to everyday speech in order to reach the wider urban audiences of the day. The Yüan administration itself used a more vernacular style in its documents so that these would be more easily intelligible to the many officials who lacked a Chinese classical education. Chinese scholars on their part, finding less opportunity in official life and less patronage of classical studies, turned their talents to purely literary endeavor. Playwriting had begun to flourish in the twelfth century, both at Peking under the Chin and at Hangchow under the Southern Sung. Titles of nearly a thousand plays survive from this period. From the Yüan there exist the printed librettos of many plays. Their themes, typically Chinese, involve conflicts of human passion with the social bonds of filial piety, fidelity, or loyalty.

The Chinese drama was semioperatic, with orchestral music to accompany a great deal of singing and dancing. Scenery and realistic properties were not used, as in Elizabethan England. In their place was developed a great variety of conventions—stylized movements of the hands, sleeves, eyes, and feet, as in stepping over an imaginary doorsill, climbing nonexistent steps, or mounting an imaginary charger. Female roles generally came to be played by men, whose falsetto singing, dancing, and delicate gestures were especially appreciated. Romantic plots, technical virtuosity, humorous dialogue, brilliant costuming, and violent action all combined to create an urban art of wide popularity.

While the drama grew up primarily at the capital cities, the novel was created by professional storytellers among the populace. The Buddhist wonder stories of T'ang times grew into historical or purely imaginative love and adventure tales, which professional storytellers developed into long, loosely constructed sagas. Prompt-books for itinerant storytellers were the earliest written form of these episodic tales, and when gradually filled in with details by many different hands, became the early novels. Most are of prodigious length. The heroes usually are not scholar-bureaucrats but men of low class or military origin. All the novels are written in a style close to the vernacular of the day. The later ones were usually the work of single authors, men of education and literary talent, though they often concealed their identity. (The principal novels are discussed more fully on pages 235–237.) Although most of the major novels attained their mature form, or were actually first composed, in the Ming and Ch'ing periods, their roots go back to the Yüan or earlier.

The novel became the kind of literature that the majority of literate Chinese could most readily appreciate. Though customarily disesteemed by the scholar trained in the Classics, it became a principal literary form, with wide influence as a repository and mirror of social values. The emergence of both the novel and the drama in the Yüan period illustrates the vitality of Chinese culture as well as the frustration of the scholar class under the Mongols.

8. State and Society under the Ming

Chinese "Culturalism"

The Ming period from 1368 to 1644 is one of the great eras of orderly government and social stability in human history. A population averaging around 100 million lived during 276 years in comparative peace. The subsequent change from Ming to Ch'ing rule was relatively easy. The decline of Ming power and the Manchu capture of Peking in 1644 were followed by the Manchu conquest of all China. But this warfare and its devastation seem limited in comparison with the organized looting and massacres of contemporary European armies during the Thirty Years' War of 1618–1648. In any case, so stable was the political and social order of the Ming that it persisted, basically unaltered, under the alien Ch'ing dynasty for another 267 years from 1644 to 1912. Thus from the middle of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, China followed traditional ways.

Unfortunately for the Chinese people of recent times, this remarkable stability was maintained during those very centuries that saw the dynamic rise of modern Europe — the Renaissance, the Reformation, the growth of national states, their expansion into the New World and over the earth, followed by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. None of these fundamental Western transformations of the last six centuries had a real counterpart in China's own experience. China remained outside the turbulent stream of Western history, which was moving to engulf the world, and consequently by the nineteenth century had fallen behind the

West in many aspects of material culture and technology as well as in economic and political organization. This long period of stability in East Asian civilization left it comparatively "backward" or "underdeveloped." But this comparison with the expanding West should not stigmatize the Ming and Ch'ing periods as retrogressive or overshadow their real achievements. As we learn more about these centuries, we may expect to find many evidences of innovation and growth. Chinese society was far from unchanging, but the pace was slower and the degree of change less than in the West.

One factor creating stability was the Chinese view of history as "change within tradition." The leaders of society were devoted to tradition; anything that happened in the present had to be fitted into the rich pattern of experience inherited from the past. Instead of the ideal of progress, which Westerners today have inherited from the nineteenth century, the Chinese of the Ming and Ch'ing saw their ideal models far in the past.

This turning back for inspiration to the great ages of Han, T'ang, and Sung was accompanied by a deep resentment against the Mongols. Alien rule had inspired hostility toward alien things in general. Gradually this view hardened into a lack of interest in anything beyond the pale of Chinese civilization. This turning away from the outside world was accompanied by a growing introspection within Chinese life. We have already seen this in the antiquarian interest in art and in the burst of historical scholarship in the Sung. From that time on a degree of mingled fear and contempt for the outside world and a narrow concentration on the exclusively Chinese way of life produced a growing ethnocentrism. Eventually it dominated China's foreign relations and gave her an intellectual and psychological immunity to foreign stimuli.

This attitude had much in common with modern nationalism. But there were differences. A nationalist group asserts its own distinctiveness and superiority because it fears not only political but also cultural inundation by some other group. Nationalism thus seems closely tied to a general feeling of competition and insecurity. It is commonly asserted by a cultural subunit, particularly a linguistic subgroup, against other subunits within the same culture, as in the rise of national states within the common culture of Western Christendom. The Chinese, by contrast, showed no sign of a feeling of cultural inferiority. Political subjugation may have been feared, but cultural conquest was unimaginable. Thus Chinese xenophobia was combined with a complete confidence in cultural superiority. China reacted not as a cultural subunit, but as a large ethnocentric universe which remained quite sure of its cultural superiority even when relatively inferior in military power to fringe elements of its universe. Because of these similarities to and differences from nationalism, we call this earlier Chinese attitude "culturalism," to suggest that in the Chinese view the

significant unit was really the whole civilization rather than the narrower political unit of a nation within a larger cultural whole.

Underlying this devotion to the Chinese way of life was one primary political fact, that the whole Middle Kingdom remained an administrative unit under a central government. This remarkable cohesiveness, compared with the constant disunity among the relatively smaller European states, cannot be attributed to geography. It normally took a month or so for the emperor's writ to be carried by horse to the borders of the realm in Kwangtung, Yunnan, Central Asia, or the Northeast, farther than any distances in Western Europe. China's inveterate unity must be explained on institutional grounds, by the habits of thought and action that had become established in the society. The Chinese state was regarded as coterminous with Chinese culture. There was such a close identification of the entire way of life with the unified empire that the one implied the other. It was as if the Roman Empire had persisted in the West and had prevented the rise of France, England, and the other nations. The identity of culture and polity made the Chinese leadership of the Ming and Ch'ing periods uninterested in, and at times hostile to, things foreign. Culturalism thus was a pervasive attitude throughout the period.

Government under the Ming

The Founding of the Ming Dynasty. The weakening of Mongol rule was hastened by fratricidal rivalry within the imperial clan. Fifteen years of frequent famine in North China after 1333 were capped by severe floods of the Yellow River. Flood and famine depleted the granaries. During the 1340's, uprisings occurred sporadically in nearly every province. In 1351–1353 several major rebel leaders emerged, and a typical interdynastic contest began among them to determine who should survive as the fittest to inherit the Mandate of Heaven. Some of these men claimed descent from the Sung emperors, some invoked a religious sanction by prophesying the advent of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, and others had the help of secret societies. The most famous of all secret societies has been the White Lotus Society. Its origin as a sect of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism has been traced back directly to the first half of the twelfth century. As with any group that opposed the ruling dynasty, this society had to be secret in order to survive.

The eventual winner among all these Chinese rebel heroes was Chu Yüan-chang (1328–1398), whose name ranks with that of Liu Pang, the founder of the Han, as a humble commoner who through native ability in a time of opportunity became the Son of Heaven. He was born in the Huai River region northwest of Nanking. Left an orphan, he entered a Buddhist monastery as a novice, which gave him a chance to become

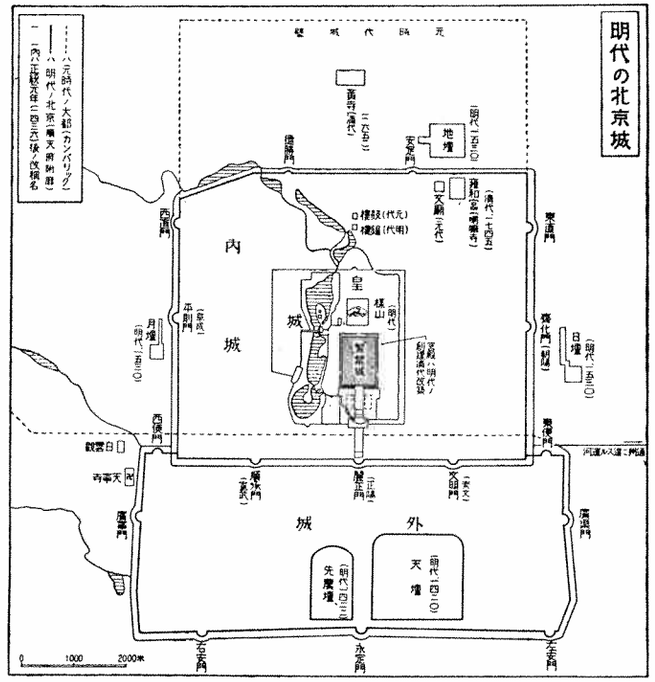
literate. For a time he even begged for a living. But in 1352, at the age of twenty-five, he joined a rebel band. (Probably he also joined the White Lotus Society, but he later denied this—it was an unwise precedent to leave in the historical record.)

Chu and his band crossed the Yangtze and in 1356 seized Nanking, a strategic base close to the key economic area of the Yangtze delta. By 1367, after defeating rival regimes both upstream and downstream, he controlled all the Yangtze Valley. Meanwhile, the Mongol commanders, instead of attacking the Chinese rebels, fought among themselves. In 1368 Chu Yüan-chang seized Peking but continued to use Nanking as his capital. He proclaimed himself the first emperor of the Ming ("Brilliant") dynasty, and chose Hung-wu ("Vast military power") as the name of the "year period," but, by keeping it for his whole reign, the first Ming emperor transformed it into his reign title. This set a fashion throughout the Ming and Ch'ing, of using only one year-period name during a whole reign, so that emperors of this era are generally known by their reign titles.

A second strong ruler was Yung-lo (reigned 1403–1424). The fourth son of Hung-wu, he had his base of power in Peking, where he rebelled against his nephew, Hung-wu's grandson, who had inherited the throne at Nanking. He waged a devastating civil war until he finally captured Nanking, and as a usurper at the age of forty-three took as his reign title Yung-lo ("Perpetual Happiness").

Nanking had been built up by Hung-wu as the imperial capital, with a city wall sixty feet high and over twenty miles around, the longest city wall in the world. Yung-lo in 1421 moved the Ming capital to Peking, leaving Nanking as the subsidiary capital. He rebuilt Peking on a more extensive plan than that of the Mongols. The main city walls, forty feet high and more than fourteen miles around, formed a square with nine gates, each one protected by an outer gate. In the center stood the walls of the Imperial City, some five miles in perimeter. Within it, in turn, were the high red walls of the Forbidden City, the imperial palace itself, surrounded by a moat about two miles around. Running from south to north through the palace, on the main axis of the whole capital, are the imposing throne halls with their gold-tiled roofs, each one rising from a terrace of white marble. Much of this great architectural creation of the Ming still stands today as an unparalleled monument of empire. The walls of the southern city of Peking with their seven additional gates were added in the sixteenth century.

Ming Despotism. The seventeen Ming emperors reigned during a series of recognizable phases: (1) the inaugural era of founding and consolidation under Hung-wu (1368–1398); (2) the vigorous building and expansion under Yung-lo (1403–1424) and his successors, which, however, by the



PEKING UNDER THE MING AND CH'ING. *Top and center: Site of Yüan capital, Tai-tu, of which the northern walls were razed by the Ming. Center: Inner City surrounds Imperial City which encloses lakes on left and Forbidden City or Palace on main axis, with Prospect Hill (dredged from lakes) on north. Bottom: Outer city (under the Manchus, the "Chinese City") with Altars of Heaven (right) and of Agriculture (left). Outside the main city on east, north, and west, respectively, are Altars of the Sun, Earth, and Moon. (From Wada Sei,* Tōyō bunkashi taikei.)

middle of the century had overstrained the imperial resources; (3) a century of gradual decline of imperial power both at home and abroad; (4) in the latter part of the sixteenth century a period of reform; and (5) by the early seventeenth century an intensification of evils and final collapse.

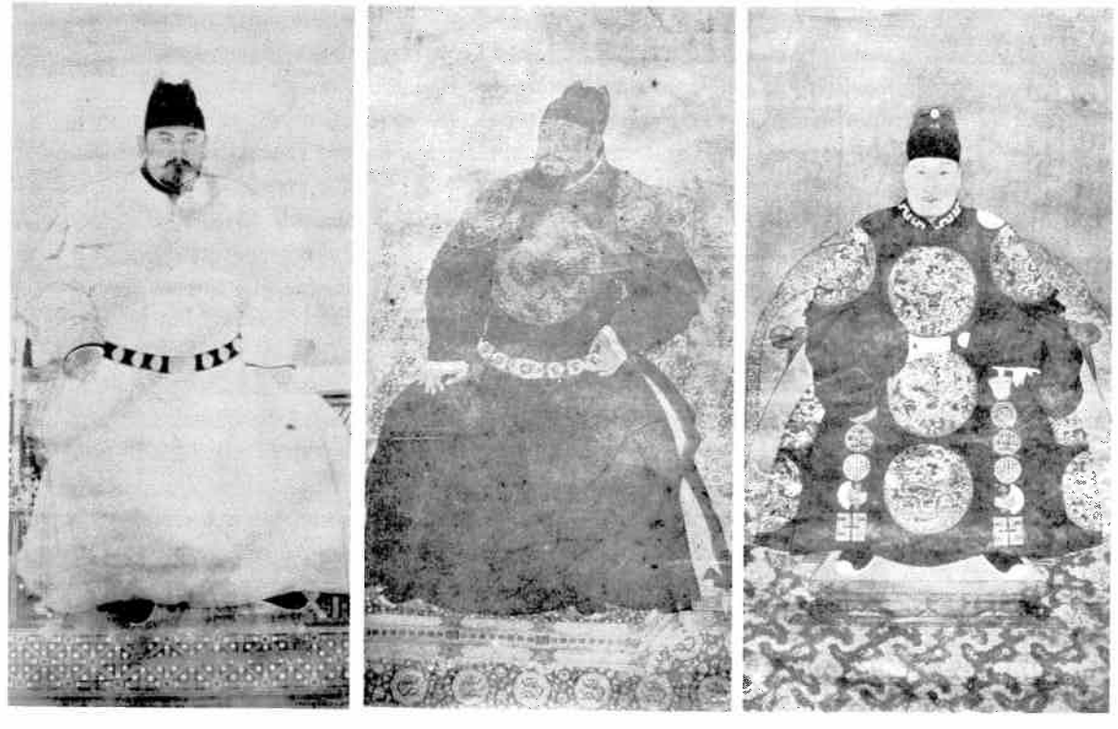
This profile was studied intensively by moralistic Confucian scholars in the late Ming, who saw the Chinese state collapsing. They and their successors in the Ch'ing made a moral interpretation of the dynastic decline, analyzing the personal failings of successive emperors, the errors of their officials, and the factionalism which rent the bureaucracy. Today, our basic political criticism might be that the emperor was subject to no higher law or constitutional checks. Power was concentrated in him

personally. He had to be either a benevolent despot or tyrant, or else let his power be exercised by others as favorites on an irregular, unstable, personal basis. The Ming government had to have a great man at its head or face disaster.

Because the founder of the Ming, ruling for thirty-two years, left his imprint so strongly upon the dynasty, his personality was of special significance. Hung-wu was represented in his portraits as a man with an ugly, porcine face. He had had a hard life in his youth, and as emperor remained lonely and austere. He made a fetish of frugality and became subject to fears and suspicions, sometimes to delusions and violent outbursts of temper. He became very cruel and inflicted terrible tortures for slight offenses. In his final will he wrote: "For thirty-one years I have labored to discharge Heaven's will, tormented by worries and fears, without relaxing for a day." Perhaps this rather paranoid temperament of the founder helps to explain the growth of the Ming despotism. Hung-wu's concentration of power in his own hands may also have derived from his experience as a self-made conqueror of pre-eminent capacity. He institutionalized his personal role.

In 1380, suppressing a widespread plot attributed to his chief minister, Hung-wu abolished the central administrative organ of past dynasties, the Imperial Secretariat. Henceforth the emperor's rule was to be personal and direct. This institutional change gave the emperors of the Ming and also the Ch'ing periods a more autocratic role. In his personal administration Hung-wu, however, made use of Grand Secretaries, who handled the flow of official memorials (as many as a hundred a day) and drafted the imperial edicts in reply. Eventually they became institutionalized informally as the Grand Secretariat, a sort of cabinet, superior to the Six Ministries. But the Grand Secretaries remained merely aides of the ruler, unable to take executive action on their own initiative.

One group who eventually acquired considerable power were the eunuchs. Hung-wu had warned vigorously against this very possibility. He erected in the palace a metal tablet three feet high reading, "Eunuchs must have nothing to do with administration." He limited their numbers, ranks, titles, and style of clothing, forbade their handling documents, dismissed those who commented on government affairs, and decreed that they should remain illiterate. Nevertheless the eunuch institution remained an integral part of the Inner Court, based on the emperor's need of male descendants and his consequent maintenance of a harem. Later emperors grew up in the Inner Court, often personally devoted to eunuchs who had been their childhood companions or preceptors. The eunuchs' ranks and duties proliferated within the palace, and their influence gradually extended into the entire administration. In the 1420's a palace school was set up for them. The number of eunuchs increased to thousands. In a central office in



THREE MING EMPERORS. *Left: The founder Chu Yüan-chang who reigned as the Hung-wu emperor, 1368–1398. Center: The consolidator, the Yung-lo emperor, 1403–1424. Right: A source of disaster, the Wan-li emperor, 1573–1620.*

Peking (the Eastern Yard), they kept secret files on official personnel, accessible only to the emperor. They became, in effect, a separate echelon of administration, not unlike a present-day security system. This was because eunuchs, as palace inmates, lacking family loyalties and completely dependent upon their master, had a unique inside position, closer to the imperial person than any of the scholar-officials. Eunuchs consequently gained great influence as trusted agents of the emperor, even becoming commanders of military forces or inspectors in the provinces. The Ming saw a constant struggle for power between the eunuchs and the Grand Secretaries within the palace, and also between these groups of the Inner Court and the top officials of the imperial bureaucracy, or Outer Court, at the capital.

The arbitrariness of the emperor's rule was visibly demonstrated in another custom, the corporal punishment of high officials at the court. Hung-wu had early followed the Mongol precedent of having officials publicly and ceremoniously beaten with the bamboo. He had a dozen

officials executed at various times on suspicion of having inserted derogatory puns in their congratulatory memorials. Such treatment contravened the Confucian doctrine that punishments are for the unlettered masses while the superior man is to be moved by the power of the ruler's moral example. The Ming regime, famous for exalting the letter of the Classics, became notorious for contravening their spirit.

Another phenomenon of the Ming court was factionalism. Cliques of officials became violently involved in one dispute after another, hating their opponents, appointing members of their own faction to office when they could, accusing those in power when they were not. However, the unconfined power of the emperor and the factionalism of officials were active mainly at the level of the imperial bureaucracy, which was spread very thinly over the empire. At the local level was a stable social order in which the emperor's power was held in reserve and seldom exercised.

The Structure of Government. The Ming emperors retained the inherited structure of central government: first, a civil bureaucracy under the Six Ministries and other organs; second, a centralized military hierarchy; and third, a separate hierarchy of censors. In Western eyes the Board of Censors is perhaps the most interesting of the three. Its chief bureau at the capital had a staff of 110 "investigating censors." In addition, each ministry had a special censorial staff that watched its operations. Censors drawn from the general civil bureaucracy were typically younger officials of rather low rank, selected for personal qualities of probity. When sent into the provinces, often on one-year tours of duty, they investigated the conduct of justice and of ceremonies, the condition of granaries and of schools, and received reports from officials and complaints from the public. Their power came from their having direct access to the throne, both to impeach other officials and to remonstrate (at their peril) with the emperor. These broad powers were limited by the fact that censors usually returned to the regular civil bureaucracy after a tenure of nine years or less; like all officials, they depended upon the imperial whim. Protected neither by life tenure nor by immunity from their master's wrath, these "eyes and ears of the emperor" were in reality bureaucrats like all their fellows, concerned for their own safety, dependent upon favorable merit ratings from their superiors, and sometimes open to bribery or intimidation.

This threefold administration of the Ming and Ch'ing has an interesting comparability with the recent regimes of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. Since 1928, China has been governed through the three principal echelons of party, army, and government. The modern governing parties in China may be viewed as the successors of the dynastic families, from whom the rulers were chosen and to whom they answered. The party apparatus, running parallel to army and civil administration, has also

inherited some of the ancient censorial functions. This Chinese trinity is not a separation or balance of powers, like that under the Constitution of the United States, but perhaps we may call it a system of balanced administration. The military forces kept the regime in power, the civil bureaucracy carried on the government, and the censors (and also the eunuchs) kept watch on everything.

The territorial civil administration of the Ming was divided into 15 provinces, which the Ch'ing later increased, by subdivision, to 18. Each province was divided into local units composed of still smaller units—prefectures, of which there were, generally speaking, 159 in the Ming Empire; subprefectures or departments, of which there were 234; and counties (hsien), which totalled 1171. Under the Ch'ing these totals expanded to roughly 183 prefectures and 1470 counties (also called districts). The local administrative hierarchy of magistrates, according to the law of avoidance, were never permitted to serve in their own native provinces lest they be seduced into collusion with kinfolk and local friends. These officials in ascending order were the hsien magistrate, the subprefect, and the prefect. Their administration was headed by a provincial administrative commissioner. There was also a judicial commissioner or judge, with his own staff. A third top official was the provincial military commander. Thus each province was under a collegial group of officers who represented the same threefold administrative, military, and supervisory functions as in the capital. A governor was eventually added as a coordinator at the top of each province. The administrative hierarchy was also watched, as already noted, by censors on tour.

The Ming military system developed by Hung-wu was based on guards units of 5600 men. Each unit was divided into five subunits of 1120 men, who were registered professional soldiers. By 1393 there were 493 guards units under the Ministry of War, stationed at strategic spots on the Inner Asian frontier and the seacoast, along the Grand Canal and at the capital, under five main regional commands. The original guards units had thus become garrisons, independent of the local civil administration. The positions of the registered soldiers were hereditary, and many were given land on which to farm for their livelihood, in the hope of realizing the ancient ideal of a self-supporting army of farmer-soldiers. But inevitably, these Chinese garrisons, even more than Khitan, Jurchen, or Mongol troops, found it difficult to remain effective soldiers in a nonwarlike society.

As at the capital, new administrative organs in the provinces began informally and later became institutionalized. Among these were the intendants of circuit (*tao-t'ai,* Anglicized as taotai), first appointed to handle special functions connected with the salt monopoly, police, customs, river conservancy, or the like. Eventually, the provinces were each divided for these various purposes into a number of circuits, which formed a new

CHINA UNDER THE MING

administrative level between the provincial and the prefectural levels. Another development was the sending of new traveling inspectors and special commissioners from the capital to check corruption and misgovernment. Such officials were given certain administrative, censorial, and military powers within designated areas, so as to introduce a more unified executive capacity into the territorial administration. From them developed, by the middle of the Ming era, the office of provincial governor, already mentioned, as well as that of governor-general, an official normally in charge of two provinces.

Land, People, and Taxes. The Ming government's control over the land and the people was signalized by the drawing up of detailed registers of land and of population. In 1393 the population registers gave an estimated total of 10 million households and 60 million persons. This registration, not based on a modern type of census, produced a total no greater than that of the Han period. We can only wonder whether the population in 1393 may not have been double this figure. The land registers in 1393 recorded a total of roughly 129 million acres of land in use, less than half the estimated acreage of cultivated land in recent times. Each holding was classified according to type and productivity and was taxed accordingly.

Taxation followed the tradition which went back to the Double Tax of the eighth century (see pages 120–121). The Ming Summer Tax was collected in the eighth month on the supplementary crops grown during the winter and harvested in early summer. The Autumn Grain Tax was collected in the second month on produce grown during the previous summer and harvested in the autumn, above all on the great rice crop of the Yangtze Valley. The usual government monopoly taxes on tea and salt were also maintained. The Ming continued to issue paper money, as the Sung and Yüan had done, but made it unconvertible into metal currency (copper cash or silver bullion), so that it became worthless and had to be abandoned by 1450.

Households were classified into three, five, or nine grades (there were many complexities) and were obliged to provide labor service according to the number of registered adult males between sixteen and sixty years of age. One kind of labor service was to bear local responsibilities in connection with tax collections and public works. This service was organized under the *li-chia* system. Ideally, each 110 neighboring households formed a unit (*li* or village). Within this unit each year one of the ten leading families superintended one-tenth of the 100 remaining households to form a *chia* or section, which bore the responsibility for local labor service during the year. The others served in rotation over a ten-year period. Thus the *li-chia* system had common features with but was separate and distinct from the *pao-chia* system of mutual guarantee which had been inherited from the Sung (pages 100 and 129). Another kind of labor service, also apportioned among the male adults, involved prescribed tasks in the big government offices (*ya-men,* Anglicized as yamen), or else money payments for supplies for the yamen. Still other forms of labor service, apportioned among the populace, required service at the government post stations and in the local militia.

The Ming legal system showed the same pattern of reapplying traditional principles with a new thoroughness. A comprehensive body of administrative and criminal law was first published in 1397.

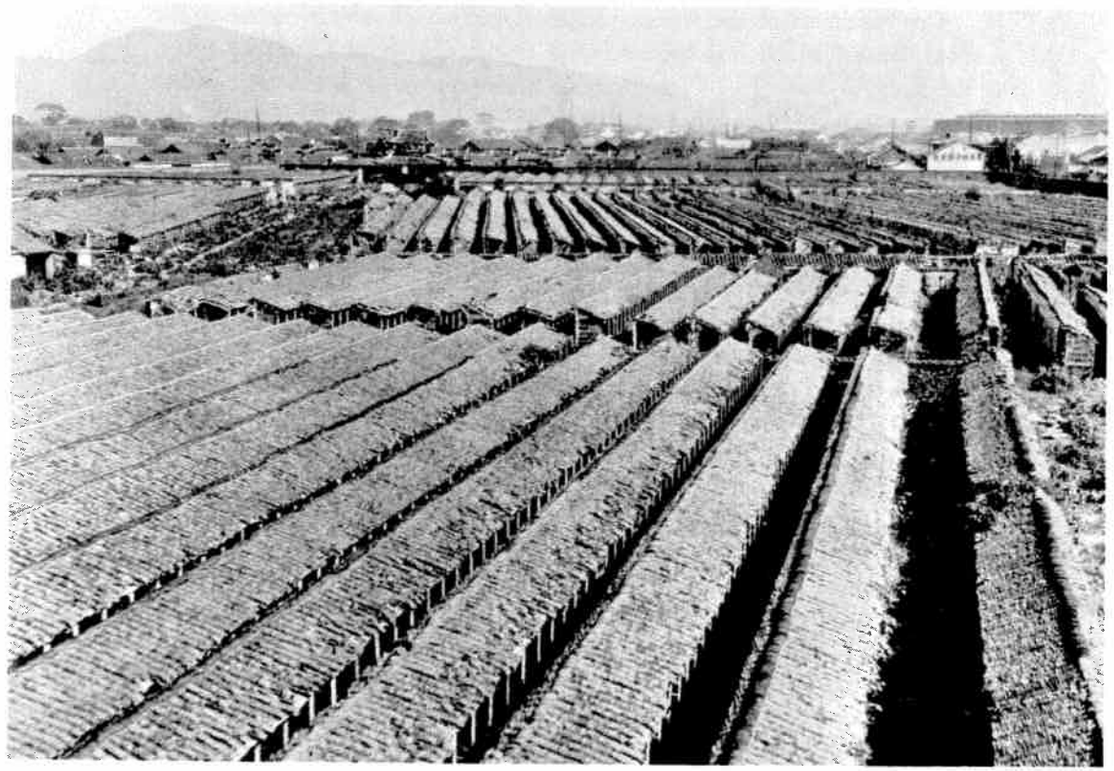
Yet the early Ming government remained, by modern standards, superficial. It claimed the prerogative of organizing and controlling all aspects of society. But in practice it did not interfere with the Chinese people in

their daily lives. There were in the provinces only about two thousand principal posts. If one adds minor incumbents, the total of civil officials in the Ch'ing Empire as late as 1800 was only around twenty thousand. The control of the country by such a small number of mandarins, as Chinese officials came to be called by Westerners, was feasible only because of the functions performed by the dominant elite in each locality, that is, the degree-holders or gentry.

Society and Culture under the Ming

The Examination System. In the Ming revival of a purely Chinese rule over China, the animating spirit had been to return to the pre-Mongol institutions of the T'ang and Sung. This soon built up the importance of the examination system. Under the Ming and Ch'ing there were three main levels of examination activity: First were preliminary examinations in the county (*hsien*), which qualified one to compete in examinations held during two out of every three years at the prefectural city (*fu*). This gave one the lowest principal degree, that of licentiate or bachelor, called by the ancient name of *hsiu-ts'ai,* "flowering talent." This admitted one to the privileged class of literati, who enjoyed exemption from labor service and corporal punishments. In order to retain this lower-gentry status, the degree-holder had to pass routine examinations, usually every three years. For the second level another preliminary test led to the great triennial examinations at the provincial capitals, where thousands of candidates would spend several days incarcerated with brush and paper in the long rows of individual cells at the examination field. One out of every one to two hundred competitors became a provincial graduate or "recommended man" (*chü-jen*), eligible to compete at the third level in the triennial metropolitan examinations at Peking. If successful at the capital, he became a metropolitan graduate or "presented scholar" (*chin-shih*), went to the palace for a final test by the emperor himself, and then received his official ranking and appointment to a post.

The bureaucratic system flexibly permitted some men to advance without examination. One means was the inheritance privilege, by which a son of an official of high rank could receive degree status and sometimes even official position in consideration of his father's merit. Another means under the Ming and Ch'ing, as in all previous dynasties, was to let men secure degree status by purchase. This was done by making a contribution to the imperial treasury. Generally the purchaser was allowed to obtain only degree status, not an actual official post. This admitted him to the gentry class, but not into officialdom. Thus degrees acquired by purchase, clearly designated as such, admitted certain men of wealth, mostly merchants or landlords, to the scholarly elite, giving them, in return for their



THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT'S EXAMINATION SYSTEM. *Thousands of cells standing in a vast enclosure at Nanking, as in other provincial capitals.*

payments, a qualified recognition within a framework that still gave the genuine scholar the highest prestige. The sale of degree status in this fashion was partly a safety valve, letting ambitious nonintellectuals into the establishment, and partly a source of revenue, which tempted a dynasty particularly in time of need. In the nineteenth century roughly a third of the lowest level degree-holders got them by purchase.

Generally speaking, the examination system brought in the great bulk of the bureaucracy and succeeded in recruiting the best talent of the country for government service. Quotas limited the number who could succeed in each county and province, so as to ensure geographical representation. Candidates' papers were sometimes copied, without their names, before being read in order to ensure anonymity and impartiality. For the provincial examinations, the examiners were sent out from the capital. The system was managed by the Ministry of Rites, instead of the Ministry of Personnel which supervised the officials' later careers. All these practices ensured the impartial universality of the selection process.

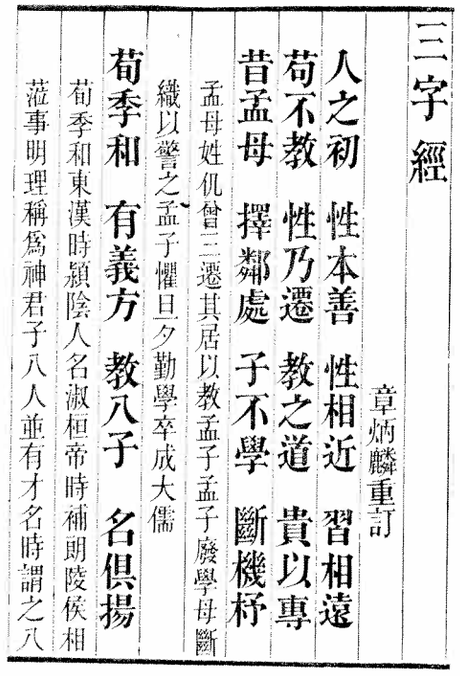
One weakness of the system was its restriction of subject matter to the Four Books, which had been selected as the essence of Confucianism in the Sung, and the Five Classics, again as interpreted by the Sung scholars of the school of Chu Hsi (see pages 149–150). In its passion for formal organization, the Ming adopted finally in 1487 a set form for writing examination papers under eight main headings, with not over seven hundred characters in all and with much use of balance and antithesis. This was the famous "eight-legged essay" style, later denounced as imposing a tyranny of literary structure over thought.

The institutions which prepared examination candidates included so-called government schools, which were ordered to be set up at the county and prefectural levels. But their chief function was to enroll the scholars and hold periodical examinations, not to provide organized instruction or residence facilities. The actual preparation of scholars began in the family or sometimes in a clan school. This gave the advantage to youths from extended families that could afford tutors, specifically from scholar-official families, in which parental example and family tradition provided incentive and guidance.

The chief primer, memorized by many millions during the Ming and Ch'ing eras, was the *Three-Character Classic* produced in the thirteenth century. It gave in jingle form a concise summary of basic knowledge and doctrine in 356 alternately rhyming lines, each of three characters. The opening lines, when understood, convey the prime doctrine of Mencius that human nature is fundamentally good, an idea universally accepted in China, which was to prove a stumbling block to Western missionaries convinced of original sin. Thus the process of elementary learning was at the same time a process of philosophical indoctrination.

Scholarship. At the top of the intellectual pyramid under the Ming stood the Hanlin Academy, a carefully selected body of outstanding metropolitan graduates, who performed important literary tasks for the court. The ethnocentric reaction of the early Ming centered in this citadel of Confucian doctrine. In addition some 300 private academies (*shu-yüan*) were founded in various parts of the country, on the model of the Sung, as centers of scholarly study, discussion, and compilation, usually under the patronage of high officials or rich merchants; some also received imperial encouragement. They brought together eminent scholars, students who received free maintenance and tuition, and small libraries. Academies also published scholarly works and stored the wooden printing blocks.

The emperor's sponsorship of letters and the arts was an important means of maintaining his position as head of the Confucian state and culture. This tradition produced in 1407 the great *Encyclopedia of the Yung-lo Period* in 11,095 volumes—a compilation of all the principal


三字經
章炳麟重訂
人之初 性本善 性相近 習相遠
苟不教 性乃遷 教之道 貴以專
昔孟母 擇鄰處 子不學 斷機杼
孟母姓仉曾三遷其居以教孟子孟子廢學母斷
織以警之孟子懼旦夕勤學卒成大儒
荀季和 有義方 教八子 名俱揚
荀季和東漢時潁陰人名淑桓帝時補朗陵侯相
蒞事明理稱爲神君子八人並有才名時謂之八

THE THREE-CHARACTER CLASSIC (SAN-TZU CHING). *The first page of a modern edition, with the title of the book at the upper right-hand corner and the text itself starting on the third line. The commentary appears in smaller type.*

works on history, government, ethics, geography, etc., inherited from previous ages. Compiled by more than two thousand scholars, it was too large to print. Fewer than four hundred manuscript volumes have survived. The next two centuries saw a continued flood of publication sponsored by the court, by officials, and by academies and families. To try to describe this literature, its great compilations, the myriad monographic treatises, the many genres of belles-lettres, would be no easier than to attempt to describe the literature of all Europe in the same period. To cite one example, after several smaller works had led the way, one scholar (Li Shih-chen) spent twenty-six years compiling an illustrated *materia medica* which described almost two thousand animal, vegetable, and mineral drugs and gave over eight thousand prescriptions. Completed in 1578, it described smallpox inoculation and the uses of mercury, iodine, chaulmoogra oil, ephedrine, and other items of a rich pharmacopoeia upon which the modern world is still drawing. Again, a well-illustrated handbook of industrial technology (by Sung Ying-hsing, printed in 1637; see pages 14, 15, and 74), describes methods and instruments used in producing rice, silk, salt, pottery, metals, coal, paper, weapons, and many other products of China's premodern technology.

The vitality of Ming scholarship reflected processes of social growth of the same sort that had flowered in the Sung. Two centuries of domestic peace under the Ming brought substantial economic growth—big increases

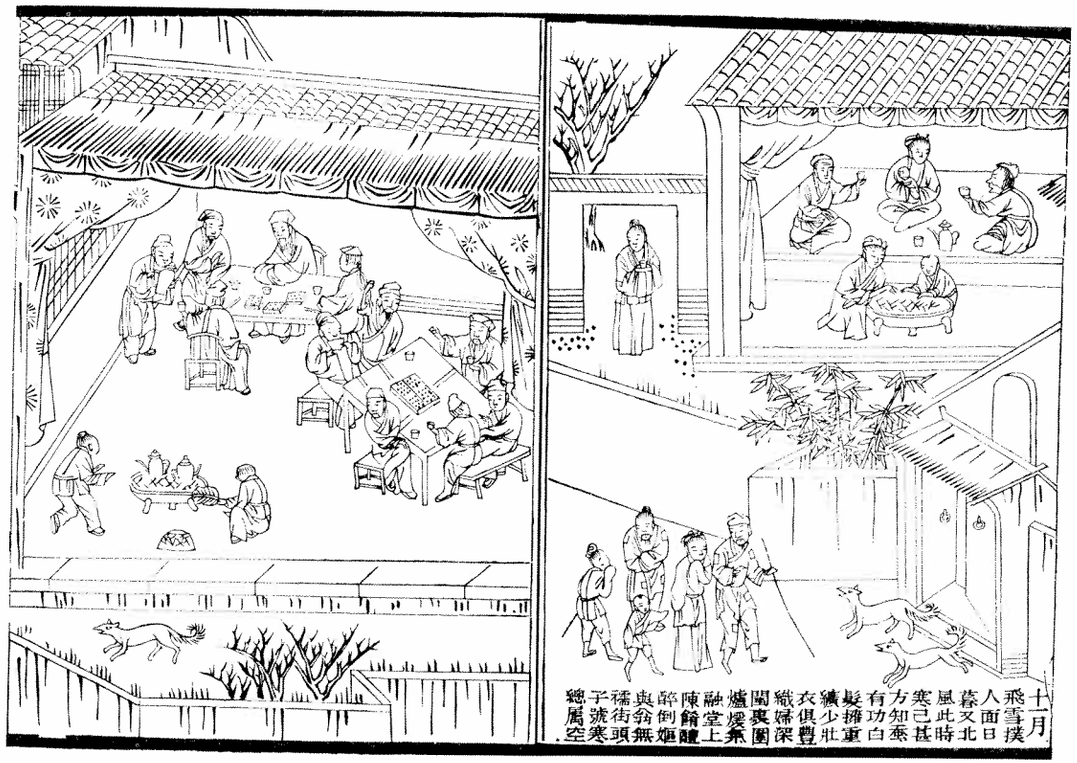
The Ming official and philosopher, Wang Yang-ming (Wang Shou-jen), 1472–1529.

in farm production and population as well as in trade and industry. City life flourished accordingly, accompanied by more printing and distribution of books, more widespread education, and a more refined and also more democratized urban culture. Out of this came a larger scholar class as well as an enlarged bureaucracy; yet the problems of Chinese life also proliferated and taxed the powers of Confucian thinkers to maintain an integrated view of society and define the scholar's role in it.

The Ming philosopher most influential on later generations in China and Japan was Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529), a successful high official who went beyond the orthodoxy of Chu Hsi by advocating both spiritual enlightenment through meditative self-examination and a vigorous ethical activism within society. Wang carried further a line of Sung thought (see page 149), the Neo-Confucian school of Idealism or of the Mind which had stemmed from a contemporary of Chu Hsi as a minority school opposed to the dominant Chu Hsi school of Rationalism. In general, this School of the Mind was inclined to deny the dualism of Chu Hsi's system, the sharp distinction between Heaven and man and therefore between "Heavenly Principle" (*t'ien-li*) and "human desire." Instead, it viewed them both as parts of a single realm, which brought it closer to Buddhism. Building on this tradition, Wang Yang-ming's teaching represented a sort of Zen revolt within Confucianism: it put greater stress on meditation and intuitive knowledge. Chu Hsi's interpretation of the classical phrase (from the *Great Learning*) about the "extension of knowledge through the investigation of things" could thus be revised. Wang advocated instead "the extension of intuitive knowledge," which could be achieved through the investigation of one's own inner mind, the *li* within one. The process for doing this, as in Zen Buddhism, was essentially meditation, leading to a sort of enlightenment. But Confucian self-cultivation sought to eliminate not all desires, as in a Buddhist nonattachment to the world, but only selfish desires, the better to achieve one's dutiful harmony with others and with all creation. This led Wang to stress the "unity of knowledge and conduct." As he put it, "Knowledge is the beginning of conduct; conduct is the completion of knowledge." This has remained a Chinese and Japanese ideal down to the present day.

The Gentry Class. The metropolitan graduates totaled only 25,000 men during the whole Ming period. But the degree-holders of the lower ranks probably numbered at any one time about half a million. These degree-holders of all ranks have been known in Chinese as "officials and scholars" (*shen-shih*). In English the term gentry has been applied to them, but this term requires careful definition. It is ambiguous, for it is applied both to individuals and to families, and may have either a political-social or an economic connotation. Strictly defined, the gentry were individual degree-holders. Yet in China where the family overshadowed the individual, the existence of gentry families (i.e., families that had members who were degree-holders) was to be expected. Individuals became gentry by securing degrees. Yet, in a crowded society based on farming, where landowning was a chief economic support for scholarly study, landlord-gentry families were very common. Degree-holders and landlords overlapped to a considerable but imprecise extent.

The peculiar strength of Confucian government lay in the fact that the gentry performed so many public functions in the local community without official remuneration. They commonly lived in their big houses in the market towns but also maintained contacts or establishments in the administrative cities. As men of influence, they assumed responsibility for many activities which today are performed by officials. They raised funds for and supervised public works, such as the building and maintenance of irrigation ditches and canals with their dikes and dams, and roads with their bridges and ferries. They took responsibility for public morals, maintaining the local Confucian temples and ceremonies. They supported schools and academies. They compiled the local histories or gazetteers. In time of plenty they sponsored orphanages and care for the aged. In time of disaster they provided relief. In the face of disorder, they might get permission to organize local militia as defense forces. In most of these activities they received official encouragement or recognition but not specific appointment to office or any pay. A loose comparison might be made



GENTRY IDEALS. *From an eighteenth-century work* (Pin-feng kuang-i) *illustrating the rewards of virtue. The caption (not shown) for the illustration on the left says: "In the tenth month winter cold sets in. The diligent have ample food and clothing. They feast with wine, play games, and entertain relatives. Parents live in comfort while sons pursue learning." The illustration on the right is for the eleventh month and shows a winter scene. Within their apartments women who have done their weaving sit warmly clothed around a brazier enjoying wine. On the street people who have been indolent suffer from the cold.*

with other classes that have functioned in very different societies, such as the equestrian order of ancient Rome, the modern American business class, or other nonofficial groups that have provided local community leadership.

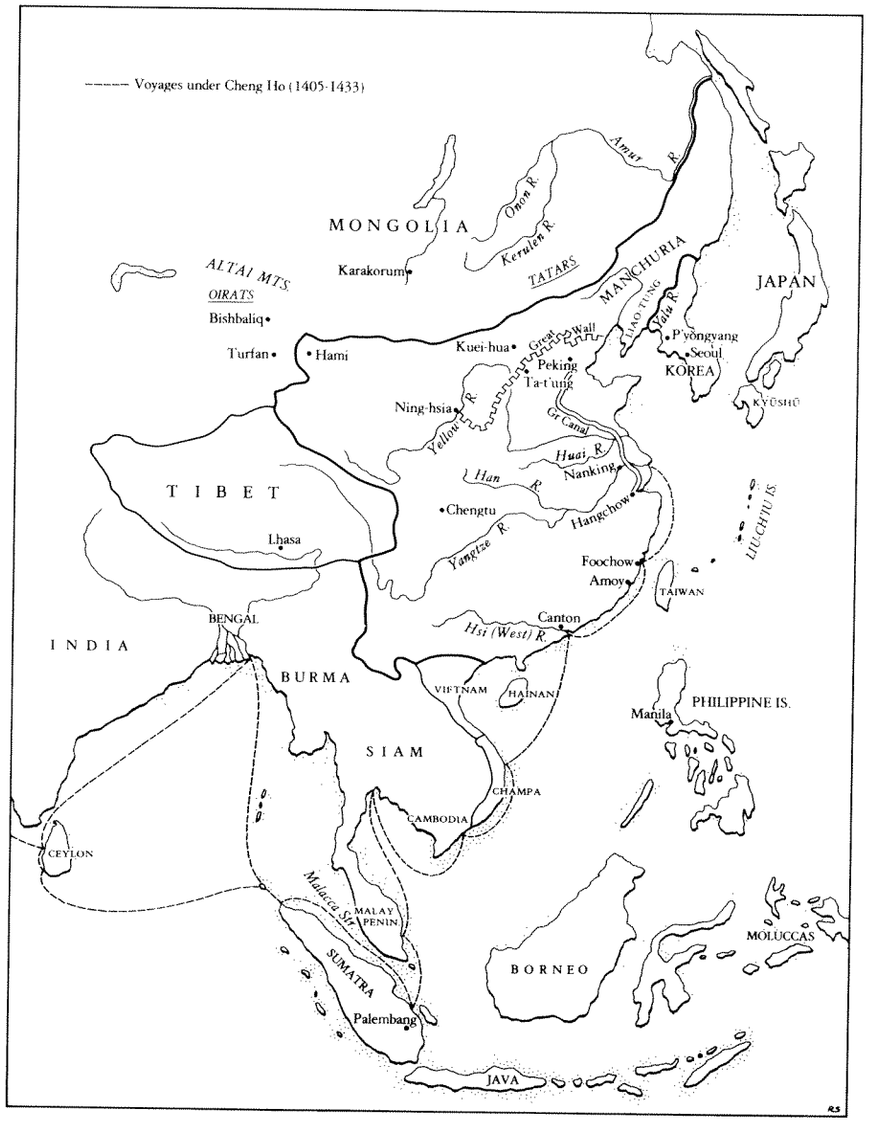
The interest of the government was to maintain morale and a type of public spirit among the gentry, as opposed to selfish opportunism. To this end the Confucian doctrines were recited in the local Confucian temples and the Son of Heaven issued his moral exhortations. The six imperial injunctions of Hung-wu were ordered posted in all villages in 1397. These said, in effect, "Be filial, be respectful to elders and ancestors, teach your children, and peacefully pursue your livelihood." Thus the great tradition

of learning, under the patronage of the head of the state, was used to indoctrinate the common people, while the gentry class as the local elite in turn provided leadership in the orderly life of the villages. Though not aristocratic in a hereditary sense, this was indeed an elitist system, for the degree-holders with their immediate families formed certainly no more than 2 per cent of the population but held the highest social authority outside the small official class itself.

Foreign Relations

The Tribute System. Upon gaining the throne, Hung-wu immediately tried to re-establish the grand design of the Chinese state in his foreign relations as well as at home. He sent envoys to the peripheral states, Korea, Japan, Annam (Vietnam), Champa, Tibet, and others, announcing his accession. Tribute missions soon came from these states and from others to which Mongol expeditions had been sent almost a century earlier, on the established routes of China's overseas trade.

The suzerain-vassal relationship between the ruler of China and rulers of other countries expressed the traditional "culturalism" in which China was assumed to be not only the largest and oldest among the states of the world but indeed their parent and the source of their civilization. Tribute relations involved not only performance of the kowtow, the "three kneelings and nine prostrations," but also many other aspects of interstate relations: the exchange of envoys and conduct of diplomatic relations, repatriation and extradition of persons, regulation of Sino-foreign trade, and special Chinese efforts at self-defense through intimidating, cajoling, or subsidizing foreign tribes and rulers. In short, the fitting of foreign potentates into a hierarchy of superior and inferior, and the expression of this in ritual observances, was merely an extension to the outer world of the "Confucian" social order which the ruler of China sought to maintain at home. The vassal king was given an official patent of appointment and a seal to use on his memorials, which were to be dated by the Chinese ruler's year period. The Son of Heaven affected a paternal interest in the orderly government of the tributary state, confirming the succession of new rulers, sometimes offering military protection against attack, usually conferring the boon of trade with China, and in any case sending down moral homilies and exhortations. This was not an aggressive imperialism. Rather, it was a defensive expression of culturalism: foreign rulers, if they wished contact with the Middle Kingdom, had to accept its terms and acknowledge the universal supremacy of the Son of Heaven. Trade with China might be of great value. Tribute formalities were the price to be paid. Like so many grand designs, this one failed of perfect execution. Yet Chinese chroniclers, by maintaining the forms of tribute at least in the



THE MING EMPIRE AND ITS FOREIGN RELATIONS

record, made it seem important. It was often regarded quite differently by the tributaries.

The tribute system served many purposes. To get the "king of Japan" to curb Japanese pirates who were raiding Chinese ports, Hung-wu sent three missions to Japan in 1369–1372, using various inducements—repatriation of captured pirates, threatening rescripts from himself, and Chinese monks as envoys, but all to no avail. Japanese piracy continued. Though tribute missions came, they were not always submissive, nor were

they from the Japanese sovereign. "You stupid eastern barbarians!" wrote Hung-wu to the Ashikaga shogun, the feudal ruler of Japan. "Living so far across the sea . . . you are haughty and disloyal; you permit your subjects to do evil." The Japanese replied in kind: "Heaven and Earth are vast; they are not monopolized by one ruler."

The high point of tributary activity under Yung-lo saw a brief period of professed Japanese fealty to China, expressed in very dutiful terms but regarded by the Japanese feudal rulers as merely a means of monopolizing the lucrative Chinese trade for themselves. Yung-lo in 1403 reopened the three Superintendencies of Merchant Shipping in the southern coastal provinces, which had been closed in 1374, and built hostels at each to entertain tribute envoys. Japanese missions now came annually for several years. In the usual fashion the Chinese court prepared a series of numbered paper passport tallies, tore them from their stub books, and sent them to the vassal ruler, retaining the stub books. When a mission came to the designated Chinese port to bring tribute and to trade, its ships, goods and persons were all specifically limited by statute. They were recorded on one of the numbered tallies, which could be verified by its fitting into the stub books. Thus all envoys were given bona fides, and imposters were checked. The Japanese shogun could maintain his trade monopoly and the Chinese could identify pirates. Between 1433 and 1549, eleven large Japanese missions, usually of several hundred persons, came to the Chinese court under the tally system, by way of Ningpo. Innumerable problems arose—rivalry in Japan to get possession of the official tallies, conflicts in China with disorderly Japanese warriors, prolonged haggling at Peking over the prices to be paid for trade goods, which included copper ore and sulphur by the hundreds of tons and Japanese swords by the thousand. Members of missions also carried their own goods for private trade. In addition, they received gifts from the emperor, as did the shogun, in lavish quantity.

The Maritime Expeditions. One of Yung-lo's major undertakings was to incorporate the states of South and Southeast Asia into the tribute system. While his motives still remain a matter of speculation, this ambitious venture was marked by seven great maritime expeditions which were begun in 1405, and continued until 1433. They were led for the most part by a Muslim court eunuch named Cheng Ho, who came originally from Yunnan and as a Muslim was well fitted to deal with the Islamic rulers of South Asia. (See map, pages 172–173.) The first fleet sailed in 1405–1407 with sixty-two vessels carrying 28,000 men, and reached India, as did also the second and third. The fourth voyage in 1413–1415 reached Aden and the head of Asian circum-navigation at Hormuz on the Persian Gulf. A fifth voyage also went as far as Aden. The seventh voyage

started out with 27,500 men and reached Hormuz again in 1431–1433. Chinese vessels visited far down the east coast of Africa, where chinaware and copper cash had been known for centuries. Seven Chinese reached Mecca.

The world had never seen such large-scale feats of seamanship. These Chinese armadas sailed all across the Indian Ocean almost a century before the Portuguese in 1498 reached India by sailing around Africa, and a century and a half before the Spanish Armada of 1588 made Western history by its short voyage around England. Cheng Ho's voyages were made possible by the development of Chinese shipbuilding and techniques of navigation on the Asian sea routes. His seagoing junks were of considerable size, some over four hundred feet in length, with four decks and up to a dozen watertight compartments. They navigated by detailed sailing directions and also used the compass. These remarkable expeditions penetrated to the sources of China's maritime trade not only along the Southeast Asian coasts but also in Ceylon, on both coasts of southern India, and in the Middle East and East Africa. In addition to customary tributaries, like Vietnam and Siam, some fifty new places were visited, and their rulers enrolled as tributaries. Missions from Hormuz and the African coast came to China four times, from Bengal eleven times. Rulers in Sumatra and Ceylon were brought back by force. Back also came ostriches, zebras, and giraffes, the latter touted as the auspicious "unicorn" of Chinese fable.

These spectacular maritime expeditions expressed the exuberance of an era of great vitality. For the eunuch leaders, they brought adventure, fame, and presumably profit. Commercial interests were also no doubt at work on the well-established routes of earlier trade, where Chinese migration had already created large overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asian ports. Another motive seems to have been broadly political, to bring all the known world within the Chinese tributary scheme of things. Far-distant places trading by land were regularly enrolled as tributaries. Why not those trading by sea? This grandiose concept had been in the minds of Mongol emperors and was implicit in the idea of the universal rule of the Son of Heaven.

Speculation as to the causes of the Ming expeditions raises the question of why they were suddenly stopped and never resumed or imitated later. One reason for their cessation was their great cost, at a time when the early Ming campaigns against the Mongols and the building of Peking had begun to deplete the imperial coffers. The great fleets could be criticized as expensive adventures, largely unproductive except for pageantry and strange tales. They were also promoted particularly by court eunuchs, whose activities were opposed by the scholar-officials—so much so that Cheng Ho's feats were practically suppressed in the historical record.

These demonstrations of the early Ming capacity for maritime expansion were all the more dramatic because Chinese ideas of government and official policies were fundamentally indifferent, if not actually opposed, to such an expansion. The contrast between capacity and performance, if looked at by our modern world of trade and overseas expansion, is truly striking.

Chinese seapower, based upon the fishing fleets and trading junks of Canton, Amoy, Ch'üan-chou, and Ningpo, had been steadily increasing. China was on the verge of becoming a naval power that could dominate East Asia. The Ming fleets were developing the nautical and logistic capacity to bring military force and trading goods in overwhelming volume to any point in the Eastern seas. But after 1433 this beginning was cut short. No Henry the Navigator came to the Chinese throne. The Ming court, unlike that of contemporary Portugal, had no sustained interest in seafaring, no grasp of the possibilities of seapower. The Ming voyages were not followed up but remained isolated *tours de force,* mere exploits.

Ming Anticommercialism. This contrast throws light on the nature of Chinese society. Cheng Ho lived and sailed a century and a half before Sir Francis Drake and the other captains of Queen Elizabeth began to lay the foundations of the British Empire. The Chinese Empire was then greater than all of Europe in size and in the volume of her domestic, if not also her foreign, commerce. Yet Ming China, having shown her capacity to do so, failed to become a maritime power. Through this default, the Eastern seas and even the China coast soon came to be dominated by a succession of non-Chinese seafaring peoples—the Japanese, the Portuguese and Spanish, the Dutch, and finally the British and Americans. Out of this commercial and naval domination of East Asian waters emerged eventually those forces of imperialistic expansion which finally humbled the traditional Chinese Empire and led to its disintegration. Cheng Ho, as a court eunuch and high dignitary, lacked precisely those motives which later inspired the merchant-adventurers of Europe. His power and advancement, even as he cruised the Indian Ocean, still depended upon the emperor. Cheng Ho was an organizer, a commander, a diplomat, and an able courtier, but he was not a trader. No chartered companies grew out of his expeditions, empowered like the Virginia Company or the East India Company to found colonies or establish governments overseas. The migration of Chinese into Southeast Asia was already under way, and the Chinese in that area would always outnumber the Europeans who might come there. But the Chinese state remained uninterested in these commercial and colonial possibilities overseas. The Ming and Ch'ing governments got their major sustenance from the land tax, not from trade taxes. They refused to join in the great commercial revolution which was beginning to sweep the world.

To understand this anticommercialism we may suggest several approaches, institutional, economic, ideological, and strategic. The institutional explanation goes back to the early environment of ancient China on the North China Plain far from the sea, where the official class came into being as tax-gatherers, fostering agriculture and gathering its products to maintain themselves and the state. In this agrarian-bureaucratic society merchants were kept subordinate to officialdom and utilized by it. The economic interests that did grow up were centered in domestic, not foreign, commerce simply because the Chinese subcontinent, then as now, was so relatively self-sufficient. But after the growth of commerce during the T'ang, Sung, and Yüan, why did the Ming and Ch'ing governments revert to the traditional agrarian-centered attitudes of an earlier era? Perhaps one reason was the culturalism we have already mentioned, in particular the establishment of the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy as the matrix of Ming thought. This revived the classical values, including the ancient disesteem of commerce. Foreign trade was left to powerful eunuchs, which made it all the more distasteful to the official class. Another explanation was presumably strategic—the Ming determination to prevent a repetition of the Mongol conquest.

The Mongol Problem. Hung-wu's preoccupation with breaking the Mongol power remained the chief focus of early Ming foreign relations. His aim was not to subjugate the whole of Mongolia but rather to destroy the unity of the tribes, which gave them their striking power. Even before China had been unified, Ming armies crossed the steppe to break up the Mongol forces, twice seizing Karakorum. Mongol chieftains pacified by defeat, intimidation, purchase, or other means were put in charge of Mongol settlements on the border and given titles, honors, emoluments, and opportunities for trade. Using a divide-and-rule policy, the Chinese tried to keep the seminomads of Inner Mongolia as border allies against the fully nomadic and mobile tribes of Outer Mongolia.

In the Central Asian khanate of Chaghadai, the last great successor of Chinggis, the conquerer Timur, known to Europe as Tamerlane (1336–1405), rose to power in 1369. From his capital of Samarkand, he expanded violently in all directions, overrunning Persia and Mesopotamia, defeating the Golden Horde in southern Russia, even briefly invading northern India. Tamerlane had some contact with the Chinese court and conceived the ambition to take it over. When he died in 1405, he had a vast army already on the way eastward to conquer China and make it an Islamic state. His death, however, marked the end of the Mongol era, particularly of the Mongol capacity to keep Central Asia united and so to threaten the agricultural civilizations that bordered on it. The end of a united Central Asia also diminished the trade and contact across it between East and West. Under the Ming and Ch'ing, this land route was severed, and the tribes of Mongolia became more dependent on trade with China alone.

By the early fifteenth century the Mongol tribes were split (see map, page 196): in eastern Mongolia were the Tatars (*Ta-tan* in Chinese, corrupted by Europeans to "Tartars"), in western Mongolia, the Oirats. Chinese strategy was to play each off against the other. The Yung-lo emperor rose to power by leading expeditions against the Mongols and also by finding allies among them on the border. After his usurpation in 1403, Yung-lo personally led five expeditions far out across the steppe. In 1410 he mobilized over 100,000 men with 30,000 cartloads of supplies, overawed the Oirats, gave them gifts and secured their neutrality, crossed the Kerulen River, and defeated the Tatars. However, when the Oirats expanded eastward in 1414, Yung-lo led an army back to the Kerulen and this time defeated the Oirats. Both these Ming expeditions used cannon. Soon the Tatars ventured to raid the border. In 1422 Yung-lo led forth another host of 235,000 men with a supply train of 117,000 carts and 340,000 donkeys. The Tatars escaped westward, however, and further campaigns in 1423 and 1424 were unable to catch them.

Already Yung-lo's removal of the capital in 1421 from Nanking to Peking had symbolized the Ming preoccupation with defense against the Mongols. Imperial strategy centered on the frontier, where Peking stands guard near the principal gateway (the Nan-k'ou Pass) leading from Mongolia down onto the North China Plain. The capital of the great Ming Empire thus was located a scant forty miles from the traditional northern boundary of China, the Great Wall. This site has been used by dynasties oriented toward Inner Asia—the Liao, Yüan, Ming, and Ch'ing, as well as the Chinese People's Republic since 1949. Southern capitals have been used by regimes originating in the south or oriented toward overseas trade—Hangchow under the Southern Sung; Nanking in the early Ming, under the Taiping rebels (1853–1864), and under the Nationalist Government after 1927. Peking was far from the centers of Chinese population and production. Its strategic vulnerability to nomad inroads and its dependence on grain shipments from the lower Yangtze via the Grand Canal, are startling facts—too startling to be mere accidents. The explanation is that the capital of China had to serve also as the capital of the non-Chinese areas of Inner Asia. The "barbarians" were a constant military and therefore political component of the Chinese Empire; its capital was drawn outward to the border of China as a result.

The Ming expeditions to chastise the Mongols had been part of the effort to keep them harmless by carrot-and-stick methods. The Oirats, for example, had established tribute relations in 1408 and sent missions almost every year, which became a thinly veiled means of keeping them pacified through subsidies, a sort of tribute in reverse. Their annual mis-

sions to Peking sometimes totaled two or three thousand persons, including several hundred merchants from Central Asia. Passing through the Great Wall at Ta-t'ung in northern Shansi, this host had to be quartered and banqueted by the local authorities, for, like cultural delegations invited to Peking today, tribute missions were guests of the Middle Kingdom. As tribute, the Oirats presented their chief native product, horses, and received in return imperial "gifts in reply," mainly silk and satin textiles. A few days of free trade in the market followed the presentation of tribute within the Forbidden City. In this context of profitable exchange, the "barbarians" acquiesced in the "three kneelings and nine prostrations" as a traditional court ceremony. While gaining the nomads' submission, China had to suffer their depredations on the route between the border and the capital, and their drunken roistering at Peking. For the Mongols, the trip spelled glamour and profit, from fees paid them by the Muslim traders to whom their tribute missions gave cover. Many bearers of "tribute" were actually merchants claiming to represent distant and sometimes nonexistent potentates. The Ming *Collected Statutes* listed thirty-eight countries of the Western Regions which submitted tribute by way of Hami, the natural funnel for the caravan trade. Among them, for example, the Kingdom of Rum in Asia Minor (i.e., the long defunct Roman East) was recorded as presenting tribute as late as 1618. The Ming viewed this thin trickle of Central Asian tributary trade as having political rather than fiscal value, as it kept troublesome warriors quiet on the frontier.

In the late 1430's, just as the overseas expeditions came to an end, the Inner Asian frontier saw a violent recrudescence of the Mongol threat. A new chieftain of the Oirats subjugated Hami, then extended his influence over the tribes to the east all the way to Korea, and in late 1449 mobilized his horde along the border, threw off the forms of tribute, and approached Ta-t'ung. The Ming emperor, a product of palace life, was under the ill-advised domination of his chief eunuch, who took the emperor into the field and foolishly advanced toward Ta-t'ung to do battle. The Oirats advanced, defeated, pursued, and destroyed the Chinese force, and captured the emperor. But when they came to Peking, they found that the war minister and others had prepared a defense with cannon, enthroned a new emperor, and affected no interest in the former one. After several days before the walls, the Oirats went back to Mongolia. Next year they sent back the useless emperor and soon resumed their profitable tribute relations.

Ming-Mongol relations during the next century were a mixture of border raids and tribute missions. In 1550 a new leader, Altan Khan of the eastern Mongols, united a large striking force, came through the Wall from the northeast, and pillaged around Peking again for several days before withdrawing. Ming defenses of walls, beacon towers, and military agricultural colonies on the frontier were offset by Chinese deserters who

aided the raiders. Such Chinese helped Altan Khan try to establish a settled administration. He built a capital city at Kuei-hua outside the Wall, northwest of Ta-t'ung. Eventually in the 1570's he was pacified and given the hopeful title of "Obedient and Righteous Prince" (Shun-i Wang). Until the rise of the Manchu Empire, however, Mongol freebooting continued to harass the Chinese border.

Troubles with Japan. From the cost of the Japanese and the Mongol tribute missions, we can see why the Ming court may have preferred to let the tribute system rest in comparative abeyance overseas after the first half of the fifteenth century. The expense of maintaining, transporting, and bestowing gifts upon hundreds of functionaries and merchants who came to Peking was not compensated by the trade they conducted. Missions from Southeast Asia grew fewer and fewer. The Ryūkyū Islands alone remained a regular maritime tributary on a biennial basis, serving actually as an indirect channel for Sino-Japanese trade. In this context of fading grandeur and frontier disorder, the first Europeans to reach China by sea, Portuguese adventurers in 1514, seemed to the Chinese only a small increment in a general growth of piracy and unwanted relations on the China coast (see Chapter 16).

In Japan a growing maritime capacity had produced overseas adventurers a full century before the Elizabethan age glorified the somewhat comparable exploits of gentleman-pirates from England. Like Drake and Hawkins, the Japanese could trade or loot by turns, as opportunity offered. Their bigger ships could carry three hundred men. Landing suddenly and attacking villages with their great swords, the pirates would seize provisions, hostages, and loot and make their getaway. Although known in Chinese records as "Japanese pirates" (*Wo-k'ou,* or in Japanese, *Wakō,* a term with pejorative connotations of "dwarf"), these raiders actually included many Chinese. Unlike the Mongol raids, the disloyal Chinese in these forays were not so much advisers as principal participants. By the latter decades of Ming rule, Chinese actually formed the majority among the "Japanese pirates."

The Ming response to this growing disorder, the prohibition of maritime trade, reflected the court's agrarian-minded and land-based unconcern for foreign commerce in general. The prohibition had the effect of forcing crews and captains into smuggling or buccaneering for a livelihood. Pirate raids after 1550 became actual invasions. The pirates based themselves on Chusan Island south of Shanghai, which was later to be the British base in 1840, and in 1552 they attacked inland cities in Chekiang, while others went up the Yangtze. In defense, Ming pirate-suppressors bought over the leading renegades with rewards and pardons and attacked the pirate lair on Chusan. But the scourge increased. Japanese harassment

of the South China coast declined only with the political reunification of Japan in the late sixteenth century (see Chapter 13). However, this reunification concentrated Japan's military energies in a form even more menacing and exhausting to the Ming court.

Peking learned of Japan's intent to invade China by way of Korea through spies in Japan as well as from Korea. In 1592, when the Japanese attack on Korea came, the court debated whether to send a fleet from the southern provinces to attack Japan, or to put an army on the Korean frontier, or to negotiate for peace. In the end the court decided it had to fulfill its suzerain duty to aid Korea in order to defend Southern Manchuria and North China. Ming forces did not cross the Yalu until after the whole peninsula was in Japanese hands. The Chinese attacked P'yongyang in mid 1592, were badly defeated, and started negotiations to gain time. Early in 1593 they surprised the Japanese, drove them out of P'yongyang, and advanced to the outskirts of the capital, Seoul, but were ambushed and again defeated. The short swords of the Chinese cavalry proved no match for the long swords, spears, and guns of the Japanese infantry. Negotiations and exhausting conflict continued until the Japanese finally withdrew in 1598 (after a second invasion in force in 1597). The total Ming expenditure to meet the first Japanese invasion of Korea must have come to over 10 million taels, with a comparable sum required later to meet the second invasion. The administration was already close to bankruptcy, after constant subsidies to the Mongols and rebuilding of Peking palaces. Japan's invasions of Korea were a final strain on Peking's dwindling resources and prepared the way for the rise, after 1600, of bandits within and "barbarian" invaders from without.

The Ming Economy

Economic Growth. In studying China's economic history, we must constantly distinguish between the imperial regime and the country as a whole. We have noted the court's anticommercial attitude and approach to final bankruptcy. But if we look at the late Ming economy as a whole, we find much evidence of growth in almost all its aspects—population, area of cultivated land, volume of foreign trade, production of handicraft and industrial goods, and even, perhaps, in the use of money.

Tax grain (called by Western writers "tribute rice") had to be transported from the rice baskets of the Huai River and lower Yangtze to feed the new capital at Peking. Sea transport around Shantung was increasingly hindered by Japanese pirates, and was in any case expensive. Yung-lo therefore dug out the unused "Connecting Canal" in western Shantung that Khubilai Khan had first constructed as part of the second Grand Canal system, and installed fifteen locks. Three thousand or more shallow boats

were now used on the canal route, and after 1415 sea transport was given up. But transport of tax grain to collecting depots on the canal, still part of the labor-service obligation of the peasantry, became a heavy burden on them. Yung-lo's successors therefore placed the task of transportation entirely on certain military transport divisions of the local garrisons, which had to be increased from 120,000 to 160,000 men. From the 1430's this new system supplied usually over 3 million Chinese bushels (say roughly 200,000 tons), and sometimes over 5 million, to the capital every year.

Trade between North and South China was stimulated by the growth of Peking and the canal system. Trade on the Yangtze and in South China also increased. For example, merchants in the southernmost part of modern Anhwei spread their operations widely into other provinces. Called, from an old place name, "Hsin-an merchants," they traded in all manner of commodities—porcelains from the nearby production center at Ching-te-chen in Kiangsi, teas and silks locally produced, salt, timber, and comestibles. Naturally they developed the close relations with officialdom that such extensive operations required for their protection.

Specialized handicraft production grew up for this enlarging market and even some larger-scale manufacturing. At Ching-te-chen the imperial kilns produced great quantities of porcelain for the palace and also for upper-class use and even for export. The particular clay now known as kaolin (named for *Kao-ling,* "High Ridge," a hill east of Ching-te-chen; a hydrous silicate of alumina), when properly prepared with other substances and heated to about 1400 degrees Centigrade, becomes white, translucent, and so hard that steel will not scratch it. This porcelain was a truly superior product in the eyes of Europeans, who lacked the technique and who properly called it "chinaware." Again, Soochow became a national center of trade, finance, and processing industries, particularly the weaving and dyeing of silk. The nearby Sungkiang region, inland from Shanghai, became a late Ming center for cotton cloth production, using raw cotton from other provinces both north and south, and sending its product back for sale there. Canton iron pans (shallow cooking pans for use directly over fire) were exported widely throughout China, overseas, and to Central Asia.

This domestic commercial growth led to the setting up in the sixteenth century of numerous regional guilds with guild halls in major centers, especially Peking. These bodies were created chiefly by officials and merchants who came from a common region—a province, prefecture, county, or city—so as to have a convenient center of contact and mutual aid in a distant place, pre-eminently at the capital.

Meanwhile China's maritime trade developed steadily in the late Ming outside the framework of the tribute system. Missions from Southeast and South Asia became fewer, while Chinese merchants who went overseas became more numerous. In short, foreign trade was no longer brought to

China principally by intermediaries, like the Arabs, but was now carried by Chinese merchants who went abroad with Chinese products and on their return with foreign wares entered easily into the stream of China's coastwise junk traffic. The government did little to encourage this trade and sometimes banned it, but it continued to grow.

The Single-Whip Reform. The traditional taxes on land and labor underwent a gradual reform during the sixteenth century, which reduced them to money payments and simplified them by combining many small items into one. The whole movement has become known as the "Single-Whip" reform. (The name is a pun, since *i-t'iao-pien,* meaning "combination in one item," sounds also like "a single whip.")

The evils in the land and labor taxes had begun with the falsification of local records. As we have seen on pages 186–187, both landholdings and households early in the Ming period were classified into grades and remained supposedly subject to reclassification every ten years or so. Each man's tax burden depended first of all on his classification in the local registers. But responsibility for management of the system was placed on the leading households—the wealthier families, who thus had an opportunity to escape their allotted burden by falsifying the records. By collusion and bribery, these interested parties could reduce their own tax liability, providing they could increase that of the poorer households to meet the overall tax quota of the area. Many methods could be used: concealing the number of male adults, removing land from the record altogether, registering land under the name of a servant or tenant, or registering private land as government land or private persons as officials. Because of the special privileges enjoyed by wealthier families, smaller households often sought their protection, transferring the nominal ownership of their land in order to escape the tax burden, for a consideration paid privately to the large household. As a result, the official registers within a few generations became meaningless, while taxation became chaotic—a racket levied by the powerful upon the weak. Revenue collections ran short, the government above suffered loss, and the poorer peasants beneath were milked harder than ever, while the large households and petty officials in between benefited from their mutual arrangements. Since this middle stratum of leading families in the countryside provided many of the degree-holders through examination or purchase, they became all the more a "landlord-gentry" ruling class.

The confusion of this situation was compounded by the variety of taxes. The forms of landholding were complex: rights to the subsoil might be held by one person but rights to the use of the surface by another, who might lease the use of the surface to a tenant, who could sublet in turn. Tenantry assumed many forms. The labor service charges became even more complex. They were apportioned on the basis of a factor less stable than land, namely, the number of male adults, and might vary according to local needs and by decision of the local powerholders. As the institution became more corrupt, demands for labor services bore so hard on the poorer peasantry that first households, then sections (*chia*) of villages, and finally whole villages (*li*) began to abscond. Since tax quotas were seldom diminished, this increased still further the burden on those left behind. Finally, as more and more items became commuted to money payments, the tax collectors had every opportunity to add surtaxes and extra fees, commute labor into silver inequitably, and maintain assessments after the need for the original services had passed. The result was a limitless web of money taxes entangling the peasantry, levied in all seasons of the year for myriad nominal or alleged purposes, inequitably assessed and imperfectly recorded, according to no general scheme and under no superior control or direction.

The Single-Whip reform was carried out gradually by many hard-pressed provincial officials in one area after another, in a desperate effort to maintain a reliable tax structure and regular collections. It occurred chiefly in the period 1522–1619, that is, in the final century of effective Ming administration. It consisted of two principal tendencies—to combine all the various items of taxation under one or a few headings and to collect them in silver. One basic reform was to simplify the land classification so that in place of as many as a hundred different land tax rates, there were only two or three rates. Another reform was to unify the land taxes, combining sometimes thirty or forty different taxes into two or three items. Labor services were similarly unified. Next, the two major categories of land tax and labor service were sometimes combined to make a single item. Finally, dates of collection were unified, as well as the apparatus for it, which reduced the opportunities for extortion and fraud.

The resulting fiscal situation was probably no simpler than it would be to have a separate income tax law for each county in the United States. The Single-Whip reform was only a partial step toward a modernized tax structure. After the reform, the government used its tax receipts in silver to pay wages to hired laborers, who performed the labor service tasks formerly required of the common people. Communities were no longer required to transport their tax grain to a government granary. The reform also abolished the former indirect payment of taxes through the section and village heads. Instead, the taxpayer now put his tax silver directly into the government collector's silver chest in front of the local yamen and got an official receipt.

Several earlier dynasties had begun by relying at first on taxes and services in kind, only to have the system deteriorate, until a reform simplified it by a greater recourse to tax collections in money. In the late Ming

this increased use of money was related to the vigorous economic growth already mentioned and in particular to the inflow of silver from abroad.

The End of Ming Rule

Even if we make allowance for human frailty among historians—their capacity to find in the voluminous record of history the evidence they may seek for almost any interpretation of events—still the drama of the late Ming has all the classic features of a dynastic decline: effete and feckless rulers, corrupt favorites misusing their power, factional jealousies among officials, fiscal bankruptcy, natural disasters, the rise of rebellion and, finally, foreign invasion. These evils in the last decades of Ming rule were highlighted by the fact that they followed a vigorous reform effort under Chang Chü-cheng, one of the great ministers of the era, who rose to supreme power as senior Grand Secretary during the first decade (1573–1582) of the Wan-li reign. Chang was on good terms with the Outer Court and influential with the young emperor. He tried to increase the land tax revenue by getting exempted lands taxed again. He tried to restrict the ever-growing perquisites and privileges of the official class and the imperial family. Yet Chang, for all his efforts, could not check the emperor's greed. After his death in 1582, Wan-li, reigning for another thirty-eight years until 1620, became utterly irresponsible. He avoided seeing his ministers for years on end, refused to conduct business or make needed appointments, let evils flourish, and squandered the state's resources. The fifteen-year-old emperor who ascended the throne in 1620 was a dimwit interested mainly in carpentry. He let his nurse's close friend, the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien (1568–1627), who had been butler in his mother's apartments, take over the government. Wei brought the eunuch evil to its highest point. Backed by a small eunuch army to control the palace and a network of spies throughout the empire, he recruited unprincipled opportunists among the bureaucracy, purged his enemies in official life, and levied extortionate new taxes in the provinces.

Factionalism: The Tung-lin Party. The Confucian resistance to these evils was carried on mainly by a group of scholars, whose long struggle and eventual failure make a poignant chapter in the annals of Chinese politics. Tung-lin (literally, "Eastern Forest") was the name of an academy at Wusih on the lower Yangtze. Led by a dozen scholar-ex-officials, most of whom had been dismissed during factional controversies at the court, its members lectured at affiliated academies nearby, and soon spread their influence among scholars and officials elsewhere in a moral crusade to reassert the traditional principles of Confucian conduct. They condemned the philosophical eclecticism that had grown popular in the sixteenth century since the time of Wang Yang-ming, and that seemed to confuse Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. They stressed the supreme importance of moral integrity and denounced various holders of power, both Grand Secretaries and eunuchs.

The Tung-lin reformers of course had an incomplete monopoly on virtue. By 1610 they were being denounced in turn as a *tang* (the modern word for "party"), that is, an organized clique of the sort traditionally anathematized as subversive of imperial authority and bureaucratic harmony. The factional struggle was conducted in terms less of state policies than of the moral qualities of ministers. Denouncing and being denounced, the Tung-lin crusaders had their ups and downs. They became dominant in the years 1620–1623, just before the eunuch Wei Chung-hsien achieved complete power. In 1624 a Tung-lin leader accused Wei of twenty-four high crimes, including murders and a forced abortion of the empress. Wei mobilized the enemies of the reformers and retaliated with terror. Blacklists were compiled of some seven hundred Tung-lin supporters. Leading figures were denounced, condemned, dismissed, disgraced, imprisoned, tortured, and beaten to death. The Tung-lin group had been practically wiped out by the time Wei fell from power in 1627. This eunuch's manipulation of the sacred office of the Son of Heaven for evil ends had completed the moral degradation of the Ming regime.

The Rise of Rebellion. Yet the Ming collapse was perhaps due less to misgovernment than to nongovernment, less to eunuch immorality than to the regime's failure to keep up with its problems. The real problem was not that tax burdens were oppressive but that tax revenues were inadequate. The administration suffered less from tyranny than from paralysis.

When Shensi in the Northwest was hard hit by famine in 1628, a postal employee named Li Tzu-ch'eng was thrown out of his job by unwise government economies. Li joined his uncle, who was already a bandit, and made his lair on the edge of the North China Plain in the mountains of southern Shansi, the same area where the Japanese during World War II proved unable to dislodge the Chinese irregular forces. Li Tzu-ch'eng raided Honan and Szechwan, acquiring more followers, and eventually some of the forms of an organized government. At least two scholars joined him and advised him how to win popular support. They spread songs and stories about his heroic qualities, helped him distribute food to the starving, appoint officials, proclaim a dynasty, confer titles, and even issue his own coinage. By 1643 Li Tzu-ch'eng held much of Hupei, Honan, and Shensi. Early in 1644 he descended on Peking from the northwest, just as the last Ming emperor hanged himself on Prospect Hill, overlooking the Forbidden City.

Meanwhile Li's chief rival, another rebel named Chang Hsien-chung,