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Walter Fuchs

Heft 1

The Growth of Chinese despotism

A critique of Wittfogel's theory
of Oriental Despotism as applied to China

by F. W. MOTE
(Princeton)

I. The Wittfogel thesis and the concept of terror in government.

The concept of terror as an aspect of oriental despotisms, and in particular of the government of China in its imperial millenia, has been most strikingly developed Professor WITTFOGEL. His *Oriental Despotism, A Comparative Study of Total Power*, includes a Chapter Four entitled "Despotic Power — Total and Not Benevolent" followed by Chapter Five entitled "Total Terror — Total Submission — Total Loneliness."¹ In the belief that Professor Wittfogel's work is well known, I will not attempt to relate the concept of terror as outlined there to the whole of his conceptualization of Oriental, or of Chinese, society, but it may be useful in briefest fashion to review here the main outlines of his concept of terror itself, and his description of its workings as a necessary adjunct of Chinese government.

Chapter Four sets forth the evidence for believing that hydraulic government (he uses the term "hydraulic" interchangeably with but in preference to "Oriental") is necessarily despotic in character. He states that its despotism was "one of "total power" because it permitted neither effective constitutional checks nor effective societal checks upon itself; there were also no checks in "laws of nature" or "patterns of culture". Here he makes a special point of emphasizing the lack of checks in codes of law, and in particular of implicit checks in such things as the "right of rebellion" and in "inter-governmental influences" which have been cited as sources of restraint checking the absolute despotism of the Chinese ruler by many other scholars. Wittfogel does point out that absolute despotism does not imply its universal operation on all aspects of the lives of its subjects. Instead, he notes, the operation of a "law of diminishing administrative returns" made it impractical for a despot to concern himself with politically irrelevant activities of his subjects, so that "genuine elements of freedom remained". (OD., page 124) This he effectively describes as a "beggar's democracy", emphasizing the lack of altruism on the part of the rulers in granting these freedoms, and their political insignificance. He also categorically denies the possibility that oriental despotism could ever be a "benevolent despotism". Although the preservation of the myth of benevolence was useful to the rulers, their

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UNDERGRADUATE RESERVE, DF-10.

own interests were in inevitable conflict with those of their subjects, and in such conflict they had to decide ruthlessly in favor of their own. Thus he concludes that even the presence of good sovereigns and just officials cannot upset the prevailing trend toward the absolute exercise of nonbenevolent power, and toward the total corruption of those who wield it, for however benevolent in superficial forms, hydraulic despotism must be oppressive in content in order to function.

In Chapter Five, Professor Wittfogel comes more specifically to the subject of interest here. Accepting the idea from Erich FROMM (he cites *Escape from Freedom*) that man is only "ambivalently attracted" to freedom, he notes the complexity of the psychological motives of "autonomous man under total power". This awareness of the complexity of human psychology is important to Wittfogel's development of the role of terror in despotic government. He states:

Man is no ant. But neither is he a stone. A policy that upholds the rulers' publicity optimum confuses the people's mind, without however eliminating their feelings of frustration and unhappiness. Undeclared, these feelings may lead to rebellious action. To counter this dangerous trend the hydraulic regime resorts to intimidation. Terror is the inevitable consequence of the rulers' resolve to uphold their own and not the people's rationality optimum. (OD., page 137)

The "rationality coefficient of hydraulic society" is a basic concept in Wittfogel's work. He discerns three levels of operational tasks that the government must accomplish: these are managing the agrarian economy, (i. e., "managerial"); using corvée and taxes, (i. e., "consumptive"); and maintaining peace and order, (i. e., "judicial"). He explains:

Evidently operational tasks may be handled in a way that satisfies the interests of the rulers at the expense of the non-governmental forces of society. Or they may be handled in a way that satisfies the needs of the people and gives few, if any, advantages to the government. Intermediate solutions compromise between the two extremes.

As a rule, the three alternatives are seriously considered only if the actual circumstances permit genuine choice. In the managerial, the consumptive, and the judicial spheres of hydraulic life this is indeed the case. But in all these spheres we find the people's interests sacrificed to the rulers' rationality optimum.

The non-benevolent character of despotism is reflected in the maintenance of the rulers', rather than the people's, rationality optimum in the sphere of the managerial, the consumptive, and the judicial, and in all three, the non-benevolent character is particularly evidenced in the conscious application of terror. It is especially evident in the "judicial" sphere. The need for this, Wittfogel insists, is officially recognized. Specifically in the case of China, he argues:

Chinese statecraft learned to express its need for terrifying punishments in the rational and normal forms of Confucianism. But punishment was the primary weapon of the so-called Legalists and of such Legalist-influenced Confucianists as Hsün Tzu. And it remained a cornerstone of official policy throughout the imperial period. What we would call the Ministry of Justice was known in traditional China as the Ministry of Punishments. (OD., page 139)

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He goes on to describe the "morphology of violence" in despotic systems, i. e., the patterns of distribution of and the agencies for the exercise of violent coercion of the people. He points out that terror in hydraulic despotism has both its physical and its psychological aspects. On the one hand, the agro-managerial despot must possess the power to crush his victims, and he does possess it. "He exercises unchecked control over the army, the police, the intelligence service; and he has at his disposal jailers, torturers, executioners, and all the tools that are necessary to catch, incapacitate, and destroy a suspect." (OD., page 141) On the other hand, he notes that "unpredictability is an essential weapon of absolute terror", (OD., page 141) and he describes the components of the psychological aspects of terror. He notes that there may be not only "lawless terror" in the form of the arbitrary savagery of rulers or their bureaucrats who existed above the law, or who violated the law in excessive brutality, but also well-institutionalized terror within the law. Of the former, in a higher civilization like that of China, he remarks:

In more differentiated hydraulic civilizations, there is less need to bulwark the ruler's exalted position by spectacular acts of autocratic ruthlessness. Although such acts do not completely cease, they are now initiated mainly by excessively cruel (and/or insecure) sovereigns and by the heads of dynasties which operate below the rulers' rationality maximum. (OD., page 142)

But particularly in the case of a highly-institutionalized civilization like that of China, it was the continuous working of the "terror within the law" that was of greatest significance. He states:

The excesses of autocratic and bureaucratic terror are an extreme manifestation of human behavior under total power. Institutionally, however, they are probably less important than the innumerable acts of terror that were perpetrated as a matter of routine and within the flexible framework of despotic law. It was this routine terror in managerial, fiscal and judicial procedures that caused certain observers to designate the government of hydraulic despotism as "government by flogging". (OD., page 143)

He describes the application and functioning of terror in managerial, fiscal (i. e. "consumptive") and judicial procedures. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with "total submission", the intended result of terror and necessary component of oriental despotism, and "total loneliness", an unintentional but inevitable by-product of the system, and one which incidentally (as in the isolation and hence the weakening of the bureaucrat) contributed positively to the strength of the despot.

So much for the general outlines of the problem of terror as set forth in *Oriental Despotism*. In a brief article on the nature of Chinese society published about the same time, Professor Wittfogel adds a point or two which may contribute to our discussion of terror. Speaking of "traditional China and other agro-managerial societies" he says:

In societies of this type the new ruler usually began his career by downgrading persons who were closely identified with the dead autocrat. Former favorites were often arrested and killed, and their riches confiscated. Usually, also, he increased his popularity by proclaiming an amnesty and relaxing severe regulations and imposts. Often he listened attentively to

official or unofficial advisors. But generally the more consolidated his position became, the less eager he was to raise the ruler's rationality coefficient. The generous young overlord grew into the hardened despot who did not hesitate to exhaust the possibilities of his terrifying power².

This passage is important because of its relevance to a critical aspect of Wittfogel's view of despotism in China. That is its history, its developmental aspect. He refers to the corrupting effect of total power (*Oriental Despotism*, page 133) as a progressive thing, and he speaks of the "cumulative tendency of unchecked power" (p. 106 ff) implying that the growth of absolute power also is a snowballing process. But he has not made clear what the scope of application of this developmental concept should be, i. e. has China been in the process of becoming a more despotic political order since the emergence of Chou despotism in the 2nd millennium B. C. (which he insists was non-feudal and already well established as an agro-managerial hydraulic despotism), or has there been a cyclic and non-progressive development of this feature of Chinese society? While the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the passage quoted above makes it evident in his opinion that the cyclic pattern within shorter periods, and indeed within the reign of a single ruler, also existed. But it leaves unclear the whole problem of the historical development of the dominant features of Chinese government, and of the relation of the problem of terror to that history. The historian therefore, more than the theoretician, feels compelled to criticize Wittfogel's concepts as applied specifically to China.

In the same article, Professor Wittfogel also speaks of the psychological issue, as it applies to the patterns of behavior of "China's traditional ruling bureaucracy". He states that these patterns of competition among them and their relations to one another are "as unlike the patterns of feudal and capitalist competition as they are like the patterns of competition prevailing under Communist totalitarianism, significant differences notwithstanding". He notes that these patterns of competition involved intrigue and slander, where in feudal and capitalist situations the "open fight" prevailed.

Combined with totalitarian methods of judicial procedure, including frame-ups, arbitrary arrests, and torture, this behavior keeps the members of the ruling bureaucracy apprehensively on the alert. . . . A member of the ruling bureaucracy who makes a basic mistake in his field of action is apt to lose his position, his life, his fortune, and his good name. His destruction is as total as the system of power to which he owed his former distinction.

But if the life of a member of the ruling bureaucracy was beset with so many fears and dangers, why was it so attractive? And if the members were so insecure, why did they not strive for a more balanced and less fear-ridden system of human relations? The answer to the second question also gives a partial answer to the first. The pulverization of the non-

² Karl A. WITTFOGEL: "Chinese Society: An Historical Survey" JAS 6, 3, (May, 1957) pp. 343-364. Hereafter cited as CS. The passage quoted here is on page 357.

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governmental forces of society blocked the development of all effective attempts to create a multicentered societal order. That is, the countries of the hydraulic world were underdeveloped not only in terms of technology, but also, and even more crucially, in terms of the theory and practice of societal freedom . . .

True, to hold office in a despotic government meant living dangerously. But insecurity was also the fate of all other classes, and particularly of the wealthy businessmen, who, besides being favorite targets of fiscal frame-ups and persecutions, lacked the compensating political power and social prestige of the ruling officials. Knowing only the agropototic way of life, the younger members of the officialdom (and the bureaucratic gentry) in traditional China understandably chose the career which promised to give them a maximum of the available advantages.
(CS., pages 357—358)

Here we have a complex of psychological, intellectual and institutional problems. The Chinese bureaucrat lived in a vicious world, he was irrevocably trapped by his inability to conceive of any other kind of world, and he was forced by economic and psychological attractions, which were not equalled by those of any other possible career, to play the ruthless power game despite its well known hazards. Here again the historian will want to square this view of traditional Chinese life with what he knows of the institutional and the intellectual history of various ages. Wittfogel presents effective arguments, and the neatness of his total view of Chinese despotism is compelling, yet when it is applied to any one period of history there appear certain difficulties in accepting his arguments. This is not to suggest that his view of Chinese despotism is to be abandoned in its entirety, but rather that a close examination of it in connection with one period of Chinese history — in this case the period from the 14th through the 17th centuries — may suggest that his view must at least be modified. In these two problems, i. e. that of historical development of terror, and that of the institutional functioning of terror, this critique finds its focus.

II. Chinese Despotism in Historical Development

A. The Inadequacy of a Static View of Chinese Society

Professor Wittfogel does not write of Chinese government and society as a historian; the reader does not sense any awareness of the steadily cumulative development through the centuries which gave each age its own character³. He is informed that Chinese society has been distinctly that of hydraulic despotism from the earliest periods that are known. It was "simple Oriental society" in ancient China "until the end of Early Chou (722 B. C.) and probably also in the first centuries of Later Chou" (page 252), and it was "semi-complex" "at least twice, once during the last centuries of the Chou period and again from the latter part of the 5th century to the 8th century A.D." (page 260), and "complex" throughout the

³ This is not to suggest that *Oriental Despotism* should have been written as a work of history, but merely that any theory of history or of society must at least be consonant with the facts of the history to which it is relevant.

remaining portions of the imperial era. (page 286 ff). Thus we are given a general framework of the development of Oriental society in China, the stages of which are defined primarily by the patterns of property ownership. But beyond that there is evidenced little or no awareness of, for example, the gradual evolution of the institutions of government, despite the fact that despotism is a system of government, and terror is described as a necessary, functional and often institutionalized part of that system. A general character is imputed to the government of hydraulic societies from the primitive to the highly-differentiated, and this general character assumes more importance in Wittfogel's system than the fact that the institutions and forms have varied greatly from the early Hawaiian to Sumer and Pharaonic Egypt and to India and China. How great a latitude is possible within a "general character"? Egypt was not China. Chou and Han China were not Ming and Ch'ing China. Professor Wittfogel establishes his general character only on a very high level of abstraction which renders the details invisible and the institutions and forms of every place and age largely unrecognizable. This is not to say *a priori* that the abstractions are meaningless; it is to say that the abstractions must be put to the test of history through the precise examination of specific examples.

In looking at any particular period in China history which may serve as the example, we must see it as a segment of a long line of continuous historical development. Professor Wittfogel aids us little in this. He makes no reference to the possibility of temporary relevance or of transitional character in any of his descriptions. As has been pointed out above, he states a principle of the "cumulative tendency of unchecked power", but this is described as something which expands the ruler's authority until "having conquered all other centers of supreme decision, he alone prevails" (pages 106—107). In terms of Chinese history, this appears to be the description of the rise of a new dynasty or of the career of one despot. It does not apply to the development of institutions through centuries.

However elsewhere and only in the most general terms he appears to accept the idea of some kind of dynastic cycle. For example, in speaking of the "rulers' managerial optimum" he implies that the dynasty may not always maintain that optimum, and that varying levels and patterns of maintenance imply a measure of dynastic decline. He states:

In its early phase the hydraulic regime becomes stronger and wealthier with the growth of its hydraulic economy. But at a certain point the government can obtain additional revenue by intensifying its acquisitive rather than its productive operations. It is at this point that different power constellations lead to different managerial optimums. (OD., pages 128—129)

And speaking of the institutional vulnerability of hydraulic societies:

Serious political crises arose in all hydraulic societies. But the way in which the men of apparatus overcame them demonstrates the staying power of their methods of organization and exploitation . . . hydraulic societies . . . have a stationary quality. (OD., pages 194—195, underlining mine).

He speaks elsewhere of the decline of the dynastic authority (cf. page 307), and in describing the Liao dynasty's fall he appears clearly to be applying the familiar dynastic cycle concept:

Thus we are given a society in China, the of property ownership, of, for example, ment, despite the fact ror is described as a rt of that system. A draulic societies from eral character assumes t that the institutions waiian to Sumer and great a latitude is China. Chou and Han Wittfogel establishes bstraction which ren- ns of every place and that the abstractions ist be put to the test examples.

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The final crisis of Liao power has all the earmarks of a dynastic crisis under a typical agrarian despotism. Here as in similar circumstances, the landowners increased their acquisitive but not their organizational strength. The collapse of the dynasty led to no property-based industrial order. Instead it led to the restoration and rejuvenation of the old agromanageial society. (OD., page 184)⁴.

But despite the infrequent and scattered uses of familiar bits of the concept of the cyclic rise and fall of dynasties, Wittfogel seems purposely to avoid it⁵. And both from specific (but scattered and perhaps incidental) statements, and from the general import of the whole, one gets the feeling that not only is the cyclic movement within dynasties overlooked, but that the whole range of Chinese history has been frozen into one static picture. Thus, even if administrative crises could bring the rise and fall of dynasties, and presumably with varying quality of government, or even varying institutional adaptation from one stage of a cycle to another, the overall effect was one of sameness from one end of Chinese history to the other⁶. For it is the "stationary quality" of Chinese government that is emphasized. An example of this, bearing specifically on the element of terror, is found in the following statement:

The devastating potential of bureaucratic competition is realized much more fully under modern forms of totalitarianism, but the student will find the results in traditional Chinese society frightening enough. A survey of Han bureaucracy reveals that out of some 1300 officials on whom we have relevant information more than a third died a violent death outside the battlefield, the great majority at the hands of the state or by suicide induced by actual or expected charges against them. A study of Ch'ing bureaucracy suggests that many high officials in the course of their career were accused, investigated, or for shorter or longer periods of time put in jail. (CS., pages 357-358, quoting a more detailed statement on the same subject in OD., page 336)

⁴ Here it seems obvious that the only change WITTFOGEL is prepared to regard as significant is the change from oriental society to a "property-based industrial order", i.e. the same kind of change that the Chinese Communist historian is required by his Marxian formula to seek in the "semi-feudal, semi-colonial" society of the later imperial era.

⁵ For example, in describing Ch'ing decline in the 19th century, he avoids reference to internal factors, and seems to make external pressure alone responsible for the fall of the dynasty, as well as the fall of the imperial system (OD., page 435).

⁶ In OD WITTFOGEL addresses himself specifically to the subject of "development" and oriental society's potential for development, but by that he means development out of the form of society which he calls oriental despotism; in the case of China, it means China's potential for change under Western influence in modern times. In his article "Oriental Society in Transition" (FEQ XIV, No 4, pp. 469-478) his interest is in countering the vulgar Marxian formula of the unilinear development of society, and not in discussing qualitative change within the period he designates that of hydraulic society in China. He sees differences between the traditional governments of India and China, for example, but classes them simply as "cultural peculiarities" too superficial to detract from his generalizations about their basic character. He states: "Though it is important to recognize these variations, it is equally important to remember that they all occurred within the pattern of a despotic state, bureaucratic class rule, and weak property common to all oriental societies." (page 473). He also states: "Oriental society is neither uniform nor static." (page 472). However, beyond defining the stages of development — i.e. simple, semi-complex and complex — he shows no interest in and attaches no importance to institutional development within those stages.

Are we to assume that, given the periodic variation within the despotic cycle, the conditions and the degree of despotism were the same in Han and Ch'ing times, and that the quality of terror and the way in which it functioned, and the institutions and forms through which it was exercised, were analogous? From Professor Wittfogel's work we see no reason to believe that such was not the case, and we find explicit theoretical justification for believing that it was essentially the same, for both periods represent "complex HS Loose 1" in which "the rulers' rationality optimum" must have been the same, and the maintenance of this meant that there had to be "the innumerable acts of terror that were perpetrated as a matter of routine and within the flexible framework of despotic law". (page 143)

However when the history of Chinese government is examined with a view to its progressive development and qualitative change, it may be discovered that: 1) In their quality and in their significance for Chinese history, the vicissitudes of Han officials had little in common with the dangers of public life in Ming and Ch'ing times. 2) One may question the entire concept of "total terror" as a necessary and inevitable functional element of Chinese government at any time, even in those times when unquestionably it was ruthlessly present.

B. Historians' views of the growth of despotism in the Sung — evidence from the realm of thought.

Chinese thinkers and historians have perhaps been less analytic than Professor Wittfogel, but as historically-minded men they have been quite aware of the qualitative differences of successive ages of their history. Among traditional historians this is too clear to demand evidence. It is more pertinent to look at the more analytical but still primarily historical views which have been developed by modern Chinese scholars.

Professor HSIAO Kung-ch'üan^[1] sees early Chou society as "feudal", unlike Wittfogel. He sees a fundamental transformation of institutions and forms of government, accompanied by a parallel transformation of political thought, at the end of the Chou dynasty. He calls this the period of transition from feudal (*feng-chien*^[2]) government and society to that of the authoritarian empire (*chün-chih*^[3]), or to despotism. Where Wittfogel, whose divisions in history are marked primarily by changes in the proprietary relationships, sees merely an advance from "semi-complex HS" to "complex HS Loose 1", Hsiao sees his great turning point in Chinese political history, and although it is not the subject of his study, he is very conscious of far-reaching parallel changes in social and economic conditions. Hsiao, like most Chinese historians, calls the whole period from Ch'in-

¹ Subsequent references to Professor HSIAO's writings are to his *Chung-kuo cheng-chih ssu-hsiang-shih* (History of Chinese Political Thought) Taipei, reprint of 1954.

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Han to late Ch'ing the period of authoritarianism, or of depotism, but he does not ascribe to the two thousand years a "stationary quality". Rather he emphasizes growth and change, new governmental needs and problems, and the institutional and ideological adaptations making for distinct differences from one age to the next⁸.

In particular however Hsiao emphasizes certain trends which concentrated in the Sung dynasty and made it a kind of turning point in the history of authoritarian government in China. On the one hand, there were forces in the realm of politics and government, and on the other, developments in the realm of philosophy, which can be clearly traced. Of equal importance, no doubt, were parallel and closely related developments in the social and economic life of the country, but they are less clearly visible.

Hsiao approaches this problem through the subject matter of political thought. To paraphrase his much more detailed statement, there were two main sources of the historical forces that brought about the great transformation in Confucian political thought. The one is in the historical background of the times, in particular, in the concrete problems that faced the government of the Sung dynasty. The other is in the history of philosophy itself. The former, i. e. the exigencies of the historical conditions of the Sung era, explains the remarkable appearance of the realistic *kung-li* ("utilitarian" or "accomplishment and benefit") school of thought within Sung Confucianism. This is a remarkable and inadequately known development of Sung thought. For although Confucian emphasis from the time of the Sage himself had been strongly oriented toward the practical and the realistic, as opposed to Taoism, it had been forced by the competition of the more ruthlessly utilitarian and amoral Legalists to abandon its concern for the materialistic appraisal of national wealth and strength, for fear of being labelled "legalistic". After the generally despised legalist experiment during the brief Ch'in dynasty in the 3rd century B. C., Confucianism (whose realism was firmly based on moral concepts,) was left with the alternate extreme of emphasis on benevolence and righteousness and moral suasion, as far as its theoretical development was concerned. Hsiao implies that the necessity to avoid appearances of Legalism which, as a school was thoroughly discredited, forced a rather unnatural choice on Confucian political thought, making it less realistic in political theory than a faithful development of its early spirit would necessarily have demanded. In any event, regardless of so-called Confucian practice, for a thousand years no nominally Confucian political thinker had come out and

⁸ It might be argued that WITTFOGEL is making a comparative study emphasizing comparison in space rather than in time, in OD. However this is not the case in CS, where his stated purpose is to present a "historical survey" of Chinese society, yet there too the a-historical view of traditional China prevails. Moreover even a study emphasizing comparisons in space must employ comparisons of real situations, i.e., historical realities.

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openly talked about such things as how to enrich and strengthen the state and society in frankly realistic terms, and attempting to found such ideas solidly in Confucian humanism, until the Northern Sung period. And this he feels came about under the pressure of increasing difficult national problems. The Sung state was from the beginning (960 A.D.) threatened by hostile alien power build-ups (the Ch'i-tan Liao, and the Tangut Hsi-hsia, then later the Ju-chien Chin and the Mongol Yüan). Yet the policy of the founder and his early successors had been to weaken the state's military forces rather than strengthen them, because he was more concerned about the threat of internal disorder arising from an excess of ill-controlled military power than from the external threat. The Sung founder felt this way because of the historical lesson of the recently fallen (906 A.D.) T'ang whose dissolution had been caused by centrifugal military forces that had proved stronger than the centralizing forces of the imperial government. Sung T'ai-tsu also had reason to feel this way because of his own experiences as a military commander under the powerful but short-lived Northern Chou dynasty⁹.

The Sung also suffered from fiscal weakness, and the combination of these weaknesses (military and fiscal) after two or three generations of steadily worsening conditions turned the thought of some Sung statesmen and Confucian thinkers to the problem of "enriching and strengthening" more urgently than in the past¹⁰. Many statesmen, particularly from the rich lower Yangtze region, came to develop very practical and realistic approaches to national problems, under the stimulus of the urgency of the times. And, these practical approaches all took for granted the need for strengthening the state, giving it fiscal and military and organizational powers which it had not possessed previously.

* These historical facts themselves seem to contradict Wittfogel's theoretical analysis of despotism, for he considers such a situation impossible. He states: "In some cases the rise of hydraulic despotism was probably contested by the heads of powerful clans or by religious groups eager to preserve their traditional autonomy. In others, semi-independent military leaders may have tried to prevent the masters of the hydraulic apparatus from attaining total control. But the rival forces lacked the proprietary and organizational strength that in Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as in Medieval Europe, bulwarked the nongovernmental forces of society. In hydraulic civilizations the men of the government prevented the organizational consolidation of all non-governmental groups". (pages 49-50) Although WITTFOGEL might say that Sung T'ai-tsu was afraid of the military because of conditions that had prevailed only in a century of dynastic decline, it would appear to be more accurate to say that the existence of military forces that could readily contest the power of the state had been a prominent feature of Chinese history from the third century to the tenth, and one that statesmen of the early Sung were determined to overcome, not merely by strengthening the state's control of the military but also by weakening the military itself.

¹⁰ There also is the probability that Sung policy was responsible for fiscal weakness as well, in a very special way. Early Sung policy perhaps consciously favored the growth of an economically-privileged but politically weak small gentry class, and hence avoided equalization of land holdings and other measures rehabilitating the agrarian economy at the beginning of the dynasty. The land tax system and privileges granted to office-holders both were conducive to such a development, and harmful to the health of the agrarian economy and the fiscal system based on the grain taxes.

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The other force contributing to the new developments in Sung is in the realm of pure philosophy. The further development of the original fund of ideas within the Confucian teachings had reached limits in Mencius and Hsüntzu; in the Han period, largely because of concern with recovering and restoring this, Confucian thought was not freshly creative, opening new vistas, but merely adaptive. In following centuries it absorbed much of Taoism and Buddhism while at the same time resisting these same forces, but never matching them in vitality and drawing power for the intellectuals of the time. Even in the T'ang period, which gave Confucian philosophy a new but still slender hold on life, it did not regain its exclusive pre-eminence in the world of thought. This came about only in the Sung, but even then the brilliant new philosophical movement known as *li-hsüeh*^[5] was in large part brought to its new life by transfusions of Buddhistic blood, and not surprisingly it was concerned primarily with purely philosophical problems, and only incidentally with practical aspects of statecraft.

For the purposes of this discussion, the *kung-li* school and Neo-Confucian *li-hsüeh* were the most important movements in Sung thought. On the one hand was the new school of Confucian realistic statecraft which departed from early Confucianism in its emphasis, - - i.e., in slighting the doctrine that the perfection of the self is the basis of all government, - - even though it remained self-consciously quite Confucian. On the other hand there was the new movement in Confucian speculative philosophy, the Neo-Confucian *li-hsüeh*, which likewise had departed from early Confucianism through the injection of Taoism and Buddhism, but which was no less self-consciously and nominally Confucian. These two currents of Sung thought often were in sharp conflict with each other, but in their theories of government as in the ideological implications of their philosophies, both contributed to the strengthening of the authoritarian character of the state. Yet criticism of the Sung trend toward ever greater centralization of government authority also developed in both schools. (Cf. Hsiao, page 449 ff.) In this criticism of the over-centralization we can see most clearly the qualitative change in Sung government over that of earlier times, but we must not assume that the thinkers who criticized it meant thereby that the power and prestige of the sovereign and his central government should be reduced. This is evident when we examine some of the criticism.

The transformation of government that had occurred in the Sung period was evident to the late Sung writer Yeh Shih^[6] (1150—1223), who urged a return to the decentralized (i.e. *fen-ch'üan*^[7] or "divided powers") pattern of Han and T'ang, and who urged it as a political realist, not as a promoter of abstract theories, or as a moralist. Yeh noted that the Sung seemed obsessed only with correcting the faults of the late T'ang and the Five Dynasties era that had immediately preceded it, and that this had led to over-correction and to over-rigidification. Yeh makes an elaborate exposé

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of the faults of overly-centralized governmental authority, and in evaluating it, Hsiao comments:

Prior to this there had been no lack of opinion critical of despotism. But for the most part it had centered its attention on the excesses and the violence of the ruler, or on the burdensome nature of government business, or on the precarious livelihood and the misery of the people. And although not without basis in fact, such opinion tended to be imprecise and general. Shui-hsin (i. e. Yeh) was the first who addressed himself solely to the subject of institutions in discussing this, and he discovered that the basic difficulty with despotism lay in excessive centralization of authority. Until this evil was eliminated, the world could not be brought to peace and stability even though there might be benevolent rulers and worthy ministers . . . (page 469).

Over-centralization of authority, is the term is used by Yeh Shih and by many modern writers in discussing the faults of the Sung period government, means that the government would not delegate clear-cut authority to its officials, especially to local officials, but hedged it around with checks and safeguards, and in particular with interminable regulations and instructions. Yeh wanted the great and overawing power that rested in the sovereign to be more effectively employed by his officials. Peace and stability, he felt, were to be achieved only when the prepossessing imperial influence was directly felt. Yeh and *kung-li* thinkers dared to speak approvingly of *shih*^[8], the sovereign's power and authority, which had been a central concept of ancient Legalism. In the fear that local officials would act too much on their own initiative and thereby become independent minded, and possibly a threat to the central authority, the Sung state had deprived them of all opportunity and initiative to act on their own, and this had weakened the emperor's *shih*. This powerful influence, which kept the world in proper balance, could not be transmitted to the points where it was needed by a government bound up in red tape. That is why these thinkers objected to centralization, and urged delegation of stronger powers as a means of strengthening sovereign and government. The *kung-li* thinkers recognized that the Sung had achieved a qualitative change in the character of government, through the development and adjustment of institutions within the broad outline of structure and form that had existed before in earlier dynasties. These developments and adjustments had been for the purpose of strengthening the powers of the central government by controlling and centralizing, but in the process they had achieved inefficiency and lack of initiative. The *kung-li* thinkers wanted the sovereign's power to be more clearly recognized, and wanted it to be exercised more directly and effectively through the delegation of meaningful amounts of it to the emperor's officials. They were Confucians, in recognizing the moral foundations of government. But their contribution toward the development of despotism was to urge that the practical application of the emperor's supreme authority, which was necessary to the proper functioning of society and the universe, be made more effective. At the same time,

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they also clearly saw the trend toward "centralization", if they did not recognize its implications for the growth of despotism.

On the other hand, the Sung *li-hsüeh* thinkers, the Neo-Confucian philosophers, did not on the whole produce any important or highly original theories of government. In the main they merely re-hashed old concepts from the pre-imperial age, and although this was done in a highly unrealistic manner, yet, as Hsiao points out, it bore some relevance to Sung conditions:

In terms of the historical setting of the Sung period, the proposals of the *li-hsüeh* thinkers that the well-field (*ching-t'ien*) system and the feudal system (*feng-chien*) be restored had some real meaning. The well-field system was expected to overcome the fault of inequality in poverty and wealth, and the feudal system, it was expected, would correct the fault of overcentralization of authority. And in both these matters they were unintentionally in agreement with the *kung-li* faction. (page 503)

But this common observation of real needs did not lead the two schools of thought into any agreement on practical methods. The *kung-li* school ridiculed the *li-hsüeh* thinkers for their vague and foolish notions of government, and not without reason¹¹.

Yet the *li-hsüeh* school also made its contribution to the growth of Chinese despotism, in particular, in promoting the exaltation of the ruler to new heights of unquestioned authority, and the demands upon the servitor to new degrees of unquestioned loyalty. The philosophical foundations for this were prepared by the Northern Sung *li-hsüeh* cosmologists. It saw ~~at~~^{its} most important political expression in the theories of Ssu-ma Kuang (1019—1086), who although in the *li-hsüeh* camp, was more important as statesman and historian than as a philosopher. Hsiao points out clearly that Ssu-ma Kuang extended his concept of the exaltation of the ruler to the point that in his very influential historical writings he even interpreted China's pre-imperial age of decentralized feudal government as one of highly centralized despotism. This established a tradition for such a view of history, and one that may have been transmitted to the West through de Mailla's 18th century translation of the orthodox abridgement of Ssu-ma's work; it is even possible that Professor Wittfogel's view of early Chinese history can in part be traced ultimately to Ssu-ma Kuang's view, which it much resembles. Ssu-ma Kuang not only did not understand (or perhaps did not choose to perpetuate an understanding of) the highly decentralized nature of the government of the revered age of Chou, but as is well-known, he tried to undermine the authority of the most liberal-minded of the Confucian thinkers of that age, Mencius. Yet he felt himself to be thoroughly Confucian, and denounced Wang An-shih and the realistic promoters of "strengthening and enrichment" of the state as violators of the Confucian doctrine that benevolence and righteousness are the basis

¹¹ As Hsiao points out, Chu Hsi was the notable exception. Not only did he have a clear conception of the historical gulf that lay between antiquity and the Sung, and of the inapplicability of ancient measures to vastly changed conditions, but he also had a warm appreciation of the merit of the *kung-li* proposals, especially of the efforts of Wang An-shih. cf. pages 504—506.

of government. Ssu-ma's benevolence and righteousness, to be sure, were rigid and authoritarian in application, and were conceived not in broadly humanistic terms, but as props to the ruler's authority. Both Ssu-ma Kuang and his arch-enemy Wang An-shih felt themselves to be wholly Confucian, and their denunciations of each other (more especially, their partisan follower's denunciations of each other) are analogous to those of reformation period Calvinists and Catholics, each claiming to represent Christian truth. Neither Ssu-ma nor Wang lived in a world that much resembled the world of Confucius, and neither realized how much he saw the basic elements of Confucianism through eye-glasses colored by distance and time, by the mists of the moment and by his own personality. The historian must be warned by Ssu-ma Kuang (and by Professor Wittfogel) to look for the distinctive conditions of an age, and to note that formulations which are derived from one environment can scarcely be expected to be wholly relevant to that of another millenium.

The Sung period's importance in the growth of despotism in China, then, is that the historical situation which faced practical statesmen and realistic thinkers was one of urgent national problems and widespread change. Their almost universal reaction was to demand the strengthening of the power of the sovereign, the increase in efficiency, and the ability to deal forthrightly with problems, unencumbered by abstract principles or old-fashioned notions of propriety¹². At the same time the movement of ideas in philosophy and particularly in the dominant Neo-Confucian *li-hsüeh* school was to demand on the one hand a totally impractical and vaguely conceived return to antique institutions, but at the same time to give philosophical foundation to an increasingly rigid application of the moral bonds and restraints, with an increasingly authoritarian tone in the realm of public morality and political behavior¹³. And it devoted much of its attention to the development of a cosmology in which a hierarchical cosmos dominated by a supreme ultimate strongly implied a hierarchical society dominated by a supreme sovereign. But beyond that, *li-hsüeh* tended to turn the interests of thinkers away from practical affairs to abstract theories, so that the practical weaknesses of the *li-hsüeh* position were less subject to discovery and correction.

From the statesmen there came a force tending toward greater real power, and from the philosophers a force providing philosophical justification of that power. The history of government cannot be explained satisfactorily by the history of thought, even of political thought; — these changes must have been linked to important social and economic developments, of which we know less, and about which we can only hypothesize. But in the history of political thought we find an adequate reflection, if

¹² Notwithstanding the sincerity of their Confucian belief that the ruler must be charged with responsibility for moral conduct and for the maintenance of moral standards throughout government and society. Note that this idealistic part of the *kung-li* program had the least practical hope of being realized.

¹³ Notwithstanding their benevolent concern for the livelihood of the people and their desire to do away with the extreme disparity of wealth and poverty which had come into being. Note that this rather vague part of the *li-hsüeh* program had the least practical hope of being realized.

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not an adequate explanation, of the history of political institutions. As Professor Hsiao has written: "We have been discussing the fact that the development of the despotic form of government during the Sung period more or less reached its completion, and Ssu-ma Kuang's theory of the exaltation of the ruler most accurately displays the spirit of the age". (page 506) It is not perhaps surprising that the practical effect of these twin influences of the time in the realm of thought was to strengthen that which neither could approve, i. e. heightened despotism, capable of ruthless and untempered operation at the whim of whatever forces might direct it.

C. Historians views of the growth of despotism in the Sung — evidence from political and general history.

The view that the Sung constituted a general turning point in Chinese history is of course well-known and has been widely influential. This view began to be formulated in Japan by Naitō Torajirō about forty years ago, and the "Naitō hypothesis" as worked out by him and a whole school of historians under his influence is that the transition from T'ang to Sung is the transition from a medieval China to a modern China¹⁴. Naitō and other historians have produced studies tracing these fundamental changes in all aspects of Chinese life, economic, social, political and cultural. Particularly in the spheres of social and economic history the study of traditional China has not yet achieved the depth and solidity necessary to permit more than hypothesis, but much of Naitō's view of the Sung has been widely accepted¹⁵. Of greatest interest is Naitō's view of the growth of despotism in the Sung period. He relates it to the decline of the old aristocracy, and states that from the Sung period on, the emperor assumed ultimate responsibility for all decisions, and performed all state functions, taking over many of the former prerogatives of the great officials who in earlier times had represented a well-established aristocracy of great families. The emperor's position became independent of the will of aristocratic clans, which due to social changes, tended to disappear, and the new officialdom lost the right and the agency through which to challenge the emperor's decision in matters of government. By the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties, he notes, the emperor felt free to address his ministers in disrespectful terms, and treat them with harshness.

Unfortunately no history of China or of Chinese government has been written which makes it possible for us to relate the development of political institutions with the same degree of confidence that we can feel in using Hsiao's *History of Chinese Political Thought*. But a survey of modern Chinese scholarship shows that Naitō's suggestive interpretation of the

¹⁴ For a review of the Naitō hypothesis see Hisayuki MIYAKAWA: "An Outline of the Naitō Hypothesis and its Effects on Japanese Studies of China", *FEQ* 14, 4, (August 1955) pages 533—552.

¹⁵ See E. A. KRACKE, JR.: "Sung Society: Change Within Tradition", *FEQ* 14, 4, (August 1955) p. 479—488. KRACKE does not cite Naitō, but does cite a number of Japanese scholars of the "Kyōto school" which was strongly influenced by him, and KRACKE's views strongly support the hypothesis.

Sung period is in general agreement with much of the Chinese historical writing. In his sketchy *History of Chinese Government*¹⁶, Chou Ku-ch'eng^[9] discusses the differences between the more limited despotism of Ch'in and Han and the "absolute despotism" of Sung and Ming, and although his interpretation is forced into a preconceived formula for Chinese history which is unacceptable, his discussion of the distinctly new and different character of Sung and later government is not without substance. Chou discusses the new centralization of military, local administration, and fiscal powers, and notes that supervisory agencies were given threatening powers which tended to rob individual administrators of courage and initiative. In this, Chou corroborates the views held by Sung officials, cited in Hsiao, about the Sung's overcorrection of the shortcomings of T'ang and Five Dynasties' government, and the unfortunate results, described as over-centralization of the central government's powers, overpunctilious laws and regulations, and over-emphasis on checks designed to guarantee the sovereign's unlimited powers, to the destruction of efficiency and morale, and leading to repeated political crises.

CH'EN Mu's^[10] total view of Chinese history is quite different from Chou Ku-ch'eng's; his attitude toward the Sung is largely one of regret for its weakness in the face of alien pressures, and its inability to hold and govern all of China's traditional territory¹⁷. Nonetheless he agrees with the view that the weakness of Sung government stemmed from the new over-centralization of powers, to the extent that local government was robbed of the ability to act. Ch'ien also notes that these changes occurred within the general framework of governmental structure adopted from the T'ang and earlier ages, and he emphasizes the strikingly new character of government despite the superficial resemblances. Corroborating views from other modern Chinese historians could be multiplied at great length¹⁸.

How do these views, ranging from those of Sung dynasty statesmen to those of modern Chinese historians, that the Sung was politically weak, support our thesis that the Sung marked a turning point in the growth of despotism? The weaknesses that all of these writers point out are those of administrative inefficiency stemming from the central government's efforts to bring more of the activity of government directly into its own hands, and from the emperor's personal assumption of direct responsibility for more of this activity. If it caused political difficulties at the time, and in particular if it made administrators long for the freedom of action and

¹⁶ *Chung-kuo cheng-chih-shih*, 4th edition, Shanghai, 1946, page 175 ff. (The first edition of this work appeared in 1940).

¹⁷ CH'EN Mu: *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, 3rd edition, Shanghai, 1947, page 390 ff.

¹⁸ Wu Han^[11] has also discussed this in a number of places; for his fullest discussion of it see *Chu Yüan-chang Chuan*, pages 231—246. Among Western historians of China, Otto Franke has perhaps been most interested in Chinese government. He also remarks on the new character within the old form (*Geschichte des Chinesischen Reiches* IV, 351 ff. esp. page 354, and page 396 ff.)

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the personal exercise of great power that earlier officials had enjoyed, it none the less clearly provided a basis for an enlarged exercise of political power by the sovereign. Looking backward from the Sung to earlier dynasties, we are forced by the recognition of these very great changes to resist generalizations imputing a "stationary quality" to Chinese history, and more specifically, we are forced to be skeptical of generalizations about the workings of despotism in the imperial period. Looking forward from Sung, we can see how the theoretical and institutional adjustments achieved at that time provided the basis for the still further growth of despotism, and for its actual practice to a degree never realized, or anticipated in the minds of those who helped to bring it about in the Sung period.

D. The Yüan Period — The brutalization of Chinese Government

Alien rule, of the Chin dynasty in North China (1126—1234) and the Mongol Yüan dynasty (North China after 1234, thereafter all of China 1279—1367) brought violence and destruction to all aspects of China's civilization. There is a tendency among Western scholars to overlook or to de-emphasize this fact, or even to state the opposite. Chinese historians have never made this mistake. From the 12th and the 13th centuries on they have complained bitterly about the sad consequences of this alien rule, and not without reason. The Mongols in particular were, as a ruling group, insensitive to Chinese cultural values, distrustful of Chinese influences, and inept heads of Chinese government. They only slowly acquired an understanding of the Chinese concept of the state, and to the end showed no ability to use its institutions effectively or to plan for its well-being. Their own ideas of government were simple compared with those of the Chinese, and we see the activities of government often reduced to simple and more direct forms of the maintenance of power (suppression of opposition through direct military force) and of economic exploitation of their positions as rulers. The Sung, the most refined and the least violent, the most bookish and the most over-organized government that China had known, was violently replaced by the crudest, the least concerned and the most chaotic¹⁹.

Yet the Mongol government was not vicious by design, at least not after the conquest of the Chin dynasty in the North in the early 13th century. Mongol tax schedules were relatively light, even if actual exactions from the people were often oppressive. Mongol laws and punishments were very lenient, even though Mongol rulers usually were not accustomed to observing the laws as written. The Mongol period brought some new freedoms to the people, or to certain groups in society, such as members of religious organizations and of merchant and craft guilds, but privileges granted to these groups often served only the purpose of enabling them to exploit their positions in harmful fashion.

¹⁹ For one description of Yüan government, see Wu Han: "Yüan-ti-kuo chih peng-k'uei yü Ming chih chien-kuo" (The collapse of the Yuan empire and the founding of the Ming), CHHP 11, 2, April 1936, pp. 359—423.

✓ The most significant development in Chinese government and in Chinese society was brutalization, — i. e. a destruction of the sources of humaneness and refinement, and their replacement by crudeness and force. The Mongol court took on a rough military atmosphere under the early Mongol emperors, as the emperors' chief concern was discussions of military strategy with their generals, and their chief recreation was violent exercise tests of strength and courage, and the hunt. The Mongol government was at its best under Kubilai Khan (1260—1294), and was most encouraging to Chinese interests under Jen-tsung (1312—1320) but those two reigns stand out not because they fundamentally altered the evil conditions that prevailed throughout the dynasty. After Jen-tsung's reign, the court degenerated to dissolute and unrestrained excesses, to murderous factionalism and intrigue, establishing an atmosphere of violence and brutality in government. To an increasing degree the normal patterns of civilian bureaucratic government broke down, written regulations and standards were ignored, and integrity in public office became a rare exception. Precedents from the revered past became meaningless, and direct force came to operate in all places. This spread from the court and government to all walks of life. In its last thirty or forty years the dynasty's ability to maintain law and order completely broke down. Banditry, lawlessness and defiance of the government became general, reflecting in part the desperate economic conditions, and in part the ambitions of rebellious leaders.

The Yüan period made few positive contributions to Chinese government. By destroying much of the restraint inherent in a highly-civilized atmosphere, however, it contributed to the growth of despotism. Out of this period of violence and lack of restraint appeared the forces that were to create the new Ming dynasty.

There is no doubt that the Yüan period saw a growth of terror in government, but it was a blind and meaningless terror, and it signaled a great lowering in the effectiveness of Yüan government. We cannot say that it in any way increased the ability of the sovereign to maintain his "rationality optimum", or that it can be characterized as the institutionalized or functional "routine terror in managerial, fiscal and judicial procedures" that Wittfogel feels is necessary to the operation of the agro-managerial society. The brutalized world of the Yüan is of significance chiefly because it was the world in which the first generation of the Ming's rulers and subjects alike grew to adulthood, and in that way it helped to establish the tone and character of the Ming dynasty.

III. A. Despotism at its height — the Ming dynasty.

The modern historian Ch'ien Mu discusses the Ming dynasty under the heading "Dictatorial rule under the restoration of traditional government"²⁰. He states: "The Ming dynasty represents the restoration of China's traditional government, but also its degeneration. The chief reason for this was the abolition of the office of prime minister." (page 476)

²⁰ CH'EN MU, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, page 474 ff.

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This is a common view. Certainly, in form, the Ming represented a restoration of the kind of government that had existed in the Sung, as opposed to the relative lack of system that had prevailed in the Yüan. Nonetheless the superficial form of Yüan government was very similar to that of the Sung which preceded and of the Ming which followed. What Ch'ien is referring to is the restoration of a civilian government in which properly-selected Confucian scholar-officials staffed the bureaucracy. And Ch'ien also expresses a common view of the cause for the degeneration of Ming government. Ever since scholars and Ming loyalists like Huang Tsung-hsi in the 17th century pondered the evils of the late Ming that led to its fall, and analyzed the sources of Ming governmental problems, it has been customary to give primary blame to the abolition of the prime-ministership²¹.

However, we should regard this Ming innovation as but another step in the direction clearly established in the Sung. The Sung emperors abolished the traditional system of three secretariat divisions, in which was done most of the proposing and discussing of policy, as well as the paper work of the executive level of government. Supervisory and censorial functions formerly subsidiary to them also were made independent. This meant a great weakening of the secretariat, which for all practical purposes can be said to have retained only one of its three divisions (i. e. the *chung-shu-sheng* [12]), and few of its powers. This level of policy-making and administrative supervision was taken away from the leaders of the civil bureaucracy and made directly subservient to the Emperor. Moreover, the office of prime minister in the Sung was further deprived of financial control and fiscal power, as well as the power directly to advance and demote officials. This great reduction of the powers of the leading official in the civil bureaucracy (and in particular of his ability to wield firm control over the bureaucracy) was symbolized by changed relationship between the Emperor and his chief minister. The usual courtesies formerly extended to the prime minister, such as permitting him to sit when conducting business of state with the Emperor, inviting him to drink tea, and permitting him to propose policy matters freely and verbally, all were done away with. He now was required to stand when reporting to the Emperor, all proposals, even the most routine ones, had to be approved in writing before they could be acted upon, and the old courtesy of permitting the prime minister to sit and drink tea became a very rare privilege instead of a normal courtesy²².

Thus it appears considerably less striking when the founder of the Ming dynasty, in the 13th year of his reign (1380) abolished the secretariat and

²¹ See William Theodore DE BARY: "Chinese Despotism and the Confucian Ideal", in J. K. FAIRBANK, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago, 1957, pp. 163—203, especially pp. 175—176.

²² See CH'EN MU, pp. 392—395.

the prime-ministership altogether, and left the Six Ministries (i. e. the executive departments of civil office, rites, revenue, war, punishments and public works) as the highest level of administration, directly responsible to the Emperor himself. The changes in the structure of government made by the Ming founder simply carried to the limit the institutional adaptation and the theoretical adjustments which had been provided for in the Sung dynasty. The emperor now was the government; he proposed and disposed. His officials merely worked for him, not with him. They were no longer the representatives of opinions that must be listened to or of powers that must be coordinated with those of the throne. Such opinions and powers now had less compelling force. The Emperor had the power to ignore or suppress both, and he often felt it to be to his advantage to do so. Despotism in actual practice, as well as in theory, had reached its limits.

But beyond this the reign of the Ming founder is marked by developments which, in so far as they have precedents, have them only in the brutal world of the Yüan, and not in the refined despotism of the Sung. Chu Yüan-chang, the Ming T'ai-tsu, became the harshest and the most unreasonable tyrant in all of Chinese history. Moreover, much of his harshness and cruelty was perpetuated in institutions that lasted throughout the dynasty. The Ming period not only saw the culmination of the growth process of despotism, but it had the misfortune to see this coupled with the career of a founding emperor who was moved by suspicions and hatreds to deeds untempered by any gentleness of character, or by humanistic learning. This combination made the Ming dynasty an age of terror — almost what Professor Wittfogel would call "total terror". But this was in large part a fortuitous combination; much of the result of it was wholly unreasonable in terms of Chinese society and of the needs of Chinese government. Nor was it an inevitable development in Chinese history.

The basic facts of Chu Yüan-chang's life are perhaps not well-enough known even to persons having an acquaintance with Chinese history. He was born in 1328 of a poor peasant family in what would be modern Anhwei north of the Yangtze. Orphaned at 16, he lived subsequently as a novice in a Buddhist temple, as a wandering mendicant, as a soldier in a local rebellious movement having much the character of organized banditry, as an officer in the military uprising supporting the rebellion of Han Lin-erh, and finally (from 1355 to 1367) as a rebel leader on his own with a base at Nanking, from which he expanded to conquer his rivals in the Yangtze valley and to establish his new dynasty in 1368. Open rebellion against Mongol rule was widespread before Chu was ten years old. Central China north of the Yangtze where he lived suffered greatly from drought and famine, and from the disorder which followed in their wake. Chu grew up without any education, knowing only the most desperate kind of poverty, and in a social environment in which the normal patterns of life were weakened, and in which there were few restraining influences. He had no family after the age of sixteen; he had no home village community to

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which to remain attached. His Buddhist temple turned him out to wander and find for himself by begging for a living after only a few months there and for three or more years thereafter he wandered through a region in which there remained no local government and no respect for regularly constituted authority. Moreover in these years he became a member of a political movement which hoped to put a supposed descendant of the former Sung dynasty on the throne, but which also adhered to a popular religious cult that preached the imminent appearance of the Buddha Maitreya and the establishment of a golden age on earth. This vulgar cult promoted the most fantastic kinds of superstitions.

From none of these environmental factors did the young Chu Yüan-chang receive any kind of knowledge of the Chinese cultural tradition except in its most popular forms, or any formal training for his future role as emperor. From his 21st to his 24th years he probably spent much of his time at the Buddhist temple to which he had first been sent at the age of sixteen, after being orphaned by a devastating plague. He appears to have begun to acquire the rudiments of literacy at that time. It was not until 1355 when, at the age of 27, he set out to establish an independent career as a military leader that he began to seek the company and the guidance of men learned in the Confucian tradition, and began to learn from them systematically about history and the canonical Confucian texts, and the principles and precedents of Chinese government. But Chu Yüan-chang was a busy man from 1355 until he became emperor in 1368. In these 13 years he built a military machine and established an ever expanding local government, and against great odds conquered all of Central China. It is amazing that he had time to learn anything of a bookish nature. In fact, however, he learned quite a lot. He learned to write a fair hand, and to draft letters and government documents in a plain and direct style. He learned to read and to be highly critical of the classics, as well as the elegantly worded government papers that were put before him. But he never acquired a thorough and a deep education, and he retained the suspicions of an uneducated man with regard to those sons of well-to-do families who were underlings in government, but his superiors in learning to a degree that he could never hope to overcome. Chu Yüan-chang was a tremendously shrewd man, and undoubtedly in his 20's and 30's a man of impressive leadership ability. His success in putting himself on the imperial throne must in large part be laid to lucky circumstances, but it must also be admitted that he built a tough and a solid organization, and that he had the capacity to take fullest advantage of all opportunity. In selecting his advisors and in establishing governmental measures he showed wisdom and foresight unmatched by any of his rivals for the power which the Mongols had in fact abdicated. Thus when he came to the imperial throne at the age of forty he was ready to provide strong leadership to the reconstituted Chinese state. He was in a position to weigh and judge among forms and methods of government, in so far as he could conceive of various forms and methods, or could apprehend the variety of them that he knew from his imperfect acquaintance with Chinese history. In

fact, he largely retained the skeleton of governmental institutions inherited from the Yüan which, in large part, had in turn been taken over from the Sung. Thus there was a continuity of basic features of form and structure from the earlier imperial period. There was also recognition of the basic element of Confucian government — a civil bureaucracy staffed by men learned in the Confucian tradition, specifically in the Sung *li-hsüeh* tradition which had become the prevailing orthodoxy. Given these elements of continuity, and Chu Yüan-chang's forceful personality and vigorous personal leadership, we might have expected a strongly centralized despotism like that which had emerged so clearly in the Sung. And in fact that is what appeared.

But at the same time a ruthless and vicious despotism, not only without precedent in the Sung but the very antithesis of the whole spirit of the Sung age, began to function within that framework of government. Chu Yüan-chang reigned for thirty-one years, during which time some important further changes in the structure of government were made at the higher administrative levels, and during which time Chu's increasingly tyrannical nature impressed itself indelibly on the character of Ming government. It was these two things which brought despotism to its fullest growth, and which injected into it so strong an element of terror. Particularly for the latter, we must find the causes in Chu's own personality, and not in the inevitable expression of forces in the Chinese socio-economic system.

As emperor, Chu Yüan-chang was suspicious of the peasantry, because the Red Turban (*hung-chin*^[13]) secret society ideas were still strong among them, and as an ex-leader of the Red Turbans, he knew what such seditious movements could accomplish. Hence he sternly forbade their continuation and ordered their suppression and extermination. He was also suspicious of the upper classes, because he was conscious of the contempt that the learned and the elegant could feel toward a ruffian like himself. Yet at the same time he was conscious that in the period when he himself had been a Red Turban rebel the upper classes had been firmly against such popular rebellious movements, and on the side of legitimate authority. Now he represented legitimate authority, and these Confucian literati, who earlier had been the enemy as much as the Mongols, now had become his chief assistants in governing. He did not have their degree of attachment to their traditional values, and he could not help resenting them, while forced to rely on them. In his early years after 1355 he had been more pliable. Under the advice from some early recruits to his banner from the fringes of the literate upper classes, he had learned to seek out eminent men of learning in fitting humility, and press them into his service. He seems really to have been stimulated by their thinking, and he learned much from them. In large part he accepted the outlines of their world, their standards of government and their principles of statecraft. In the late 1350's and early 1360's at Nanking, members of the old scholar officialdom (who as a class, while properly loyal to the legitimate rulers, were none the less estranged from and frustrated by the

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Mongol government) were brought in ever larger numbers to his rebel court at Nanking. Undoubtedly they thought they were using Chu Yüan-chang to rebuild their kind of world, and undoubtedly he thought he was using them to strengthen his own grasp on the world. In a sense, both were correct. But after 1367 when the whole world suddenly came into his hands, Chu Yüan-chang lost his pliability and his humility. He must have been overwhelmed by the size of the prize that had befallen him, and beset by fears that he would lose it just as easily. His character changed under this weight, and his life came to be dominated by an ever-deepening suspicion which may in fact have made a mad-man of him. Without losing his shrewdness, he none the less appears to have become a victim of obsession that deprived him of reason and balance.

Suspicion built up to violent outbursts of cruelty, unmoderated by reason, but still skillfully directed by his shrewd understanding of the forces that bore on politics. He understood the dangers in which he was placed trying to perpetuate his newly-founded dynasty. He knew popular uprisings could produce another Chu Yüan-chang. He knew that among his erstwhile rebel cohorts were many proven leaders who might covet his position. Above all, he understood the scholar-officialdom and the gentry element they represented. He knew all too well they would try to design the new government to serve their needs. He realized that they could keep a screen of fancy language between his will and their purposes, that they could interfere with his policies at all levels of their execution, and ridicule him behind his back for his lack of *savoir*. They could marshal a solid front of their Confucian principles to balk his program when it suited their purposes to do so, and could even educate his sons and heirs into believing that they were right. They were the greatest danger, for while they might often lack the backbone to oppose him openly, they could subtly steal his empire out of his hands without his even knowing it. Stern suppression could keep peasant rebellions from spreading, as he knew, for in his own early career as a rebel it was only the utter incompetence of the Mongol government which on several important occasions had made it possible for him to achieve his first important victories. As for possibly ambitious rivals among his earlier companions-at-arms, he could liquidate them, and he systematically did so. But the scholarofficials were a greater threat. He could not conceive of a government that did not use them. Moreover, he was a citizen of their world also, and there is no reason to believe that he did not accept their values and their standards as workable and proper, if not binding on himself, or that he did not take their moral and political doctrines seriously, as far as his non-learned understanding of them permitted. Chu Yüan-chang lived in a world in which many competing forces existed on the level of popular superstition, but he was much too shrewd a man not to see through simple superstition and to desire a more solid philosophical foundation for his universe. Yet he was himself no philosopher, and he was quite ready to accept the philosophical superiority of the literate tradition in his civilization, without necessarily having examined and understood it all by himself. His move up the social scale had

not made an intellectual of him, but it had made him accept the "great tradition" as proper and normal. And on the level of that great tradition there was no competing force, no room for choice. Whereas in the immediate post-Han centuries an aspiring dynast could have promulgated a great variety of ideologies²³, by the 14th century Chinese civilization had become culturally unified to a degree that no longer permitted such freedom of choice. By reason of his becoming the emperor (or aspiring to become one) he automatically had to conform to the only set of standards for rulership that existed — i. e. those forms and practices, and their underlying philosophy that we call (and they called) Confucian²⁴.

Thus Chu Yüan-chang, in building a government that would be strong and effective, and by that fact one that would have to be legitimate and proper, had no alternatives but to build it on the scholar-gentry class, to honor their standards and to sustain both the class and their standards as dominant features of his society. Yet as an individual, he could feel no identification with them, and rule as the leader of a club the way the emperors of the T'ang dynasty, for example, had seemed to feel themselves the natural leaders of the upper segment of their society. And Chu could not conceive of these scholar officials ever becoming a wholly subservient or reliable component of his government. The thirty-one years of his imperial rule show a series of measures and tactics, at times coldly reasoned, at times passionate and frantic, designed to deal with the threat to his dynastic interests which he saw lurking in this stratum of society²⁵.

²³ See Arthur F. Wright: "The Formation of Sui Ideology, 581—604" in FAIRBANK, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, pp. 71—104; this shows that there was a broader set of choices before an emperor in developing an official ideology at that earlier period in Chinese history.

²⁴ To use a term of which Daniel LERNER has made effective use, no one in 14th century China could have possessed the "psychic mobility" to conceive of any world radically different from the one in which he lived. Contemporary descriptions of the millenium which the coming of the Maitreya Buddha would bring to the world, products of the popular mind, bear this out; they are nothing more than fantastically idealized descriptions of Chinese society at its best. For LERNER, see his: *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing The Middle East*, Glencoe, Ill., 1958.

²⁵ Wu Han, in his nonetheless valuable biography (*Chu Yüan-chang Chuan*, Shanghai, 1949) forces a "class-consciousness" interpretation on Chu that appears to me to be unnecessary and insupportable; moreover it is in conflict with his description of the way in which Chu "sold out" the peasantry in the pages that follow. He sees a resentment of the landlord class, fostered during Chu's early years of rebel activity, motivating him later on in spiteful revenge on the oppressor class. I am inclined to feel that Chu simply accepted landlord-gentry leadership of the rural society, and only desired at first to become part of it, later to use it, and that his cruel treatment of the scholar-officialdom after he became emperor reflected his personal psychological make-up. I see nothing in his career that suggests that he felt a sense of identification with the interests of any class in Chinese society, even though he referred frequently to his Anhwei peasant origin in proclamations earlier in his reign. We might note that in the 20th century the Communists have had to engage in massive efforts to teach "class alertness" to the Chinese peasantry, without notable success, complaining that the Chinese peasant mind has been extremely resistant to the awareness of its class position, in conflict with that of the "oppressor classes." (in WU, see especially pp. 136—138).

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When we examine the changes in the structure of government made by Chu Yüan-chang, and the new institutions created by him, we can see how the twin influences of growing authoritarianism in government and in society, and his individual personality, both contributed to the nature of Ming depotism. In the early 1360's, even before Chu Yüan-chang's rebellion had overcome the last of his nearby rivals, he began to investigate administrative principles, and in particular formed opinions about the Mongol failure in government. He defined these as: lack of simple and clear-cut laws and regulations; lack of consistency and thoroughness in their application; lack of institutional system; and a kind of slipshod laxity in government on all levels. In 1369, the second year of his reign, he invited a number of Yüan officials to court to discuss the Yüan failings. When one of them said: "The Yüan won the country through leniency²⁶, and lost it through leniency," Chu dissented, demanding that a distinction be maintained between leniency and slipshod laxity. He made no important changes in the structure of Yüan government in these first years, but clarified and simplified regulations "in order to prevent subofficials (*li*) from treacherous manipulation" of the vague and disorderly collections of rules and precedents that served the Yüan dynasty as a code²⁷. He is quoted in a number of places as having expressed approval of light punishments but strict enforcement. However from the beginning he applied the harshest punishments with rigid strictness, saying that only by extreme measures could the evils of the Yüan situation be overcome. There are examples of his executing officials for relatively light crimes as early as about 1361 when he personally beheaded the son of a leading general for an infraction of a regulation against using grain to make liquor. When urged to spare the man for the sake of retaining his father's loyalty, Chu replied: "I would rather cause his father to rebel against me than not to have my laws obeyed."

The most important changes in the structure of government came only after a decade of experience as emperor. The first move (1376) was to abolish the "detached" sections of the central secretariat (*hsing chung-shu-sheng* [13]) which since Yüan times had functioned as provincial governments, and establish in their place, at the provincial level, three officials who

²⁶ The Yüan of course won the country through military power, but in their final campaign against the Sung south in 1275—1279, the commander in chief Bayan was under instructions from Kubilai Khan to emulate the Sung general Ts'ao Pin, who did not permit his troops needlessly to harm civilian populations. Such gentleness was so unexpected from the Mongols that it won them the reputation for lenient treatment of civilian populations in that final campaign, as contrasted with their reputation from earlier campaigns.

²⁷ The early promulgation of a clear and simple code, and its repeated revisions and improvements through the thirty-one years of his reign, is considered one of the major administrative achievements of the early Ming. See Huang Chang-chien [14], "Ta Ming lü-kao k'ao," CYYY 24, June 1953, pp. 77—101, for a study of the earliest form of the Ming code.

were to be separately responsible for supervision of administrative, judicial and military affairs of the province. These officials did not constitute a provincial government in the true sense of the word, i.e. a unified administrative organ, as had the old Yüan *hsing-sheng* system that possessed full powers of regional government. Rather they remained divided, and were merely supervisory, and most important of all, they were made directly responsible to the throne. It was a device for bringing provincial government more directly under the emperor's personal purview; at the same time it further weakened the powers of the prime minister. In 1380 the final logical step was taken. The central secretariat itself was abolished, and with it the office of prime minister. This was done in the wake of the attempted treason of Prime Minister Hu Wei-yung, which reminded Chu Yüan-chang of the threat which this repository of administrative power could hold for the throne. With this highest level of the bureaucratic administration abolished, the second level, that of the Six Ministries, became directly responsible to the throne, and the emperor became his own chief of administration as well as the sole source of administrative authority. At the same time, the chief military office, the *Ta-tu-lu-lu*, analogous to a general staff, was divided into five separate offices, and commanders were deprived of their military commands until specially appointed by the throne through the civilian Ministry of War in time of need. Finally, in this reorganization of administrative functions, the Censorate was reorganized in the period 1380—82, giving it both greater supervisory and censorial powers than it had ever possessed in the past, making it directly accountable to the throne, separate from all other administrative channels. These changes brought the form of despotism to the peak of its development and made the Ming monarch the strongest ruler in China's long history. The process of institutional development was now complete as the theory supporting it had been completely worked out in the Sung²⁸.

B. Terror at its Height

But even though it was Chu's suspicions and insecurity which led him to hasten the completion of this process of development, a benevolent despotism could have functioned within this highly centralized system. That the Ming despotism was harsh and cruel, and the dynasty became known as an age of terror, is due to other (and incidental) factors, and the Ming founder's reign of terror was carried out through other (and non-essential) institutions. The most important of these were creations of Chu Yüan-chang's; some others which developed only later in the Ming period were modelled in form and spirit on his. Chu's means of exercising tyranny and terror included: institutions for deepening the gulf between the ruler and his bureaucracy, and further exalting the position of the ruler; consciously applied terror for the purpose of intimidating the unreliable but

²⁸ See Charles O. HUCKER, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *HJAS* 21, Dec. 1958, pp. 1—66, for the fullest descriptive account and functional analysis of Ming government.

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indispensable scholar-official class; unspeakably cruel punishments and institutionalized humiliation of officials intended to keep them conscious of their insecurity; secret-service agencies answerable only to the throne and beyond the reaches of the not overly harsh laws; a literary inquisition through which unsuspecting persons were made the object of the emperor's unpredictable wrath.

Even the new Ming regulations for the conduct of the court, arranging the imperial throne on a much-elevated dais to keep it above and away from the area in which the officials were required to present themselves, and to go through their repeated prostrations and kow-tows, and all of the newly-fixed ceremonials and rituals, — this too can all be seen as a logical growth of despotism, and of the Sung trend toward the greater exaltation of the emperor²⁹. But Chu Yüan-chang added to this his personal delight in humiliating high officials, and keeping them in terror of his temper. His sudden outbursts of wrath were so real a threat that the court became accustomed to watching his countenance for indications of his mood, and officials are said to have fainted from fright on hearing him raise his voice to a shout, without waiting to hear what he said. Eunuchs, despised by the Confucian literati, were given the responsibility for supervising the decorum of ministers in the daily audience, and for administering beatings with heavy clubs in the presence of the court on a signal from the emperor, to any official who incurred his displeasure. These beatings at court (*T'ing-chang*^[17]) introduced by Chu became a most notorious feature of Ming government, and in later reigns were a chief means by which eunuchs came to intimidate the officialdom³⁰. Other means of applying terror were numerous. Several important "treason" and "malfeasance" cases were

²⁹ LEI Hai-tsung^[16] also relates this to the gradual process of making the emperor divine in the eyes of the population at large, which he traces back to the magical additions to Han period Confucianism. He has written: "From the end of the Han through the Wei and Chin and Northern and Southern Dynasties the actual power of the emperor was somewhat reduced; it again became great in the Sui and T'ang, and from the Sung period onward the position of the emperor became ever more lofty and awe-inspiring. It became more and more divine from the Ming period onward, with even more magical power attributed to the office by the people at large." See his "*Hsiang-ti chih-tu ti ch'eng-li*", *CHHP* 9, 4, October 1934, pp. 853—871; the passage quoted is on page 871. LEI may be making too much of the relation of the character of the imperial office in the popular mind to the growth of despotism, but it is not surprising that the fact accomplished in philosophy, political thought and political institutions should be reflected in a vulgarized form in the popular imagination.

³⁰ See TING I^[18]: *Ming-ta t'e-wu-cheng-chih shih*, 2nd ed. Peking 1951, page 387 ff., for contemporary descriptions of this. Soldiers of the *Chin-i-wei*^[19] (see below) did the actual beating with long wooden clubs, while eunuchs supervised. Normally eighty blows were administered. In Chu's reign, and early in the dynasty, the beatings were intended merely to humiliate the official; he was permitted to wear padded clothing, and after a few months in bed he would be none the worse for the experience. Later under eunuch direction the officials were stripped to be beaten, and death often resulted. But humiliation was as important an objective of this punishment as was terror.

[16] 雷海宗

[17] 廷杖

[18] 丁易

[19] 錦衣衛

punished by cruelly murdering the guilty person, and exterminating not only his own family but his most distant relatives, his friends and neighbors and their relatives, and all classes of associates. The number put to death in the Hu Wei-yung case in 1360 is said to have been in excess of 30000, and in the Lan Yü case ten years later more than 15000. These great blood-lettings conveniently got rid of all manner of old associates of the emperor, and other possibly ambitious men, and they terrorized the whole world of officialdom. Innumerable smaller cases brought death and destruction to prominent gentry families every year, as well as to seemingly harmless beggars, soldiers, or others who happened to rouse his anger. Often it was the cruelty of the execution that accomplished the greatest terrorization. Many new means of slowly and painfully separating the body from the spirit were made regular punishments; they included beating the victim with sand bags without breaking his skin until his whole body was a balloon of jelly, inducing a lingering and painful death; alternate scaldings with boiling water and scrubbing with wire brushes; and *ling-ch'ih*^[20], which meant slowly slicing a man to pieces with a prescribed 3,357 strokes of the knife, with a pause after each ten strokes to permit him to recover his feelings. Never before had such cruelties been widely practiced as legitimate means of execution: they reflect the brutality introduced into Chinese life by the Mongol conquest. But these terrors, while increasingly frequent as Chu Yüan-chang's reign went on, were never blindly and purposelessly applied. For example, in front of all local government offices was a "skinning place" where the whole skin was peeled from the body of the corrupt official, and filled with straw to make an effigy of him which was then hung there to warn his successor and associates.

Most vicious of Chu's new institutions was the *Chin-i-wei*^[19], a secret police unit which had the power to arrest any person at any time, incarcerate him for any length of time, and inflict any manner of torture on him in order to prepare a case against him. A forerunner of this organ was founded in 1367, the year before Chu became the emperor, reorganized in 1369, and fully developed under the name *Chin-i-wei* (literally "brocaded uniform garrison") in 1382³¹. Nominally the imperial bodyguard unit, it was in fact a secret police organization of great scope of action and size. Although abolished in the last years of Chu's reign, it served as a precedent

TING I contradicts himself about the origins of *ling-chang*. On page 40 he states that was first used in the Yuan period, which I feel is likely, but he does not cite a reference. On page 389 he states explicitly that it was first used by Chu, and the first use was in the 8th year of Chu's reign, i.e. 1375. The origins of *ling-chang* have been much studied, and isolated precedents going back as far as the Han Dynasty (204 B. C. — 220 A. D.) have been noted. However, Ming period historians agree in thinking of it as a common occurrence only from Yuan times, and as a regular court practice only from Chu Yüan-chang's reign onward.

³¹ See a description and brief history in TING I, pp. 34—41; also in *Wei Han: Chu Yüan-chang Chuan*, pages 224 ff.

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for a revival of the organization soon thereafter in the reign of Chu's son,
and still later it was supplemented by parallel organs of similar nature, so
that eventually there was achieved a great reduplication of secret police
activities and organs.

Finally, there was the literary inquisition, which like most of the above
was not "legalized" by reason of its having been proclaimed or regularized,
but which was simply a direct expression of the emperor's power. It was a
most convenient device for getting rid of a man and simultaneously terror-
izing others. Chu Yüan-chang appears to have expected slights and insults
from his scholar-officials, and he examined their perfunctory memorials, their
congratulatory odes and all their writings and their speech for passages
capable of double meaning or veiled slander. Words homophonous with or
suggestive of "bandit" or "monk" or "bald-pate" and the like, referring to
his inglorious origins, were especially likely to be regarded as such, and
homophones are particularly numerous in Chinese. Characters were exam-
ined to see if their separate parts could add up to some hidden meaning.
And on occasion, when suspicious of something but unable to discover the
concealed insult, he had its author put to death just to make sure. In other
dynasties, books have been burned and authors punished, but there is
nothing to equal the extreme and even absurdly vicious nature of this
threat which was hung over the heads of the early Ming writers and
officials³².

C. How is Chu Yüan-chang to be interpreted?

This literary inquisition is but one among many difficult aspects of Chu
Yüan-chang's character, and of his reign, to understand and to evaluate.
Did it spring from his lack of learning, which sometimes made him mis-
read things, or from his insecurity in dealing with elegantly-phrased
literature and with those who could produce it, or did he merely pretend to be
worried about hidden insults in order to have an excuse for terrorizing
his court? Historians have differed. Wu Han, in his biography, supports the
paranoic interpretation (pp. 210—222) while Chou Ku-ch'eng, in his survey
history of China (*Chung-kuo t'ung-shih*, Shanghai, 7th printing, 1946, esp.
page 823) states his opinion that Chu understood very well the real and
innocent intent of the hapless writers, and merely used this as a device
for justifying the terrorizing murders of the literati.

But the literary inquisition is merely one well-known aspect of a career
that in its entirety is difficult of interpretation. Commenting on what seemed
contradictory aspects of Chu's character, the Ch'ing historian CHAO I^[21]
(1727—1814) remarked:

³² See Ku Chieh-Kang, "A Study of Literary Persecution During the Ming," tr.
by L. Carrington GOODRICH, *HJAS* 3, 3/4, Dec. 1933, pp. 254—311, for some
illustrative examples.

[21] 趙翼

At the time [of Chu's first rise to power] all the rebel chieftains arose simultaneously, and all devoted their energies only toward plundering people's families and their valuables, with disastrous consequence for all the people. Alone among them the Ming founder was concerned about righting the world and restoring peace and order. Hence his reputation for benevolence and righteousness spread, bringing about surrenders to him and making it unnecessary for him to waste his strength in military operations well over half the time. Later on he slaughtered forty or fifty thousand persons in the treason cases of Hu Wei-yung and Lan Yü, but by that time the empire was under his control, therefore he could give free reign to his violent suspicions. And also in his campaigns in Yünnan and Kweichow he had no less than sixty or seventy thousand Miao and other aborigines slaughtered. But that was because he felt it was the nature of these border-region people to respect only force, and there was no other way to establish rule over them. There is no doubt that as a man Ming T'ai-tsu had all the qualities of sage and worthy, of hero and tyrant, and of bandit and rebel³³.

Chao I was not conversant with modern psychological concepts, so he does not refer to paranoia or schizophrenia in evaluating Chu, but his list of historical types from sage to bandit indicates that Chu was in his mind unclassifiable, and presented a problem of understanding because of the contradictory aspects of his character.

Most modern writers have dealt severely with Chu Yüan-chang. The only full biography of him by a modern historian is that of Wu Han, in which a certain sympathy and understanding for Chu in his early years turns to strong condemnation of his later years. Wu Han has been a specialist in the period for twenty or thirty years, and is a respected historian, although already strongly leftist-minded when he wrote this biography. But Communist historians too have a similar problem of interpreting Chu. On the one hand, to them he represents the ("good") revolutionary force later in the peasantry, but on the other hand he betrayed the peasant background from which he sprang by foisting on the peasantry a harsh regime that exploited and mistreated them. FAN Wen-lan^[22], in an official but rather conservative Communist history of China, sees Chu as a monarch whose excesses of cruelty were carefully planned measures to rid the realm of threats to his dynastic stability³⁴.

The most lenient interpretation of Chu's character and the most laudatory of his career comes from a well-known recent historian, MENG Shen^{[23] 35}.

³³ CHAO I: *Nien-erh-shih cha-chi*, ch. 36, "Ming-tsu i pu shih sha te T'ien-hsia."

³⁴ FAN Wen-lan: *Chung-kuo t'ung-shih chien-pien*, Shanghai, 2nd printing, 1947. Discussions of Chu are scattered throughout the section on Ming, pp. 506—612.

³⁵ MENG Shen: *Ming-tai-shih*, lecture outlines prepared for his classes at National Peking University in the 1920's and 1930's, and first published in book form, Taipei, 1957.

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Chia-sha te T'ien-hsia." Shanghai, 2nd printing, on Ming, pp. 506—

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Meng recognizes the excessive use of terror and harsh punishments, but does not emphasize them. He also recognizes in Chu a remarkable administrative ability, wisdom in listening to and accepting the best advice, and a sincere desire to govern thoroughly and well. He emphasizes the many constructive aspects of Chu's reign, and the obvious improvement of government, society and the people's livelihood under Chu's strong hand. Meng's considered and balanced judgment forms a useful counter-balance to the emotional and prejudiced writings of Wu Han and many other modern historians, and in particular to the impassioned book by Ting I, called *A History of the Ming Dynasty's Secret Police Government*³⁶. Ting was a leftist-minded young historian, probably not a Communist but very sympathetic to the Chinese Communist regime when he wrote this work in the late 1940's at a time when he considered himself to be a much-persecuted victim of a "secret service government". (Like Professor Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism*), Ting's book can be regarded as a political book directed at issues of current relevance as well as at problems of past history, and like it, it loses in breadth and balance while at the same time gaining unity and force through its passionate concentration on the one issue it wants to drive home. None the less, as a compendium of materials bearing on the evils of Ming government (and in particular on the evils of the eunuch system which were flagrant only after the first three or four reigns) it is a useful work. For a description of the most terror-dominated government in all Chinese history (albeit without penetrating analysis or much feeling for the overall history of the period) one need but turn to Ting's elaborately detailed account. It makes very uncomfortable reading to be reminded so vividly of the cruelties which so-called "Confucian" government could inflict on people, and it leaves one unsatisfied with any simple explanation of its meaning. Chu Yüan-chang established a reign of terror that more or less persisted throughout the 277 years of the Ming dynasty. Meng Shen, largely ignoring this, sees a greatness in Chu, but Ting's horrifying facts cannot be doubted, and cannot be discounted. Chu Yüan-chang and his government are as difficult to evaluate as Mao Tse-tung and his, and largely for similar reasons. But in terms of the problem of political power in traditional China, there is no question either about the extent to which Chu possessed and applied it, or about the objective achievements of his regime.

IV. The Limits of Power and the Limits of Terror

Professor Wittfogel would have us believe that the extremes of power which Chu Yüan-chang achieved were in fact and by definition necessary in hydraulic society, and hence that Chu's government in essential respects was no different from other governments in China from Chou times onward. He would also have us believe that terror of the kind which Chu made to function for him was "essential for maintaining the rulers' rati-

³⁶ TING I: *Ming-tai t'e-wu cheng-shih-shih*, cited in note No. 30 above.

onality optimum", and since necessary, obviously had always existed throughout the 3,000 or more years of China's hydraulic history. Both of these points have been challenged in the foregoing. It remains to look more carefully at the concepts of "total power" and "total terror" and to see what they really signify in the history of a particular government in time and in space.

As emperor, Chu Yüan-chang indeed was an all-powerful individual. He literally could do about anything he was capable of wishing to do, so long as it was physically possible. For example, after centuries of mismanagement and hopeless dissolution of system, Chu could order a complete and accurate land measurement and registration and census, and by the establishment of these records, could bring about a rational and highly effective taxation system again. Meng Shen praises this as an unconscious application of "political science" at its best for the pre-scientific age³⁷. It demanded highly organized deployment of manpower and of technical skills, and it brought the daily lives of all the millions of people into systematic relationship with the government, permitting their efficient and constructive exploitation. It was a great test of the power of the ruler and the strength of his system.

Chu Yüan-chang also could unleash his anger and bring death and destruction to 30,000 members of the upper classes on the excuse of punishing one man for plotting treason. He had the power to do this without arousing rebellion, and in fact by the measure probably further solidified his power for the time. We cannot but call him an absolute despot, a true dictator.

But, if there seem to be no theoretical limits to this power, there were practical limits, and they may have been far greater than Chu Yüan-chang or the modern reader of history would realize, for many of them are inherent in the nature of things, and so are taken for granted. S. N. EISENSTADT, in a review of *Oriental Despotism*, has stated theoretically the objection to Wittfogel's "total power" that emerges most clearly from the historical situation of fourteenth century China, and from the whole history of the Ming dynasty. He writes:

Today it seems to be accepted that the political institutions are one part of the social structure, and that they are necessarily dependent on other institutions for their own smooth functioning. They are dependent on them for various material resources, for their basic legitimation, and for support for various policies and activities. The needs for these various types of support are also related to the fact that the political institutions of any society are concerned not only with the exercise of naked power but also with the implementation of various collective goals, and that the holders of political power have somehow to justify these goals according to the basic values of the society. They have to mobilize support for their various policies and goals, and through such mobilization they must also take into some account the interests of at least the more active groups in the society.

Rulers of large-scale bureaucratic empires, who want to perpetuate their rule, have to implement complicated policies which necessarily favor some

³⁷ Op. cit., note 35.

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groups more than others, and they must continuously mobilize resources and support from diverse strata. It is impossible to understand their activities without taking into account all the problems connected with the mobilization of such support, which cannot be ensured by coercion and terror alone³⁸.

Eisenstadt mentions, for example, legitimation. We can see how Chu Yüan-chang, perhaps we can say despite his background and temperament, had become a proper "Confucian" ruler in a Confucian civilian state. Wittfogel's treatment of the meaning of the role of Confucianism is the most inadequate part of his treatment of China; a full review of it would require a separate study. But it can be said most simply that Confucianism (which in later imperial history should be called that only for convenience, as it had become a very complex amalgam) was not merely a set of decorative phrases which the despot could manipulate at will. It was a real and potent force, and though a ruler like Chu could perhaps defy any particular aspect of it at any particular moment, none the less it placed limitations on his conduct. (The legitimacy of the dynasty had to be established and maintained in Confucian terms) For example, Chu rejected much of the vulgar superstition of the common people, such as the superstitious foundations of the Red Turban movement in which he was active at the beginning of his career. But the belief in a reigning or a supervising moral Heaven was not a superstition in his world. From the care with which he studied the regulations for the sacrifices to Heaven which could be performed only by the legitimate ruler as bearer of the Mandate, we can believe that Chu was guided by this belief, and tried to conform in some measure to the standards of propriety which this belief implied. He accepted the Neo-Confucian cosmology and applied its principles in realistic terms to his actions, such as palace building and important measures of governing. Wu Han believes it helped to determine the name chosen for the dynasty, and many other of Chu's measures. Wittfogel specifically denies that the Confucian "right of rebellion" (and by implication the Mandate of Heaven concept from which it is derived) was a check on the ruler's power, because it was not "incorporated into any official constitutional regulations or laws", hence was ineffectual, since the risk in acting on it against the regime was too great. This seems to imply that the ruler and his subjects alike were cynical about the right of rebellion and about Heaven's moral will. To the extent that ruler or people believed in such a Heaven, these concepts may have possessed a limiting function that did not depend on any formal constitutional guarantee of them. Chu Yüan-chang could justify in his own mind slaughtering thousands (and he may even have buttressed his justifications with the thought that he was protecting the dynasty to which Heaven had given its Mandate). But there were many things that he could not do because he would have felt them obviously inappropriate to

³⁸ S. N. EISENSTADT: "The Study of Oriental Despotisms as Systems of Total Power", JAS 17, 3, May 1958, pp. 435-446. The above passages are from page 445. Some of EISENSTADT's review seems unacceptable, but I accept his final section outlining the basic weaknesses of WITTFOGEL's approach.

legitimate Confucian government, and knew that the world would feel the same way. He might have felt that he could do any particular thing that he wanted to do, but the vast majority of his actions, like those of his scholar-officials, were unconsciously or consciously directed or determined by unquestioned patterns of correctness. The necessity to be a legitimate monarch in a world that he did not create greatly influenced Chu's daily activities as emperor.

This is even more clearly true of Eisenstadt's statement that the emperor and his people had certain collective goals which had to be justified in terms of the values of the society. Chu Yüan-chang's entire value scheme came from his Confucian environment. His constant appeals to it were not mere empty phrases, even if his cruel punishments were travesties of Confucian humanism. The crimes meriting death listed in Chu's new Ming code were all defined solely in Confucian terms, and this code had a daily influence on the whole government and society at large, even if Chu could execute persons by the thousands without reference to the code. For those thousands were still "exceptional" cases (no matter how much more numerous than the regular cases). *Their* lives were not saved by Confucian protests against the ruler's excesses, but there were such protests, and other lives probably were protected by them. Resentment of Chu's cruelty and those excesses was a force in politics, and Chu was both conscious of it and influenced by it. In the 28th year of his reign (1395), when he was old and tired and perhaps convinced that his slaughter and terror had accomplished the needed rectification of the degenerate late-Yüan conditions, he issued a proclamation drafted in his own hand, which said in part:

Since the time when we first commenced to undertake military action more than forty years have passed. We have personally ordered all the affairs of the realm, and there are no cases of human goodness and evil, honesty and falseness, to which we have not turned our attention. Among these we have indeed encountered many persons whose flagrant treachery and evil were beyond doubting, and we have specially ordered extra-legal punishments for them. Our intent has been to teach people about that from which they should be deterred by fear of the consequences, so that they would not readily violate the laws. However this special power has been only temporarily instituted, in order to deal with the incorrigibly treacherous; it is not a method which a ruler who maintains the precedents [of the past] would adopt permanently. Hereafter successive emperors in ruling the realm will adhere exclusively to the regulations of the Great Code (i. e. the Ming Code), and will not be permitted to employ . . . (various corporal punishments) . . . Should any official ever propose the employment of such punishments, all civil and military officials shall immediately impeach him, and he shall be severely punished³⁹.

³⁹ Quoted in Wu Han: *Chu Yüan-chang Chuan*, page 192, from the *Ming-shih-lu*, ch. 239.

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Wu Han feels this proclamation was motivated only by a feeling of security derived from the belief that he had killed and terrorized enough by this time to secure the dynasty against all dangers. Whether or not this is so, it represents a concession to the moderating force of Confucian principles as well as recognition of certain common goals in terms of which his extralegal punishments had to be justified. Wittfogel says:

Mores and beliefs do indeed play a role; and so, for that matter, do the laws of nature. However, the potential victims of despotic power seem to find little consolation in either fact. They know that their master's behavior, like their own, is affected by laws of nature and by more or less firmly established cultural circumstances. But they know also that, nevertheless and in the last analysis, their fate will be determined by the will of those who wield total power.

The potential victim of despotic persecution knows full well that the natural and cultural settings, whatever temporary respites they may provide, do not prevent his final destruction. The despotic ruler's power over his subjects is no less total because it is limited by factors that mold human life in every type of society. (OD, page 108).

Wittfogel thus discounts the mitigating force of "patterns of culture", saying that they do not in the long run "prevent the government from ultimately achieving its goal". But the government's goal should not be seen merely as the simple exercise of unlimited power for the sake of maintaining the ruler's exploitation optimum. Chu Yüan-chang's goals were far more complex than this, and they coincided with many of the goals of the whole society. His recognition of common standards for judging such goals was a directing influence on his actions, as the proclamation quoted from above shows. Given his unfortunate personal characteristics and the contributions to their unrestrained development made by his individual experiences, he was less effectively limited by these forces than we might have hoped, but he was an extreme case, not a representative one. And even this most extreme case in Chinese history shows evidence of having recognized cultural limitations on his actions, and displays more complex motivation than Wittfogel's theoretically-conceived tyrant could possess.

We might also question other of Wittfogel's assertions about the lack of limitations and checks on the imperial power. He states that obedience was demanded of the members of hydraulic society. Somewhat cynically he writes:

To the demands of total authority common sense recommends one answer, -- obedience. And ideology stereotypes what common sense recommends. Under a despotic regime, obedience becomes the basis of good citizenship. (OD, page 149)

He notes that a top ranking minister who disapproved of a ruler's propriety might retire, but that the ideal functionary obeyed his ruler, and the commoner was given no choice whatsoever. "In Confucius' good society . . . the good subject was the obedient subject".

Here Wittfogel is making the mistake of generalizing about the import of Confucian doctrine over the whole range of Chinese history, as well as

distorting Confucianism by making individual sentences from different works stand out of context, and, in their new juxtaposition to represent the whole system of thought. Most students of China would agree that Confucianism promoted obedience in the family, and by extension, to the state, and in particular that the more authoritarian Neo-Confucianism greatly rigidified and strengthened the application of Confucian morality. But obedience to the ruler even in the Neo-Confucian age could be countered by Confucian emphasis on individual moral responsibility, and the many who refused to serve unworthy rulers were more apt to justify themselves by Confucian than by Taoist or Buddhist or any other set of standards. Franz MICHAEL has written of a more active kind of opposition:

The officials could however oppose government policy if they felt it to be in disagreement with their interpretation of Confucian beliefs. Such an independent political stand was even more likely to occur among members of the scholar-gentry who were not in official service. Among the scholar-gentry at large and, to a certain degree, among the officials, there could then be political opposition. The basis of this was the fact that the fundamental loyalty was to the Confucian system itself and not to the prevailing government's policy; the gentry were the guardians and propagators of the Confucian system as such, they were not bound by an emperor's verdict on its right interpretation . . . the gentry did not owe the emperor unconditional obedience . . .⁴⁰

Michael is less cynical about the nature of Confucian obedience, and most students of Chinese history will agree with his view. That officials of the time of Chu Yüan-chang did resist serving in his government, expressing criticism of it in that way, and that this kind of opposition did form a political force of some consequence, is indicated by a special law promulgated as part of the Ming code: "Scholars anywhere in the realm who refuse to enter the ruler's service are to be excuted." This was a law that could be invoked in any particular case, but that does not prove that the ruler's power was unlimited, for in fact the ruler could not through this law command the service of all the scholars in the realm. Throughout Chu Yüan-chang's reign, and throughout the most despotic centuries of the late imperial period, those who resisted by refusing or evading service were a large and a significant group.

Thus total power, while not a meaningless phrase, must be understood in the context of a complex historical situation. It existed in Ming China, but it did not mean totalitarian power, omnipresent and omniscient. Concentrated on any single objective, it probably could accomplish that objective but by the nature of the cultural environment, it would not be applied toward the achievement of many possible objectives, including some no doubt highly consistent with "the ruler's rationality optimum." Moreover

⁴⁰ Franz MICHAEL: "Political Dynamics", in *A General Handbook of China*, Seattle (for the Human Relations Area Files), 1956, pp. 1215—1256; the quoted passage is on page 1220. In discussing this present essay, Professor MICHAEL was quoted in the proceedings of the conference at which it was first presented: "The significant factor in the Chinese situation was that the bureaucracy-gentry had recourse to an ideology outside the control of the emperor."

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Another objection to "total power" is that it overlooks the significance of delegated power. Wittfogel writes:

Because of immaturity, weakness, or incompetence, he (the ruler) may share his operational supremacy with an aide: a regent, vizier, chancellor, or "prime minister". But the exalted power of these men does not usually last long. It rarely affects the symbols of supreme authority. And it vanishes as soon as the ruler is strong enough to realize the autocratic potential inherent in his position. (OD, page 305).

This might seem to have been written precisely with the Ming dynasty in mind. Chu Yüan-chang, and his son who reigned as the third emperor from 1403—1424, were very strong rulers who exercised the "autocratic potential inherent in their position". After them, the remaining 200 years of Ming rule saw a succession of weak and incompetent rulers who could not realize that potential, and who delegated their authority by default to their eunuchs, with disastrous results, for these assistants practiced the same vicious cruelties with less sense of responsibility and with less administrative ability. But the quoted passage does not really fit the Ming situation. Even Chu Yüan-chang had to delegate authority to thousands of persons from chiefs of ministries to local tax collectors. The fact that they were more directly responsible to him put a greater administrative burden on him, but it did not make for less delegation of power and hence less division of authority, — even though it meant that the delegated power held by any one person was less than otherwise would have been the case. To use one possible example, in the early Ming a prefectural magistrate may have felt the emperor's suspicious eyes on his back much of the time, but he could not refer to the new clear laws or to the emperor himself in more than a tiny fraction of his daily decisions. For the rest, he governed a locality according to the accumulated political wisdom of Chinese history, and according to his own judgment. He may have done so in terror of the punishment that any error could bring down upon him; this may have induced an unusual degree of consistency in local government, and simultaneously a lack of initiative. But he still had to make his daily decisions, and he must have grown accustomed to the threat of sudden punishment. In any event, Chu Yüan-chang ruled in Nanking, but the magistrates governed in their prefectures, and as far as the population of those prefectures were concerned, the magistrates shared a very real measure of power. It is irrelevant to say that they did not "share the ruler's operational supremacy". They did not contest that supremacy, but they shared power, and the position of the strongest despot was meaningless without their local exercise of power which, in innumerable ways, had

to represent their individual wishes and intentions. Because of the nature of Chinese government, stressing as it did the application of precedents and principles, rather than the perfunctory observance of detailed regulations, this sharing of power was of great significance. It was this local exercise of judgment which guarded Chinese society and its traditions; this gave the Ming period, despite its harshness, a continuity with earlier and later periods. Confucian humanism, to use but one example, continued to dominate Chinese life even if it did not transform the actions of the emperor in his court. In the comparative study of power systems, recognition of this aspect of Chinese government must give a special character to the Chinese example.

A final doubt about Professor Wittfogel's concept of terror, while mentioned above, must now be expressed more fully. Was terror in truth "essential for maintaining the ruler's rationality optimum", i. e. for making hydraulic society work? There are doubts of two kinds: 1) Did it always exist, if not in the spectacular fashion seen in the Ming period, then in what Wittfogel calls the institutionally more important . . . "innumerable acts of terror that were perpetrated as a matter of routine and within the flexible frame of despotic laws", (OD, page 143). And, 2) even when ruthless terror did exist, as in much of the Ming dynasty, did it in fact perform a necessary function? Even if designed to increase the effectiveness of government, did it in fact do so? Is it to be explained as necessary and inevitable, or as historically fortuitous and only incidentally augmenting or diminishing the effectiveness of government? An implicitly negative answer to these questions is clear in all of the foregoing discussion.

Evidence that any considerable period of heightened despotism existed without such terror and intimidation would suffice to substantiate all of the negative answers. The Sung period provides the best evidence. In ideology and institutions the Sung period was one of heightened despotism, clearly anticipating the final development achieved immediately thereafter in the Yüan and Ming periods. Yet the Sung is a period in which there is no evidence either of spectacular outbursts to intimidate populace and officialdom, or of the "innumerable acts of terror perpetrated as a matter of routine". The Sung founder brought all of China under his rule by compromise and patient waiting, utilizing his military force less than any founder of a dynasty in Chinese history. He took the military commands of his companions-at-arms away from them, to be sure, but not by liquidating them. Instead of terrorizing them, he bought them off with generous rewards, but pulled their teeth just as effectively, none the less. In the regular administration of justice, corporal punishment was practiced with extreme infrequency; even notorious traitors were not punished, because of regulations against harshness in vindicating the laws. The founder laid down a special commandment for his successors forbidding them from executing high officials for any crime, and once when a later emperor suggested that certain treacherous officials should be executed, a leading official remonstrated: "In the Three Dynasties of antiquity there were such

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There was uncertainty in the careers of officials in the Sung period, and this made difficulties and even suffering for them, but this was a result of the strong factionalism among officials and the lack of career stability which the rise and fall of factions from control of the civil bureaucracy tended to produce. There is visible no suggestion of the resort to terror on the part of the government. Terror as "the inevitable consequence of the rulers' resolve to uphold their own and not the people's rationality optimum" (OD, page 137) simply is not to be found in the Sung period, despite the strong powers which the emperors took upon themselves.

In earlier Chinese history the case may be less clear. But it is certain that the temporary terror induced by tyrants like Ts'ao Ts'ao (3rd century A.D.) and Sui Yang-ti (early 7th century A.D.) was comparable to the individual cases of tyranny of unrestrained or mad rulers anywhere in world history. It was not institutionalized terror, and it was in no sense of a kind peculiar to hydraulic society or characteristic of the age in which it occurred.

Terror functioned by design in the Ming Period, to be sure, but then it was introduced because of the peculiar and largely fortuitous situation that has been described above. That it perpetuated itself in the Ming is largely the result of accident also. The second emperor, the founder's grandson, was a gentle and learned young man strongly under the influence of certain Confucian scholars who not only would end the terror, but who were trying to turn back the clock and destroy the overcentralization of authority in favor of a return to feudal conditions as described in antique texts. The success of this emperor and this group of anti-authoritarian political thinkers might have had curious consequences for Chinese history. But after less than three years, another son of the founder, the uncle of the reigning emperor, usurped the throne, and not only permitted no single measure of the second emperor's to stand, but also permitted no accounts of the reign to exist. The usurper was a strong and violent man like his father, and he immediately went back to the methods and the spirit of the first reign. He also permitted the eunuch system to develop into an important arm of the administration, paving the way for future disaster when eunuchs would become in effect prime ministers. If there had been any hope that the Ming terror would cease with Chu Yüan-chang's death, that hope died with the Yung-lo usurpation. But this too was an unforeseeable accident of history, and not the inevitable consequence of forces necessarily present in hydraulic society. Terror perpetuated itself in the Ming dynasty in part

⁴¹ Cited in CHANG Meng-lun: *Sung-tai hsing-wang shih*, Shanghai, 1948, page 12. The theme of this rather old-fashioned and non-analytical little book on Sung history is that the generosity and gentleness of the refined Sung age actually contributed to its eventual downfall.

because of the strains upon the ruler in ruling so completely without the help of chief-ministers representing the civil bureaucracy, and partly because of the inviolability of the family law laid down by Chu Yüan-chang, binding his descendants to adherence to his system. Wu Han feels that the terror and intimidation of the Ming period was largely peculiar to that dynasty⁴². The only other dynasty which may be considered to have had the element of terror as a regular and functionally-conceived component of government is the Ch'ing. The Ch'ing dynasty inherited many features of Ming rule, including the main features of its administrative system intact. And though it was a psychologically insecure alien dynasty, and was willing to use force to suppress opposition to itself, the amount of terror in government sharply diminished, and what of it remained was exercised in far less spectacular fashion. Goodrich describes the extensive inquisition of the Ch'ien-lung period as aimed mainly at stamping out sedition, and he probably underestimates in saying that the Ch'ien-lung Emperor did not wish to displease his subjects unduly by it, so moderated its workings⁴³. At any rate, it is obvious that the nature of the inquisition under Ch'ien-lung was quite different from the appearance of the literary inquisition of Chu Yüan-chang.

Ch'ien Mu sees the literary inquisition of the Ch'ing as a much more ruthless intimidation of the scholar-gentry class than would I, particularly from the Yung-cheng reign (1723—1736) onward, but he too notes the special conquest-dynasty situation, making naturally for a greater need to intimidate the Chinese population. He notes also that the court formalities still further humbled the official and exalted the ruler, even beyond those of the Ming, but this might be questioned. Despite prostration and the custom of addressing the emperor while kneeling at the Ch'ing court, there was an air of dignity at the Ch'ing court that the Ming court, especially under Chu Yüan-chang, may have lacked. The Ch'ing formalities can be interpreted as courtesies that gave dignity to all participants, emperor and official alike. We read of none of the humiliating display of unpredictable temper, and the lack of decorum and reasonable attitudes, at the Ch'ing court. In other ways, however, the Ch'ing dynasty carried on many of the harsh practices of the Ming, such as cruel forms of punishment and extra-legal punishment for persons guilty of offenses at court, but they did not assume great prominence⁴⁴. None the less a certain element of terror in Ch'ing government cannot be discounted, and the Ch'ing appears to constitute a borderline case, with regard to the role and the scope of such terror.

⁴² Wu Han: "Ming-tai ching-nan chih i yü kuo-tu pei-ch'ien", *CHHP* 10, 4, Oct. 1935, pp. 917—939, especially page 933.

⁴³ L. C. GOODRICH: *The Literary Inquisition of the Ch'ien-lung Period*, Baltimore, 1935, page 42.

⁴⁴ CH'EN Mu, *Kuo-shih ta-kang*, pp. 598—599, and p. 606. CH'EN displays a strong animus toward the Ch'ing conquerors of China, and his description of Ch'ing viciousness may be out of proportion. Ku Chieh-kang's view of the Ch'ing inquisition (op. cit., note 32 above) also reflects the same animus, and should be challenged as a considered historical judgment.

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In summary, then, terror did not always exist in Chinese government of the imperial period. It became an institutionalized feature only in the Ming dynasty, thus did not become a feature of Chinese government until well after the achievement of heightened despotism in the Sung. When it appeared and became fixed, it was for reasons that cannot be explained in abstract generalizations or in terms of inevitable developments within the socio-economic order; rather, an explanation demands reference to highly accidental facts such as personalities and fortuitous events. Nor, I think, was terror necessary even when it existed, even though Chu Yüan-chang who did the most to bring it into existence probably thought of it as a necessary part of government — though perhaps even he thought of it as necessary only for a difficult period of transition and reconstruction. The Sung period seems to be adequate proof that a highly authoritarian despotism can maintain itself for centuries without terror or intimidation. But once terror is established, as in the early Ming, it is difficult to do away with. To most holders of power, it comes to be seen as an indispensable prop, and one that they often are unwilling to forego. Especially when a strong founder has justified it and given precedent for its use, and successfully resisted the pressure against it, weaker successors are glad to retain it. But that is not to say that terror was inevitable, or necessary, and without debating the point, it might also be doubted that terror was productive or useful in the last analysis. Nor can I agree with Professor Wittfogel that the Chinese critics of hydraulic society traditionally have not thought about making fundamental changes in it. Wittfogel says that they . . . "have in almost every case complained only of the misdeeds of individuals or the evils of specific governments acts . . . these critics aim ultimately at regenerating a system of total power, whose fundamental desirability they do not doubt." (OD, page 134). To discuss this would open a new aspect of the problem and it would lead to further criticism of Professor Wittfogel's treatment of Chinese thought, for it ignores much of the political thought of all ages, and particularly that of the early Ming, and of the important thinkers of the 17th century whose thought was a direct product of their reflections on the evils of Ming despotism.

When applied directly to later Chinese imperial history, there are numerous difficulties with this portion of Professor Wittfogel's work describing total power and total terror. This may not affect the many valuable aspects of his vast conceptualization of Oriental society, but it does suggest that some of his key generalizations are seriously to be questioned.