THE FALL OF IMPERIAL CHINA

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The Dynastic Cycle

Dynastic and Secular Change

Secular changes among the peasants, gentry, and merchants were outside the perspective of most traditional Chinese historians. Chroni-
clers were certainly aware of social and economic conditions, but
these were only a backdrop for the much more dramatic history of
dynastic politics, which played itself out in patterns as seemingly
repetitive as the seasons. And those few institutional historians who
discerned long-term social changes like the demise of feudalism or
the rising economic influence of merchants did not project them
into a progressively altered future. History was not linear for the
Confucianist; it was a series of whorls moving forward through
time without necessarily reaching a higher end. Individual dynasties
rose and fell like man himself, obeying a cycle of life and death
that governed all animate beings. This notion of a dynastic cycle
was the primary political concept of the Chinese. By the late im-
perial period it incorporated three related elements: moral retribu-
tion, ritual magic, and historical voluntarism.

The Moral Factor

Moral retribution was the earliest significance attached to the
notion of a dynastic cycle. In 1027 B.C. the Shang empire was con-
quered by the Chou Dynasty. Until then the Shang had governed
in the name of Shang-ti, a deity who ruled over the bureaucrat-
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cally ranked ancestral spirits of the Shang royal family. Although Shang-ti may originally have been an ancestral spirit, by the twelfth century B.C., it was sufficiently abstracted to be identified with an entirely impersonal force called Tien or heaven. Since heaven could not be the anthropomorphic personal property of the Shang kings, the Chou Dynasty believed it could legitimately claim the right to usurp the former. After defeating the Shang, the Chou rulers then proclaimed that they had won because their enemy had lost the Mandate of Heaven (tsen-ming) by ruling immorally.

As elaborated in later canonical texts like the Book of Documents (Shang shu), the Mandate of Heaven theory was enthusiastically adopted by Confucius and his disciples in the fifth century B.C. According to the Analects, and then later the Mencius, the sage-ruler fulfilled heaven’s mandate by cultivating his own moral propriety. If an emperor observed Confucian rites (li) of social intercourse by being filial to his parents, attentive to his ministers, and paternalistic to his subjects, then the empire would prosper and civilization flourish. As the Chinese state took shape after the founding of the Han, these Confucian principles proved to be self-fulfilling. The ruler’s moral propriety did, in effect, influence the political order. Lacking elaborate institutional controls upon bureaucratic performance, dynasties had to rely upon Confucian norms of behavior; and hence upon their officials’ own sense of self-restraint, if the emperor was a paragon of virtue, then officials were likely to emulate him. But when a ruler was amoral, demanding favors and gifts from his ministers, officials were likely to lose that modicum of self-control, and—like the emperor—to look to their own private interests at the expense of public welfare. If corruption spread too far, so that taxes became inequitable or riversworks collapsed, peasant rebellions were sure to follow, apparently creating the conditions for a new dynasty to arise and take over the heavens mandate.

Pushed to the extreme, this aspect of the dynastic cycle suggested that a single law ruler might easily forfeit the mandate of his entire royal house. It also gave carte blanche to usurpers by providing a right to rebel whenever social conditions deteriorated. Fearing political instability and recoiling from the prospect of a recurrre new revolt, Confucians therefore added certain safeguards to the mandate theory. A metaphorical parental relationship was established between impersonal Tien and the emperor, who was often
called “the Son of Heaven.” Rules of legitimate succession were carefully observed. Ambitious ministers were discouraged from rebellion by being taught to regard the monarch as their figurative father. And in the later imperial period, subordinate officials were indoctrinated with the ideal of unswerving loyalty (chung) to the throne, which led many of them to commit suicide rather than serve a usurper. Because of this concern with proper succession and hierarchy, founders of new dynasties had to behave with ritual caution, moving through a circumstantial minuet by seeking public support for each step of the process toward emperorship. Many victorious generals rebel leaders, and provincial aristocrats were able to take the first steps, but very few indeed ever made it all the way to the throne.

The Ritual Factor

A ritual element was added to the dynastic cycle concept during the Han period, and it too discouraged usurpation and helped prevent political instability. Under the Han emperors, an increasing amount of attention was devoted to imperial ceremony as a means of retaining the Mandate of Heaven. Influenced by Taoist nume-
origin and astrology, Han philosophers such as Tung Chung-shu (c.179-c.104 B.C.) set out a complicated mechanism of the dynastic cycle which related the reign of a monarch to certain colors and natural elements. By carefully observing an astrological calendar and conducting sacrifices in accordance with those relationships, a ruler could help ensure the success of his reign. Since Han Confucians had declared the emperor to be semi-divine, the act of keeping heaven and earth in the proper and harmonious balance was seen as his proper duty. This cosmic role both underscored the importance of the monarch’s personal virtue and provided him with great confidence in the routine preservation of his regime through the use of magic. Social reactions to miracles thus seemed a consequence of ritual lapses, as well as signs that heaven and earth had been thrown out of balance by the ruler’s religious and political negligence. Consequently, peasant rebellions were viewed as natural calamities of the same magnitude as earthquakes, meteoric volcanic eruptions, and other omens of heaven’s displeasure—were thunder-
The Voluntary Factor

Although the emperor regulated the cosmic-historic balance of the universe in person, the Han theory of the dynastic cycle did not give any individual ruler ultimate control over the mechanical and necessary successions of one cycle by the next. When a new calendrical stage had arrived, a reign or dynasty had reached its appointed term, and there was little that human agents could do to forestall its due-line and fall. But by the time of the great Sung Dynasty, philosophers like Ch'eng Hao (1032-1085) had begun to restore a measure of voluntarism, arguing that the duration of the heavenly mandate was affected by men's individual efforts. The historian Su-ma Kuang (1139-1193) asserted that a wise emperor and his counsellors could study the history of the past and apply its lessons to the present, reforming an ailing government so as to postpone its demise. The dynasty would last forever, but sagacious leadership might overcome the worst of times.

Individual Emperors and the Dynastic Cycle

Those three elements—rettributive, ritualistic, and voluntaristic—had by the late imperial period merged into a single resonant idea that aptly represented the relationship which was supposed to exist between an emperor and his officials. The monarch was ritually exalted, but he was saved from becoming a religious figurehead or a puppet of setsuits and courtiers like the Japanese emperor, by the Confucian regard for his moral self-cultivation and his day-today involvement in government. On the other hand, the same theory served to justify the independence and moral integrity of his ministers. Since heaven evaluated a monarch's reign in terms of his subjects' welfare, an emperor had to know whose policies failed. Shrewd courtiers might soothe his vanity, but he needed ministers bold enough to advise him when he had erred. To Confucianists, who highly valued an honest ruler-minister relationship, the trust sign of loyalty was frankness, even if it meant losing majesty and the loss of one's head. By speaking truthfully to one's monarch, a loyal minister helped the emperor reform and enabled him to preserve the mandate.

Dynasties were not immortal, but neither did they have a fixed life span. No one could confidently predict how many years the Ming or Ch'ing was destined to rule. Responsible men could not even be certain that a newly founded regime would last beyond a generation. The historical annals of certain periods, like the tenth and fourteenth centuries, were littered with accounts of princes and princelets too ephemeral to deserve the dynastic titles their founders had arrogated. Often such claims were too tenuous to succeed. The adoption of imperial regalia and ranks by a weak rebel regime only aroused mirth and contempt and—in the eyes of Confucianists—called down destruction by affronting heaven. Even when firmly established by a dynamic founder, however, an imperial regime risked collapse when a second generation of heirs struggled over the throne.

The Ming, fortunately, was strong enough to survive such a battle in 1424 when the Prince of Yen usurped the throne from his nephew, the Chia-wen Emperor (reigned 1399-1424). Once succession was secured, a regime like the Ming was assumed by contemporaries to be following the general pattern of the dynastic cycle: after the political and military vigor of its youth (fourteenth century), a more middle age of peace and stability (fifteenth century), to be succeeded by feebleness and eventually fatal decline (the sixteenth century). Temporary restorations, such as the first decade of the Wan-li reign (1573-1585), helped stave off the inevitable demise, but the dynasty was bound to end sometime. And when contemporaries of high and low station began to sense that the Ming was on its way out, the decline accelerated. Officials defected to foreign enemies or internal rebels. Queens were heard across the land. Magicians and shamans found ready audiences for their predictions of a change in the mandate. The time had come—in the words of the Book of Changes—for dragons to take flight and a new Son of Heaven to appear.

At such moments, when heaven's mandate had been lifted from a dying regime and seemed poised to redescend to someone sufficiently audacious and promising to accept it, men across the empire stirred expectantly. The prospect of a new mandate reverberated repeatedly, which seemed in turn to prove that the previous dynastic cycle had reached its term.
Popular Revolts

Such rebellions came from many quarters. Taoist religious sects, for example, were often quick to revolt. In peaceful times, Taoist deities attracted the support of local officials on the margin of settled peasant society. But when the administrative routine of the empire was severely disturbed and the regular political order seemed about to fail, the sect’s promise of protection and salvation appealed to much wider audiences. In groups of these devotional movements during the late Han provided physical refuge for peasants who had been driven off their land by natural or human catastrophes. Their leaders, hundreds of thousands of people in religious societies which provided food and security, spread across entire provinces.

After the Han period, chiliasm Buddhism added the promise of eternal salvation to such movements. The White Lotus sect predicted the coming of a Messiah, the Buddha Maitreya, who would lead his followers into a third great age, or kalpa, of human history. The passage would not be easy: the second kalpa would end with death and destruction, and the forces of darkness would try to keep the true creed from being propagated. But those who joined the sect of Maitreya’s followers and helped the White Lotus society defeat its enemies would survive the catastrophes to enjoy a paradise on earth during the coming third age. Maitreyaan Buddhism was less creditable in stable times than when the natural order of life was disturbed. The harsher the peasants’ death and suffering, the easier it was to believe that mankind had begun to endure the terrible conditions prophesied for the end of the second kalpa, and the greater the need for eventual reprieve in a new paradisaical age.

There was nothing particularly Chinese about this willingness to hope for a miraculous salvation, but what made the Chinese peasants’ response unique was their identification of cosmic instability with the supposed life cycle of the dynasty. So linked were the natural and political orders to the popular conception of the Mandate of Heaven that dynamism change as such was a symbol of total chaos. And, correspondingly, dynastic stability was a sign of cosmic regularity. When a new dynasty finally did restore unity to the empire, chiliasm movements lost their cause appeal. Peasants returned to the land and sects went underground. Their membership dwindling to a marginal peace-time group of true believers for whom prophecies never fail. The best example of this occurred when the Ming was founded by Chu Yuan-chang, a non-ascetic Buddhist monk who joined White Lotus rebels in overthrowing the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. Chu used these White Lotus elements to build a private army which enabled him to consolidate a regional government in central China. After eliminating his military rival one by one and carefully wooing influential gentry support, Chu inaugurated the Ming Dynasty in Nanjing in 1368. Once secure, he turned against the White Lotus rebels who had helped make him emperor, persecuting the sect and executing many of its adherents. But the cult was never extinguished entirely; it reappeared periodically during periods of political and social turmoil until the 19th century.

Chiliasm movements ebbed and flowed with the dynastic cycle because Confucian political theories and folk religion held that dynastic acts and natural phenomena were causally linked. They also shared a mutual respect for hierarchical order. A peasant’s private worship was devoted to his own ancestral spirits or to Buddhist-Taoist deities, but his public religious obligations centered on the local earth god (tián’gū) who was the patron of his community and a subordinate of the district’s city god (chéng-huang). The relationship between a worshipper and the city god was analogous to the attitude taken by a peasant petitioner toward a district magistrate. In fact, the Chéng-huang, who was originally a protective god for the city walls, was not so much an individual deity as an official in the underworld. Each city god’s rank depended, like the civil bureaucrat after which he was modeled, upon the size of the area he administered. The central government even appointed the spirits of deceased officials to the position of given city gods for regular three-year terms, and announced that “while it is the magistrates who rule in the world of light, it is the gods who govern in the world of shadows. There is close cooperation between the two authorities.”

Religion was also bureaucratized in the concept of the afterlife, which the peasant regarded with the same terrience as a magistrate’s court with its judicial torture and powers of legal imprisonment. Tián’gū, god of the underworld, was usually depicted seated on a judge’s throne, dressed like a Confucian magistrate and aided by demonic lectors. While a dead soul’s record of good and evil deeds was read aloud by the devils-clerks. Yama then meted out sentences strikingly similar to the rewards and punishments of a human courtroom.

The parallels between secular and sacred orders were not a
clever invention of the imperial authorities to keep the masses in their place. Since the dawn of history Chinese peasants had assumed that the world was organized hierarchically and expected to obey officials who lived up to their own bureaucratic obligations. But the populace's submission was conditional upon benevolent government, and if officials failed to observe this tacit covenant they deserved to be attacked. When "the officials [thus] forced the people to rebel" (saun pi mun juan), revolts were likely to be directed against individual magistrates or in opposition to onerous supplementary taxes. Such protest movements were often led by lower-degree holders, who formulated specific political demands. But when peasants led their own uprisings, they acted more from desperation than decision. Rather than making negotiable demands they revolted to express general social grievances. Yet even such unfocused popular movements were motivated by the peasants' continual concern for order.

Many peasant uprisings, for example, occurred when bandits threatened their region or armies fought nearby. The contemporary chronicles that record such incidents convey an atmosphere of utterable forces of darkness, of rising waves of chaos about to sweep over the land. Someone in the marketplace might report that black-turbaned bandits had been seen beating farmers to death several villages away. Another peasant might insist that fast across the nearest hills, out of sight, armed militiamen were massacring the people. As an old saying multiplied, the peasants would arm themselves and then convivially arise en masse, uninviting strangers and attacking gentry homes. Yet at the same time, one senses in the very midst of unruly turmoil a longing for the previously predictable routine.

The appeal of movements like the White Lotus sect may even have derived from their promise of a comforting order which civil society had momentarily lost.

Peasants were frightened by the threat of disorder apparently because the prospect of social disorder was so prevalent in late imperial China. Banditry was endemic in most parts of the country. Many varieties of outlaws—professional salt smugglers, pirates, highwaymen, waterborne extortionists, footpads, robbers in hiding and the martial arts, bowmen of the green wood—were gloried in vernacular literature and drama. Heroes to the young, they ideally robbed the rich to help the poor or took to the hills to resist barbarian invaders. Living by a military code of honor, these gua-hua (knights errant) were admired for being rash, quick-tempered, and bold enough to challenge established authority. They were, in short, the afterglow of the settled peasants, and like all steppenwolves were alternatively admired and feared.

Whether hijacking merchant convoys or controlling urban racketeers, ganglords enjoyed a marginal degree of official tolerance during the late imperial period. Conscientious officials sometimes tried to extenuate all banditry in their districts, but most magistrates were willing to overlook a modicum of criminal activity, partly because law enforcement agents were spread too thin to both patrol distant border regions and police the populous urban complexes of the late Ming and Ch'ing. There was no official tolerance, however, for any acts that implied political rebellion. If a ganglord attacked a district yamen or proclaimed himself the leader of a rebellious army, then the authorities were almost certain to mobilize troops against his band.

Despite the knowledge that political rebellion endangered their bailiwicks and illegal sources of income, outlaws were among the first to engage in the Great Enterprise—the competition for the mandate—during periods of dynastic instability.

In contrast to social bandits elsewhere, Chinese outlaws were imbued with a political self-consciousness because of the traditional belief that man of resolve could win heaven's mandate. In other traditional civilizations, like pre-colonial India, the official political world was hermetically separated from autonomous social units beneath it. But in China, especially during times of crisis, state and society were not so distant. By the fourteenth century, at least, many different social elements were responsive to signs of political change. Outlaws were merely the most vivid examples of this sensitivity, repeatedly revolving in the name of restoring an old or founding a new dynasty. In the Ming period rebels fought to restore the Song; during the Ch'ing they struggled to return the Ming to the throne. Historically speaking, then, secular social forces constantly revolved to the political rhythms of seemingly repetitive dynastic cycles. Ganglords frequently used military revolts to widen their own following. By adopting an imperial title, a small-time bandit chieftain with fifty or a hundred bandits could quickly attract other auxillary bands to serve under his banner. These confederations were inherently unstable, but the leaders could sometimes stabilize his control over the new bands by personifying imperial pretensions. Chinese history offers enough examples of rebel generals actually founding a dynasty, like the Han or the Ming, to make such success
seen possible. But any rebel leader hoping to make the transition from barracks chief to emperor had to enlist gentry support. It was therefore unlikely that these aspirants to the throne would abandon the imperial Confucian model of the state. On those rare occasions when rebellions came close to succeeding, egalitarian slogans were largely forgotten and the old familiar dynastic panoply was once again adopted. Whether religious uprisings or barracks revolts, peasant rebellions did not basically threaten the existing order or fundamentally change the polity.

The Gentry and Dynastic Change

The civil gentry, for instance, radically changed its cooperation when a new dynasty took the throne. During the Yuan-Ming and Ming-Ch'ing transitions, hundreds of new noble homes (magnates) rose to the fore by supporting the winning side in the dynastic struggle. But increased individual mobility at such times did not fundamentally change the social quality of the gentry, which was ill-equipped to improve its own position by taking advantage of the throne's momentary weakness. Although versed in the civil arts, the local gentry was unable to stand alone against the military skills of peasant rebels or bandit warlords. Consequently, when the empire's administrative structure weakened and the dynasty's hold faltered, the gentry gave all the more aware of its importance, dependence on central authority and military protection. Unable to become a local aristocracy in its own right, the gentry did have one major weapon when a dynasty perished. Since its social status and Confucian skills were indispensable to those who planned to form a new government, the literati could influence the formation of a dynasty by favoring one contender for the throne or by supporting a military leader like Chu Yuan-chang, the founder of the Ming, into his imperial role. But the gentry seldom had the opportunity to lend support to a new regime. Because of the Confucian stress on legitimate succession and hierarchy, only those dynasties occupied the throne between 1790 and 1980. The 14 emperors who ruled China during those six centuries ultimately relied upon the gentry's acceptance of their regimes, but an individual monarch's favor was more in demand by his subjects than vice versa. With the immediate balance of power in the monarch's favor, imperial despotism grew discernibly stronger and gentry influence waned beneath the apparently repetitive patterns of dynastic cycles.

Increased Imperial Despotism

Before the thirteenth century the literati had been represented at court by chancellor or prime ministers who had enough stature to oppose absolute autocracy. The gentry's standing slipped sharply under the Yuan Dynasty, however, when Mongol emperors preferred to employ foreigners, like the Uighur Yeh-li Ch'ueh-chi or the Venetian Marco Polo, and introduced such despotic practices as the public hanging of offending Chinese ministers. Although the early Ming emperors ceased using foreigners, they continued to deny the civil service a strong voice at court, thereby perpetuating the erosion of corporate gentry political power. In 1370 the Ming founder abolished the post of prime minister altogether, and while Chu Yuan-chang's successors gave their personal secretaries de facto chancellorial powers, the latter basically remained courtiers. They enjoyed that of so powerful a grand secretary as Chang Ch'iao-heng in the 1530s—ultimately elected upon the emperor's personal choice, so that they did not provide an effective check on the power of the kungfu. Moreover, by the late sixteenth century factional court intrigue had displaced bureaucratic policy divisions. The emperor's councils deline the law by setting up schools within the Forbidden City to teach themselves how to draft edicts for compliant emperors like Hsung-chih (reigned 1488-1505) and Wan-li (reigned 1573-1620). They also formed a secret police, the infamous Eastern Depot, which superintended imperial armies and tortured opponents of the regime. Lacking the cultural independence of the literati, the eunuchs seemed more reliable (and pliable) servants than the regular bureaucrats, and were eventually able to decisively influence the emperor's appointment of grand secretaries. The metropolitan gentry bridled at these developments after 1530, demanding the right to memorialize the throne directly and impeaching grand secretaries who collaborated with the eunuchs. But the confrontation between the inner court and the regular bureaucratic broke down into factional squabbling on both sides. The last Ming emperors, Ch'ing-ch'en (reigned 1620-1644), grew so weary of this constant antagonism as to forbid such dis-
The Fall of the Ming Dynasty

Years later, after the Ch'ing had conquered China, Confucian historians frequently blamed the Ming Dynasty's defeat upon its eunuchs and scapegothic courtiers. But this change in heaven's mandate had other, much more momentous causes. More than three centuries of official Ming and awkwardly implemented reforms had turned the land tax system into a refuge for the wealthy and a curse for the poor. Unable to increase its revenue without alienating the influential local gentry, the central government could only meet its rising frontier defense costs by imposing commercial taxes which cost the throne public popularity. Public works also suffered from short-sighted economy measures. In the 1460s a series of bad harvests and famines struck the Northwest, which was then the most economically depressed area of China, and revolts broke out in Shantung and Shenni. Military costs increased correspondingly, bankrupting the central government. The regular Ming armies had long been underequipped and undermanned. Now the government had to meet the threat of rebellion by allowing professional soldiers to form their own private armies, which lived off the land and proved more rapacious than the rebels themselves. Meanwhile, small bandit units, army deserters, and peasant rebels were coagulating into major military confederations which at various times occupied entire provinces in central and northern China.

One of these rebel confederations was commanded by a groomsman named Li Tsu-ch'eng. After losing his job in the government postal service in 1640, Li became a Ming soldier, who mutinied the following year to join one of the many gangs then flourishing in the impoverished Northwest. Over the next decade, and despite numerous defeats by government troops, he steadily increased his influence among the rebels. By 1643 Li was strong enough to establish a provincial base in Honan where he attracted a gentry supporters and adopted tax reduction slogans to appeal to the peasantry. The ancient city of Kaifeng held out against his repeated sieges, but in October, 1643, Li finally reduced its defenses after cutting the Yellow River's dikes and killing hundreds of thousands of people. From Honan the rebel leader moved to southern Hunan, where in 1646 he captured his ancestors, ennobled his generals, and inaugurated the Shun Dynasty.

Ready now to make a bid for the capital, Li Tsu-ch'eng divided his cavalry and infantry into two armies which poured through the Tung-kuan pass and swept across Shansi onto the plains of northern Chihli. One group turned south to take the important garrison of Tai-chang, which surrendered without resistance. The other, personified by Li, moved north to capture Peking and thus capital could not possibly have expected to defeat Li's rebel troops. Loyal but militarily inexperienced, Li Chien-t'ai, succeeded in his troops, whose ranks melted away even before reaching Shansi. By April 18, 1644, his soldiers were plundering the outskirts of the Ming capital. Watching the smoke of burning buildings from his own inner palace walls, the Ch'ing-ch'en Emperor finally realized that the mandate was lost. Stupefying himself with wine, he donned his ceremonial robe and wrote a final message to his ministers. Then the emperor walked to a pagoda on Coal Hill just behind the Forbidden City and hanged himself from a rafter. His suicide note read:

Seventeen years ago I ascended the throne, and now I meet with heaven's punishment above, sinking ignominiously below, while the rebels reine my capital because my ministers have deceived me. I die unable to face my ancestors in the underworld, depainted and ashamed. May the bandits dismember my corpse and harm a single one of our people.

The Ming was dead; long live the Shun.

But the mandate had not yet fully passed on. Despite the defection of many Ming officials, Li Tsu-ch'eng's triumphal entry into Peking did not augur well for his regime. Chronicles apocryphally bowman, drew an arrow from his quiver, aimed at the character shang (central) inscribed upon the lintel—so if to prove that the
Central Kingdom (chung-kuo) was now his alone. To his surprise the shaft missed the target. Li laughed and a courtier tried to explain away the meaningless 'shun', but its meaning was clear enough to the Chinese historians who recorded this act.7

A conciliator once told the Han founder Liu Pang that the empire could be conquered on horseback but it had to be ruled from the throne. Though soldiers could win the mandate, only Confucian emperors could retain it. Li Tzu-ch'eng was unable to make that transition. While Li harangued the civil servants who tried to appease him, his soldiers raped and looted throughout Peking. Wealthy citizens were seized and then tortured if they could not venome themselves with precious metal and jewels. The poor suffered as well. According to one citizen's diary:

The bandit soldiers filled the city from top to bottom. Several hundred rebels rushed forward, flying on their steeds into the Forbidden City. The common people all held up towels to wel-

come them. Phrases like "Shun" or "the Heavenly King of shun" or "long live the new emperor in the first year of Yung-ch'ing" were written on paper and passed up on all the gates. Some had the words, a "subject of Shun," painted on their foreheads. On foot and horseback, [the rebels] waved through every alley to ex-

propriate horses and mules. Throwing off all restraints, some murdered and robbed. Men and women milled about, calling out [each other's] names. Crowds suddenly assembled, and just as quickly scattered—running, stumbling, backed at with swords, pierced by arrows, knocking each other to the ground in their panic. Some banded themselves, others threw themselves into wells; women miscarried in their fright, and abandoned their swaddled infants to escape. As the crowds squeezed together, people were crushed or trampled to death by horses' hooves. Hands were amputated, heads lopped, stumps and limbs ripped open—wars sliced off, hair cut away. The streets and alleys were as though filled with wolves, the groans of grief a chill snarl. Some bandit soldiers were in a rage; while others were benign. Some murdered, others used persuasion. In a single Shun soldier arrived, hundred-

eds of people would throw themselves down and beg or prostrate [to be spared]. All [that the soldiers] carried were swords and broadswords. The children among the La-dicts spotted short knives. Yet the people's spirits were matched away at the very sight of them. No one dared oppose them. At first, they only stole gold and sil-

ver. The ones that came after stole jewelry. And finally the very last to come [stole the people's] clothing.8

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Within a few weeks the populace's loyalty was totally alienated from the new Shun Dynasty, and Li Tzu-ch'eng found that his soldiers had squandered the short reprieve they could enjoy before other rivals challenged their hold on Peking. To the northeast forces were gathering against the Shun. The Ming commander at Ningyuan beyond the Great Wall was already moving toward the capital. Before him yet another army of barbarian Manchus was preparing to enter the Central Kingdom. When the two allied at last, Li's fate was sealed. In spite of all his ministries, his reign titles, his canonical ancestors, and even his Chinese nationality, Li Tzu-ch'eng held less appeal for Ming subjects than did barbarians from beyond the wall. The Manchus had set their sights on Peking long before Li Tzu-ch'eng had thought to establish a Shun Dynasty. For decades they had sought to accommodate their own native institutions to Confucian modes of rule. No one could doubt the seriousness of their intention to found a lasting government when their time came to dismount and ascend the imperial throne. Less than two months after Li Tzu-ch'eng first entered the capital, the Manchus were to proclaim the accession of their own Ch'ing regime from the steps of the Great Audience Hall in Peking, and a new dynasty once more began the ancient cycle of imperial rule.

Notes

1. Ts'ien-ming in this case referred to the bestowal of human nature upon each individual as well.

2. Many historians believe that the White Lotus sect (as distinct from the White Lotus monastic sect) was influenced by Manichaeism, which depicted the universe as engaged in a cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness. Manichaeism was a syretic doctrine, preached by the Persian prophet Mani (d. 274 x.4.), with elements borrowed from both Christianity and Zoroastrianism. The Vajrachana, who served as mercenaries under the Tang dynasty, proba-

bly introduced the Chinese to Manichaeism. The latter would have been only one of many elements in White Lotus doctrine, which combined vegetarianism, some Islamic practices, and Taoist ditties with the idea of the coming Maitreya Buddhas.


5. This was because their covenant with officialdom was only implicit, and specific service obligations were not formally recognized. In contrast, Japanese peasant risings during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) were often based on the sense of injury felt by villagers whose much more explicit covenant with their local daimyo or lord had been broken by the authorities. Japanese risings were therefore much more likely to be accompanied by petitions, citations of customary precedents, and specific political demands. My understanding of Tokugawa revolts is drawn from Irwin Schoener’s work on that topic.


7. The sources vary considerably concerning this famous incident. Some say, for instance, that he fed at the character fên (heaven) and succeeded in striking the target. See, for example, Lin Shou-yen, T'ang-chen hsiien-chü [A Model Record to Settle My Thoughts], in Chao Shih-yen and Wang T'ou-sheng, eds., T'ang-chou t'ung-chieh [Selections Compiled in 1937] (Wuchu: N. P., 1937), and id., p. 49.

8. Chen Chih-sheng, Ts'ai-sheng chi-shih [A General Chronicle of Robert] in Cheng Chih-t'ao, ed., Hsien-lunyang t'ung-chu [Collections of Hsien-lunyang Hall] (Nanking: Nanking Central Library, 1947), ch. 2:113-120. It should be noted, however, that the rebels did not begin extensive looting until several weeks after they had first entered the capital.