

SOURCE PACKET III: IDENTIFYING BIAS

We will use the following source in our lesson on how all documents—including supposedly objective academic works—must be considered in light of the context in which they were written. As you read the following secondary sources, please jot down your impressions—anything you find striking, interesting, confusing, or otherwise worth your attention—in the margins or in a separate notebook.

Source I: The Cambridge History of China¹

The crisis of 168

The reign of Ling-ti (A.D. 168-189) began with a crisis. The court eunuchs felt that they had lost their power with the demise of the previous emperor, and they were desperate to regain it. The leading families and officials were overconfident and reacted too late.

The choice of Ling-ti

On 25 January A.D. 168, Huan-ti (r. 146-168) died, leaving no designated heir. The next day, his wife, the empress Tou (d. 172), was declared empress **dowager**, a title which gave her the authority needed to validate edicts. At this time she was in her late teens or early twenties. This was not the first time that the throne had been left vacant, and a rich body of precedent had grown up to deal with just such a situation. The empress dowager, in secret consultation with the most senior male member of her family (in this case her father, Tou Wu, d. 168), was expected to select a candidate who met the following requirements. He should be a young male member of the imperial Liu family, chosen from the noble descendants of Chang-ti (r. A.D. 75-88), who together formed the most senior branch of that family. In order to secure support for the candidate, and in **contravention** of established practice, Tou Wu called together a conference of at least eight persons representing various cliques and interests. The Tou family was represented by Tou Wu himself, by his son, and by two of his nephews. The powerful families were represented by Yuan Feng (d. ca. 180), the most senior member of the noble Yuan family, and the bureaucracy was present in the person of Chou Ching (d. 168) who, as supreme commander (*t'ai-wei*), was the head of all officials. The palace establishment was represented by Liu Shu (d. 168), whose rank is variously given as gentleman of the palace or palace attendant. Finally, there was the eunuch Ts'ao Chieh, until then a minor figure, who doubtless represented the empress dowager and thus the throne.

Liu Shu is on the record as having proposed for the succession a certain Liu Hung, the third marquis of Chieh-tu-t'ing, at the time a boy of eleven or twelve years of age and a great-great-grandchild of Chang-ti. Chieh-tu-t'ing was about 500 miles northeast of the capital, Lo-yang, and the marquis's family had been living there for the past thirty-six years, since A.D. 132. Liu Shu came from the same region, which may help explain his proposal. There is very little likelihood that the marquis had ever been in the capital or had met previously with Tou Wu.

¹ Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, *Cambridge History of China*, Volume I: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Liu Shu's proposal was adopted by Tou Wu, who in his turn notified the empress dowager. She agreed, and issued an edict in which she stated that:

"After an investigation of virtues and a discussion of talents, no one was found to match the marquis of Chieh-tu-t'ing, Liu Hung, who, in his twelfth year, has the virtues of King Ch'eng of the Chou dynasty [r. 1115-1078 B.C.] in a majestic way. . . . May Liu Hung be the heir of the late emperor."²

Liu Hung is known to history as Ling-ti. Ts'a Chieh, again as the empress dowager's representative, and Liu Shu were sent to Chieh-tu with a thousand eunuchs and bodyguards of the late emperor to escort the emperor designate to the capital. The journey there and back took about two and a half weeks, and in the interregnum, on January 30, Tou Wu had himself promoted by his daughter to the rank of general-in-chief (ta chiang-chun). This rank was customarily given to the senior member of an empress dowager's family and implied no actual military command.

It was probably also during the interregnum that incidents occurred concerning the late emperor's large harem.³ The empress dowager had never been Huan-ti's favorite wife, but she had been forced upon him by high-placed bureaucrats. Huan-ti had given his favors to nine other women who were now at the empress dowager's mercy. She killed one of them, but the remaining eight were spared after two eunuchs had vigorously **interceded** for them. What happened to these women and the rest of the harem is not known, but it is likely that they were sent home. Some of the ladies may have found their way to Tou Wu's household, or at any rate rumors to that effect circulated later in the year.

On 16 February, the emperor-designate's retinue arrived at the gates of Lo-yang and was met there by Tou Wu.⁴ Tou Wu and Ts'a Chieh then introduced the boy to the court, and on the next day the formal enthronement took place. This ceremony was accompanied by two acts of state. First, Ch'en Fan (ca. 90-168), an old ally of Tou Wu from the time of the political struggles of the preceding reign, was given the position of grand tutor (t'ai-fu); second, Ch'en Fan, Tou Wu, and a third statesman, Hu Kuang (91-172), who had had a distinguished career with a dazzling record, were placed collectively "in charge of the Privy Secretariat," thus creating a regency **triumvirate**, so common during the Han dynasty.

The struggle for power

These arrangements seemed to be satisfactory to all concerned, and for the rest of February, March, April, May, and early June nothing is recorded except formalities: Huan-ti was buried, and the new emperor announced his accession in the shrines of the founders of the Former and Later Han, respectively.

Meanwhile, however, opposing forces had started to work on the emperor and the empress dowager. The young emperor had taken along with him from Chieh-tu his wetnurse and a few trusted servants whom he called his "lady secretaries." This **clique** and the eunuchs expected favors and appointments, but so did Tou Wu's side. Evidently, the Chieh-tu-t'ing clique and the eunuchs met initially with more success than did Tou Wu, for it is said that "every time Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan advised against certain

² Hou-Han chi 22, f. 21a (pp. 266-67); Hou-Han shu 8, p. 327; HHS 69, p. 2241. HHS does not include the text of the edicts.

³ For Huan-ti's consorts, see HHS 10B, pp. 44 3f.; and Chapter 4 above, p. 287.

⁴ HHS 8, p. 328; Hans Bielenstein, "Lo-yang in Later Han times," BMFEA, 48 (1976), 95C

appointments, their protests were overridden.⁵ There are, however, no real examples to prove Tou Wu's and Ch'en Fan's bitter complaints about one-sidedness in the distribution of favors. We only know of the case of Liu Shu, who had originally proposed the new emperor, and who was driven to death by a eunuch, Hou Lan (d. 172) with the emperor's connivance.⁶ On 10 June, the new emperor's grandfather, grandmother, and father were given honorary titles elevating them to imperial status posthumously; his mother, however, who was still alive in Chieh-tu-t'ing, was not invited to come to the capital, nor was she given full imperial status.⁷ Behind this decision we may see the hand of the empress dowager, who wanted to spare herself the embarrassment of two empresses dowager at one court.

Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan began to discuss their misgivings, and Ch'en Fan proposed a drastic solution. In his view, all eunuchs should be executed. It evidently took some time before Tou Wu was brought round to this view, but in the meantime he secured some important appointments for his own supporters. He managed to have a **protege** appointed an official of the secretariat, and he could depend on the loyalty of the commandant of one of the five regiments stationed in the capital. Perhaps as a threatening gesture to the eunuchs, he appointed several of their victims in the struggles of the preceding reign as members of his personal staff. On 23 June, there was an eclipse of the sun and Ch'en Fan seized upon this bad omen to urge Tou Wu on.⁸ He complained of the influence of the Chieh-tu-t'ing clique and of the eunuchs. Tou Wu decided to act; he read a memorial in the court that asked for all the eunuchs' heads, complaining that they had overstepped the limits of their positions by appointing their clients all over the empire. The execution of all eunuchs without exception was refused by the empress dowager; instead, she handed over the two eunuchs who had frustrated her attempts to kill the eight women of the late emperor's harem earlier in the year.

The cards were now on the table, and initially it seemed that Tou Wu's side was gaining the advantage. On 8 August, honors, doubtless long awaited, were proclaimed ennobling Tou Wu, his son, his nephews, Yuan Feng, Ts'ao Chieh, and four others for their support of the new emperor. One of Tou Wu's nephews was put in charge of a regiment of the standing army, bringing the number of regiments on Tou Wu's side to two. Ch'en Fan, however, was not satisfied, and he stepped up the pressure on the empress dowager to deliver up more eunuchs. To this end, he read a very strong memorial in the court branding five eunuchs —Hou Lan and Ts'ao Chieh among them—and the Chieh-tu-t'ing clique as traitors. The court was shocked by this and the empress dowager again refused to deliver up the culprits. A stalemate resulted, and Tou Wu wavered. A new impulse for action came when Liu Yü, a fortune-teller who was an expert in astronomical portents, pointed out to Ch'en Fan that the planet Venus was behaving in a way "not advantageous to great ministers"; he evidently meant the eunuchs. This may have been during August or in early October.⁹ Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan must have come to the conclusion that pressure on the empress dowager would not have the desired effect, and they therefore tried a different approach. If the eunuchs could be **indicted** for specific crimes, their arrest could hardly be blocked. To this end, Tou Wu packed the civil and judicial administration of the capital with his supporters, and then managed to have a eunuch who was loyal to him, Shan Ping, appointed to the

⁵ HHC 23, f. 2a (p. 270). HHS does not mention the protests made by Ch'en Fan and Tou Wu at this stage; it simply refers to Ch'en Fan's "worry": HHS 66, p. 2169.

⁶ HHS (tr.) 13, p. 3283.

⁷ The date is incorrectly given in HHS 8, p. 328. See HHC 23, f. ia (p. 269).

⁸ 7 HHS 8, p. 329; HHS 66, pp. 2169f.; HHS 69, pp. 2242f.

⁹ For Liu Yü, see HHS 57, pp. i855f. The sources give different dates for the portent, i.e., HHS 69, p. 2243, reads eighth month; HHS (tr.) 12, p. 3238, reads sixth month; HHC 23, f. 2b (p. 270), does not specify the month.

strategic position of director of the Yellow Gates (*huang-men ling*, or head eunuch), thus acquiring a foothold within the palace.

By now it was late October, and the affair was quickly drawing to a conclusion. In order to obtain incriminating evidence against the eunuchs, the new head eunuch arrested and tortured one of them until he was willing to implicate Ts'ao Chieh and another eunuch, Wang Fu (d. 179). It is interesting to see that at this point, Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan evidently worked at cross purposes. Ch'en Fan wanted the arrested eunuch to be killed immediately, but Tou Wu, hoping to extract more confessions, spared his life.

The crisis

The head eunuch immediately wrote a memorial to have Ts'ao Chieh, Wang Fu, and others arrested, and during the night of 24-25 October he had the fortune-teller bring the memorial into the palace. Neither Tou Wu nor Ch'en Fan seem to have been fully aware of this fact, for the turn that events were now taking evidently surprised them. When the memorial was brought in, no doubt to have it ready for the early morning levee, the eunuchs secretly opened it, after some hesitation; they were shocked at the number of eunuchs named for arrest. Seventeen eunuchs then swore on oath to kill Tou Wu. They "smeared blood on their mouths" and prayed to August Heaven: "The Tou family has no moral principles; we wish that August Heaven will assist the emperor in executing it. A good thing must succeed, and the empire will gain peace."¹⁰ Ts'ao Chieh was woken; he escorted the young emperor to a safe place, gave him a sword, and put his wetnurse at his side. He had the gates closed and forced the officials of the secretariat at the point of the sword to draw up an edict that appointed Wang Fu as head eunuch, with the specific command to execute the rival head eunuch, who was Tou Wu's ally.

Wang Fu killed his rival in the prison and took the tortured eunuch back with him to the palace. Then the eunuchs took the empress dowager by surprise, as they clearly did not trust her. They confiscated her seals, and with that authority they ordered soldiers to guard the two palaces and the road that ran between them; thus protected in the rear, they issued an edict that asked for Tou Wu's arrest. They also changed two key figures in the civil and judicial administration at the capital.

From what followed it can be seen that Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan had not coordinated their plans, and indeed had not foreseen that trouble would arise so swiftly. Tou Wu, who had gone out for the night, was surprised by the edict, which was delivered to him by the same eunuch who had been in prison until just some hours before. He refused to accept it, but instead fled to his nephew, the commander of one of the two regiments loyal to him, and awaited the dawn.

In the meantime, Ch'en Fan had likewise been surprised by the events. He hurried to the palace with eighty of his subordinates — not professional soldiers, it would seem.¹¹ With some difficulty he gained access to the palace compound, where he was confronted by Wang Fu, the new head eunuch. There followed a shouting match. For a while both parties stood their ground, but then the number of eunuch soldiers increased, and they surrounded Ch'en Fan until he was overpowered and taken to prison. He was trampled to death there later that day. What happened to the eighty young men is not known, but apparently there was no fighting between them and the eunuch army.

¹⁰ 9 HHS 69, p. 2243; HHS 78, p. 2524.

¹¹ HHS 66, p. 2170

With Ch'en Fan and the empress dowager out of the way, only Tou Wu remained. The key to this problem lay with a certain Chang Huan, a military commander who had recently returned in triumph to the capital.¹² With him there had also returned his victorious army, and it was to him that the eunuchs turned to have Tou Wu arrested. He had remained uninvolved during the preceding conflict, but now he threw his lot in with the eunuchs and proceeded with his soldiers to look for Tou Wu. At dawn, the two armies met outside the walls of the palace. Again a shouting match resulted, with both sides trying to persuade the other side to defect. It is said that, owing to their great respect for the eunuchs, soldiers began to defect to Chang Huan's side. Company after company went over, and shortly before midday Tou Wu's defenses crumbled. He killed himself, the rest of his family was killed, and other key figures were rounded up and killed, sometimes with their families. It is remarkable that neither during this confrontation nor during the earlier one with Ch'en Fan was there any actual fighting. The empress dowager was placed in custody in the Southern Palace, and three days later, on 28 October, eighteen eunuchs were ennobled for their "merit in punishing Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan."¹³ The third member of the triumvirate, Hu Kuang, who had kept out of the struggle, was rewarded for his prudence with the position of grand tutor, a post left vacant by the death of Ch'en Fan. Dismissals and banishments probably continued to take place for some days, and we are told that "several hundred" died.¹⁴ Lingti's reign had begun.

Reign of Ling-ti (A.D. 168-189)

Under the rule of the eunuchs, the structure of imperial government changed. First, a career in the bureaucracy was closed to all but allies of the eunuchs; subsequently it became something that was bought and sold. The eunuchs themselves penetrated into the military. Never-ending rebellions forced the court to delegate some of its powers to provincial governors, and squabbles over the succession created rifts within the palace itself. This was the last period of orderly Han government.

The court in May 189

At the end of Ling-ti's reign, in May 189, the two most formidable ladies of the court were the emperor's mother and the emperor's wife, and these ladies were not on good terms. When the Tou Wu crisis was over and Empress Dowager Tou was locked up in the Southern Palace, the new emperor hastened to send for his mother to join him in Lo-yang. He gave her full imperial status early in 169, and as Empress Dowager Tung (d. 189) she resumed her great influence over the boy.

The emperor's wife, the empress Ho (d. 189), was a butcher's daughter who had bought her way into the harem; in 176 she bore the emperor his first son, Liu Pien (176—190).¹⁵ This had won her the title empress in 181, but, knowing how insecure that position was, she had every reason for alarm when, in that same year, another son was born, to another lady. This second son and his mother, Lady Wang (d. 181), were a threat to the empress and her son. For if he so wished, the emperor could repudiate her and take Lady Wang as his new empress. He might also choose this second son as his heir and successor; the emperor was fond of the child and had called him Liu Hsieh (181-234), which means "Liu who looks like me." To **forestall** this, the empress poisoned Lady Wang. But the child was taken out of her reach and raised by the emperor's mother, the empress dowager. When the furious emperor prepared to

¹² HHS 66, p. 2170. 11 HHS 65, p. 2140; HHS 69, p. 2244.

¹³ HHS 8, p. 329; HHC 23, f. 4b-5a (p. 271). The reason for ennoblement is not stated in Hau-Han Shu.

¹⁴ HHS (tr.) 13, p. 3270.

¹⁵ HHS 10B, p. 449; HHC 24, f. 10b (p. 290).

depose the empress, eunuchs dissuaded him.¹⁶ Both ladies, therefore, had their own candidate for the succession. If the eldest son succeeded, the empress would automatically become empress dowager, and in that capacity she would be able to hold on to power for many years to come. If the younger son succeeded, the empress dowager would become grand empress dowager and could look forward to continued years of power and influence. In fact, however, right up to the day of his death, 13 May 189, Ling-ti had not been able to decide between his two sons and the question was still unresolved.

The empress dowager Tung counted among her assets one nephew who had been given a high general's post and some one thousand men to command. The empress Ho counted among her assets her half-brother Ho Chin (d. 189), who held the exalted rank of general-in-chief from 184. This rank gave him political powers in times of national emergencies, but no actual troops to command. Another half-brother of the empress, Ho Miao (d. 189), held the distinguished rank of general of the chariots and cavalry {cbii-chi cbiang-chun}, only one step below the rank held by the empress dowager's nephew. Ho Miao did have troops at his command.¹⁷ Ling-ti's predecessor, Huan-ti, had not been very popular in his time. His excessive reliance on eunuchs from 159 onward had caused resentment among officials and those who aspired to be officials; such men saw themselves as "pure" in contrast with the eunuchs and their allies, who were branded "foul." There had been a steady stream of memorials against the eunuchs, and several incidents pitting "pure" officials against "foul" eunuchs, and the court had been defied in matters regarding life and death by officials. In 167 agitation among students at the Academy and officials who had connections with them had reached such a point that the court felt obliged to exclude some of them from holding any office whatsoever. In the field of political philosophy, some authors had attacked contemporary evils with a vehemence rarely seen before.

The prestige of the throne and of its occupant had further decayed during Ling-ti's reign. He had been called "mediocre" and "benighted" during his own lifetime, and soon after his death the leading politician of the day, Tung Cho (d. 192), said: "Any thought of Ling-ti makes me furious." In A.D. 190, four of Ling-ti's predecessors were deprived of their posthumous titles on the ground they had been "worthless sovereigns";¹⁸ Ling-ti had never been considered for such a title in the first place. During his reign, at least one plot had been hatched to replace him with another member of the Liu family, and he had had to suffer the indignity of seeing four men proclaimed as rival emperors in different parts of China (one in the south in 172, one in Lo-yang itself in 178, one in the north in 187, and one in the west in 188).¹⁹ In the year 184, a massive propaganda effort had succeeded in convincing hundreds of thousands of Chinese peasants that the days of Han were over, with the result that they had taken up arms to overthrow the dynasty and to create a new era of happiness. This rebellion, called the Yellow Turbans after the color of the cloth that the rebels wrapped around their heads, had been crushed early in 185, but its effects were still very much visible in May 189.

Military organization

These effects were most noticeable in the military organization. In the first place, there was the regular standing army consisting of five regiments, the same army that had refused to come to Tou Wu's aid in 168. It is not clear how this army was deployed in May 189: some of it may have been in the capital;

¹⁶ HHS 10B, p. 450.

¹⁷ For Ho Chin and Ho Miao, see HHS 8, pp. 348, 354, 358; HHS 10B, p. 447; HHS 69, pp. 2246f.

¹⁸ HHS 9, p. 370; HHS 74A, p. 2374; *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 59, p. 1903 (Rafe de Crespigny, *The last of the Han: being the chronicle of ibt years 181–220 AD. as recorded in chapters 58–68 of the Tzu-chih t'ung-chien of Ssu-ma Kuang* [Canberra, 1969], p. 55).

¹⁹ HHS 8, pp. 334, 354, 356; HHC 24, f. 4a (p. 285).

some of it may have been in various parts of the country where rebellions were going on. All these rebellions were in some way or another the result of the Yellow Turban rebellion of 184.²⁰ When the Yellow Turban revolt had broken out, the court had hastily created new titles for the military men it sent into the field against them. In the five intervening years some of these titles had been rescinded, but in May 189 there were still many titles and persons that did not fit into the regular military system. One of them was the general-in-chief, Ho Chin, the empress's half-brother. His title had been conferred on him almost on the very day that news of the Yellow Turbans had reached the capital. Although he had played no role in the war against the rebels, the title could not very well be taken away once the rebellion was over. There was also the title general of the agile cavalry (p'iao-chi chang-chun), which had been given to the emperor's mother's nephew.

General of the chariots and cavalry was the title given to another half-brother of the empress (Ho Miao), and next to him there were three other generals, appointed in May 189. One was the general of the rear, Yuan Wei (d. 190), a member of the noble Yuan family.²¹ The other two were the general of the van and the general of the left, both away fighting rebels in the east of the empire. These six generals' titles all represented a deviation from normal practice, and some of them had lain dormant since the days of the wars of the restoration, 150 years previously. They were revived not only in response to the never-ending rebellions, but also as a means of satisfying the ambitions of the two leading ladies' family members.

It was the title of general-in-chief, previously held by Tou Wu for a few brief months in 168, that was the least unusual. There had been six such officers prior to Ho Chin's appointment, but all except one had died a violent death in struggles with the court.²² Apparently, there was a conflict of interest between some of the generals-in-chief and the emperors, and in Ho Chin's case it was to be no different. Prior to 188, general-in-chief was in fact the highest title available to commoners (except grand tutor), and Ho Chin could use his authority to overpower the court and the eunuchs in the event of an emergency. It was probably as much for this reason as for any other that in September 188 Ling-ti took the unprecedented step of appointing a eunuch as commander-in-chief of a wholly new army. This commander-in-chief, Chien Shih (d. 189), was a protege of the emperor, and even the general-in-chief was under his orders."²³

Ostensibly, the new army, called the Army of the Western Garden, had grown out of the emperor's fear of the Yellow Turbans. Next to the eunuch commander-in-chief, he appointed seven men who were not eunuchs as colonels of the Army of the Western Garden. Some of these colonels had made a name for themselves in the wars against the Yellow Turbans and other rebels; others belonged to the influential Yuan family or were proteges of that family. The colonels' soldiers had probably served under their command previously, and this may have been the third motive behind the creation of the new army. In defense against rebels, many private individuals had begun to recruit their own armies. The Western Garden Army provided some sort of legality for these armies, and ensured that they would fight on the side of the emperor.

²⁰ HHS 8, pp. 348f.

²¹ HHS 8, pp. 354, 356-57. For the titles and appointments of generals, see Hans Bielenstein, *The bureaucracy of Han times* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 12if.

²² See Chapter 8 below, p. 515.

²³ HHS 8, p. 356; TCTC 59, pp. 1890-91 (de Crespigny, *Last of the Han*, p. 40, and see p. 385, note 13) records the establishment of the eight colonels of the Western Garden; for Chien Shih, see HHS 58, p. 1882; HHS 69, p. 2247.

The appointment of a eunuch as commander-in-chief was the last logical extension of a process that had started right after the Tou Wu crisis, the extension of eunuch power into all branches of the imperial government. Ts'ao Chieh, one of those who had plotted Tou Wu's downfall, had been general of the chariots and cavalry for one hundred days in 169, and again for five months in 180. Another eunuch held the same rank for four months in 186, and now Chien Shih was commander-in-chief. On 21 November 188, the emperor, seated under a magnificent umbrella, reviewed his troops and declared himself supreme general (*wu shang chiangchiin*), the first time during Later Han that an emperor took an additional title.²⁴ In spite of these precautions, the colonels of the Army of the Western Garden hardly ventured out into the field. In December 188, the commander-in-chief sent his deputy to fight rebels in the west, and another colonel successfully fought remnants of the Yellow Turbans south of the capital. This latter colonel, however, received no recognition of his victory and died in jail just one month before the emperor himself died. In the early months of 189, when roaming rebels threatened the capital, it was not the Western Garden army that was sent against them, but a minister leading his own private army. Another rebel, one whom the court had been unable to conquer, was showered with titles and privileges; this gesture implied that it paid to rebel against the Han. There was something undeniably weak about the dynasty, in spite of all its new titles, new structures, and new armies.

When Ling-ti lay dying, one of the two generals fighting in the east, Tung Cho, had been recalled to the capital to assume a civilian post, but he had refused to accept the charge. Instead, he claimed that his troops would not let him go, and with these troops he marched in the direction of the capital. Ling-ti scolded him by means of a letter, which Tung Cho ignored. When Ling-ti breathed his last, Tung Cho had advanced to a point some 80 miles northeast of the capital "to wait for the changes that time would bring."²⁵ The great proscription (*tang-ku*), 169—184 Twenty of the years of Ling-ti's reign represent the longest consecutive period of eunuch rule during the history of the dynasty. We have already seen how, toward the end of the period, such influence came to extend into the military organization. Very little is known about the background of the eunuchs, how they were selected for castration and by whom, or how they were given positions in the palace. We do not know whether there was a system of cooptation or whether they had to pass any tests. We do know, however, of their great influence on affairs, and their great staying power once entrenched in the ruler's confidence.²⁶

In May 189, all of the important eunuchs involved in the Tou Wu crisis were gone. Hou Lan had committed suicide in 172, Wang Fu had died in jail in 179, and Ts'ao Chieh had died a natural death in 181. Their places had been taken by Chien Shih (d. 189), the commander-in-chief of the Army of the Western Garden; Chao Chung (d. 189), who had been general of the chariots and cavalry for four months in 186; and Chang Jang (d. 189), the mastermind behind the emperor's financial manipulations. Ling-ti called Chao Chung his "mother" and Chang Jang his "father." The Yuan family also had a representative within the eunuch establishment, Yuan She (d. X79), who held the rank of regular palace attendant (*chung-ch'ang-shih*).²⁷

The eunuch establishment consisted of a bewildering variety of titles and offices, and in the course of Ling-ti's reign this variety had increased. It was by now common for eunuchs to hold noble titles which they transferred to adopted sons. Eunuchs were usually ennobled in groups, a reflection of the fact that they cooperated in groups when they aided the throne against a military leader or an encroaching

²⁴ HHS 8, p. 356; HHC 25, f. 9b (p. 303).

²⁵ For the earlier history of the eunuchs, see Chapter 3 above, pp. 287f.

²⁶ For the earlier history of the eunuchs, see Chapter 3 above, pp. 287f.

²⁷ For these eunuchs, see HHS 34, p. 1186; HHS 45, p. 1523; HHS 78, pp. 2522-38.

bureaucrat. In 126, nineteen eunuchs had been ennobled on the same day, in recognition of their help in placing Shun-ti (r. A.D. 125–144) on the throne; in 159, five eunuchs had been ennobled (together with seven men who were not eunuchs) for their help in eliminating the general-in-chief Liang Chi's (d. 159) influence; in 168, eighteen eunuchs had been ennobled for their help in doing away with Tou Wu and Ch'en Fan; in 172, twelve eunuchs were ennobled for having discovered a plot against the throne; in 185, twelve eunuchs were ennobled because the emperor was led to believe that they had been of help in quelling the Yellow Turbans. Chao Chung and Chang Jang belonged to the group of twelve ennobled in 185.²⁸

The variety of titles available to eunuchs increased after 175. That year it was decreed that all offices in the palace that were headed by directors would henceforth be headed by eunuchs. Similarly, all posts of assistant to the directors were reserved for eunuchs. It is not specified which offices were affected by this measure, but it is likely that from 175 onward the emperor's table, writing utensils, clothes, jewelry, precious objects, and even his health and medicine, were entrusted to eunuchs. From 175 it was also a eunuch who determined "the price of things," which probably meant the price that the court paid for its purchases.²⁹

This, however, was a minor matter in comparison with the offices that became available to their proteges, their brothers, and their parents, as a result of the Great Proscription (*tang-ku*) of 169-184. This had started toward the end of 169 as a smoldering conflict between the eunuchs, firmly entrenched in the ruler's confidence since the Tou Wu crisis, and some high bureaucrats who were resentful of their lack of influence. It had now come out into the open, and the eunuchs had won. Eight officials were accused of banding together as a clique that was injurious to the emperor's interests, and when these eight had been killed the way was free to kill about a hundred more of their proteges, sons, and parents. When this was done and their wives and smallest children had been banished to the cold north or the malaria-ridden south, notices went up in the office of the superintendent of trials with the names of those who were forbidden in perpetuity to hold any office. Not only were they themselves excluded, but also all those who shared a common great-great-grandfather with any of the listed persons.³⁰ It had taken some time before Ling-ti, only thirteen years old, had fully understood what was going on. Although such a massive proscription had once been in effect in 166-167 during a similar struggle between bureaucrats and eunuchs, the new emperor did not know what the words "proscription of a clique" (*tang-ku*) meant. When it had been explained to him that this meant that the "clique" plotted against the state itself, the emperor approved the edict, and the Great Proscription started. In 176 an official had dared to ask for an abolition of the **proscription**; as a result, the proscription was widened and applied to everybody having any connection at all with the "clique." In 179, with Hou Lan and Wang Fu dead, the scope of the proscription had been somewhat narrowed, but it took until 184 and the Yellow Turban rebellion before the eunuchs lost their grip on the appointments, and then the Great Proscription ended.³¹ In the meantime, however, the nature of high office had changed; from something acquired through skill and merit, it had become something that was sold to whoever offered the highest price.

In the early days of the dynasty, the number of eunuchs had been no more than fourteen, but it is reported that toward the end of Ling-ti's reign, the number had swollen to two thousand. It should not

²⁸ HHS 78, pp. 2525, 2534-35.

²⁹ HHS 8, p. 337; HHS (tr.) 26, pp. 359Of.; Chapter 8 below, pp. 50if.

³⁰ HHS 8, pp. 330-31; HHS 67, pp. 2i83f.

³¹ HHS 8, pp. 338, 343; HHS 67, p. 2189.

be thought that this huge establishment lived in peace and quiet, and in fact internal rifts had appeared. The foremost rivalry was between the eunuchs belonging to the establishment of the emperor's mother and those belonging to that of the empress. Another division was between the twelve eunuchs ennobled in 185 for merit and some other eunuchs who resented their sway over the empire's finances and talents. During Ling-ti's reign there had been plots of eunuchs against eunuchs, accusations had been brought in and counter-accusations had been the result. In the end, the twelve eunuchs triumphed over all their enemies.

In 171 there was a plot to have the empress dowager freed from her luxurious prison, and most serious of all, it was a eunuch who told the emperor in 184 that the cruel exactions of the twelve and their proscription had caused the Yellow Turban rebellion. In the first case, the eunuchs intervening for the empress dowager Tou were accused of speaking maliciously about the emperor's mother-and so the two women were used against each other. In the case of the Yellow Turbans, deft maneuvering succeeded in shifting the blame from the twelve living eunuchs to Wang Fu and Hou Lan who had died, discredited, a few years earlier; then to two eunuchs who belonged to the establishment of the emperor's mother, and finally to the accuser himself. We have seen that the twelve were even ennobled the next year for their pains.³²

The eunuchs themselves held power only within the palace, but in the years of the Great Proscription, relations, proteges, and adherents of the eunuchs had been appointed to posts within the capital and in the countryside, thus building up a vast network of influence. It is not clear how the end of the proscription affected this situation, but the eunuchs remained the most important holders of power during the rest of Ling-ti's reign. Whatever plot was made to discredit and destroy them, they always resurfaced. When, on the other hand, the eunuchs plotted to have someone discredited or destroyed, they nearly always succeeded.

The most spectacular case was that of the king of Po-hai (d. 172), a younger brother of the late Huan-ti. He had lost his title and his kingdom, but had promised to pay money to Wang Fu if the latter could have it restored. Wang Fu delivered the desired result, but the other did not pay up. In 172, Wang Fu had his revenge. The king was accused of sacrilege. He committed suicide, and Wang Fu and eleven others were ennobled.³³ In 179, a plot against the eunuchs failed miserably, and four high-ranking officials perished. In 181, it was a group of eunuchs who persuaded the emperor not to depose the empress Ho, who had just poisoned Lady Wang.

Many more examples could be given of the successes of the eunuchs, and only a few of their failures. As long as Ling-ti lived their influence could not be broken, and it was a final sign of his trust when the emperor on his deathbed placed his younger and favorite son, Liu Hsieh, in the charge of Chien Shih, the eunuch commander-in-chief.³⁴

The state of the bureaucracy in May 189

In the course of the twenty-one years of Ling-ti's reign (A.D. 168-189), the imperial bureaucracy changed almost beyond recognition. We have seen that many military titles were revived or created because of the series of rebellions that had plagued his reign ever since the Yellow Turbans, and to

³² For these events, see *HHS* 78, esp. pp. 2534⁴

³³ *HHS* 8, p. 333; *HHS* 55, p. 1798; *HHS* 64, p. 2109.

³⁴ *HHC* 25, f. 12b (p. 305); *TCTC* 59, p. 1894 (de Crespigny, *Last of the Han*, p. 44).

accommodate various interests in the capital. In the civil service, a parallel development took place. A few new titles were created or revived; in other cases existing offices were given new functions and powers.

When such new titles concerned only the emperor's own household staff, the impact was perhaps not very great. This was the case with the three new imperial parks laid out in 180, the new imperial stables founded in 181, and the Bureau of the Orchard created in 183.³⁵ These new establishments were probably staffed with eunuchs only.

The highest ranks in the civil bureaucracy did not change visibly. The grand tutor, Hu Kuang, had died in A.D.172, and no successor had been named. This was according to precedent; the nominal task of the grand tutor was to guide a young and inexperienced ruler "toward goodness," and when a grand tutor died, no new one was appointed until the accession of a new emperor. It is true that Hu Kuang's own appointment had represented something of an anomaly, since he was Ling-ti's second grand tutor, appointed after the first one, Ch'en Fan, had met his death thanks to the eunuchs in October 168. Evidently it was not considered necessary to depart further from precedent by appointing a third grand tutor for Lingti, the more so since the emperor had officially come of age in 171.³⁶ The function, therefore, was vacant in May 189.

When there was no grand tutor, the top ranks of the civil service consisted of three excellencies, nine ministers, and eight secretaries with stipends equal to those of ministers. Ostensibly this structure remained the same during the whole of Ling-ti's reign, but there was in fact an important change in the situation after A.D. 178. From then on, high office had to be bought for cash; it was no longer conferred on those who were the most deserving, but simply on those who were the richest.³⁷ In a way, sale of office was the logical outcome of a process that had started some seventy years previously, when it became the custom to dismiss the three excellencies after freakish or disastrous events. Such events, such as earthquakes or the birth of children with two heads, were considered to be Heaven's criticism of the emperor's conduct, and by shifting the blame to the three excellencies the emperor was exonerated. Under such circumstances, however, it became impossible to predict how long any of the three excellencies would stay in office. Their function was, in fact, separated from political reality. This weakening of their power was offset by an increase in the power of other government institutions. Initially this had been the secretariat, but since the Tou Wu crisis, it had moved to the eunuchs.³⁸

On a limited scale, for a limited period, and in answer to great financial difficulties, sale of office had been made possible on a few occasions previously, in 109 and in 161. In 178, however, the offices for sale included the highest of the empire, and Ling-ti could not claim any financial difficulties other than those occasioned by his own greed, that of his mother, and that of some of the eunuchs. If it was the political insignificance of the three excellencies that made the sale of office possible, it was corruption in high circles that rendered it attractive.

The sale of office was organized from a building called the Western Quarters, in the Western Garden. It cost 10 million cash to become one of the three excellencies; 5 million cash secured one of the posts of

³⁵ HHS 8, pp. 345, 347; Bielenstein, "Lo-yang," p. 81.

³⁶ HHS 8, pp. 329, 332, 333.

³⁷ HHS 8, p. 342; Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, p. 141; Bielenstein, "Lo-yang," p. 78.

³⁸ For the records of these events and their relation to political or other developments, see HHS (tr.) 12-18. For the discussion of these events as a vehicle for criticism, see Hans Bielenstein, "An interpretation of the portents of the Ts'ien-Han-shu," *BMFEA*, 22 (1950), 127-43; and Hans Bielenstein, *Tie restoration O/the Han dynasty*, Vol. II, *BMFEA*, 31 (1959), pp. 237f.

the nine ministers (cbiu-ch'ing); and for the governorship of one of the one hundred or so commanderies one had to furnish 20 million cash.³⁹ Those with an excellent reputation were allowed to halve the price, and in practice every official who had received an appointment went first to the Western Garden to bargain. In these bargainings, it was not always the court that won. In 185, Ts'ui Lieh (d. 192) became minister of finance for the price of 5 million, and during the installation ceremonies Ling-ti was heard to remark, "If we had kept him waiting a bit longer, we could have got ten million out of him." In order to get more money, after 187 the emperor allowed the sale of lesser marquises {kuan-nei hou}.⁴⁰ Euphemistically the emperor called the money thus collected his "courtesy money" (li-ch'ien), and he had a treasury built to store it, the Western Quarters. It was there too that he stored the "gifts" that flowed to him from all over the empire, offered to the emperor himself, to his mother, or to certain eunuchs, in the hope of achieving recognition or advancement; it was there that he stored the millions of cash being squeezed out of the population, at a rate of 10 cash per mou (o. 113 acres), during 185 for the building of a new palace; and it was there that the 300 million cash levied by "irregular decrees" were also stored. Another invention, "Army Assistance Funds," also went there, but when the emperor abolished all difference between the private and the public purse in 185 he built another treasury, the Hall of Ten Thousand Cash, to store the empire's annual taxes. The only time the Western Garden was of any use to the government as a whole was in 184, when the emperor magnanimously offered his horses to the armies fighting the Yellow Turbans.⁴¹

Some of the people who bought high office were nouveaux riches whose ancestry is unknown and whose descendants are lost to history. Others, however, included the cream of imperial society. The influential Yuan family bought one of the three excellencies' positions for one of its members, Yuan Wei, in 182; Ts'ao Sung (d. 194), the adopted son of a eunuch, became one of the three excellencies for a reported 100 million cash in 188.⁴² Apparently, the prestige of being one of the Han dynasty's three excellencies was enough to command a high price.

If there was no shortage of candidates willing to apply for high office in the capital, the situation with regard to other offices was different. Apart from those who did not want to pay and made a fuss over the issue, thus embarrassing the court, there were deeper reasons why some extraordinary measures had to be taken to fill all posts. One of the reasons was the Great Proscription, which lasted from 169 until 184. Another was the so-called exclusion system: An official was not allowed to serve in the commandery or county in which he had been born; he was also excluded from serving in the domicile of his wife.⁴³ These rules had become increasingly complex, and in Ling-ti's time long-term vacancies resulted.

In order to have more persons available to hold office, in 176 the court appointed over one hundred elderly university students after a summary examination; next year, in another surprise move, some merchants were awarded the title "filial son" and were immediately given minor posts. Such ad hoc measures proved unsatisfactory, and in 178 another unprecedented step was taken. A whole new university, the School at the Gate of the Vast Capital (Hung-tu men hsieh), was created, and its students were virtually guaranteed an appointment to the bureaucracy. The students of the normal university

³⁹ Payments for the governorship of commanderies, which could at times amount to 30 million cash, were started after disastrous fires had raged in the southern palace of Lo-yang: Bielenstein, "Loyang," pp. 3if.

⁴⁰ HHS 8, p. 355; HHS 52, p. 1731; TCTC 58, p. 1878 (de Crespigny, *Last of the Han*, p. 26).

⁴¹ HHS 8, pp. 351-52; HHS 71, p. 2300; HHS 78, p. 2535. For "courtesy money," see HHSCC 8, f. 8a, citation in final note.

⁴² HHS 52, p. 1731; HHS 78, p. 2519.

⁴³ For these rules, see Yen Keng-wang, *Cbung-kuo ti-fang hsing-cheng chih-tu shih*. Vol. 11, *Ch'in Han ti-fang hsmg-chtng chib-lu* (Taipei, 1961), pp. 345f.

were apparently not considered politically safe enough, witness the fact that in A.D.172 over a thousand of them had been imprisoned by the eunuchs in the course of yet another brief power struggle in the capital. There is no mistaking the shock that the new university caused. Several officials protested against the favoritism that the emperor showed to its students, but all the evidence suggests that the emperor ignored their complaints.⁴⁴ We have seen how the rebellions affected military organization; during the last year of Ling-ti's reign, their effect came to be felt on the civil service as well. It came to the court's attention that its repeated failures to deal swiftly with rebellions were caused by basic weaknesses in the local administration. The rebellions were usually too wide-spread to be dealt with by the relatively small armies of the various commanderies but there was no one on the spot with sufficient authority to mobilize and command larger armies. Every time a larger army had to be deployed, the court had to appoint a new commander. Before this whole process was completed, the rebellion had often escalated and inflicted humiliating defeats on the commanderies.

The court, however, was afraid to leave potentially powerful commanders of large armies permanently away in the provinces, and in the beginning resorted to makeshift measures. An effort to have a court official as permanent commander of a provincial army had already proved unsuccessful in A.D. 179. In the intervening years other devices had been invented, but in 188 the court finally took an important, and in retrospect, fateful step. It appointed regional commissioners {mu\ literally "shepherds"} for regions (cbou) ridden by rebellion.⁴⁵ These commissioners were to be stationed in their areas; they held full ministerial rank, and took precedence over all other local officials. In other words, relatively independent provincial power centers had been created. One of them was to develop into a fully independent empire, taking upon itself the mandate of Han and claiming to be its only legitimate successor.

From his deathbed, Ling-ti made his two last appointments, and both concerned regional commissioners. Messengers were sent north to give the very successful commissioner of a northern province, Liu Yii (d. 193), the additional title of supreme commander. This was only the second time that one of the three excellencies had been appointed outside the capital.⁴⁶ At the same time, messengers were sent west with the credentials of a commissioner to offer the title to a general who was refusing to disband his troops. Against orders this general was leading his troops toward the capital, so his appointment as commissioner may have been a last effort to force him to take his army back with him to his own area.⁴⁷ Whatever the reason, it did not work. The general was none other than Tung Cho, and even with his additional title he continued his march on the capital, arriving, as we have seen, at a point 80 miles northwest of Lo-yang when Ling-ti breathed his last on 13 May 189.

Rebellions and wars

Four kinds of wars beset Ling-ti's reign: there were raids and incursions into Chinese territory by foreign peoples; there were uprisings of foreign peoples within Chinese territory; there were revolts and mutinies pitting Chinese against Chinese, usually for reasons of material distress; and there were rebellions with religious, antidynastic overtones.

⁴⁴ HHS 8, pp. 333, 338—40; HHS 78, p. 2525; Bielenscein, *Bureaucracy*, p. 141; and Chapter 8 below, pp. 5 i6f.

⁴⁵ HHS 75, p. 2431; HHS 82B, p. 2734.

⁴⁶ HHS 8, p. 357; HHS 9, p. 368; HHS 73, pp. 2353c. For the first occasion, see HHS 72, p. 2321.

⁴⁷ HHS 72, p. 2322.

Raids and incursions were nothing new, nor was the court's inability to protect its northern provinces from nomads and horsemen who came to grab what they could not afford to buy. "From 168 onwards, no year was free from them," says the historian.⁴⁸ This refers specifically to the situation along the northeastern edges of the frontier. Two nomadic peoples, the Wu-huan and the Hsien-pi, descended every winter on the relatively rich and well-stocked Chinese towns, but only once, in 177, did the court send a large expedition against them.⁴⁹ Part of the expedition consisted not of Chinese, but of cavalry of yet another foreign people, thus honoring the political adage of "using barbarians against barbarians." This force was defeated, and from then on the war was left to the local officials, who were unable to cope with it.

If we look along the northern frontier in a westward direction, the situation between the Chinese and the foreign peoples living there becomes more complex. In A.D. 50, the first emperor of Later Han had permitted a branch of the Hsiung-nu to settle inside the Great Wall.⁵⁰ In effect, this meant that he had ceded the territory to them, although in Chinese eyes the area remained a part of the empire. During the reign of Ling-ti the arrangement caused no trouble, and in fact it was cavalry of these Hsiungnu that fought on the emperor's side against the Hsien-pi and the Wuhuan in 177. Toward the very end of the reign, however, succession troubles arose within the leadership of the Hsiung-nu, and one of their leaders who lost this struggle appealed in vain for the emperor's help. Disillusioned, he joined local Chinese rebels, and was with them when the emperor died.

Farther west and to the south lay an area inhabited by Chinese and another foreign people, the Ch'iang. Although this people did not at the time inhabit Tibet, they are often called "proto-Tibetans" in Western literature.⁵¹ During Ling-ti's reign, the Ch'iang were more warlike than the Hsiung-nu. In A.D. 184, in the wake of the Yellow Turban rebellion, the Ch'iang and a number of Chinese rose up against the empire. Their rebellion spread and twice threatened the old capital, Ch'ang-an (in 185 and 187).

At one point the situation looked so hopeless that the minister of finance advised the emperor to abandon the whole area affected by the rebellion, but in March 189, two months before the emperor's death, the court scored a victory of sorts against a combined army of Ch'iang and Chinese.⁵² Unfortunately, the victory merely caused the rebel forces to split into three groups; one of the Chinese rebels then styled himself king and would not be dislodged for another thirty years.

In the southern provinces, the Chinese lived intermingled with yet other foreign peoples often called collectively the Man. Relations with them too were frequently strained to the point of war. From 178 until 181 there was a protracted struggle, which was finally won by the court. In the remaining years of Ling-ti's reign trouble flared up now and then, but by the time of his death the situation was fairly peaceful.⁵³ It was not often that Chinese farmers and soldiers rebelled solely out of desperation. In A.D. 170, 186, and 187 there were three such uprisings, but even in these cases one cannot be sure that the rebellions did not have another, ulterior motive.⁵⁴ It was the rebellions that did rest on such ulterior motives which were most devastating to the empire. Such rebellions are sometimes called "religious rebellions" because the aims of the rebels were not only political, but also religious in nature. In

⁴⁸ HHC 23, f. 5a (p. 271). This statement is not found in *Hou-Han shu*.

⁴⁹ HHS 8, p. 339; HHS 89, p. 2964.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 3 above, p. 267; and Chapter 6 below, pp. 398f.

⁵¹ See Chapter 6 below, pp. 422f.

⁵² HHS 8, pp. 350, 352; HHS 72, p. 2320; HHS 87, p. 2898.

⁵³ HHS 8, pp. 340, 345; HHS 86, p. 2839.

⁵⁴ HHS 8, pp. 332, 352, 354.

contemporary Chinese thinking, the dynasty, though not always the actual reigning emperor, represented a cosmic force. Here, it matters little what cosmic force was understood; to some the dynasty was the living representation of the element called “fire,” and its sway was uncontested as long as “fire” ruled the world. To others, the dynasty represented the verification of old prognostications, written down in strange, esoteric books. Had not Confucius himself foreseen that the Han would come to power three centuries after his death?⁵⁵ Even for the more literal-minded, the dynasty, by its very existence, proved to be Heaven-willed, and as long as no one convinced them that Heaven’s will had changed, they would put up with the existing ruling house.

With a variation on an old French saying, the prime maxim of Chinese politics is “ne faut pas manger a l’empereur” (One should not nibble at the emperor). The Chinese themselves put it differently: “Dethronement and enthronement are weighty affairs quite beyond the power of ordinary men.”⁵⁶

However powerful a general or minister might become, it was useless to set up a new dynasty as long as there was not yet enough demonstrable cosmic backing for the venture. Success itself was taken as a sign of Heaven’s approval, but it was approval of an equivocal nature; for it could either mean approval of the person himself, or, as some took it, approval of one’s services to the dynasty. More proof was needed to show that Heaven really willed a new dynasty.

For some, this proof consisted of signs and miracles; for others, of new prophecies; for others still, it was metaphysical theories and calculations that provided proof. In short, in order to proclaim a new dynasty, one had to possess (or to fabricate) cosmic backing, proving in some way or other that the days of the Han were over. Conversely, when a new dynasty was indeed proclaimed, one could be sure that there was demonstrable cosmic backing. It is in this latter case that so-called “religious rebellions” come into the picture.

“Religious rebellion” is the translation of a term, *yao-tsei*, that occurs for the first time in Chinese historiography in connection with the year A.D. 132.⁵⁷ A literal translation of this term is “magic rebels,” but from the little information we possess it appears that what is actually meant is “rebels who use signs and miracles in order to support their cause.” What the signs and miracles were the historian hardly ever bothers to specify, but the cause for which the rebels stood is known to us in a large number of cases. What the “magic rebels” wanted was a new emperor—not from the house of Han, but from their own ranks. In other words, they wanted a change of dynasty. This became increasingly apparent after 144, when the dynastic succession in Lo-yang was quite openly manipulated by Liang Chi (d. 159), the general-in-chief. He poisoned one Han emperor and set up another, Huan-ti. Perhaps in response to this, we see three rebel emperors proclaimed in the one year 145, and in 147, 148, 150, 154, 165, 166, 172, 187, and 188 a further nine rebel emperors were set up, often with huge support.⁵⁸ We also know of a few instances when plots were hatched against the throne in 147, in 161, in 178, and in 188. The titles of these rebel emperors reveal that they saw themselves as founders of a new era, or as the fulfilment of a cosmic-religious process. We have two Yellow Emperors, in 145 and in 148, and we may presume that the rebels who produced these emperors thought that the reign of fire, and its color red, was over,

⁵⁵ For these theories and their implications, see Chapter 3 above, p. 230. For the allusion to Confucius, see *HHS* 30B, p. 1067; and Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po hu t’ung: The comprehensive discussions in the White Tiger Hall* (Leiden, 1949, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 113, 115-17.

⁵⁶ *HHS* 74A, p. 2375 (de Crespigny, *Last O/tth Han*, p. 60).

⁵⁷ *HHS* 6, p. 260.

⁵⁸ For Huan-ti’s accession, see Chapter 3 above, p. 286. For the self-styled emperors, see *HHS* 7, pp. 277, 279.

and that a new era, that of earth and yellow, had now begun.⁵⁹ In 145 we find a Black Emperor, who probably inaugurated the rule of water and its color black. We have an Emperor of the Great Beginning in 154; an Emperor Supreme in 165; a Grand Emperor in 166; and a Yang-ming Emperor (which may mean Emperor of the Light of the Sun) in 172.

The rebellion that produced this latter emperor was the first “magic rebellion” of Ling-ti’s reign. We do not know what theory these rebels had; we only know that it took the court three years to suppress the upstart rival. Religion, however, is difficult to stamp out with weapons, and in the same period that this rebellion was raging in southern China (172-175), a family of physicians was impressing the local population with miracle cures in northern China. Disease, they taught, is the result of sin, and if one confesses one’s guilt, health will return. The leader of this sect of healers was called Chang Chueh (d. 184), and at some time during his activities he adopted the idea that it was up to him to supplant the dynasty. To this end, he began to organize his followers into units, and to urge them on with promises of a better world, a world of great peace, to come. “When a new cycle of sixty years begins, great fortune will come to the world,” he prophesied, thus committing himself to the year 184, when, by traditional reckoning, such a cycle would start again.⁶⁰ Such plots could not remain secret, and as early as 181 the minister of finance had written to the emperor that apparently there was some movement afoot, and that he should try to disperse the followers of Chang Chueh by peaceful means, since otherwise they might be stirred into action. Soon after the letter was written, however, a fire broke out in the imperial harem, the minister of finance was dismissed to **atone** for this sign of Heaven’s wrath, and the matter was left in abeyance.⁶¹ Chang Chueh could proceed with his plans, and the date of the uprising — which was to occur at various places on the same day —was set for 3 April 184. Just before this date, one of Chang Chieh’s followers got cold feet and denounced the plot and its details to the throne. When the emperor ordered further investigation, Chang Chueh realized that he could not wait until the agreed date.⁶²

When the court’s investigation implicated hundreds of people, including palace guards who believed in the teachings of Chang Chueh, there may have been surprise; there was, however, outright shock when news arrived that rebellions had broken out simultaneously in no fewer than sixteen commanderies, stretching in a broad belt south, east, and northeast of the capital. This was the Yellow Turban rebellion. Everywhere the commandery armies were defeated, important cities were captured, kings were kidnapped, and many imperial officials took the safest way out: they fled. Oddly enough, we do not know when the rebellion broke out. We only know it must have been on a day in March 184, for the first reaction of the court is dated 1 April 184. The empress’s half-brother, Ho Chin (d. 189), was given the title and authority of general-in-chief. The palace guards and the standing army were put temporarily under his command “in order to preserve the calm in the capital.”⁶³ In the countryside, a first line of defense was laid south of the capital, where eight newly created commandants guarded strategic posts. Finally, the court selected three officials to take the campaign into the countryside, one to the north, two to the south. We know the course of these campaigns in great detail. Here, however, it must suffice

⁵⁹ See pp. 3601". below.

⁶⁰ HHS 71, p. 2299. This passage refers to the "great fortune" (*ta-chi*) that will attend the inauguration of the new cycle. *TCTC* 58, p. 1864 uses the expression "great peace," *tai-p'ing*; see also *San-kuo chih* 8 (Wei 8), p. 264 note 1. For the concept and significance of *tai-p'ing*, see Anna K. Seidel, "The image of the perfect ruler in early Taoist messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung," *History of Religions*, 9:2-3 (1969-70), 2i7f.; and Chapter 16 below, pp. 8i4f.

⁶¹ HHS 8, pp. 345—46; HHS 54, p. 1784; HHS 57, p. 1849; Rafe de Crespigny, *The biography of Sun Chien* (Canberra, 1966), pp. 24f.

⁶² HHS 71, p. 2300.

⁶³ HHS 8, p. 348; HHS 69, p. 2246.

to say that the Yellow Turbans were defeated during February 185. But the court did not profit from its victory for long. Within two months, new rebellions, spawned by the Yellow Turban movement though not necessarily with its religious basis, broke out time and again. Some had fanciful names (Black Mountain, White Wave), some called themselves plainly Yellow Turban.⁶⁴ In the end this wave of rebellions proved too much for the court, and the Black Mountain rebels were given the status of local officials, with permission to send in candidates for appointment. When it turned out that this was not enough, the court sent a private army under a warlord against them, as the court's own army was apparently powerless.

The impact of the Yellow Turban rebellion on military and civil administration has already been shown. In A.D. 188, there was a further massive uprising in what is now Szechwan province, but although its leader called himself a Yellow Turban and took the title Son of Heaven, there is no known connection between the real Yellow Turbans in eastern China and this rebellion in the west.⁶⁵ This latter rebellion, too, had to be fought by private armies, and it is possible that it was this circumstance that prompted the court to change its local administration and to appoint **plenipotentiary** regional commissioners. If it was not this rebellion, then it was a more long-lasting rebellion in the north that prompted the court to appoint the commissioners. In 187, a Chinese ex-official succeeded in convincing several chiefs of the Wu-huan people that the Chinese were treating them badly and so incited them to revolt, with himself as their leader. The ex-official too declared himself to be a new Son of Heaven, and in this case it was a commissioner who finally put things right in April 189, just a few weeks before Ling-ti died.⁶⁶ Culture and scholarship under Ling-ti Many more details could be added to the picture of Ling-ti's reign. There were earthquakes, droughts, floods, locusts, caterpillars, epidemics, and hail storms. The court reacted by proclaiming amnesties and rebates of taxes, by distributing medicine, and by ordering prayers for rain. In the heavens there were eclipses and comets, while on earth there was an extraordinary series of freaks: a horse giving birth to a human child, a virgin giving birth to a baby with two heads and four arms, plants suddenly adopting the shape of an animal, chickens changing into cocks, and snakes, tigers, and madmen sneaking in and out of the palace.⁶⁷ In the popular stories that grew up around the fall of the Han, these freaks and strange happenings are fondly enumerated as omens of the imminent collapse of the dynasty.

There was no lack of building activity, although we hear equally often of fires ravaging palaces or of walls suddenly collapsing. An observation tower was built, four bronze men and four bronze bells were cast, new money was issued. On the happy side, there were magic mushrooms, phoenixes, and in the year preceding the Yellow Turban rebellions, the sources say there was a bumper harvest. Several outlying countries came to offer tribute to the Chinese Son of Heaven, thus proving his influence in civilizing the world.⁶⁸ The emperor himself, however, is said to have been addicted to all things barbarian: clothes, food, music, dances, and furniture. Perhaps the most important scholar of the reign was Ts'ai Yung (133-192), and the most important scholarly event of the era was the erection in the capital of stone slabs inscribed with the correct text of the classics. This project was ordered in A.D. 175 and completed in 183, Ts'ai Yung being one of the main executors of this enormous task. Fragments of the Han Stone Classics still survive.⁶⁹ If we have devoted a lot of attention to the world of Ling-ti, it is

⁶⁴ HHS 8, p. 351; HHS 9, pp. 383-84; HHS 71, pp. 23iof.

⁶⁵ HHS 8, p. 356; HHS 75, p. 2432.

⁶⁶ HHS 8, pp. 354-57; HHS 73, p. 2353; HHS 89, p. 2964; HHS 90, p. 2984.

⁶⁷ For example, see HHS 8, pp. 352, 354. For other reports of these events, see HHS (tr.) 12 and 13-18.

⁶⁸ HHS 8, pp. 347, 353; HHS 78, p. 2537.

⁶⁹ For Ts'ai Yung, see HH5 60B, pp. 1979*.; HHS 78, p. 2533; HHS 79A, p. 2558; Tsuen-hsuiin Tsien, *Written on bamboo and silk: The beginnings of Chinese books and inscriptions* (Chicago and London, 1970).

because his reign was the last stable period of Han rule. This was the world that people remembered, that they wanted to re-create in whole or in part; it was also the world that refused to come to life again. When Ling-ti closed his eyes on 13 May 189, in a sense it was the whole traditional empire that died with him, although this was not immediately apparent.

The Collapse of Dynastic Power

The somewhat complex series of events in which the Han dynasty came to an end may be summarized in the following terms. The leading families and officials massacred the eunuchs, but lost the emperor. Tung Cho then manipulated the imperial succession, and in the east a coalition was formed against him. Thanks to its pressure, the Han emperor and Tung Cho were driven westward, but the coalition broke up with its members destroying one another until only seven remained. Meanwhile, Tung Cho had died, and the Han emperor was wandering over the face of the earth until he was received by Ts'ao Ts'ao. Ts'ao Ts'ao then overcame all but two of his rivals, and his son set himself up as emperor of Wei in place of the Han emperor. His two rivals claimed equal rank, and for forty years China was to have three emperors.

Source II: An Outline History of China⁷⁰

See attached.

III. Vocabulary

From Text⁷¹

Concurrently: Occurring or existing simultaneously or side by side

Usurp: To seize and hold by force or without legal right

Debauchery: Excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures; intemperance.

Collate: to gather or arrange in their proper sequence (the pages of a report, the sheets of a book, the pages of several sets of copies, etc.).

Helter-skelter (informal): In a disordered and haphazard manner

Crack (informal): Expert, extremely experienced

Appropriate (verb): To take and use, especially without permission or right

Ware: Articles of merchandise or manufacture; goods

Primordial: Constituting a beginning; giving origin to something derived or developed; original

Insurgent: a person who rises in forcible opposition to lawful authority; a rebel

Eunuch: a castrated man, esp. one formerly employed by rulers as a harem guard or palace official.

Propagate: To spread, as from person to person; to disseminate

Nominally: Existing in name only; refers to something that is true only in theory but not in practice

Monopolize: To obtain exclusive possession of; to keep entirely to oneself

Fiefdom: The estate or domain of a feudal lord.

Stagnant: not flowing or running, as water, air, etc.; inactive, dull

Amalgamation: A consolidation or merger, as of several corporations

Protégé: A person under the patronage or care of someone interested in her career or welfare

⁷⁰ Shouyi Bai, *An Outline History of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982).

⁷¹ "Dictionary.com," Dictionary.com, LLC, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

Proscription: Outlawry, interdiction, or prohibition

Clique: A small, exclusive group of people; coterie; set.

Indict: To charge with an offense or crime; accuse of wrongdoing; castigate; criticize

Forestall: To prevent, hinder, or thwart by action in advance

Dowager: Woman who holds some title or property from her deceased husband, esp. the widow of a king, duke, etc. (often used as an additional title to differentiate her from the wife of the present king, duke, etc.)

Contravention: A violation or opposition

Intercede: To act or interpose in behalf of someone in difficulty or trouble, as by pleading or petition

Triumvirate: A government of three officers or magistrates functioning jointly.

Atone: To make amends or reparation, as for an offense or a crime, or for an offender

Plenipotentiary: A person, esp. a diplomatic agent, invested with full power or authority to transact business on behalf of another.

GRE Words⁷²

Anathema: A ban or curse; something detested

Putative: Supposed, reported, reputed

Veracious: Truthful, earnest

Encomium: Formal expression of praise

Picayune: Worthless, petty, trifling

IV. Bibliography⁷³

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Twitchett, Denis, and Michael Lowe. *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁷² Michael Chapman, *The Historian's Companion* (Reading, MA: Trebarwyth Press, 2008).

⁷³ For the sake of brevity, the sources of sources are not listed in the bibliography.