi) against those of Ho-chung and Ho-tung (together forming modern Shansi province). The armies from Ho-tung proved superior. In a major battle fought at Sha-yüan, the site of Li K'o-yung's great victory against Huang Ch'ao in 883, the armies of Wang Ch'ung-jung and Li Ch'ang-fu were driven back to their own capitals in Pin-Ning and Feng-hsiang, their defeated troops causing havoc during the retreat.[124]

Li K'o-yung, rather than returning to Ho-tung, now continued to advance towards Ch'ang-an. The emperor and his terrified court abandoned the capital once again, less than a year after their return from the long exile in Szechwan. The capital, which had been partially restored after Huang Ch'ao's departure in 883, was now sacked more thoroughly than ever by marauding soldiers.

The imperial entourage, in desperation, fled westward towards Feng-hsiang. Li K'o-yung and Wang Ch'ung-jung, who were bitterly hostile to T'ien Ling-tz'u's domination of the government but still remained essentially loyal to the dynasty, repeatedly requested that the emperor execute T'ien and return to the capital. Hsi-tung attempted to return T'ien Ling-tz'u's old eunuch adversary Yang Fu-kung to power as an imperial secretary, but this merely provoked T'ien to move with the emperor further westward towards Pao-chi, almost the most westerly settlement in Kuan-chung.

[123] *CTS* 182, p. 4700; *HTS* 186, p. 5419.

[124] *TCTC* 256, pp. 8326–8.

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The situation changed after senior court officials, anxious to prevent the emperor from leaving Kuan-chung once again, sought support from Chu Mei and Li Ch'ang-fu to prevent the emperor from taking refuge south of the Chin-ling mountains. The two military governors, although they had recently been allied with T'ien Ling-tz'u and the court in its attempt to invade Ho-chung, now turned against T'ien and began to pursue the imperial entourage, which consisted of only a few hundred officials and soldiers who had been coaxed or coerced into joining the fleeing emperor.

Hsi-tsung and his eunuch-dominated entourage, now virtually without supporters, continued the flight west in the most difficult circumstances and then struck south across the mountains. The Imperial Guard, which gained strength during the flight, had to fight its way forward, led by five hundred swordsmen under Wang Chien, a Shen-ts'e general who was now given command.[125]

The crossing of the Chin-ling mountains was far more harrowing than the trip of 881. The court took the Linked Cloud Road, one of the most frightening of the routes across the mountains because a full one-third of its 430 *li* went along the system of wooden trestles pounded into the side of cliffs, above the roaring mountain torrents.[126] Li Ch'ang-fu had attempted to destroy part of this route to prevent the emperor from crossing, but Hsi-tsung just managed to get through. Wang Chien seems to have had special responsibility for the emperor, who entrusted him with the sacred imperial regalia, and slept exhausted with his head in Wang Chien's lap as they stopped for a rare moment of rest. The vital Ta-san Pass was crossed just before Chu Mei's pursuing soldiers arrived. The journey was already beginning to take its toll; Li Yün, Prince of Hsiang, a great-grandson of Su-tsung, became too ill to continue and was captured by Chu Mei and taken back to Feng-hsiang.

It seemed hardly possible that the situation could grow worse but it did so when Shih Chün-she, the military governor of Shan-nan West province, into whose territory the emperor was heading, decided to assist Chu Mei and Li Ch'ang-fu in their pursuit of Hsi-tsung. Shih sealed off major passes leading across the mountains and burned down the post stations where the emperor might have rested, forcing Hsi-tsung and his guard to take a treacherous and little-used route across the mountains, with the soldiers from Pin-Ning in close pursuit. Their desperate situation was slightly relieved when Shih Chün-she decided to move north to join

[125] *TCTC* 256, pp. 8330–1.

[126] For details of this route, see Yen Keng-wang, 'T'ang-tai Ch'ang-an Nan-shan chu-ku tao-i ch'eng-shu', pp. 612–15.

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Chu Mei, who was now beginning to emerge as the dominant figure in Kuan-chung. Hsi-tsung finally reached the Han-chung basin, and was met some thirty miles to the west of Hsing-yüan by the court-appointed army supervisor of Shan-nan West, who escorted the emperor to the relative safety of Hsing-yüan.[127]

This time there was no thought of continuing south to Szechwan, and during the following weeks Hsi-tsung attempted to improvise another government-in-exile. He appointed as chief ministers two officials who had followed him into exile, K'ung Wei and Tu Jang-neng, both of whom were descended from eminent officials of the first half of the ninth century. But these appointments did not solve the most immediate problem of the court, which was to find provisions for the officials and soldiers who had accompanied the emperor into exile; the Han-chung basin was sparsely peopled and unproductive, which was the reason why Hsi-tsung had abandoned it for the greater wealth of Szechwan five years earlier. To try to get the needed provisions, the court now rather optimistically appointed Wang Ch'ung-jung as Acting Commissioner for Provisions and ordered him to send 150,000 bushels of grain on an emergency basis to Hsing-yüan. This order was clearly a sign of desperation, for it had been the court's attempt to seize control of Wang Ch'ung-jung's territory in Ho-chung that had set in motion the events that had forced Hsi-tsung to flee his capital. Wang was, of course, unwilling to give up freely what the court had been unable to seize by force, and refused the emperor's order, once again giving as his reason T'ien Ling-tz'u's continuing presence at court.

Chu Mei now decided formally to depose Hsi-tsung and install on the throne in his place Su-tsung's great-grandson Li Yün, whom he had captured shortly before.[128] Hsiao Kou, who had originally sought Chu Mei's help to try to prevent T'ien Ling-tz'u from taking Hsi-tsung out of Kuan-chung, at first resisted the plan to depose the emperor but was unsuccessful, especially after Chu Mei announced that anyone opposing his plan would immediately be executed. The vice-president of the Board of War, Cheng Ch'ang-t'u, was ordered to compose an edict for Li Yün's accession, and the civilian officials at Feng-hsiang were made to accompany Li Yün to Ch'ang-an for the ceremony elevating him to the throne. Meanwhile, Chu Mei appointed himself senior general of the Shen-ts'e Army, thus assuming the most important of T'ien Ling-tz'u's offices and putting himself in a position to become the power behind the throne.

In spite of a certain initial resistance to the idea of installing a new

[127] *TCTC* 256, pp. 8331–2.

[128] For a study of Chu Mei and his attempt to place a pretender on the throne, see Kurihara Masuo, 'Shu Bai no ran', *Wada Hakase koki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 373–82; Chu Mei has biographies in *CTS* 175, p. 4548; *HTS* 224B, pp. 6404–5.

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emperor, it soon became apparent that there was much support for the decision, especially among senior provincial officials and military governors. In addition to the more specific aim of ending T'ien Ling-tz'u's stranglehold on the court, this was also the first time in more than a century that the succession had been wrested from eunuch control. Ts'ui An-ch'ien, one of the more notable victims of T'ien Ling-tz'u's domination of the government, sent a letter approving the deposition of Hsi-tsung on behalf of the court officials who had fled to Ho-chung after the emperor's departure from the capital. Another vital gesture of support came from Kao P'ien who accepted the new regime's legitimacy and urged Li Yün to take the throne. Chu Mei also sent envoys to the major military governors elsewhere in the Yangtze region, and in Ho-pei. The majority pledged themselves to accept the new court.[129]

Two critical developments in the fourth and fifth months of 886 changed matters decisively. The first was T'ien Ling-tz'u's decision voluntarily to give up his position in the exiled court. He appointed himself army supervisor of the Hsi-ch'uan Army (western Szechwan), which was still controlled by his brother Ch'en Ching-hsüan, and left Hsing-yüan. T'ien's departure greatly relieved the situation, but did not mean the end of eunuch domination at Hsi-tsung's court. T'ien's old rival Yang Fu-kung now took over his offices and banished T'ien's allies, including the general Wang Chien, to locations in Szechwan and northern Kwei-chow. The second important development was a split between Chu Mei and Li Ch'ang-fu, who had conspired together to put Li Yün on the throne. When Li Ch'ang-fu realized that Chu Mei intended to monopolize power for himself, Li withdrew his support and began negotiations with the exiled emperor for appointment to high office, to which Hsi-tsung of course had no hesitation in agreeing.

The court quickly capitalized on these developments. They sent envoys to Ho-chung to secure the support of Wang Ch'ung-jung, now that his *bête noire* T'ien Ling-tz'u was gone from court. More importantly, Li K'o-yung, the powerful Sha-t'o military governor of Ho-tung, refused to support Chu Mei. Presumably the prospect of a weakened Hsi-tsung returning to the capital to resume his ceremonial duties was more attractive to him than having a strong military governor like Chu Mei controlling a puppet ruler. Li K'o-yung thus agreed to join forces with Wang Ch'ung-jung and Yang Shou-liang, an adopted son of the eunuch Yang Fu-kung who had recently been appointed military governor of Chin-Shang (eastern Shan-nan). The alliance of these three governors made possible Hsi-tsung's eventual return to the capital.

[129] *TCTC* 256, pp. 8334–5.

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In spite of the overwhelming forces now joined against them, Chu Mei elevated Li Yün to the throne in the tenth month of 886. Yang Fu-kung responded on behalf of the emperor, sending a proclamation around the capital region that anyone bringing in Chu Mei's head would be appointed a military governor. Wang Hsing-yü, one of Chu Mei's commanders, now brought his troops back from Feng-chou to the capital, where after a brief battle he killed Chu Mei and several hundred of his men. The victorious soldiers then ran wild, looting and killing everywhere in the city, adding still further to the sufferings of the residents of Ch'ang-an.

Many of the men who had accepted office under Chu Mei, together with the usurper-emperor, now fled to the uncertain protection of Wang Ch'ung-jung at Ho-chung. Wang immediately executed most of them, including the unfortunate Li Yün, whose head was sent to the exiled T'ang court at Hsing-yüan. The emperor ordered that the men who had served as chief ministers, and all others who had accepted office under Chu Mei, should be punished with the utmost severity.[130]

After the death of Chu Mei and the eradication of his regime, Hsi-tsung returned to the capital region, though not to Ch'ang-an itself, which had been so devastated by successive occupations and sackings that it was now in a state of virtual anarchy. In the third month of 887, Hsi-tsung travelled to Feng-hsiang in western Kuan-chung, where he remained under the 'protection' of the military governor Li Ch'ang-fu, who had so recently abandoned his support for Chu Mei in return for an imperial appointment. Li hoped to use the opportunity of the court's presence at Feng-hsiang to strip it of its remaining wealth and power, but his ambitions quickly led to his own undoing. In the sixth month of 887 fighting broke out between Li Ch'ang-fu's soldiers and the imperial troops. Li attacked and attempted to burn down the emperor's 'temporary residence' and there was bitter fighting in the streets of Feng-hsiang between the local troops and the emperor's soldiers. Li was defeated, driven out of Feng-hsiang, and killed two months later after a brief punitive campaign. He was at once replaced as military governor of Feng-hsiang by Li Mao-chen, a former Shen-ts'e officer who led the punitive expedition.

Hsi-tsung's return to the capital region thus had important consequences both at Feng-hsiang and elsewhere in the capital region. Wang Hsing-yü, who had killed Chu Mei, was appointed to the post of prefect of Hua-chou, a position which now had far more than its normal importance in relation to the greatly weakened dynasty. He and Li Mao-chen became figures of enormous importance during the reign of the next

130 *TCTC* 256, pp. 8337–42.

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emperor, Chao-tsung, though their power never reached far beyond north-west China.

Elsewhere in China the political and military situation was in a state of constant flux, and for those regions the emperor's return from exile had little meaning. The degree of provincial instability during these years is apparent from the single fact that well over half of the military governors in power in 885 had been replaced by 890 (see map 22 and the accompanying table). We will discuss the most important developments in the provinces below.

Hsi-tsung remained at Feng-hsiang for the rest of 887, and returned to Ch'ang-an in the first month of 888. He had, however, fallen gravely ill at Feng-hsiang, and died in the third month of 888, still aged only twenty-seven.[131] Hsi-tsung had reigned for fifteen troubled years, though it could hardly be said that he had ever ruled. His years on the throne were a time of overwhelming crises of every description – military, political, social and institutional – which proved far beyond the capacity of the T'ang dynasty to solve. Some have attributed the dynasty's rapid collapse to Hsi-tsung's boyish frivolities or to his inattention to government, but it is doubtful whether any ruler could have effectively checked the collapse of T'ang power and authority.

Chao-tsung (reign 888–904) and Chao-hsüan-ti (reign 904–7)

The reign of Hsi-tsung's successor, his younger brother Li Chieh – known by his temple name of Chao-tsung – was a simple exercise in survival. It was a time of precarious equilibrium, when the T'ang was sustained beyond its natural life by a general apprehension over the consequences of a dynastic overthrow. Any one of a number of people could have brought down the dynasty almost at will. That this did not happen until 907 was not from lack of strength or of opportunity, but from a fear that they, like Chu Mei, lacked the stable foundations needed to sustain imperial pretensions.

Chao-tsung, twenty-one years old when he ascended the throne, was an intelligent and able young man. He was fully aware of the circumstances that had prevented the recovery of T'ang dynastic power and authority, and pledged himself to revive them. That he was completely unable to do so is hardly surprising. Not only was Chao-tsung totally powerless to reassert T'ang authority over the provinces, he was unable even to control events at his own court, or in the area immediately surrounding the capital.

[131] *TCTC* 257, p. 8364.

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For the first years of his reign, Chao-tsung's main political problem was the familiar one of eunuch control over the court. The principal villain in this case was Yang Fu-kung, who had succeeded T'ien Ling-tz'u as the leader of the eunuch establishment and had arranged Chao-tsung's succession in 888.[132] Chao-tsung, however, was never personally dependent on Yang Fu-kung in the way his brother Hsi-tsung had been on T'ien Ling-tz'u. Soon after taking the throne, the new emperor made it clear to his chief ministers that he wished them to have the predominant political role at court. They responded by urging the emperor to curb drastically the power of the eunuchs, as Hsiuan-tsung had attempted to do half a century earlier. Chao-tsung grew even more determined to eliminate Yang after the eunuch succeeded first in driving into exile and then murdering the emperor's uncle Wang Kuei, an influential political figure at court. Chao-tsung's inability to protect even his close relatives increased provincial contempt for the court, and greatly added to Chao-tsung's personal frustration.[133]

The emperor soon devised a successful scheme to undermine Yang's position at court, by the simple expedient of bestowing the imperial surname, as well as high office and real power, on Yang Shou-li, another of Yang Fu-kung's adopted sons, who commanded the most important imperial army near the capital. Yang Shou-li, renamed Li Shun-chieh, was thus at once transformed from Yang Fu-kung's main supporter to his principal adversary.[134] Yang Fu-kung subsequently fled from the capital and rallied support from some of the powerful military governors whom he had previously adopted as his sons, but they were defeated (in 892) in a campaign mounted from Kuan-chung by the military governors Li Mao-chen and Wang Hsing-yü. Yang Fu-kung fled to an estate he owned in T'ai-yüan (Shansi), but was captured by Wang Hsing-yü's soldiers who brought him back to the capital where he was executed. His defeat and execution was the most serious set-back suffered by the eunuchs in many decades.

As he struggled to regain control of his court, Chao-tsung also became drawn into hostilities with Li K'o-yung, the Sha-t'o Turk whose family had rendered such notable assistance to the dynasty during the P'ang Hsün and Huang Ch'ao rebellions. The motives for the campaign against Li K'o-yung were complex. First, there was real apprehension both in the provinces and at court about the ultimate aims of the Sha-t'o Turks. Their

[132] *TCTC* 257, p. 8376; Yang Fu-kung has biographies in *CTS* 184, pp. 4774–5; *HTS* 208, pp. 5889–92.

[133] *CTS* 174, p. 4775; *TCTC* 259, p. 8446 for an expression of provincial contempt for the court.

[134] *TCTC* 258, p. 8391.

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service to the dynasty had been gained only by permitting them to occupy large parts of Shansi, from which they could threaten Kuan-chung, Honan and Ho-pei. There was widespread fear of the Turks in many parts of north China, and this presented the court with a unique opportunity to take the initiative and organize a broadly supported campaign against them, to give a display of imperial leadership and even to regain for the court control of territory outside Kuan-chung. That Li K'o-yung was the T'ang's most powerful and dependable ally seems not to have mattered to the court.

The main proponents of the plan, the chief ministers Chang Chün and K'ung Wei, had a selfish political motive, for they hoped that a victory would enhance their own strength and permit them to extirpate totally the eunuchs at court and end eunuch control over the imperial armies. The decision to mount a campaign against Li K'o-yung was reached only after a meeting of all high-ranking officials, most of whom, including the chief ministers Liu Ch'ung-wang and Tu Jang-neng, opposed the plan.[135] In spite of this opposition the emperor, although with considerable trepidation, approved the scheme. Active provincial support for the campaign was assured from Li K'o-yung's rival Chu Wen, the military governor of Hsüan-wu (Ho-nan), and from Li K'uang-wei, the military governor of Lu-lung in the far north-east.

Mobilization began in the fourth month of 890, when nearly a hundred thousand soldiers were recruited from the metropolitan area. In the next month the chief minister Chang Chün set out from Ch'ang-an with some fifty thousand troops. In the sixth month the government army reached Chin-chou in central Shansi, where it was joined by forces sent from Hsüan-wu by Chu Wen. Conflict broke out almost at once between Chu Wen, who wanted to use the campaign to gain control of south-eastern Shansi for himself, and the government troops, who wanted Chu Wen's military assistance against the Turks but were at the same time anxious to prevent him from extending his own territory. The campaign got off to a bad start. One of the T'ang commanders was captured by the Turks in eastern Shansi, and killed after defiantly refusing Li K'o-yung's offer of an appointment in his own province of Ho-tung. Chu Wen's forces suffered a major defeat at Tse-chou, at the hands of one of Li K'o-yung's allies.

The principal danger to Li K'o-yung came not from the forces from Kuan-chung or Ho-nan, but from the north, where Li K'uang-wei, governor of Lu-lung, and the T'u-yü-hun leader Ho-lien To, who controlled the northern border region of Shansi, were allied against him.[136]

[135] *TCTC* 258, p. 8396.

[136] *TCTC* 258, pp. 8404–5; on the T'u-yü-hun and their leader Ho-lien To, see Molè, *The T'u-yü-hun*, pp. 191–219, *passim*.

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After an initial defeat, Li K'o-yung sent an army against them under his son Li Ssu-yüan, and followed closely with relief forces. Within the month, he had defeated Li K'uang-wei and Ho-lien To and secured his northern border. The T'ang forces had meanwhile suffered defeats in central Shansi, and most of the contingents from Kuan-chung had fled. The remainder, still under the command of Chang Chün, were forced to take refuge in the city of Chin-chou, and escaped only after the Sha-t'o commander voluntarily abandoned his siege of the city and retreated. The government troops fled from Shansi in disarray, an ignominious end to an ill-fated and quite unnecessary campaign.

The 890 campaign against Li K'o-yung was the T'ang court's last active intervention outside the capital region. From that time until the fall of the dynasty, the government was fully engaged in resisting the increasingly aggressive and hostile military governors who surrounded Ch'ang-an. The court itself continued to be racked by internal struggles. In the twelfth month of 891 the top eunuch generals of the Shen-ts'e Army assassinated Li Shun-chieh, formerly the adoptive son of Yang Fu-kung, out of fear that he was planning to take personal control of the army, and possibly of the government itself. By the middle of 893 Chao-tsung was considering circumventing his unreliable generals by giving commands to the imperial princes.[137]

By 893 the court's most immediate and formidable adversary was Li Mao-chen, military governor of Feng-hsiang since 887, whose power in western Kuan-chung was growing rapidly. He held the weakened court in great contempt, both for the failure of its ill-conceived campaign against Li K'o-yung, and for its inability to rid itself of eunuch influence. In a letter to the emperor in the seventh month of 893, Li taunted him with the court's vulnerability to a military rising, ending by asking, sarcastically, where the emperor would go into exile this time.[138] The emperor furiously organized a punitive force, under the command of the heir apparent, to attack the arrogant Li Mao-chen, but the result was an easy victory for the battle-hardened forces of Feng-hsiang over the government's young and untrained recruits. To complete the court's humiliation, Li Mao-chen insisted on the execution of three of the senior eunuchs, and of the chief minister Tu Jang-neng, whom he blamed for the decision to attack Feng-hsiang. The emperor was powerless to refuse, and Tu Jang-neng and his younger brother were forced to commit suicide. Li Mao-chen was then formally confirmed as military governor of Shan-nan West, official recognition of the fact that he now controlled more than fifteen prefectures in western Kuan-chung and Shan-nan.

[137] *TCTC* 258, p. 8409, and 259, p. 8445. [138] *TCTC* 259, p. 8446.

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By 894 the T'ang dynasty was clearly living on borrowed time. Chao-tsung continued to carry out his formal duties as emperor, but his appointments of new chief ministers were no longer to be taken seriously, to judge by his promotion of the bibulous poet Cheng Ch'i and the prose master Li Hsi in 894. The military governors Li Mao-chen and Wang Hsing-yü (military governor of Pin-Ning) constantly sought to destroy the last vestiges of imperial independence, abetted by the chief minister Ts'ui Chao-wei, who reported all the affairs of the court to them. There was an attempt early in 895 to put imperial princes in command of troops to suppress banditry around the capital, but even this was prevented by the officials, who feared that such a step might lead to intervention by the armies from Feng-hsiang and Pin-Ning.[139]

Chao-tsung was very nearly deposed in 895 by an alliance of the three most powerful military governors of Kuan-chung – Li Mao-chen, Wang Hsing-yü and Han Chien – and survived only because of the intervention of the Sha-t'o leader Li K'o-yung, who continued to fear the establishment of a strong and united force in Kuan-chung. Turkish troops fought their way into Kuan-chung as Li Mao-chen and Wang Hsing-yü argued over which of them would take control of the emperor. To intensify the crisis, fighting broke out among the remaining imperial forces, during which Chao-tsung was nearly killed. He finally managed to get together a small bodyguard, and fled towards the Chin-ling mountains, taking refuge first in a Buddhist temple, then in a small garrison town. After narrowly escaping capture by local troops, he was once again saved by Li K'o-yung, who provided an escort back to the capital. The palaces of Ch'ang-an were by this time so badly damaged that the emperor had to stay in the Department of State Affairs, attended by only a few remaining officials. Li K'o-yung was rewarded by the gift of the most exquisite beauty from the imperial harem; and he himself, his allies and descendants were all granted noble titles, one of the few functions remaining for the T'ang court.

In the twelfth month of 895, Li K'o-yung left the capital and returned to Ho-tung, having been persuaded that his prolonged presence in Kuan-chung might unduly alarm the people. His departure was also encouraged by a 'gift' of some three million strings of cash for his troops. But Li was far more concerned with Chu Wen's possible expansion into Ho-tung than he was with affairs in Kuan-chung and was therefore anxious to return to his own capital; less than a month later he was engaged in bitter fighting with Chu Wen.

As soon as Li K'o-yung left the capital region, Li Mao-chen continued his expansion, taking three prefectures in Ho-hsi (Kansu) in the twelfth

[139] *TCTC* 260, pp. 8466–7.

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month of 895, and naming one of his own officers as military governor of Ho-hsi, an unprecedented, but not surprising, usurpation of the imperial prerogative.

Provincial interference in court affairs became even more intense after 895. Chu Wen sought to have Chang Chün, who had led the unsuccessful campaign against Li K'o-yung in 890, appointed as chief minister, presumably in the hope that he would again mobilize troops from Kuan-chung against Li K'o-yung. But the idea was quickly abandoned when Li K'o-yung threatened to attack Ch'ang-an if Chang Chün were appointed. Further factional struggles led to the death of the chief minister Ts'ui Chao-wei in the fifth month of 895, when eunuchs, who had formed close alliances with the Kuan-chung military governors and in particular with Li Mao-chen, arranged for his execution because of his constant efforts to induce Chu Wen to intervene and rescue the court from the military governors' dominance. Chao-tsung was again forced to put imperial princes in command of loyalist forces, but this at once caused Li Mao-chen to move his troops towards the capital. The people at Ch'ang-an feared the worst, and fled into the hills outside the city. The imperial troops were easily defeated in a brief battle, and Chao-tsung, more desperate than ever, decided to flee to Ho-tung and seek the protection of Li K'o-yung.[140]

As he set out for Ho-tung, Chao-tsung was intercepted by the son of Han Chien, the prefect of Hua-chou, whose territory lay between the capital and Ho-tung. Han attempted to persuade the emperor to accept his father's protection at Hua-chou. Chao-tsung was at first unwilling but was finally persuaded by Han Chien himself, who met the emperor at Fu-p'ing and warned him that if he went into 'the border region' of Ho-tung and surrendered himself to the Turks he would never again return to the capital; if he remained in Kuan-chung, there was still hope of a dynastic recovery. The threat behind Han Chien's advice to the emperor was unmistakable, and Chao-tsung arrived in Hua-chou on the seventeenth day of the seventh month of 896.

Those among Chao-tsung's ministers who accompanied him there were under no illusions about the real nature of Han Chien's 'protection' of the emperor, and were careful to consult Han before conducting any court business. Han sent out a proclamation to the provinces ordering them, on the emperor's behalf, to send provisions to Hua-chou. This order was received with scorn by the nearby governors, who regarded Han Chien's crude manipulation of the emperor with open contempt. Early in the following year, Han took further steps to cripple the court, and to reduce the emperor to a helpless puppet. In the first month of 897, he informed

140 *TCTC* 260, pp. 8489–91.

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Chao-tsung that he had discovered an assassination plot directed against himself by the imperial princes who still had troops under their command and who, he claimed, planned to move the emperor east into Ho-chung; it is of course quite likely that such a plan had been devised. Han ordered the princes back to Ch'ang-an, placing their troops under his own command. Furthermore, he prohibited Chao-tsung from having contact with any outsider, lest he became 'confused'.[141]

In the sixth month of 897 Li K'o-yung attempted to organize forces to rescue the emperor from his virtual captivity, but could find little support. The next month Han Chien decided to take even more drastic steps against the imperial princes in Ch'ang-an. Blaming all the difficulties between the emperor and the Kuan-chung military governors upon them and their control of imperial troops, he decided to kill the princes. With the aid of the eunuch Liu Chi-shu, who hoped to gain advantage for himself by assisting Han Chien, in the eighth month of 897 Han's troops surrounded the imperial compound. Some of the princes shaved their heads pretending to be monks and others tried desperately to escape, but eleven were captured and killed.

The situation changed significantly at the beginning of 898, as the Kuan-chung governors grew increasingly apprehensive of the expanding power of Chu Wen to the east, especially after Chu took Lo-yang and invited the emperor to go there. This led to a temporary alliance between Li Mao-chen, Han Chien and Li K'o-yung, who decided to move the emperor back to Ch'ang-an rather than let him fall into the hands of Chu Wen. Chao-tsung thus returned to Ch'ang-an in the eighth month of 898 and to celebrate the occasion declared a new reign period, called 'Radiant Transformation' (Kuang-hua).

Once back in Ch'ang-an, the old struggle between the eunuchs and officials created yet another crisis. The chief minister Ts'ui Yin plotted with the emperor to rid the court of eunuchs, especially their leaders, the hated imperial secretaries Sung Tao-pi and Ching Wu-hsiu. The eunuchs allied themselves with Kuan-chung governors, while Ts'ui Yin gained the support of Chu Wen, whose influence was growing in Kuan-chung, after he had extended his personal territory to the very border of that province in 899. The atmosphere of intrigue at court that Ts'ui had done so much to promote led to his own brief dismissal, but he was restored through Chu Wen's intervention and succeeded in the sixth month of 900 in bringing about the banishment and forced suicide of a rival chief minister and of the chief eunuchs Sung Tao-pi and Ching Wu-hsiu.[142]

[141] *TCTC* 261, pp. 8497–8.

[142] *TCTC* 262, p. 8530; for a survey of the alliances between eunuchs and military governors during the late T'ang, see Wang Shou-nan, *T'ang-tai huan-kuan ch'üan-shih chih yen-chiu*, p. 47.

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The remaining eunuchs, realizing that their personal and political positions were in great danger as long as Ts'ui Yin was able to exploit Chao-tsung's life-long hatred of them, now reacted by plotting to remove Chao-tsung from the throne and to replace him with the heir apparent. In the eleventh month of 900, the eunuchs carried out their plan, deposing the emperor and confining him in the palace under the strictest guard. The new eunuch-dominated regime carried out savage reprisals against its real or suspected political opponents, who were systematically executed. The only major figure spared was their principal adversary Ts'ui Yin, who still enjoyed Chu Wen's protection. Chu Wen seemed about to intervene at court at the end of 900, and this induced the eunuchs to return control of the court to Ts'ui. Chu was, however, wary of involving himself too deeply in the brutal politics at the court, and refused to take any direct action. The coup against Chao-tsung lasted only a short time, however, as the new regime failed to gain any support. The eunuchs who had carried out the coup were themselves assassinated in the first month of 901; Chao-tsung was freed and restored to the throne. A new reign period was declared, and in celebration of the victory over the eunuchs, Chao-tsung issued a major Act of Grace which included a posthumous pardon for Wang Ya and the other officials executed more than half a century earlier after their abortive attempt to extirpate the eunuchs in the ill-fated Sweet Dew incident.[143]

After 901 court politics deteriorated still further. Hatred and intrigue grew to grotesque proportions between the ministers (led by the chief minister Ts'ui Yin) and the eunuchs, with each side willing to pay any price to damage the other. The only beneficiaries of this situation were the military governors who manipulated both parties. The real question was which governor would prevail, and which court faction would be the last to succumb.

This tragic situation was nearing an end by 903 when Chu Wen, whose armies by then had taken control of most of Kuan-chung, established his own domination over the court and capital. He stationed forces under a nephew to guard the emperor, and appointed his own commissioners to take charge of what was left of the capital. Urged by Ts'ui Yin to kill the eunuchs, but no doubt following his own impulses as well, in the first month of 903 Chu Wen ordered his soldiers to herd several hundred of the remaining eunuchs into the Department of the Inner Palace (Nei-shih sheng), where they were brutally executed.

In the first month of 904, having no reason to remain in Ch'ang-an,

[143] *TCTC* 262, p. 8552; for the text of the Act of Grace, *TTCLC* 5, pp. 31–3. For the execution of Wang Ya and the other ministers after the Sweet Dew incident, see *TCTC* 245, p. 7916.

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Chu Wen moved Chao-tsung to the newly rebuilt eastern capital of Lo-yang, which he controlled. During the journey Chu killed all the emperor's remaining personal retainers. By the eighth month of 904 Chao-tsung himself had been murdered by Chu Wen and replaced by his ninth son, the twelve-year-old Li Chu. Li Chu, who is conventionally known as Ai-ti or Chao-hsüan-ti, was nominal ruler for three years, until in 907 Chu Wen deposed him and established his own Liang dynasty. This last brief reign has no real meaning as a part of T'ang history, and is properly seen as only a stage in the consolidation of power by Chu Wen, a process which we will now describe.

Chu Wen and the beginning of the Five Dynasties

Chu Wen was nearing the peak of his power, which he had carefully and systematically built up over the previous two decades, when he brought Chao-tsung to Lo-yang in 904. Although Chu suffered set-backs on several fronts during the next few years, he remained sufficiently strong in 907 to proclaim the establishment of his own Liang state, after declaring an end to the defunct T'ang dynasty.[144] The Liang (907–23) was the first of a series of shortlived dynasties which dominated north China between the time of the T'ang overthrow in 907 and the founding of the Sung in 960.

In addition to Chu Wen's historical role as the founder of the Liang state, his early life and career illustrate with special clarity the means by which the most important members of the newly-risen political and military elite of the late T'ang period came to power.[145] Chu Wen was born in 852 in Sung-chou (modern Kiangsu province), then part of the Hsüan-wu command. His father and grandfather had been scholars and teachers, but had never received any official appointment. They were, however, important enough in their own locality to have formed marriage ties with one of the more prominent local official families. His father died when Chu was still young, and his mother and brother were forced to take employment on the estate of a landlord in his mother's native county. Even as a boy, Chu Wen displayed his lifelong traits of self-reliance and calculating aggressiveness, and even after he grew up he had no regular profession, but relied on his skill in fighting; he was disliked by many of his fellow villagers.[146]

When the Huang Ch'ao rebellion broke out, Chu Wen and his brothers

[144] *TCTC* 266, p. 8674.
[145] For a discussion of the sources available for Chu Wen's life, see Wang Gungwu, *The structure of power*, p. 27n.
[146] *Pei-meng so-yen*, 17, p. 1a; *CWTS* 1, p. 2a.

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joined the rebel forces. Chu was with Huang Ch'ao when the bandit army swept into Ch'ang-an in 880, and was appointed prefect of T'ung-chou during Huang's occupation of the capital. Sensing Huang Ch'ao's weakness, he surrendered to the loyal forces and was rewarded in 883 with appointment as military governor of his home province in Hsüan-wu.

Chu showed great skill and determination in consolidating his personal control over Hsüan-wu, a province which had a century-long history of instability, mainly caused by the highly independent, and often unmanageable, local garrison. He placed his own personal followers in command of those forces, retaining the hereditary officers only in subordinate positions. More importantly, he, like other military governors of the period, built up a personal guard, or *ya-chün*, as his main force.[147] These *ya-chün* soldiers came from widely varying backgrounds, including regular guardsmen, members of the local elite, peasants, traders, travelling merchants, bandits, criminals and menials of all sorts.[148] Some were selected from the local garrison or conscripted locally, others were surrendered or captured troops. Many appear to have been semi-servile personal retainers of the military governor, and all were personally loyal to him, rather than to the garrison officers. Without them, Chu Wen would have been unable to hold his own province of Hsüan-wu, much less expand beyond its borders. In addition to the *ya-chün* troops, Chu Wen established a special cavalry unit, the military value of such forces having been clearly demonstrated in the numerous successful campaigns of the Sha-t'o Turks. These cavalry soldiers were an elite group, consisting of members of wealthy families who supplied all their own arms, horses and provisions.[149]

During his early years as military governor of Hsüan-wu, Chu Wen faced numerous external threats. After Huang Ch'ao's army had abandoned Ch'ang-an early in 883, it threatened Chu Wen with a major assault, from which he was saved only by the heroic defence of Ch'en-chou and by Huang Ch'ao's decision to commit the bulk of his army to an abortive year-long siege of that city. At the end of 883, Chu Wen was involved in a campaign against Huang's forces at Po-chou, in central Hsüan-wu, and used his victory there to consolidate his control of the area. Chu was,

[147] Important studies of the *ya-chün* during the late T'ang–Five Dynasties period include Sudō Yoshiyuki, 'Godai setsudoshi no yagun ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu – bukyoku to no kanren ni oite', *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 2 (1951) 3–72; Hori Toshikazu, 'Godai Sōsho ni okeru kingun no hatten', *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 4 (1953) 83–151; Kikuchi Kideo, 'Godai kingun ni okeru shingunsei no seiritsu', *Shien*, 70 (1956) 51–77.

[148] See Sudō Yoshiyuki, 'Godai no setsudoshi no shihai taisei', in his *Sōdai keizaishi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1962), p. 576.

[149] For a study of this cavalry regiment, see Hori Toshikazu, 'Shu Zenchū no Chōshito', in *Wada Hakase koki kinen Tōyōshi ronsō* (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 819–31.

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however, wary of wasting too much of his strength fighting Huang Ch'ao. In the first month of 884 he joined with other military governors of the region in requesting the assistance of the Sha-t'o leader Li K'o-yung, who had recently recovered Ch'ang-an from Huang Ch'ao. Huang Ch'ao, as we have seen, was crushed in a final series of battles in the fourth and fifth months of 884 and committed suicide in the sixth month of that year, bringing the rebellion to an end.

Two important events preceding Huang Ch'ao's death had a deep influence on the structure of power in China over the next decades. The first was Chu Wen's cynical attempt to murder Li K'o-yung while the Turkish leader was in Pien-chou. Li managed to escape and return to his own capital in Ho-tung, but this act of treachery helped to harden the mistrust between them.[150] It also exacerbated the existing differences between the Turks and the Chinese military governors. There was already a long history of conflict between them, which was to continue during much of the tenth century.

The second important event during the period just before the end of the rebellion was the surrender of most of Huang Ch'ao's remaining forces to Chu Wen. These troops, the well-trained and battle-hardened core of Huang Ch'ao's otherwise casually organized forces, were integrated into Chu Wen's army and their commanders were appointed as officers under him. They were an extremely important source of support for Chu Wen during the difficult years that lay ahead.[151]

Chu Wen's most formidable adversary during the years immediately following the rebellion was another military governor, Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan, whose career had certain parallels with his own.[152] During the early years of the Huang Ch'ao rebellion, Ch'in had been an officer on the staff of the military governor of Chung-wu. In 880, when Huang Ch'ao crossed to the north of the Yangtze, Ch'in was sent with a force of ten thousand men to hold Ts'ai-chou (formerly the capital of Huai-hsi province), just south of the Chung-wu command and on the southern bank of the Huai River. Because Ch'in carried out his duties so effectively, a military governorship was established for him in Ts'ai-chou, where he remained. Although he was one of the few provincial governors who had sent troops to Ch'ang-an to help relieve the capital during Huang Ch'ao's occupation, he had no hesitation in going over to Huang Ch'ao when his troops attacked Ts'ai-chou in 883. After that, Ch'in joined the bandit gangs in pillaging the countryside and also took part in the siege of

[150] *TCTC* 255, pp. 8306 ff.

[151] Wang, *The structure of power*, pp. 56–7; for an important survey of Chu Wen's power structure, see Hori Toshikazu, 'Shu Zenchū seiken no seikaku', *Sundai shigaku*, 11 (1961) 38–61.

[152] His biographies are in *CTS* 200B, pp. 5398–9; *HTS* 225C, pp. 6464–6.

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Ch'en-chou. Ch'in earned a reputation as one of the most ruthless of all the military and bandit leaders of the late T'ang.

After Huang Ch'ao was crushed, Ch'in attempted to establish a dynasty of his own, and assumed the title of emperor. His troops attacked and raided over an enormous territory in central China, but this probably did more to weaken and fragment his regime than it did to strengthen or consolidate it. Late in 885 he captured Lo-yang and Cheng-chou, which lay just between the eastern capital and Chu Wen's base at Pien-chou. Before the end of 886, Ch'in besieged Pien-chou. Chu Wen responded by making alliances with the leaders of neighbouring prefectures, who feared Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan's forces as well as himself. In the last month of 888, Ch'in was betrayed by one of his own generals who handed him over to Chu Wen for execution, in return for his own appointment as military governor of Ts'ai-chou.[153]

After his victory over Ch'in Tsung-ch'üan, Chu Wen faced no serious adversaries anywhere near to his own territory. Over the next decade and a half he steadily expanded his control over a large region of northern China, and finally established his own Liang state in 907. His success was due in great measure to the skill and determination with which he had trained and moulded his powerful army. But it should also be said that his success owed much to his ruthless cruelty and deviousness, which were second to none even in that brutal time. With his own soldiers he was savage – any unit that lost a battle faced execution. He was totally treacherous and unscrupulous, as Li K'o-yung discovered after barely escaping assassination at his hands. Even would-be allies found Chu extraordinarily ruthless and devious. When Lo Hung-hsin, the military governor of the strategically vital province of Wei-Po, wavered between supporting Li K'o-yung or Chu Wen, Chu settled the issue in 896 by turning over Li K'o-yung's captured son to him for execution.[154] Willing to use any tactic, and in control of a powerful army, Chu could not be challenged by any Chinese governor, though some were able to avoid his domination. The dynasty he founded lasted for less than two decades, however, and was brought down in 923 by the superior strength of China's principal foreign enemy, the Sha-t'o Turks, whose remarkable rise to power in north China must now be outlined.

Li K'o-yung and the foreign occupation of north China

Some Chinese scholars, seeking to explain the collapse of T'ang power, have put great emphasis on the extent to which the T'ang permitted the

153 *TCTC* 257, p. 8382.

154 *TCTC* 260, p. 8489.

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occupation of north China by foreign peoples, mainly from Inner Mongolia.[155] It is, of course, absurd to single this out as the main cause of the T'ang downfall, and it would indeed be easier to show that foreign intervention helped prolong the dynasty's life. But the extent of foreign presence in north China at the end of the T'ang period was still a very significant development.

The situation along the northern border in the late T'ang was extremely complex, and we have only a scanty knowledge of actual conditions and of the patterns in which Chinese and non-Chinese peoples intermingled. We do know, however, that some areas, including Kuan-chung itself, had an extremely large non-Chinese population. Other areas of north China within the Great Wall had come under the full or partial control of foreign warriors, although we have no evidence that this was accompanied by the movement of large numbers of non-Chinese settlers. In terms of sheer ethnic variety, the range of foreign peoples in north China was remarkable. There were resettled T'u-yü-hun and Tanguts, T'ieh-le and Ch'i-pi, Hsien-pei and Uighurs. But most important by far at this time were the Sha-t'o Turks, who had succeeded the Uighurs as the major power in the steppelands of Inner Mongolia and had become a major factor within China proper.

The Sha-t'o Turks first appear in the record during the first decades of T'ang rule, when they were the easternmost tribe of the Western Turks, living far to the west of China proper. Early in the eighth century, Tibetan attacks pushed them north to the region near Lake Balkash. By the mid-eighth century the Sha-t'o had become subjects of the Uighurs, and sent troops with the Uighur forces which assisted the T'ang against the An Lu-shan rebels. Late in the 780s they again changed their allegiance, some 7,000 of their 'tents' moving over to Tibetan control. They often joined in Tibetan forays into Chinese territory, and many of them settled in central Kansu. However, serious discord developed with the Tibetans, and in 808, 30,000 Sha-t'o decided to surrender to the Chinese. The Tibetans pursued and killed many of them but nearly 10,000 were settled in Yen-chou (central Kuan-chung) by Fan Hsi-ch'ao, the military governor of Ling-chou, and a smaller group of 700 settled in Chen-wu, the Ordos Desert region to the north of Kuan-chung. When in 809 Fan Hsi-ch'ao was sent to garrison T'ai-yüan he took with him 1,200 Sha-t'o soldiers who played a major role in his successful campaigns against Wang Ch'eng-tsung, the military governor of Ch'eng-te, in 816. Another small group was placed under the control of the military governor of Chung-wu, in

155 See esp. Liu Shan-li, 'T'ang-tai fan-chen chih-huo k'o-wei wei ti-san-tz'u i-tsu luan-Hua', pp. 821–58.

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Ho-nan, and was used in the vital and successful Huai-hsi campaign of 817; its fate after that is obscure.[156]

The bulk of the Sha-t'o Turks, however, were not involved in these early campaigns in the interior of China, but remained in northern Shansi. In the campaigns against P'ang Hsün in 869 they played a vital role, and the T'ang subsequently adopted their leader Chu-yeh Ch'ih-hsin into the imperial family. Known afterwards as Li Kuo-ch'ang, the Sha-t'o leader continued to consolidate his control in northern Shansi during the 870s and early 880s. The T'ang soon grew apprehensive over the possibility of a Sha-t'o invasion, and strengthened their own defences in central Shansi, using both regular troops and militia forces. From 878–80 they dispatched six successive military governors to T'ai-yüan, none of whom had any success in containing the Sha-t'o incursions. In 880 the dynasty finally sent to T'ai-yüan a former chief minister with a hand-picked team of officials as well as military reinforcements from Lo-yang, and by the middle of 880 the Chinese succeeded in re-establishing control of the Shansi border region. Within a short while, however, the court was forced to grant pardons to the Turkish leaders in order to obtain their support to recover the capital from Huang Ch'ao and to assist in the final campaign against him.

The Sha-t'o leader in the campaigns against Huang Ch'ao was Li K'o-yung, the son of Li Kuo-ch'ang. He had earlier taken part in the fighting against P'ang Hsün, had spent some time in the T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an and in 887 was appointed deputy commander of his father's Sha-t'o forces.[157] He soon tightened his control of the northern border until the Chinese were forced to strengthen their defences against his encroachments.

In spite of Li K'o-yung's numerous successful campaigns against Huang Ch'ao, he does not seem to have sought any territory beyond what he already held. This is not surprising, since his base area in Ho-tung was easily defensible, and an ideal base in which to establish an independent regime during a period of political decentralization and endemic warfare. Li easily staved off the campaign mounted against him by the government in 890, and his power increased steadily over the next decade, keeping pace with the growing power of his rival Chu Wen. In 895 he was able to appoint his own candidate as military governor of Lu-lung province in northern Ho-pei, and for a time regularly exacted taxes from that productive region.[158] A decade later, in 905, Li K'o-yung made a very

[156] For a good account of Sha-t'o movements during the early and middle T'ang, see Chang Ch'ün, 'T'ang-tai hsiang-hu an-chih k'ao', *Hsin-Ya Hsüeh-pao*, 1.1 (1955) 311–12.

[157] For details, see Molè, *The T'u-yü-hun*, p. 196 n.

[158] See *TCTC* 261, p. 8505.

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important alliance with the Khitan leader A-pao-chi, who came from his homeland in Manchuria to northern Shansi with an army of seventy thousand horsemen.[159] This alliance marked the beginning of the close ties between the Sha-t'o Turks and the Khitan that lasted throughout the Five Dynasties period, and led to an increasing involvement of the peoples of southern Manchuria in Chinese affairs.

The strength of the Sha-t'o Turks continued to grow during the first decades of the tenth century. After many years of fighting, they succeeded in conquering Chu Wen's state of Liang, and established their own Later T'ang dynasty, which claimed legitimacy as a successor state to the T'ang, many of whose policies they adopted. The Later T'ang ruled for only little more than a decade, until 937, but during that time it succeeded in establishing control over the whole of north and west China, conquering the independent states of Ch'i (western Kuan-chung) and Shu (Szechwan), which had remained independent of Chu Wen's control. Its state thus marks a particularly significant stage in the consolidation of power in north China, and was an important step in the unification process completed by the Sung. After the collapse of their Later T'ang dynasty, the Sha-t'o continued to maintain an independent existence in Shansi as the state of Northern Han, one of the Ten Kingdoms. This area was not recovered by the Chinese until 979, after more than a century of Turkish domination.

Independent states of the tenth century: the Ten Kingdoms

Regional divisions and cultural variation, always an important part of Chinese history, are never so apparent as in a period of extreme political fragmentation such as the late T'ang. Lines of division in north China appear with unusual clarity in the long decades of struggle between the Turkish rulers of Shansi and the Chinese military governors of Ho-pei and Ho-nan. Though these two groups were the principal contenders for power during the late ninth and early tenth centuries their struggles did not take place in isolation. Elsewhere in China, the collapse of T'ang authority led to the formation of regional states, each with its own cultural and historical identity, all of which played an important role in spanning the transition from the late T'ang to the Sung.

The best known and most enduring of these independent states appeared in central and south China, and are known collectively as the

[159] For a detailed study of the alliance between Li K'o-yung and A-pao-chi, see Ch'en Shu, 'A-pao-chi yü Li K'o-yung meng-chieh hsiung-ti chih nien chi chi pei-meng hsiang-kung chih t'ui-tse', *CYYY*, 7.1 (1936) 79–88.

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Ten Kingdoms. The first emerged in the Lower Yangtze delta and south-eastern coastal region, where the first major anti-dynastic rebellions had broken out in the late 850s. Tung Ch'ang's shortlived state of Lo-p'ing, which rested on a consolidation of local militia forces organized to suppress banditry in the region of Hang-chou (see above, pages 753–4), was the first of these. It was succeeded in 921, as we have seen, by the state of Wu-Yüeh, founded by the gang-leader turned militia commander Ch'ien Liu, who consolidated control over most of Chekiang. To the north and west was the rich and prosperous state of Wu, founded in 902 by Yang Hsing-mi, 'a man risen from nowhere', based directly on the regime established in Huai-nan by the T'ang general Kao P'ien. The state of Wu eventually covered an immense territory, centred in the Lower Yangtze delta but extending far to the north and south.[160]

The state of Min was given formal shape only in 926, but its rulers already had *de facto* control of Fukien as early as 893, and Fukien enjoyed a rich and varied culture under the Min during the first half of the tenth century.[161] Along the south China coast Liu Yin, a local warlord, took control of Canton in 896. In 918, his son Liu Yen declared the establishment of the state of Southern Han, whose territory covered most of the T'ang province of Ling-nan. For several decades the Southern Han state grew increasingly wealthy and expansionist, but around mid-century it was weakened by a series of brutal and corrupt rulers, and proved no match for the Sung armies, which captured Canton in 971.[162]

These regional states of the south are important in the local histories of the areas they ruled, and occupy a prominent place on the map of China in the years preceding and following the formal termination of T'ang rule in 907. One other state is, however, of greater immediate interest to this study, as its history is even more directly related to the precise circumstances of the T'ang collapse. This was the state of (Former) Shu, established in Szechwan in 907 by Wang Chien, whose career is surely one of the most extraordinary of the period.[163] A man of commanding appearance, Wang began as a village thief – a never-forgotten fact – then enlisted as a soldier in one of the important military commands in northern China

160 See Robert J. Krompart, 'The southern restoration of T'ang: counsel, policy and para-history in the stabilization of the Chiang-Huai region, 887–943', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1973, p. 54, *passim*.

161 See E. H. Schafer, *The empire of Min* (Rutland, Vermont, 1954).

162 On the state of Southern Han, see E. H. Schafer, 'The history of the empire of Southern Han, according to chapter 65 of the *Wu Tai Shih* of Ou-yang Hsiu', *Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zimbun-Kagaku-Kenkyūsyo* (Kyoto, 1954), pp. 339–69.

163 For a useful sketch in English of his career, see Feng Han-i, 'Discovery and excavation of the Yung-ling, the royal tomb of Wang Chien (847–918 AD), *Archives of the Chinese Arts Society of America*, 2 (1947) 11–20.

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and was eventually adopted by the powerful eunuch T'ien Ling-tz'u. After T'ien was dismissed during Hsi-tsung's second exile, Wang was in 889 appointed military governor of Hsi-ch'uan (western Szechwan) and by 901 was virtually an independent ruler, with his capital at Ch'eng-tu. His regime was in numerous ways an extension and continuation of T'ang rule on a regional basis. He was assisted by many T'ang officials, most notably the famous poet Wei Chuang, who devised a formal system of administration and ritual based on that of T'ang.[164] At Wang Chien's capital of Ch'eng-tu he attempted, on a small scale, to imitate the great T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an, and many of the city wards were even given the same names. Wang's legitimist regime in Szechwan became a great refuge for artists and poets, not to mention members of the T'ang official class who were able to escape the brutal fighting taking place in the north. His regime was one of the most stable and peaceful of these years.

The Ten Kingdoms forms the final part of our picture of the new structure of power in late T'ang China. Though none of those states had any chance of establishing a centralizing dynasty, all played an important part in the process of political consolidation completed by the Sung. Between 885 and 907 some fifty provincial regimes had been consolidated into a dozen regional states.

The importance of the Ten Kingdoms goes beyond matters of political consolidation, however. Much of the distinctive character of Sung China – the accelerating economic progress of the Yangtze delta, the rich sea-going trade along the south China coast, the new class of literati so heavily concentrated in the south-east – derived from the half-century of peace and stability achieved by the rulers of the Ten Kingdoms.

If many of the distinctive features of Sung China are linked with the Ten Kingdoms, others are tied to developments in north China, which we have traced earlier. The eclipse of north-west China as a political centre, which was at least partly due to the debilitating, endless conflict of the last decades of T'ang rule, was never reversed under the Sung. The political and military foundations of Sung imperial power were laid well before the formal termination of T'ang rule, and were largely completed by Chu Wen and his successors. Finally, the constant and ultimately overwhelming foreign threats that afflicted Sung rule clearly have their origin in the military weakness of the late T'ang, which permitted large and crucial areas of north China to be effectively lost to Chinese control for many decades.

[164] See Chang Ts'ung-p'ing, *Wei Tuan-chi shih chiao-chu* (Taipei, 1969), p. 2.

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