A POLITICAL INTERPRETATION OF
CHINESE REBELLIONS AND REVOLUTIONS

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Rebellions and revolutions in Chinese history, according to Mencius, have followed a definite cycle. Mencius has a saying, "Now a period of good order and now a period of confusion," which reflected, even in the third century B.C., his developed theory of evolution.

It is my tentative thesis that these cyclical Chinese rebellions and revolutions were usually caused primarily by corrupt government. Corrupt government implies a loss of its original soundness, integrity, or purity. Instead of working for the welfare of the people, security for the nation, etc., the government neglects its duties, abuses public funds, accepts briberies, weakens the security measures of the nation, causes people trouble, increases their financial burden, and makes their lives unbearable. Any extreme cases of these examples may result in a disaster. Many people tend to insist upon an economic interpretation of history, but we have observed that an efficient government and good leadership may assist people to overcome economic and other difficulties and galvanize a country into vigorous action; on the other hand, a corrupt government with bad leadership always abuses natural and human resources, and, consequently, is more likely to irritate the people eventually into subversive action.

A Chinese proverb says that he who is successful in a revolt becomes a king; he who fails in such an attempt becomes a bandit. From this proverb we can see that a revolution is nothing but a successful rebellion. Both, however, may be taken to mean a concerted movement of the ruled against the rulers. They represent, inter alia, the political failure of a government or the general failure of a social system. A revolution does not actually occur unless the state has become a barrier to change; it may become such a barrier if its own form fails in some way to adjust to the society it is supposed to serve.

The period leading up to a revolution is marked by an increasing inability at the top to maintain the status quo and by a growing unwillingness at the bottom to tolerate it. Revolutions are often preceded by public calamities which serve to spread and to intensify revolutionary tendencies. The approach of a revolution is heralded by the growing restiveness of the masses and by
increasingly frequent outbursts of violence on a local scale. Lack of food is one cause of such riots; threats to survival, such as arbitrary executions, mass murders, and wars, form another. Restrictions of the people’s freedom through political and military pressure erupt in a vengeful outbreak of public indignation when the government becomes corrupt and its military forces disloyal.

Since ancient times, China has been primarily an agricultural society. This society has been ruled by nearly thirty dynasties, established by an official of the preceding dynasty, by a commoner through the process of revolution, or by a foreign conqueror. At the beginning or during the first two or three generations of a dynasty, the emperors, having grown up among the people, understood their social and economic condition, frugal, energetic, and enlightened. But the emperors of the later generations were raised in the palace, among eunuchs and beautiful women; they remained in ignorance of what was going on in the vast nation under their rule. Placed on a throne of immense power, they proved themselves generally licentious, wavering, inactive, and inept in state affairs. Under such weak rulers most of the ministers and officials were sycophants, who could read the minds of the emperors; they used the emperor as a pawn to maintain or improve their own positions. They rarely missed an opportunity to extort funds from the public; they sold government positions and they imitated their emperor in enjoying themselves at the taxpayers’ expense. The officials at the same time owned much land, but usually, on account of their personal influence, paid little tax to the government. Their tenants had to pay high rents, and even in times of plenty, they had to work hard for a meager subsistence; in time of dearth, famine, and high rents, they often were reduced to vagrancy.

When a government was efficient, irrigation and water conservation were well attended to, famine and other catastrophes were prevented or relieved. When the emperors and their officials were corrupt, they neglected public works; crumbling dikes went unrepaired, public granaries were mis-appropriated or unkept. Floods were frequent, and the Yellow River, spilling from its bed above the surrounding land, often made thousands of people homeless. Lacking positive governmental care, these thousands were driven to vagrancy and brigandage.

The whole political, military, and economic machinery is impaired under an incompetent government. When a government is extremely weak and the political system incompatible with its society, small riots can develop into large-scale rebellions and revolutions. In China these usually occurred near the end of a dynasty. Each dynasty passed into a period of decline after a few generations of prosperity and its eventual fall completed the cycle of
peace and war depicted by Mencius. In this way, bad government, at least in China, may be said to be one of the major causes of revolution or rebellion.

The characteristic pattern of Chinese revolution may be illustrated by a number of historical cases from early times. To begin with, the pattern may be seen in one particular attack upon the government of the tyrannical Emperor Ch’iu Shih-huang and his son Erh-shih. This revolution in 209-206 B.C. is always associated with three heroes: Ch’en She 陳涉, a farmer of southern Honan; Liu Pang 劉邦, a minor government officer in northern Kiangsu; and Hsiang Yu 项羽, a nobleman of K’uai-chi in modern Chekiang. Agitated by these courageous men, the great masses of pauperized peasants killed the local officials of the Ch’in dynasty. When Liu Pang became the founder of the Han dynasty, he and his associates had completed the first successful plebian revolution in Chinese history. The causes of the revolt, vividly described by the famous classical historians Ssu-ma Ch’ien 司馬遷 and Pan Ku 龐樸, were despotic government, unjust laws, excessive taxation, and incessant corvée. ¹

Students of Chinese history sometimes tend either to follow original sources uncritically or to interpret eloquently without much regard to original sources. We intend to use both primary sources and new studies, although, on account of limited space, neither can be exhaustive.

The above uprising was the prototype for a comparable action in or before A.D. 18 when, after a long period of peace and prosperity, the “Red-eyebrowed bandits” became active in Shantung and eventually caused the death of Wang Mang 王莽, a usurper of the Chinese empire from A.D. 9 to 23. The reason for the Red Eyebrows’ rebellion or for Wang Mang’s fall has been variously analyzed. ² The newest theory is painstakingly formed by Hans Bielenstein, who concludes that “the ultimate reason for the fall of Wang Mang was the change of the course of the Yellow River.”³ Hans Bielenstein’s careful study, “The Restoration of the Han Dynasty” is remarkable; his conclusion, however, deserves re-examination and reconsideration. This case study may serve as an illustration of a political interpretation of Chinese rebellion. From primary sources ⁴ Wang Mang’s failure can be clearly seen through his political actions. A few months after he became acting emperor, in A.D. 6, a member of the imperial family, Liu Ch’ung 劉崇, rebelled against him, because he was going to take the throne from the Liu family. In the following year Governor Chai I 賴義 rebelled against him and made Liu Hsin 劉信 emperor. After suppressing the two rebellions, Wang Mang made himself emperor in A.D. 9. A few months later Marquis Liu K’uai of Hsiu-hsiang (徐讬侯劉快) in modern Shantung made an attempt, with several thousand followers, to get rid of Wang Mang, but
again this attempt was abortive.

Wang Mang initiated a series of reforms. He declared the abolition of slavery, and nationalization of land and gold. The land confiscated by the state was to be divided into equal lots. Peasants were allowed to work on it and to borrow capital from the government at a low interest. He reinforced the imperial monopolies on salt, iron, wine, coinage, and products of mountains and marshes. He reorganized the currency and introduced new currencies. He also attempted an official control of prices and regulated the salary of public servants. These well-intended reforms were poorly executed by local officials. Heavy penalties were imposed upon objectors to Wang Mang’s reform measures. Many of the gentry class were thus punished, merchants suffered from the depressed currency, and peasants were impoverished by avaricious government executives. In addition, Wang Mang started a foreign war against the Hsiung-nu. The officers on the Chinese frontiers were particularly unprincipled. They took this war as an opportunity to draft the people and collect taxes and provisions so harshly that many residents deserted their cities or towns to become bandits.³

At this time (A.D. 11) the Yellow River broke its dikes in the Wei commandery and flowed into the Huai River. This catastrophe was at least partly caused by the government’s negligence in not repairing the dikes. Formerly Wang Mang was afraid that a dike might break at the spot where his ancestral tombs would be submerged. When that spot was out of the danger, he paid no more attention to dike repairing.⁴ This big event, the changing of the Yellow River course, is briefly narrated in the dynastic histories. If the change of the river course were the chief reason for Wang Mang’s fall, as Hans Bielenstein tried to prove, he should have had serious trouble with the displaced people in the several years following the break in A.D. 11. Curiously enough stability and peace prevailed, as Hans Bielenstein says, “From A.D. 10 to 19 not a single attempt was undertaken to overthrow him” (p. 155). In the meantime, Wang Mang discussed day and night with his courtiers his reform movement and his restoration of ancient political and social systems based especially on the pseudoancient classics, Chou-li. He paid little attention to the urgent needs of the people, whom he allowed to be preyed upon by avaricious officials. Many alleged law-breakers were imprisoned for years without any examination or sentence, and for years many vacant government posts were not filled by formal appointments; their duties were simply taken over by minor officials. These petty officials became greedier and harsher to the people, with no restriction from their superiors. Lacking a regular salary, they depended on bribery for self-maintenance. Both the rich and poor became
their victims. The poor, unable to make a living, became vagrants and bandits, hiding themselves among mountains and rivers. Unable to arrest them, the local officials would not report their existence to high officials until the bandit actions became very serious. An example of direct reaction against severe government punishment is found in A.D. 17 when Mrs. Lu of Lang-ya in Shantung started an uprising. Formerly Mrs. Lu's son, a petty district official, was unjustly executed by a magistrate for a minor offense. The mother liquidated her large properties and used them for buying weapons, clothes, and wine which she gave to young people without charge. By this means she gathered more than a hundred men, attacked the city, Hai-ch'ü, and killed the magistrate as a sacrifice to her son's tomb. She then led her soldiers to the sea coast, and soon after her followers numbered about ten thousand.⁸

Similar rebellions also broke out in Honan and Hupeh. Some of the rebels were arrested and questioned as to why they became bandits. They answered:

We are sick and tired of severe laws and minute prohibitions which forbid us from doing anything; our earnings from hard work were insufficient for paying tributes and taxes. If we sit at home we may be accused by our neighbors for secretly counterfeiting coins and keeping copper so as to give malicious officials an opportunity to prey upon us.⁹

Under these conditions the bandits in A.D. 18 painted their eyebrows red, to consolidate and distinguish themselves from government troops, and carried on an open life and death struggle against governmental misrule. Instead of working to lessen the hardships of the people, Wang Mang, in A.D. 20, abused his financial and human resources in building temples and palaces, decorating them with gold, silver, and precious stones, and exhausting all treasuries and craftsmanship. Such work cost several million ounces of gold and more than ten thousand lives of forced laborers.¹⁰ The hard-driven people were even more determined to join bandits whose sphere of activities was no longer limited to Shantung and Honan, but extended to a large part of eastern and southern China. Finally Wang Mang realized his own mistakes; he rescinded all his administrative orders which were "inconvenient to the people," and raised the ban on land and slave possessions in A.D. 12 and abolished the six monopolies, in A.D. 22.¹¹ Unfortunately it was too late, for he was killed by the rebels on October 6, 23.

In view of the above facts the fall of Wang Mang was evidently caused by his corrupt government and poorly executed laws, which incurred objection from the gentry and merchant classes who led the hungry people in getting rid of him. Wang's usurpation of the throne from the Liu family hurt the feelings, security, and pride of the members of the imperial clan. His attempt
at the abolition of large land and slave holding antagonized the gentry. The repeated currency reforms netted a profit for the government but were disastrous to merchants. His foreign warfare, the floods, famines, and the change of the course of the Yellow River undoubtedly aggravated the political and economic situations and worsened the lives of the people; but the change of the river course is not "the ultimate reason for the fall of Wang Mang." While I respect Hans Bielenstein's careful study of the Wang Mang period, I regret I cannot entirely agree with his conclusion.

The Red Eyebrows were led by Fan Ch'ung 奔競, a native of Shantung, and Wang Lang 王朗, a disappointed scholar of Honan. They failed, too, because of a great famine which left the people without food; and the rebels led by the descendents of the Han Dynasty secured better leadership and support of the gentry class. Finally in A.D. 24 Liu Hsiu 劉秀 became the emperor of the Later Han Dynasty. Within a few years he suppressed the Red Eyebrows.

China was peaceful again from the A.D. 30's until near the end of the second century when the government fell once more into the cycle of decline and corrosion. Most of the emperors were ignorant teenagers. They lived in luxurious courts, surrounded by a large number of wives and concubines. These girls were necessarily waited upon by a great army of eunuchs who served as the eyes and ears of the emperor, and hence they could influence or control him. Theoretically the emperor steers the wheel of the empire; practically, in the middle of the second century, the emperors cared less for state affairs than for their personal enjoyments. The eunuchs allied themselves with some imperial concubines as a political faction in fighting against the other faction—the scholar-officials, including state ministers and courtiers. Unable to match the power of the eunuchs, some of the scholar-official partisans were imprisoned. The emperor was not able to stand on his own feet in facing political affairs in which he took little interest. What interested him most was to get an enormous amount of money for his court life. Beginning in 178, Emperor Ling opened a special office at the West Quarter (Hsi-ti 西第) of the palace for the sale of official posts and set up a price scale for different ranks. "He secretly ordered his left-and right-hand men) to sell high ranks, a duke for ten million coins, and a ch'ing or minister for five million." With this money he built (in 180) large parks with swimming pools and fishing ponds. He established markets in his harem, where he allowed himself and many girls to dress like merchants and to bargain with each other, drinking and joking. He raised numerous dogs, granting them official ranks and costumes for racing in his parks. He was fond of driving a cart pulled by four donkeys; the nobles
imitated this way of amusement as a fashion. He built in 182 a pavilion five hundred feet high; and in 185 his south palace was burned, the fire lasting for half a month—good administrative efficiency! He desired to rebuild it at once, but without money. The eunuch Chang Jang 蕃護 suggested a charge of an additional land tax at ten coins per mou throughout the empire for the reconstruction funds. On top of this the people were ordered to contribute lumber, stone and other materials to be sent to the capital. Both eunuchs from the central government and local officers pressed them hard to make the contribution and charged them extra for the services. When the materials were shipped to Loyang, the eunuchs criticized quality and quantity and forced the people to re-contribute until substantial bribes were paid. Conditions were as disastrous as in the time of Wang Mang.

Under such a corrupt central government, the Yellow Turbans rebellion occurred in 184. Around this time there were frequent natural catastrophes, and foreign raids of Chinese frontiers by the Hsien-pi tribe from the northeast, and the Ch’iang tribe from the northwest. The leader of the Yellow Turbans was Chang Chüeh 樊角 of Chü-lu in present Hopei. A Taoist, Chang Chüeh had taught people magical healing for more than ten years; and the people regarded him as a deity. He collected a following numbering several hundred thousand from various parts of the empire and organized it into thirty-six fang or divisions, each of which had a commander. Local officials did not know the danger of this formidable force until one of Chang Chüeh’s disciples reported the secret to the government. Chang quickly notified his followers everywhere to start a great uprising at the same time. All of them wore the Yellow turban as a symbol. In more than ten months the rebellion spread all over the empire and the capital was menaced. Wherever the rebels went they burned government buildings. Frightened, the emperor was persuaded to pardon the imprisoned partisans, but he declined to punish the ten notorious chief eunuchs who were accused by a government secretary, Chang Chün 樊鈞 as the main trouble-makers causing the Yellow Turban rebellion. Chang Chün said in a memorial to the throne:

The reason for Chang Chüeh’s armed revolt . . . is that the ten chief eunuchs were mostly unprincipled, their relatives and friends control many districts (in the empire), they grasp the money and oppress the people who have no place to redress their grievances but by revolt. If the ten chief eunuchs were executed, their heads hanged high on the southern suburb, and their fate widely made known to (the people) of the empire, the great rebellion would liquidate itself without military suppression. The tactless emperor showed this memorial to the chief eunuchs who
knocked their heads to beg for pardons, and immediately contributed a great deal of money for the military funds. Then they were allowed to serve the emperor as usual, and soon after they accused Chang Chün as a student of Taoism and tortured him to death in a prison. A famous scholar and honest official, Liu T'ao 劉陶, also called the emperor's attention to the fact that “The great revolt of the empire is all caused by the eunuchs” (天下大亂，皆由宦官) The latter accused Liu of having secret communications with the rebels. The emperor put Liu in jail, where he was whipped daily, and eventually he committed suicide.18 A few loyal generals, such as Lu Chih 劉植 and Huang-fu Sung 黃甫松, who were fighting victoriously against the Yellow Turbans but refused to pay bribes to eunuch military supervisors, were also slandered before the emperor who had them either executed or dismissed.19

While the struggle between the eunuchs and officials continued at the central government, the duty of suppressing the Yellow Turbans fell into the hands of provincial generals like Tung Cho 鄧卓 and Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操. Within a few years they brought the main army of the Yellow Turbans under control and drove them to resume underworld activities as a secret society.20 The fate of Han was doomed and eventually sealed by Ts'ao Ts'ao in 220. Although not every eunuch was bad, and some exaggeration should be allowed for the brush of Confucian historian against eunuchs, there is undoubtedly truth in the account of corrupt government under strong influence of eunuchs, which formed one of the major reasons for the fall of the Later Han dynasty.

Near the end of the Western Chin dynasty (ca. 300) another rebellion broke out in Shantung and spread to several provinces, lasting for more than ten years. The causes of this insurrection were much the same: political corruption, numerous heavy taxes, and frequent catastrophes which led to a severe famine. The imperial family, Ssu-ma 司馬, after a few generations in power, was very degenerate, and the emperor had no knowledge of the outside world. Emperor Hui 惠帝 was not only fickle-minded but also unbalanced. When many people died of hunger during the famine, he wondered, “Why did they not eat meat?” At that time there was civil struggle among the eight princes, lasting from 290 to 306; there were also invasions by the Hsiung-nu, who had long been living at the Chinese frontier, and now came to the interior to cause trouble for the weak and deteriorating government. The great famine drove thousands of people into vagrancy. They were quickly persuaded to join the rebel leader, Wang Mi 王粲, a native of Tung-lai in modern Shantung and a scholar of an old aristocratic family. Wang Mi and Shih Le 石勒, a barbarian chieftain jointly took the capital, Loyang. They burned government offices and killed more than thirty thousand people. The young
emperor, Huai-ti, was captured and killed. Five years later, in 316, another emperor, Min-ti, was also arrested and executed by a Hsiung-nu leader.\textsuperscript{21} The Western Chin was followed by the Eastern Chin, near the end of which the ruling family was again corrupt and foreign invasions threatening. A Taoist secret society, under the leadership of Sun En 孫恩 caused great trouble in 396 and 402, as the Taoist Yellow Turbans had done near the end of Han.\textsuperscript{22} We have no intention, however, to trace all rebellions in Chinese history in detail. After 418 China was split up into what are known as the Southern and Northern Dynasties. During this time no one house ruled the whole of China until the Sui dynasty reunited the country in 589.

The short-lived Sui dynasty (589-618) is in many ways comparable to the Ch'in dynasty. Sui Yang-ti may be compared with Ch'in Shih-huang-ti. Both were very capable, ambitious, energetic, and far-sighted. Both were interested in enhancing the splendor of their courts and of their empire. Both expanded Chinese territory and made indelible contributions such as the Great Wall and the Grand Canal, the chief building of which has been attributed to Ch'in Shih-huang-ti and Sui Yang-ti respectively. Both were so self-willed that they would not accept advice from their ministers. Since both were despotic rulers upon whose shoulders lay the sole control of the government, they were held responsible by Chinese historians for the fate of the two dynasties. In this case rebellion was caused by over-rule and harsh rule.

Emperor Yang built a new capital at Loyang, Honan; and another capital at Yangchow, Kiangsu. He developed the Grand Canal to link communications between the north and south. He strengthened the Great Wall for frontier fortifications. For these public works, the government is said to have employed on a single day over a million men and women workers.\textsuperscript{23} The oppression of the people involved in these works as described in the dynastic history appears terrible. For instance, in one day during 607 “more than a million men were sent out to build the Great Wall.” The cost in human life was tremendous; “five or six out of every ten died.”\textsuperscript{24} Rare objects were used to decorate the imperial courts and were brought in through special requisitions. The lavish equipment of Emperor Yang's chariots, banners, and other decorative contrivances taxed the whole empire. Three high officials, including Kao Kung 高頊, who advised the emperor not to undertake these unnecessary works and abuse natural resources, were executed.\textsuperscript{25}

In 610 about a hundred bandits, claiming that the advent of the Maitreya Buddha (\textit{Mi-le-fo}) had opened a new era, broke into the imperial palace of Loyang to start an insurrection. All of them were killed on the spot. A great search in the capital for the Mi-le-fo party members involved more
than a thousand families, the members of which were imprisoned. 26

Emperor Yang was not alarmed by this insurrection. He continued his territorial expansion for his empire. He sent three disastrous expeditions to Koguryo, or, roughly speaking, Korea. To carry on these expeditions the government demanded forced labor, troops, and contributions of goods and money. These levies and the collection of taxes are said to have been exacted in an arbitrary and oppressive manner, the result being that "those who were strong assembled and became robbers, while those who were weak sold themselves as slaves." 27

As early as 611 bandit leaders like Wang Po 王譚 of Tsou-p'ing 鄫平 in Shantung, and Tou Chien-te 鄕建德 of Chang-nan 漢南 in Chihli attracted many dissenters from the Korean expeditionary force and many displaced people from a catastrophic flood which submerged the houses of more than thirty districts in Shantung and Honan. In 612 a large army claimed to number two million men, actually 1,113,900, excluding twice as many as porters, rushed to Korea. The army suffered a great defeat; only 2,700 men returned to the Chinese side of the Liao River. 28

Emperor Yang did not know how to call a stop. He insisted in instituting a second campaign immediately. In June, 613, a serious rebellion broke out near Loyang under the leadership of the Minister of the Board of Rites, Yang Hsüan-kan 楊玄感 who declared that the unprincipled emperor cared nothing for the people, but caused great disaster for the empire, and thus he revolted against him. 29 Yang was joined by his friend, Li Mi 李密, also an official of the Sui dynasty. This revolt diverted the attention of the emperor's personal command of an attack on the city of Liao-tung, and the second expedition also ended in failure. The emperor managed to defeat Yang Hsüan-kan's rebels and mercilessly killed thirty-thousand of the alleged Yang's party. More rebel leaders emerged, each followed by a large number of army dissenters. 30 Ignoring the discontented people, the emperor launched a third Korean expedition in 614. At this moment the Koreans were themselves "suffering from exhaustion" and sent envoys to offer their allegiance. 31 The emperor's face was somewhat saved; his third expeditionary force was withdrawn. He then went to subdue the Turks in Shansi where he was besieged for a month by his enemies at Yen-men. It was a severe blow to his prestige. 32 Finally out of more than a hundred thirty rebel leaders a high official of the Sui dynasty, Li Yüan 李淵, and his son, Li Shih-min 李世民, were successful in founding the T'ang dynasty in 618.

The various factors leading to the fall of the Sui dynasty are based on the official source, the Sui History and the Tzuchih t'ung-chien, or Comprehensive
Mirror for Aid in Government. These are usually exaggerated, particularly in describing notorious emperors. Sui Yang-ti is one of them. He is described as an extravagant emperor; deceitful, suspicious, and too much given to the pleasures of the palaces. He is said to have been vindictive towards any officials who did not agree with his views. Under his rule, officialdom became demoralized through bribery and unjust punishment. Professor Woodbridge Bingham has made a very careful study in redressing many exaggerated or unfair statements about Emperor Yang in Chinese sources. As a result, Bingham admits:

Emperor Yang’s force of character showed itself also in ruthlessness and his imagination led him beyond the bounds of practical achievement. The imposing scheme of development which he envisaged for his empire was pushed forward without regard to cost.

Emperor Yang does not seem to have known when to stop in the face of military checks and adverse natural conditions.

Loss of prestige on that (Korean) frontier together with his internal weakness, were directly responsible for the collapse of his dynasty.

These remarks from a new study of Sui Yang-ti suit well our political interpretation of Chinese rebellions and revolutions. Granting exaggerations of Chinese sources, the rebellion against the Sui is due to mis-rule.

After more than a hundred and thirty subsequent years of peace and prosperity, however, the emperor, T’ang Hsüan-tsung 唐玄宗, was challenged by the rebellion of An Lu-shan 安祅山, which infested a large part of North China for a period of eight years (755-763). This catastrophe was a great turning point in the political and social history of the T’ang dynasty.

An Lu-shan was born in Jehol, son of a Turkish mother and a Sogdian father. He mastered six frontier languages and built up a reputation as a capable warrior. Hopei was then a special frontier zone protecting the empire from the barbarian invasions from Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. Emperor Hsüan-tsung hence appointed this experienced fighter from that area to govern the frontier by the usual combination of diplomacy and force. An Lu-shan was so diplomatic that he won the full confidence of the emperor through the beautiful imperial concubine, Yang Kuei-fei, and eventually he was authorized to command the best troops of the rich and vast empire.

Marching from modern Peking, An Lu-shan and his followers infested some of the provinces in Northern China. Soldiers as well as civilians, having seen no warfare for many decades, fled before the dust-clouds raised by his marching force. But after triumphing over the rich capital, Ch’ang-an, the rebel emperor An Lu-shan also had domestic trouble. He was assassinated (757) by a eunuch.
who conspired with An Lu-shan’s son An Ch’ing-hsü 安慶緝，The latter in turn was murdered by the general, Shih Ssu-ming 史思明。The T’ang force then quickly retook the capital with the help of Uighur and Arab troops from Central Asia. After Shih Ssu-ming was killed by his own son, peace was finally restored in 763.  

Since the rebellion occurred at the prosperous age of the T’ang dynasty an economic interpretation of An’s revolt would seem to be markedly inadequate. Professor Ch’en Yin-k’o 陳寅恪, the greatest living authority on T’ang, who had many revolutionary ideas, again placed the blame on “political and court corruption of the T’ien-p’ao period (742-755)”, which was one of the reasons for the An Lu-shan rebellion. The other reason was An’s overwhelming military might, which enabled him to take such action. This political and court corruption include the short-sighted abolition of the fu-ping 府兵 militia system, the permission of eunuchs to grasp political power, and of foreign generals to guard strategic regions. All these took place during the reign of Hsüan-tsung.  

Professor Ch’en's mastery of source material and his deep penetration into the T’ang period are commendable, but the brief presentation of his points in writing usually makes necessary a little illustration. It goes without saying that the famous eunuch, Kao Li-shih 高力士, began to play a prominent role in T’ang history and literature. In the declining age of Emperor Hsüan-tsung, who enjoyed the prevailing peace and “thought that there was nothing for him to worry about under the heaven, he then lived in the forbidden palace, devoted his time to music and sex for self-amusement, and left all political affairs to (Li) Lin-fu 李林甫, his chief minister.”  

“Lin-fu flattered him in every way and read his mind in order to become his sole favorite. The way for other advice or criticism (of the emperor) was blocked, and his (majesty’s) intelligence was beclouded in order to accomplish his trickery. Wise men of ability were kept away and those who were more capable than himself were ousted in order to protect (Lin-fu’s) own position. Large numbers of imprisonments were frequently ordered to demonstrate (the minister’s) power. From the heir apparent down, all were afraid of him and hurried to step aside before him. During his nineteen-year premiership (734-752) he brough on the great disaster for the empire, and yet the emperor was unaware of the fact.”  

Li Lin-fu was a virtual dictator. While the central government was such, the national frontier and the defence measures are described by the usually reliable source, the T’ung-lien 通典, as follows:  

When Hsüan-tsung came to the throne, the country had long enjoyed
peace. The empire was calm and orderly. Wealth was abundant and power was great. After 732 generals who won glory on the frontier strove to enlarge the boundaries in order to please the emperor.... As their favor and rewards were high, so their arrogance grew.... Ko-shu Han controlled two groups of armies in the west, An Lu-shan controlled three in the north-east.58

The fu-ping or militia system was abolished in 749 just a few years before the An Lu-shan rebellion. The domestic defence measure was ridiculously neglected. The picture is well painted by a historian about half a century later.

At the end of T'ien-pao (742-756), because there was great peace in the Middle Plain, the emperor cultivated the arts of civilization and abandoned military preparation. He had the spear and arrow points melted down in order to weaken the valiant knights of the empire... Any one who practiced archery committed a crime. When worthless youths became soldiers their elders repudiated them and would not associate with them.... Men grew to old age without hearing the sound of war... When an emergency arose their knees shook and they were incapable of carrying arms.59

Viewing these contemporary accounts we cannot say that the main reason for the great rebellion (755-763) was anything else but political corruption. Professor Edwin G. Pulleyblank, who spent a few years studying An Lu-shan, says:

The theory sometimes expressed that the rebellion of An Lu-shan was, at least in part, one of those all-too-frequent peasant uprisings brought about by hunger and desperation, is quite without foundation. It has recently been the fashion to see all the great rebellions of China as motivated by class struggle and some historians have been ready to seize on the slightest hints in order to turn An Lu-shan's rebellion into an agrarian revolt.

“On the other hand,” Pulleyblank continues, “the Chinese historians are probably not altogether wrong in emphasizing the very harmful, corrupting influence it had on the emperor and his entourage.”60 With quotations from original sources and from appraisal by competent modern scholars, the cause of this catastrophe may be clear.

The rebellion of An Lu-shan marked the decline of the T'ang but the dynasty's fate was not wholly sealed until another great rebellion—that of Huang Ch'ao—flared up near the end of the ninth century. Its causes given in the two dynastic histories of the T'ang,61 are analyzed by Professor Shih Yu-chung as “a result of famine, government corruption, heavy taxation, and
failure on the part of the government to give just reward and punishment."\(^{42}\) Floods and droughts appeared in Honan, Shantung, and other provinces for a number of years in succession, but these were not reported to the emperor by the local magistrates; and the hungry people were loafing around with no one to whom they could report their hardships. Thus they formed armed bands.\(^{43}\)

Much the same conclusion is reached by Howard S. Levy, who says in the introduction to his 1955 translation of *The* Biography of Huang Ch'ao that "[The Huang Ch'ao rebellion] seemed to be a spontaneous uprising on the part of the people who were driven to despair by extreme abuses that they had suffered throughout the waning years of the T'ang dynasty... When the central government proved incapable of initiating positive measures for the alleviation of the starving masses, bands of desperadoes arose in the north..."\(^{44}\) This interpretation, from Levy's careful study of Huang Ch'ao, coincides with the thesis of this paper.

In 874 a peasant leader, Wang Hsien-chieh 王仙芝, gathered several thousand people and started a great uprising at Ta-ming in southern Hopei. When Wang was slain in 878, his able lieutenant, Huang Ch'ao, a native of Ts'ao-chou in Shantung, took over. Born into the family of a rich salt merchant, Huang was well-educated, but like the Taiping leader, Hung Hsiu-ch'üan 洪秀全 in the nineteenth century, he also had failed several times in the civil service examinations. He had had military experience, and he was an able organizer who knew how to stir up mobs to fanatical action. He quickly ravaged the provinces of Southern China, including Kwangtung, and made himself emperor. This rebellion lasted ten years (874-884) and affected all provinces in China proper except Szechwan. Finally Huang Ch'ao also faced internal dissension. Because of unsatisfactory distribution of new posts, one leader after another left him, either accepting a government offer or becoming an independent gang-leader. While Huang Ch'ao weakened himself, the Sha-t'o cavalry in his native province of Shantung ruthlessly crushed his force by superior weapons. Although Huang Ch'ao's rebellion did not immediately overthrow the T'ang dynasty, his follower, Chu Ch'üan-chung 朱全忠, deserted the imperial side and proved a successful fighter against the Sha-t'o force. When the T'ang empire began rapidly to disintegrate, Chu killed the entire entourage of the emperor and in 907 made himself son-of-heaven of the Later Liang Dynasty.

After more than half a century of chaos, the Sung emperors restored order and promoted art, literature, and philosophy. The scholars were gradually divided into conservative and liberal factions, arguing against each other on academic and political problems. But the chief ministers, Ts'ai Ching 窦京 (1046-1126), Wang Fu, 王黻, and their henchmen ruled harshly. They engraved
the names of their opponents on a stone tablet as "traitors"; they drafted thousands of laborers from the area between the lower valley of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers to build palaces and bridges; and they searched for queer rocks, plants, and flowers from the empire to please the emperor. Precious jewels were even dug out from peoples' ancestral tombs. This policy hurt the feelings of many scholar-officials, as well as the farmers. The insufferable misery imposed upon the people by the systematic search was a reason for rebellion. As Richard G. Irwin also said, "Increasingly harsh government accompanied the decline of actual authority." Domestic trouble was thus fomented, and was soon followed by foreign invasions, a common enough sequence in Chinese history.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, Shantung and Hopei were haunted by bandits under the leadership of Sung Chiang 宋江 and thirty-five sub-commanders. They declared, "Officials drive the masses to revolution" (Kuan-pi min-fan 官逼民反). A famous gangsters' stronghold was Liang-shan-po 梁山泊, a fishing port in Sou-chang, Shantung. When Sung Chiang and his comrades pillaged the rich to relieve the poor in the south of the Huai river, several hundred thousand government troops dared not oppose them. Many people joined the bandits in Liang-shan-po and caused great trouble from 1119 to 1121. Finally Sung Chiang was persuaded to surrender to the government, and he commanded his followers to fight against another rebel leader, Fang La 方腊.

Fang La's rebellion took place in 1120. A vegetarian, Fang was said to be a devotee of a heretical religion, which, according to Professor Shih, is probably Mazdaism. Apparently he was an influential orator, for once he made a speech saying that almost all the farmers' hard-earned money had been taken by the government and used lavishly; whenever the government desires were not fully met, the people were whipped or tortured; "officials seize what they want, and farming and sericulture do not suffice to meet the demands." He therefore urged his fellow farmers to take action against the misrule. The rebels claimed that their chief aim was to get rid of corrupt officials. In less than ten days he mustered several hundred thousands of followers. Wherever they conquered they burned the government buildings, killed the officials, and even chopped their bodies to pieces in order to avenge their hatred. In the capital, Minister Wang Fu did not bother to report the alarming news to the emperor until more than twenty cities had fallen into Fang La's hands and more people had joined the insurrection. Then a large force of a hundred fifty thousand was sent to the front to suppress the rebellion in 1122. According to Shih:

Essentially, Fang La's rebellion is not different from any other. We
find in it the same reasons for rebellion; social unrest and economic chaos as a result of corrupt government and heavy taxation.\textsuperscript{50} A few years after Fang’s rebellion the Northern dynasty was terminated by Juchên invaders.

Then the myth of the Maitreya Buddha played a role again in the popular revolt. The White Lotus Society (Pai-lien-chiao) is believed to have existed at the beginning of the Southern Sung. Its members believed in the reincarnation of the Maitreya Buddha and abstained from drinking wine, eating meat, and taking life. From the very outset it was a political society under a religious mask. Owing to rapid increase of members, the society was banned by the Sung government, and its founder, Mao Tzu-yüan 茅子元, a Buddhist monk, was driven from Kiangsu to Kiangsi. Yet it survived in the underground in the region along the lower Yangtze, the Yellow, and Huai Rivers. Its existence was repeatedly condemned as illegal in the Yüan dynasty, yet it continued to grow in its sphere of activities, especially near the end of the Mongol regime.\textsuperscript{51} It seems extremely simple, so far as its tenets and origin are concerned. Nevertheless, for self-protection, it had many branches under secret names. It is surprising to know that its members among the oppressed and impoverished ignited one rebellion after another, from the twelfth century down to the present day, whenever the government provided good opportunities, which it did all too frequently.

The Mongol lords treated the Chinese harshly. Political oppression, racial prejudice, and economic pressure were resented by the Chinese. The corruption of the administration and the lawlessness of the Lama Buddhists were additional factors to incur the hatred of the people against the alien rulers. The situation was aggravated by the break of the dikes along the Yellow River in 1351. When some 170,000 men were pressed to repair the dikes, great new revolts broke out. Everywhere in Honan, Kiangsu, and Shantung, the regions from which the laborers were summoned, revolutionary groups formed. Some groups had a religious tinge, while others showed a somewhat nationalistic sentiment in their zeal to drive away the Mongols.

At this time a leader of the White Lotus Society, Han Shan-t’ung 韓山童, spread a rumor about the rebirth of the Maitreya Buddha, which was believed by peasants far and wide. Soon Han had himself palmed off as a descendant of the last emperor of the Northern Sung, with the intention of proclaiming himself as the legitimate emperor. He rose in rebellion and called his soldiers the Red Army because they were distinguished by red turbans. But he was captured early and executed. His son, Han Lin-erh 韓林兒, carried on the revolt in Anhwei and Honan and was actually proclaimed emperor of Sung,
with his capital at Po-chou.

Kuo Tzu-hsing 郭子興, a son of a roving fortune teller, rose in southern Honan in 1352 and, in the following year, was joined by Chu Yuan-chang 朱元璋. Although Chu had been a monk and a beggar, he was the successful leader in this proletarian revolution and became the founder of the Ming dynasty.\(^\text{52}\)

After the period of peace normal at the beginning of every new dynasty, the Ming government also entered a stage of weak emperors, two of whom, Shih-tsung (1522-1566) and Shen-tsung (1573-1619), ignored their court responsibilities for more than twenty years, leaving state affairs to be handled by eunuchs. Many eunuchs in the Ming dynasty, like Wei Chung-hsien 魏忠賢, were among the most notorious in Chinese history. They fought against the scholar-official faction, and the latter again fought among themselves.

Since the central governmental machinery was very rusty, the local governments were even worse. The scholar-official class, including officials, family members of ministers and generals, and licentiates who received the first literary degree or purchased some degree, ruthlessly cheated and oppressed the populace in every way. Their maltreatment of the people were ably summed up by the famous scholars Chao I 趙翼 and Ku Yen-wu 魏炎武. In the essay “Ming hsiang-kuan múeh-min chih hai 明鄉官虐民之害” (The harms the Ming local officials did in maltreating the People), Chao said:

It was a general tendency in the former Ming dynasty that not only local officials taxed the people in many illegal ways, making them unable to live, but most of the gentry who lived in the countryside, utilizing their connections and power, also considered the people an easy prey. Officials above and gentry below protected and covered up one another; the people had no place to make complaints.\(^\text{53}\)

Then Chao I, from the biographies in the Dynastic history of Ming, listed a number of horrible cases of local gentry, mostly sons and relatives of high officials, who treated the people worse than slaves. In Ku Yen-wu's “Chün-hsien lún 郡縣論” (On the local district system), he voiced the opinion, “A good groom makes the horse fat; a good governor makes people happy.” In his famous “Sheng-yüan lún 生員論” (On the licentiates), he deplored the impractical and superficial knowledge the licentiates obtained; yet they served as intermediaries between the local governments and common people, thereby took bribes, misinterpreted government orders, overcharged the people, or involved them in serious trouble out of a small dispute. Being an eye-witness of the political evil of late Ming and early Ch'ing, Ku Yen-wu suggested abolition of the licentiate system.\(^\text{55}\)

The reason for the late Ming disturbances, as found by James Parsons in
his The Rebellion of Chang Hsien-chung, are many and varied, but briefly they center about "corruption and disintegration in the administration, natural calamities, the failure of the government to secure adequate revenues, agrarian conditions which fostered the impoverishment of the peasantry and the concentration of landholding, and the inability of the Ming imperial forces to withstand both the internal uprising and the Manchu pressure from the outside."56

According to the Ming-Shih and confirmed by Vincent Shih, the reason was even simpler. At the end of T'ien-ch'i (1621-1628), "members of the Wei Chung-hsien clique, Ch'iao Ying-chia 蕭應甲 and Chu T'ung-meng 朱童蒙, served as governors of Shensi and Yen-sui 延綏 respectively. These governors were corrupt and greedy. They paid no attention to the bandits. Thus rose the banditry."57

The two most successful leaders were Li Tzu-ch'eng 李自成 (1605?-1645) and Chang Hsien-chung 張獻忠. Li's main force consisted of well-trained cavalry. At first Li himself was said to have lived a simple life, sharing the hardships of his soldiers. The troops of the imperial government, on the other hand, pillaged the people wherever they went, and forced women to be the wives of officers. Appalled at these outrages, Chang Hsien-chung started his rebellion at Yenan, Shensi, which was, more recently, the capital of the present Chinese Communist leaders. For the following ten years (1628-1638) Chang had a checkered career in Honan and Hupeh. He later advanced to Szechwan, while Li went to Peking where he forced the last emperor of the Ming to commit suicide. But Li's own movement also soon collapsed. The throne was taken over by an energetic new force—the Manchus.58

The first several emperors of the Manchu dynasty were capable and enlightened rulers who several times exempted the people from paying income tax in order to win their hearts. These emperors were hard working, and they gave untiring attention to maintaining order, peace, and river conservation. As a result of good administration, the Chinese population increased, territory expanded, and internal peace was general until the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the latter part of the reign of the conceited but able emperor Ch'ien-lung (1736-1795), with the collusion of the notorious minister, Ho-shen 和珅 and others, bribery began to dictate the policies of the government. The rich and strong Manchu dynasty began to show signs of decline. Secret societies became active again. In the 1770's Ch'ien-lung issued edicts against the White Lotus and other societies. But as Lao-tzu said, the more laws and ordinances, the more thieves and robbers there would be. Secret agents existed in all principal
cities in Honan and the neighboring provinces. They preached sedition and enrolled new members. Thousands upon thousands of men and women were thus gathered, and were bound together by all sorts of ceremonies, solemn vows, and pledges to divulge no secrets to their enemies. Their purpose was the final expulsion of the Manchus. On October 3, 1774, a White Lotus chief, Wang Lun 王倫, led his adherents in taking three cities in Shantung, ransacking government treasuries, and releasing prisoners. After further successes, they attacked a large city, Lin-ch'ing. Because the Ch'ing regime was still strong, the insurrection was suppressed within two months by the bannermen dispatched from Peking and elsewhere. Wang Lun's family members and his eighteen adopted sons were killed. The secret society revolt, however, was carried on.

In the year 1775 a leader of the White Lotus, Liu Sung 劉松, revived its activities. Soon Liu was arrested by the Honan authorities and banished to the border of Kansu.59 Liu's disciples, Liu Chih-hsieh 劉之傑 and others, continued to agitate among the people in Honan, Hupeh, Shensi, and Szechwan. In 1793 their new plot to claim a youth supposedly a descendant of the Ming emperors as the legal ruler of China was detected. Many plotters were arrested, but Liu Chih-hsieh managed to escape. A general search was ordered for the fugitive. Taking this opportunity, the local officials of Hupeh blackmailed many innocent well-to-do farmers, who were compelled to take armed resistance with the slogan, "Officials have forced the people to rebel." They joined the conspirators of the White Lotus Society and within a few months in 1796 the rebellion spread from Hupeh to Honan, Shensi, szechwan, and Kansu, and lasted for nearly ten years.60

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the seeds of dissatisfaction sprang everywhere from the misrule of the Ch'ing monarchy. The outmoded government neglected its duties of looking after the welfare of its people, failing to protect them with an effective army, provide them with adequate means of living, or nurture them with an inspiring ideology. The whole system of ethics was breaking down. Neo-Confucianism lost its grip upon the minds of modern Chinese. The Mandate of Heaven was apparently exhausted. The invulnerable military power of the alien rulers was revealed to be a mere "paper tiger" during the Opium War with the British. Under such sociopolitical conditions, the famous Taiping rebels, inspired by some incomplete and inaccurate Christian ideas, and accelerated by uncontrolled famine and chronic poverty, started a revolution in the south, while the Nien rebels, springing from a secret society, took concurrent action in the North. The two big movements terrorized the whole empire for nearly two decades. The
Taiping leader was Hung Hsiu-ch'üan; the Nien leader, Chang Lo-hsing. The two cooperated with other rebellions in the empire to give the Manchu dynasty a near-fatal blow and paved the way for the successful revolution in 1911.

For convenience, we might tabulate the foregoing survey as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LEADER</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 209-206 B.C.</td>
<td>Liu Pang et al</td>
<td>Tyrannical government, incessant corvées</td>
<td>Fall of Ch'in and Rise of Han dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 18-22 A.D.</td>
<td>“The Red Eyebrows” Fan Ch'ung et al</td>
<td>Oppression of the people by local governments, catastrophes</td>
<td>Fall of Wang Mang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 184</td>
<td>“The Yellow Turbans”, a Taoist sect</td>
<td>Corrupt administration, dominated by eunuchs</td>
<td>Decline of Eastern Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ca. 300</td>
<td>Wang Mi</td>
<td>Political corruption, heavy taxation</td>
<td>Decline of W. Chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 394-402</td>
<td>Sun En, a Taoist</td>
<td>Political corruption, catastrophe</td>
<td>Fall of E. Chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 611-618</td>
<td>Wang P'u et al</td>
<td>Misrule of Emperor Yang</td>
<td>Fall of Sui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 755-766</td>
<td>An Lu-shan</td>
<td>Muddle-headed emperor, wrong government policies</td>
<td>Decline of T'ang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 874-884</td>
<td>Wang Hsien-chih and Huang Ch'ao</td>
<td>Extreme abuses of central administration and unrelieved catastrophe</td>
<td>Fall of T'ang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. 1119-1126</td>
<td>Sung Chiang et al</td>
<td>Harsh government accompanied decline of actual authority</td>
<td>Harassed N. Sung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 1351-1368</td>
<td>Chu Yüan-chang, et al</td>
<td>Political, economic oppression by Mongol rulers.</td>
<td>Fall of Yüan and Rise of Ming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. 1628-1644</td>
<td>Li Tzu-ch'eng, Chang Hsien-chung, et al</td>
<td>Corruption and disintegration in administration, Natural calamities</td>
<td>Fall of Ming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 1850-1868</td>
<td>Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, Chang Lo-hsing, et al</td>
<td>Widespread dissatisfaction with outmoded and corrupt Manchu administration</td>
<td>Decline and fall of Ch'ing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this brief survey of rebellions, which is not intended as a complete or exhaustive study, we notice first that political corruption is one of the most important causes of rebellion and revolution. We do not mean it is the only reason. In approximately two thousand years, China has had twelve major cyclic outbursts of rebellion, most of which erupted near the end of a dynasty when the government had become corrupt and resembled an old, weak man, susceptible to disease. The military machine, the economic and social condi-
tions were, of course, weakened by the poor central administration. It is true that at the time of Emperors Hsüan-tsung and Ch'ien-lung, economic conditions were still good, but the respective rebellions of An Lu-shan and the secret societies took place because the administration was vitiating.

A second general observation which we can make is that each rebellion took a great toll of human lives and left much land ownerless, thus temporarily relieving the population pressure, but preparing for the recurrence of the up-and-down cycle of government. The dynasty usually collapsed from sheer exhaustion caused by prolonged warfare. The government was then taken over by a commoner who had become a successful general, or by an official as in the case of Eastern Han and T'ang. After a period of peace, governmental neglect precipitated economic difficulties and natural catastrophes, and produced a growing number of vagrants who were often so mistreated by their governors that rebellion was the only recourse open to them.

Thirdly, the leadership of the rebellions usually included some lettered or educated men from the gentry or the scholar-official class, such as Liu Pang, Hsiang Yü, Wang Mi, Fang Ia, and others, to say nothing about Wang Lang, Huang Ch'ao, Kuo Tzu-hsing, and Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, who were disappointed scholars and fortune tellers. It is comprehensible that in such a society a small number of lettered men served as brokers between the government and commoners and as directors of the life and thinking of the peasants, much as did the clergy in medieval Europe; their words and actions could easily command their clan members and fellow villagers. It should be added, however, that many educated Chinese were exemplary loyalists or gentlemen.

Fourthly, the basic mass of any large-scale rebellion in China was invariably peasant or farmer, because these groups formed the majority of the impoverished Chinese population. They usually captured the district government building, killed the magistrate, rifled the treasury, and freed the prisoners. These seemed to be their direct and immediate objectives, before they took any other actions toward coping with imperial apathy. With them was allied a group whose role is generally neglected—the merchant, about whom a word must be said, if only as a reminder. On the constructive side, the powerful position and "generous" contributions to government by affluent merchants like Pu Shou-keng 蒲松庚 during the Sung and Yuan periods; or like Cheng Ch'eng-kung, or Koxinga, near the end of the Ming; or the salt dealers of Yang-chou and the Hong merchants at Canton in the nineteenth century, are well known. On the negative side, merchants played a part during the Red Eyebrows' revolt against Wang Mang's reform. Huang Ch'ao, Chang Hsien-chung, and Chang Lo-hsing, were at first rich salt "smugglers," obviously act-
ing against the numerous illegal charges made by greedy officials as well as against the regular heavy duties on salt. They were compelled to join the populace in armed resistance against government pressure.

A fifth observation on the pattern of rebellion in China is that religious ideas, superstition, and secret societies often excited the mass of the people into action. These factors worked like modern propagandists and organizers in a revolution. The White Lotus Society in North China and the Heaven and Earth Society in South China enjoyed a long history with various branches and names. Their activity and inactivity may be regarded as a barometer of the healthy condition of the central administration. When a rebellion was doomed, as on a few occasions, by the lack of food or by internal dissensions, these societies took a long hibernation period as peaceful farmers, not for one winter, but for many decades, and sometimes for centuries. They survived many very vigilant and determined attempts by Chinese emperors to eradicate them. As a matter of fact, secret societies seldom achieved a complete revolution. They sowed the seed and ambitious popular leaders usually gathered the crop.

Here, then, is a pattern of Chinese rebellion or revolution: political corruption, social insecurity, economic bankruptcy, widespread unrest, and ruthless suppression. Then the exhausted government is either usurped by an official or overthrown by a revolution.

A historian is not a prophet, nor does history repeat itself. However, similar facts or situations may yield similar outcomes. In the long history of China the meager natural resources have been largely the same, the majority of her people always poor. Under a good and efficient government which works hard for water control, for irrigation and transportation improvement, for shipping food from rich to poor areas in time of famine, for giving people security with little disturbance to their farm work, and for sharing hardships with its people, the latter would be calm and satisfied with their little lot, and peace would prevail for a considerable length of time. On the other hand, if a government is corrupt as defined at the outset of this essay, tyrannic to the people, engages in unnecessary foreign war, or suffers from internal dissensions in which its leaders kill themselves, as in the rebellions of An Lu-shan, Huang Ch'ao, and Hung Hsiu-ch'üan, or if its greedy governors and generals are extremely lazy and extravagant, the people are taxed and overworked as slaves, such a government would fall sooner or later, one way or another. To such a government, millions of dollars for economic aid could not be of much help, for the money would be misappropriated. It could not enjoy longevity. In this respect the little information presented in these pages may
help a wise observer to guage the life span of a government. Of course this
does not include atomic, hydrogen, or other nuclear warfare which could destroy
any nation in a short time, no matter how efficient the government may be. The
aftermath of such warfare will be much more complicated than its beginning.

NOTES

1. Shih-chi, Ch. 6, especially pp. 38-44; and Han-shu, Ch. 1. (In this article
quotations of the Twenty-four Dynastic Histories are from the Wu-chou
ťung-wen shu-chü lithographic edition of 1903.) Both Ssu-ma Ch'ien
and Pan Ku quoted Chia I's 俊誼 (B.C. 200-168) famous essay, “To
Blame the Ch'in” 過秦論 as their basis.

2. Such as the modern historian, Lei Hai-tsung 雷海宗, who thinks that
overpopulation and the oppression of the people by the local govern-
ments were responsible for the revolt of the Red Eyebrows (China
Year Book, 1936-1937, p. 82), and Wolfram Eberhard who views this
movement as “a genuine revolutionary rising of the peasants, whose
distress had grown beyond bearing through Wang Mang's ill-judged
measures.” (A History of China (University of California Press, Berkeley,
1950, p. 96)

(206 pp.) p.145. Hans Bielesenfeld spent more than twenty pages (141-165)
in building up his thesis.

4. Such as Wang Mang's biography in Han Shu, ch. 99A, 99B, and 99C,
various references to the Red Eyebrows in the Hou Han-shu, especially
Ch. 41, 52; and Ssu-ma Kuang, Tzu-chih ńung-chien, Ch. 36-39 (Ku-wu
ch'u-p'an-she, Peking, 1956).


6. Ibid., 21b; and Tzu-chih ńung-chien, p. 1197.


8. Han-shu, 99C, 2b; and Tzu-chih ńung-chien, ch. 38, p. 1214. This event
was put in A.D. 14, according to the biography of Liu P'en-tzu 劉盆子
in the Hou Han-shu, Ch. 41.9.

9. Han-shu, 99C, 2b. Note that I do not agree with the punctuation by
famous scholars of the text in the Tzu-chih-ńung-chien, p. 1215, line 10,
which reads: “愁法禁煩苛，不得舉手力作，所得不足以給買稅。” It seems better
to read: 愁法禁煩苛，不得舉手；力作所得，不足以給買稅.


11. Ibid., 22.
12. An-ti 安帝 (107-124) came to the throne at the age of 12, Shun-ti 福帝 (126-144) at 10, Ch'ung-ti 冲帝 at 2, Chih-ti 賢帝 (146) at 2, Huan-ti 桓帝 (147-167) at 14, Ling-ti 睦帝 (163-188) at 11, and Hsien-ti 歸帝 (190-220) at 8. Hou Han-shu, 5, 1b; 6.1b; 6.10b, 17b; 7.1b; 8.1b, and 9.1.

13. Hou Han-shu, 8.8.


15. Ibid., 8.13 and 209.23b-24.


17. Hou Han-shu, 108.22b. Here the official title, Ch'ang-shihh 常侍, lit., constant attendant (of the emperor), is loosely translated as a chief eunuch.

18. Liu T'ao's biography in Hou Han-shu, Ch. 87, especially, pp. 10-11.

19. See the biographies of eunuchs in Hou Han-shu, Ch. 108, especially pp. 23-24. See also Ho Ch'ang-ch'ün, “Huang-chin tsei yü T'ai-p'ing tao” 賀昌羣, 黃巾與太平道 (The Yellow-turban bandits and the T'ai-p'ing Taoists), Wen-shih tsa-chih 文史雜誌, 2.3 (1942), 5-20.

20. The Yellow Turbans were scattered but not annihilated. Following Chang Chўeh's rebellion, many other bandit leaders emerged, such as Chang Niu-chўeh 張角牛, Yü Tu 印俊, and Ch'u Fei-yen 褚飛燕. Ch'u followers, called Hei-shan tsei 黑山賊 or Black-hill bandits, were said to be several hundred thousand strong. They ran here and there and could not be wiped out for a long time (Hou Han-shu, cp. 104A, 6-12.) After Chang Chўeh's death, a Taoist of Lang-ya, Yü Chi 廣吉, spread Taoism by using magic water for the cure of diseases and claimed to have a magic book, Tai p'ing ch'iing-ling tao 太平清領道 of more than 100 chüan. (See the commentary of the biography of Sun Ts'e 孫策, San Kuo-chih, Wu-chih 三國志, 吳志, 1.14b-15). This book, according to Fu Chin-chia 傳勤家 is the same as Tai-p'ing ching. (Fu's Chung-huo Tao-chiao shih, 中國道教史, A History of Chinese Taoism, The Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1932.) 57-72. Both Chang Chўeh and Yü Chi were Taoists.

21. Chin-shu, ch. 4, especially p. 16, and ch. 100. In the latter source the biographies of Wang Mi and other rebels are located. A study was done by Wu Hsien-ch'ing, “Hsi-chin-mo-ti liu-min pao-tung” 西晉末的流民暴動, The vagrants' uprising near the end of Western Chin, 265-316, Shih-huo 食貨, 1.6 (1935), 6205-6209.

22. See Sun En's biography in Chin-shu, ch. 100, 24b-27.

24. Ibid., 3.11a.
26. Ibid., 181. 5648.
28. Tzu-chih t'ung-chien, ch. 181, p. 5660. It goes without saying that the statistical figures given here may be considered at most as an estimat.
29. Ibid., 182.5673.
30. Ibid., 182.5686.
31. Sui-shu, 81.5b.
32. Ibid., 4.11; and 24.20.
33. Ibid., 4.15-18.
34. The Founding of the Tang Dynasty, The Fall of Sui and Rise of T'ang, (Baltimore, Waverly Press, 1941) 25. 58. 116. See also Teng Chih-ch'eng, Chung-hua erh-ch'ien nien shih 鄭之誠, 中華二千年史 (The two thousand year history of China), vol. 3, pp. 62-73; and Susuki Shun, “Zuimatsu no ran to Tocho no seiritsu” 鈴木俊, 隋末の乱と唐朝の成立 (Rebellion at the end of the Sui and the establishment of the T'ang dynasty), Shien 史淵 53 (July 1952), pp. 53-70.
37. Tzu-chih t'ung-chien, ch. 216, p. 6914.
40. The Background of the Rebellion of An Lu-shan (London Oriental Series,

41. Chiu T'ang-shu, ch. 19B, ch. 200B; and T'ang-shu, ch. 225C; and Tzu-chih T'ung-chien, ch. 252. See also Li Wen-chih, "Huang Ch'ao pao-tung ti she-hui pei-ching, 李文治, 黃巢暴動的社會背景 (The Social Background of the Huang Chao Rebellion), Shih-ta yüeh-k' an, 師大月刊 no. 22 (1935), 294-305; and Wolfram Eberhard, Conquerors and Rulers, Social Forces in Medieval China, chapter 3, has a good discussion of Huang Ch'ao's rebellion. The latter part of Hori Toshikazu's article, "Tomatsu Shohanran no seikaku" op. cit., also deals with Huang Ch'ao.

42. Vincent Y. C. Shih, "Some Chinese Rebel Ideologies", T'oung-pao, vol. XLIV, LIVR 1-3, 150-226, p. 171. The summary is based on Chiu T'ang-shu, 200B. 7b, and T'ang-shu, 225C. 1a, 2b. Professor Shih's emphasis is on the ideology of Chinese major rebellions; this article stresses the cause.

43. Tzu-chih T'ung-chien, ch. 252, p. 8174.


45. The conductor of this search for queer plants and rocks was the sycophant Commissioner of Defence, Chu Mien, 朱勉力 (d.1126), who established a collection station at Soochow and ordered all magistrates to collect the rare objects from the people under their jurisdictions. "When a good tree or a queer rock was found to be delightful, soldiers were sent to the house, ... where the buildings were taken apart and walls knocked down to make way for moving it.... Those who had such objects, even though they were well-to-do, would be bankrupt.... Once a 50-foot high rock found near the lake, Tai-hu太湖, was taken out by a gigantic ship using several thousand workers for shipping it (to the capital, Hangchow). Along the way all water-gates, bridges, and city walls were torn apart to let the stone pass through.... The Porters and boatmen, utilizing their master's power, grasped everything from the people.... Rare objects buried in tombs were dug out and those on buildings torn down.... All districts in Chekiang suffered this evil for more than twenty years." (Sung-shih, ch. 470, 8-9). Also see the biographies of Ts'ai Ching, Sung-shih, 472, 1-8; Wang Fu, ibid., 470, 4b-7b, and Tung Kuan, ibid., 468, 8b-10.

47. Yü Chia-hsi has made a detailed study of Sung Chiang and the thirty-five other leaders entitled Sung Chiang san-shih-liu-jiun kao-shih 宋江三十六人考實 Hsin-hua shu-tien 新華書店, Peking, 1955, 89, pp. These leaders and their exploits have been racyly described in a famous novel Shui-hu-chuan (which has been translated into English by Pearl Buck under the title of All Men Are Brothers). The wide currency of this novel in China subsequently inspired many young men of later generations to rebellion and revolution. Another translation of the same work entitled Water Margin was done by J. H. Jackson. An interesting study of the Shui-hu-chuan is made by Richard Gregg Irwin, The Evolution of a Chinese Novel, in which the historical foundation of Sung Chiang and others is presented in pp. 9-22.

48. Shih, op. cit. 176-177.


50. Shih, op. cit., 184.

51. Shigematsu Shunshō, 重松俊章 “The White Lotus Society at Its Beginning Stage,” in Ichimura hakushi koki kinen Tōyōshi ronshō 市村博士古稀紀念東洋史論叢 (Collected essays in Oriental history to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Dr. Ichimura), Fuzambo, 1933. 361-394.

52. See Yüan-shih, ch. 42, 6b-7., and T'ao Hsi-sheng, “Yüan-tai Mi-lei, Pai-lien chiao-hui ti-pao-tung 元代彌勒自蓮教會的暴動 (The riots of the White Lotus Society inspired by the reincarnation of the Mi-lei Buddha in the Yüan dynasty), Shih-huo semi-monthly, vol. 1, no. 4 (1935); Wu Han, Chu Yüan-chang chuan 吳晗, 朱元璋傳 (A biography of Chu Yüan-chang); S. Y. Teng, “Ming T'ai-kao yü Ming-chü chih cheng-chih she-hui” 鄭鶴箋, 明太祖與明初之政治社會 (The political and social conditions of the early Ming dynasty as seen from the Ming T'ai-kao), Yen-ching hsüeh-pao, 燕京學報 no. 20 (December 1936), 455-483.

53. Nien-erh shih cha-chi 十二史斠記 (Notes on the Twenty-two dynastic histories. Block print edition, preface dated 1800) ch. 34, 14-16. Unfortunately we have no space to give a fuller translation. For example, a metropolitan police had a dispute with a rich man, Yang Tuan 楊端, over the purchase of a piece of land in his native district; he killed
Yang and a large number of Yang's family members and relatives. A
governor's son maltreated the people in his district so badly that they
preferred to join the White Lotus bandits. Some family members of
high officials actually sheltered bandits. Many people offered a part
of their land to powerful families to secure their protection, but
eventually all their properties were usurped.

54. T'ing-lin wen-chi 卜林文集 (Collection of essays of [Ku] T'ing-lin, Ssu-pu
pei-yao ed.) ch. 1, p. 8.

55. Ibid., 1, 17-19.

56. James B. Parsons, The Rebellion of Chang Hsien-chung as an Example of
the Internal Disturbances in China during the late Ming Dynasty, a doctoral

57. The biography of roaming bandits in Ming-shih, ch. 309. 2-3; and Shih, op. cit. 206.

58. T'ao Hsi-sheng, “Ming-tai Mi-le, Pai-lien-chiao chi-ch'i-t'a yao-tsei” 明代 羅勒, 白蓮教及其他妖氛 (The Mi-le, Pai-lien Society in the Ming
Dynasty and other heretic bands), Shih-huo, vol. 1, no. 9 (1935), 402-403;
Li Wen chih, Wan-ming min-pien 李文治 , 晚明民變 (People's uprising
in the late Ming dynasty); Li Tzu-ch'eng's biography in Ming-shih,
309.1-33; Chao Tsung-fu, “Li Tzu-ch'eng pien-luan shih-mo” 趙宗復,
李自成變亂始末 (A brief history of the Rebellion of Li Tzu-ch'eng), Shih-
hsüeh nien-pao 史學年報, 2.4 (December 1937), 127-157; Hsüeh Nung-shan,
Ch'ing-kuo li-tai nung-min chang-cheng chih shih-li yen-chiu 薛農山，中國歷
代農民戰爭之史的研究 (A Historical study of Chinese peasants war), 187;
Ming-chi pai-shih hsiu-pien 明季稗史續編 (A supplementary collection of
unorthodox history of the Ming dynasty), 231; Erich Hauer, “Li Tsz-
ch'eng and Chang Hsien-chung: Ein Beitrag zum ende der Ming
dynastie,” Asia Major, III (1926) 268-287, which contains a translation
of the biographies of Li Tzu-ch'eng and Chang Hsien-chung in the
Ming-shih; and Sun Yüeh, Ming-mo nung-min ch'i-i shih-liao 孫嶽, 明末農
民起義史料 (A source material of peasant revolt near the end of the
Ming.)

59. This statement is not recorded under 1775 in the Ch'ing Shih-lu 清實錄,
but in a retrospect, the case was traced in 1794. Ch'ing shih-lu, 1462.13.

60. Suzuki Chüsei 鈴木中正, Shinchō chukishi kenkyu 清朝中期史研究 (A Study
of mid-Ch'ing history) Toyahashi, Aichi University, 1952. 225 pp.
中國歷代反叛與革命之政治的解釋

鄧 嗣 禹

在中國歷史上如孟子所說的“一治一亂”的循環，似乎可用政治史觀去解釋。政府領導昏庸，政治腐敗，任用小人，不為民興利除害，而禍國殃民，貪污壓迫，貪赂公行，苛捐雜稅，層出不窮。公款浪費，魚肉小民。國雖富，久必貧。水利不興，河工荒廢，天災橫行，民不聊生。民至忍無可忍之時，必挺而走險，反抗虐政。成者為王，為革命元勳；敗者為寇，為叛逆罪魁。

新興之主，勤奮圖治，振作有為。節用興利，與民同憂樂，均勢政，十數年內，特亂為治，轉貧為富，轉弱為強。惜不數傳，治者年少無識，政治又趨腐敗；結果又發生反叛革命，形成一治一亂的循環率。

根據這種政治史觀的解釋，並利用原料，次料及近年中西人士研究的結果，我們可以檢討中國十餘次大反叛大革命的原因。如陳涉、劉邦等人的革命，為反對秦朝的苛政。赤眉之亂，為反對王莽之失政。黃巾之亂，由於漢末政治之腐敗，以至安禄山、黃巢、宋江、朱元璋、李自成、洪秀全、張洛行等人之反革，莫不由于各朝末葉政治之腐敗。政治之腐敗，影響經濟社會之失調，使一般情狀，每況愈下，不可收拾。我們可以說，政治必先腐也，然後亂生之。