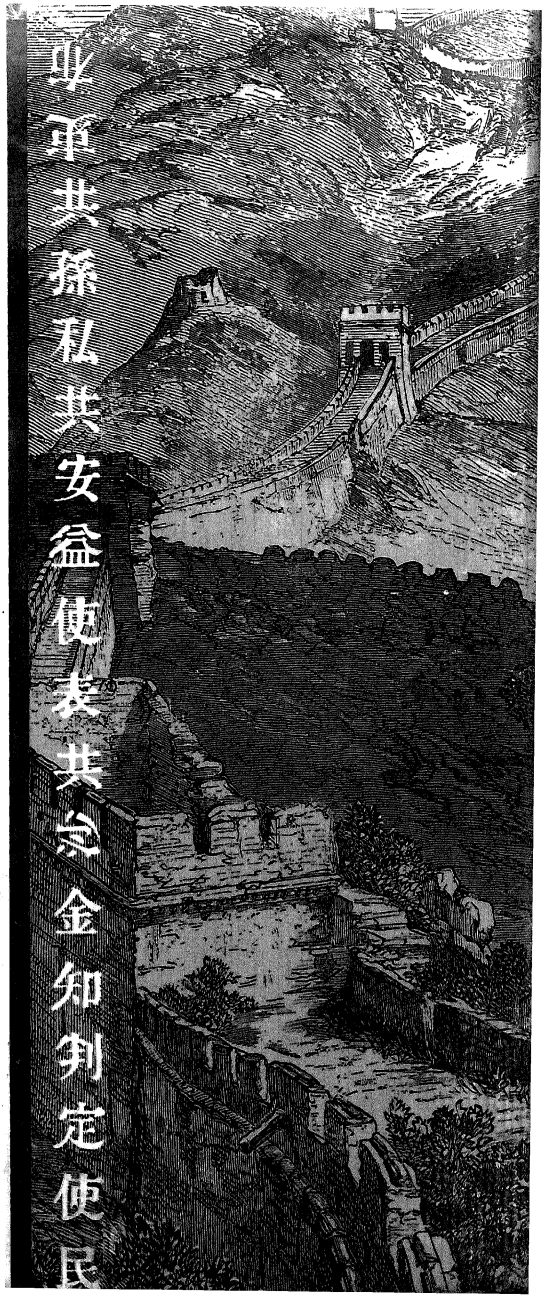
Leonard Cottrell

The TIGER of CH'IN

The dramatic emergence of China as a nation



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In the third century B.C., Shih Huang Ti, the "Tiger of Ch'in," forged the warring states of China into a united kingdom and proclaimed himself the "First Emperor" of the realm. Legend has it that his whip could halt the Yellow River and that his horse could run a thousand miles a day. Colorful, ruthless, a man of violence and vanity, as well as a brilliant administrator, he climaxed his reign with one of the mightiest engineering feats of ancient times: the Great Wall of China.

This is the amazing but little-known story of a great warlord, who adorned the capital city of his empire with 270 palaces, many of them replicas of those in feudal states he had captured. It is a tale filled with absorbing accounts of court

(Continued on back flap)

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The Tiger of Ch'in

By the same author

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THE LOST PHARAOHS
LIFE UNDER THE PHARAOHS
WONDERS OF THE WORLD
THE BULL OF MINOS
LOST CITIES
THE MOUNTAINS OF PHARAOH

The Tiger of Ch'in

The Dramatic Emergence of China as a Nation

by Leonard Cottrell

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To Rita

in appreciation
of her loyalty and hard work

Introduction

To anyone who has studied the civilizations of Egypt, Crete, and Mesopotamia, the civilization of China—which developed independently of all these—is bound to exercise a strong attraction. There are so many points of similarity between the riverine cultures of the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, and the Yellow River; and yet, whereas most educated Americans or Europeans can assimilate the first two of these and relate them to their own culture, that of China seems different, remote, "foreign."

This may be due to several factors. (1) The civilizations of ancient Egypt, Crete, Sumer, and Babylon perished so long ago that we can view them "in the round" from a distance, whereas that of China is still very much with us; it is the longest-lived civilization in the world. (2) Ancient Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, and pre-Hellenic Greece are still tenuously linked with our Western culture. The Old Testament has familiarized us with the Pharaohs, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, and in Homer we can read about the "bronze-clad Achaeans" and King Minos of Crete. But how many of us have read the *Shih Chi*? (3) We usually think of China in terms of the later dynasties, such as those of T'ang, Sung, Ming, and the Manchus—rulers who governed during a period which stretches from the European Middle Ages down to the present century. This is rather like thinking of European history as beginning with Charlemagne, and completely ignoring the civilizations of Rome, Greece, and the ancient Near East. Yet when the Emperor Hsuan-tung came to the throne in A.D. 712—thirty years before the birth of Charlemagne—he could look back at a civilization which had existed for two thousand years.

I am not denying the fascination of the later, more familiar period of Chinese history, but I am more interested in how Chinese civilization began, in seeing how it developed, and in comparing

it with the European and Western Asian cultures with which I am more familiar. This book is an attempt to describe my impressions of a journey through time, from the Old Stone Age down to the unification of China under the Emperor Shih Huang Ti, who is sometimes known as the "Tiger of Ch'in." The "historical" period of which I write covers a time span equal to that which separates the Mycenean Greeks of 1500 B.C. from the Roman Republic of 200 B.C. It is, of course, familiar territory to Sinologists, who will find nothing new in this work. But I hope that some of it may be new, and interesting, to others like myself, to whom ancient China has been hitherto little known.

To me, the journey has been all-absorbing. It began as a gentle amble over a dead land in which tools, pottery, and other artifacts enabled one to form a generalized picture of "peoples" rather than of people. Then, as I proceeded, buildings began to appear, and men and women who could speak and write. Soon these voices, speaking through the histories, legends, poems, and songs of China, became more and more insistent. In the course of the journey, I saw scenes of delicate beauty, deep pathos, and stomach-retching horror; I met people so like ourselves that, with a change of names, they could be our own statesmen and politicians, our own neighbors, husbands, wives, children. The problems which face us in the mid-twentieth century, whether political, military, psychological, or emotional, are similar to those which the ancient Chinese faced more than two thousand years ago. In the end, I was completely caught up in a drama of personalities, and such figures as Shih Huang Ti, Li Ssu, Chao Kao and Liu Pang seemed, for the moment, more real than the people I met in my daily life or read about in the newspapers. I shall never again think of ancient China as alien or "foreign"; it is my sincere hope that readers of this book will share the same experience.

LEONARD COTTRELL

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Nr. Kendal, Westmorland.

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To the southeast—three thousand leagues—
The Yuan and Hsiang form into a mighty lake.
Above the lake are deep mountain valleys,
And men dwelling whose hearts are without guile.
Gay like children, they swarm to the tops of trees;
And run to the water to catch bream and trout.
Their pleasures are the same as those of beasts and birds;
They put no restraint either on body or mind.
Far I have wandered throughout the Nine Lands;
Wherever I went such manners had disappeared.
I find myself standing and wondering, perplexed,
Whether Saints and Sages have really done us good.

—YUAN CHIEH (A.D. 723–772),[1]

[1] From *Chinese Poems,* by Arthur Waley. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1946

1

The Artist-Assassin

Two thousand two hundred years ago Rome was just emerging, victorious, from the First Punic War; Britain was a semibarbarous island on the outer fringe of Europe; Alexander the Great had been dead for eighty years, though the Greek states carved out of his former Empire still survived, from the Nile to the Euphrates. Beyond the easternmost frontier of that Empire lay lands of which the Europeans knew hardly anything: India, Tibet, Mongolia, and beyond them the land of a people whom the Romans called the Seres. This last name referred to the silk fabrics which came from the land which we now call China. Across the Syrian desert the slow-moving caravans brought to the Mediterranean world the exotic products of that far-off land of which no European had any direct knowledge. Even today, though the airplane has abolished distance and one can fly from London to Peking in little more than a day, the early history of China is still mysterious, except to the Oriental scholar. In the time of which we are speaking, the land of the silkworm seemed as remote from Europe and the Mediterranean as Mars does from us.

At that time, twenty-two centuries ago, a gentleman named Ching K'o was getting scandalously drunk in the market place of the capital of Yen, a feudal state in northwest China which owed

nominal allegiance to the Son of Heaven (*i.e.*, the emperor) though, in fact, there was no unified Chinese state. Ching K'o was also known by the title of Master Ching.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien, an ancient Chinese historian, tells us:

> Master Ching liked to read books and to handle the sword. Through his arts, he gained an audience with Prince Yuan of Wei (251–230 B.C.), but Prince Yuan would not employ him. Later on, the [state of Ch'in] attacked [the state of] Wei, established the commandery of Tung, and moved a relative of Prince Yuan to Yeh-wang [the capital].[1]

Ssu-ma Ch'ien was writing for an audience who understood and accepted the facts of ancient Chinese history, just as we understand and accept the facts of early European history. But, for us, his facts need a little interpretation. At this period there existed in what is now modern China a large number of semi-independent states, of which Yen was one and Wei and Ch'in were others. Each was ruled by a feudal lord (though he might call himself a king), together with a hereditary ruling caste. Prince Yuan of Wei was one such; he had been evicted from his hereditary domain by another powerful ruler, the king of Ch'in. Ching K'o, or "Master Ching," appears to have been one of those wandering scholars, a member of the literati, whom the rulers of these ancient feudal states employed as advisers and ministers. In this case Ching K'o, or "Master Ching," failed to obtain employment, perhaps because of his habit of getting drunk and consorting with musicians and other rascals.

[1] The quotations from Ssu-ma Ch'ien in this chapter are reprinted from Derk Bodde's *Statesman, Patriot, and General,* published by the American Oriental Society, New Haven, Connecticut, 1940.

> Yet [writes Ssu-ma Ch'ien], though Ching K'o mixed with drunkards, he was a serious man who loved books, and the persons with whom he associated during his travels among the feudal lords were all of superior worth and excellence. When he came to Yen, a Mr. T'ien Kuang, who was a retired gentleman in Yen, also received him well, and, knowing that he was not an ordinary man, had him live with him for some time. It was just at this period that Tan, crown prince of Yen, [who] had been a hostage in Ch'in, returned in flight to Yen.

Among this welter of names, that of Ch'in is important. Ch'in was a state in northwest China which had shown itself to be more efficient, ruthless, and aggressive than any of its neighbor states. Ch'in had already begun a career of conquest and annexation, in the course of which Tan, the crown prince of Yen, had been a sufferer. At that time Ch'in was ruled by a king named Cheng. Later this same king was to become known as Shih Huang Ti, and, in history, as "The Tiger of Ch'in."

> Crown Prince Tan of Yen had at one time been a hostage in Chao [another state] and Cheng, the king of Ch'in, had been born in Chao. In his youth, [Cheng] had been friendly with Tan, but when Cheng became king of Ch'in and Tan was a hostage of Ch'in, the king of Ch'in did not treat Crown Prince Tan of Yen well. Therefore, Tan became angry and fled back [to Yen]. On his return, he looked for someone who would take vengeance on the king of Ch'in, but his state was small and its power inadequate.

Let us leave the Crown Prince Tan with his worries, for the moment, and take a closer look at Ching K'o (or Master Ching), the wandering scholar. Ssu-ma Ch'ien continues:

> On arriving in Yen, Ching K'o became fond of a certain "dog butcher" [*i.e.*, a low person] of Yen and of Kao Chien-li, who was an excellent lute-player. Ching K'o liked wine, and every day he drank with the dog butcher and with Kao Chien-li in the market place . . . becoming drunk before he departed. While Kao Chien-li strummed his lute, Ching K'o would sing and make merry with him in the midst of the market place. Afterwards, they would weep together, as if there were no one around them.

Here, then, is the picture: the ancient Chinese state of Yen, one of many such states, with a civilization already more than a thousand years old; with an economy based on intensive agriculture; and with terraces of yellow earth growing millet among a network of glittering irrigation canals. Within the state lies the walled, fortified capital city of Yen with its palaces and temples and gardens, and with an aristocratic court abiding by an elaborate ceremonial based on the precepts of Confucius and Lao-tse. East, west, and south there are other, similar states, each with its capital ruled by a king and a feudal aristocracy. To the northwest lies the powerful, aggressive state of Ch'in, which has already begun the conquest of its neighboring kingdoms. And, in the innermost chambers of the royal palace of Yen, the crown prince sits frowning in council, seeking a way of revenging himself against the king of Ch'in, who has dishonored him.

> Later on [the state of] Ch'in was constantly sending forth its soldiers east of the mountains to attack Ch'i, Ch'u, and the three Chin. Gradually, it made encroaches upon the feudal lords, even unto Yen. The lords and ministers of Yen all feared that disaster would befall it, and Crown Prince Tan, being worried, asked his tutor, Chu Wu, about the matter.

> Chu Wu said, "The territory of Ch'in spreads through the world, and it has intimidated the houses of Han, Wei, and Chao. In the north, it possesses the fortifications of Kan-ch'uan and Ku-k'on. In the south, it has the irrigation of the Ching and the Wei. It has seized for itself the riches of Pa and Han. On its right are the mountains of Lung and Shu, and on its left are the defiles of Kuan and Hsiao. Its people are numerous and its gentry are dangerous. . . . Once it has the idea of sallying forth . . . south of the Great Wall[2] and north of the I river, there can be no security. How, with the hatred that comes of oppression, can you wish to oppose it?"
>
> "Well, then," said Tan, "what is to be done?"

But the tutor Chu Wu could not give a satisfactory answer.

After some period of time had elapsed, Fan Yu-ch'i, a Ch'in general who had fallen into disgrace with the king of Ch'in, fled as a fugitive to Yen, where the crown prince received and sheltered him. The Grand Tutor remonstrated with Tan, saying,

> "You cannot do this. When, with all his harshness, the king of Ch'in heaps up hatred against Yen, it is enough to chill one's heart. How much more so when he hears of the whereabouts of General Fan! This is called throwing meat in the path of a hungry tiger. The [resulting] disaster is inescapable."

When he was once again asked for his advice, the Grand Tutor suggested that Tan should hand over General Fan to the Huns, the wild frontier tribes who would certainly put him to death in a very unpleasant manner. This, Chu Wu said, would please the king of Ch'in and probably avert, or at least delay, invasion. But the crown prince refused. He said:

[2] Not *the* Great Wall, which had not yet been built.

"General Fan was in great straits in the world when he gave himself to me, and never, to the end of my life, could I, because of pressure from a powerful Ch'in, cast aside the bonds of pity and compassion and put him away among the Huns. [If I did such a thing], it would certainly be time for me to die. Let the Grand Tutor reconsider the matter."

The Grand Tutor did reconsider, but he could only produce a few sonorous truisms, such as "to bind oneself in lasting bonds to a single man, without regard for the great harm therefrom to the nation—such is what is called encouraging enmities and inviting disaster. . . . What is there then to talk about?"

Before rising from his mat, Chu Wu made one final suggestion, that the crown prince should consult a Mr. T'ien Kuang, "who is a man of deep wisdom and great bravery. You can plan with him." So, after making obeisance to his obstinate ruler, Chu Wu withdrew and disappeared from the scene.

Meanwhile Master Ching was still getting drunk in the market place, and singing songs with the "dog butcher," while Kao Chien-li strummed his lute. Mr. T'ien Kuang, who, as we have seen, knew Master Ching, is unlikely to have been present on these occasions, since he was an elderly gentleman of great dignity. It was this Mr. T'ien Kuang who was summoned to appear before the crown prince:

The crown prince welcomed him, led him inside, knelt, and dusted off the mat [for him to sit on].

T'ien Kuang sat down and settled himself [on the mat], and there was nobody around them.

The crown prince moved from his mat [toward his visitor] and requested him [to speak], saying, "Yen and Ch'in cannot

both stand. I should like you, sir, to put your mind on this fact."

Mr. T'ien Kuang pleaded that he was too old to give advice to his ruler. "The crown prince," he said, "has heard [falsely] that I am in my prime, and does not know that I have already lost my vitality. Nevertheless, I dare not on that account slight affairs of state. A good person who could be employed would be Master Ching."

The crown prince said, "I should like, through you, to make the acquaintance of Master Ching. Can it be done?"

T'ien Kuang replied, "I respectfully obey." He then arose and departed. The crown prince escorted him to the gate, and warned him, saying, "What I have told you and what you have said are important state matters. I wish you, sir, not to discuss them."

T'ien Kuang nodded and smiled, saying, "I obey."

Up to this point, though the phraseology and ceremonial are exotic, the incidents described could well have taken place in any medieval court in Europe. What follows could not. The Crown Prince Tan, having obtained an assurance from the old gentleman, T'ien Kuang, that he would introduce him to Master Ching, gives him a kindly warning not to divulge what they have been discussing. So T'ien Kuang promptly goes back to his home and summons Master Ching.

"I have heard," he told his friend, "that an old man, when he acts, does not cause people to doubt him. [But] now the crown prince has said to me, 'What we have spoken about are important state matters. I wish you, sir, not to disclose them.'

> This means that the crown prince doubts me. One who acts so as to make people doubt him is not an upright gentleman. . . . I want you to go quickly to the crown prince and tell him that I have already died, so as to show him that I have not spoken." With this, he cut his throat and died.

Ching K'o (Master Ching) then went to see the crown prince, and informed him of what had happened. Prince Tan was very grieved, and went to inspect the corpse.

> The crown prince bowed twice, knelt, moved about on his knees, and wept. Some moments passed, and then he said, "The reason why I warned Mr. T'ien not to speak was because I wished to bring the plans of an important matter to fruition. But now Mr. T'ien has used death to show that he did not speak. Alas! What intent was it of mine?"

The proprieties having been observed, the crown prince then opened his mind to Ching K'o. He told him of that which he had already informed his tutor and T'ien Kuang concerning the imminent threat of invasion by the state of Ch'in:

> "Ch'in has an avaricious heart, and its desires are insatiable. It will remain unsatisfied until it has made subject the kings of all the lands in the world within the seas. . . . Chao cannot withstand Ch'in and must become its vassal. If it becomes its vassal, disaster will then overtake [the state of] Yen. Yen is small and weak, and has often suffered from war. Were I now to plan to conscript the entire country, [the result] would be insufficient to oppose Ch'in."

The two sat opposite each other on the ceremonial mat, the crown prince of Yen and the wayward artist, the music-loving,

wine-loving, Ching K'o, who "liked to read books and to handle the sword." The historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien is careful to point out, however, that Ching K'o was a man of peace:

> Once, when Ching K'o was traveling through Yu-ts'e, he held a conversation with one Ko Nieh about swords. Ko Nieh became angry and gave him a fierce look, and Ching K'o went away. . . . [However, Ko Nieh] sent a messenger . . . but Ching K'o had then already harnessed his horse and departed from Yu-ts'e. The messenger returned and reported this. Ko Nieh said, "He has indeed gone. I have given him a fierce look and frightened him. . . ."

It was to this mild, pacific young man that the crown prince confided a desperate plan. Since there was no hope of meeting the state of Ch'in in arms, the only hope for Yen and the other weak feudal states was to assassinate the king of Ch'in. But how could this be achieved? Tan revealed his scheme:

> "My secret plan would be actually to secure one of the world's bravest men and send him to Ch'in, where he would attract the king of Ch'in's cupidity by [the promise of] great profit. With his strength, he would certainly obtain for us what we desire. If he could actually succeed in carrying off the king of Ch'in and force him to return all the territory of the feudal lords that has been invaded . . . it would be splendid. But if this were not possible, he could use the opportunity to stab and kill him. . . ."

There was a long silence. Then Ching K'o answered:

> "This is an important state matter. Your servant is an inferior nag, and fears that his capacities are inadequate for the trust."

> The crown prince bowed before him and pressed him not to give up [the trust], after which he finally consented.

It was an extraordinary situation. Clearly, the crown prince was not in a position to order Ching K'o to undertake this suicidal mission, for he found himself forced to resort to bribery. On receiving Ching K'o's reluctant consent, he immediately loaded that one with honors and privileges, making him a high dignitary and "lodging him in a superior house. Every day the crown prince went to his door . . . giving him rare objects, at intervals bringing him carriages, horses, and beautiful women, and freely granting Ching K'o whatever he desired, so as to satisfy his inclinations."

Even more remarkable is the manner in which the characters of the two protagonists emerge from Ssu-ma Ch'ien's terse narrative; the crown prince, honorable and kind (as is evident from his treatment of General Fan), but probably not highly intelligent; and Ching K'o, thoughtful, perhaps cynical, certainly realistic, and fully aware of the risk he has agreed to take. One sees him wandering in the flower-scented gardens and musing among his concubines on how best to carry out the crown prince's plan. Eventually he goes to Prince Tan with a suggestion. He points out that the king of Ch'in has offered a reward of "one thousand catties of gold and a city of ten thousand families" for the capture of General Fan. "Now," says Ching K'o, "if we could actually get hold of the head of General Fan and present it to the king of Ch'in, together with a map of [the province of] Tu-k'ang in Yen, then the king of Ch'in would certainly be pleased to see your servant, who would thus have an opportunity of avenging the crown prince."

But the prince gave exactly the same reply which he had given

to the Grand Tutor when that one had made a similar suggestion. "General Fan came to me in poverty and distress," said the prince. "I could not permit myself, for my own selfish aim, to violate a higher ideal. I should like you, sir, to reconsider the matter."

Ching K'o did reconsider it, and he made his own plan, without revealing it to the crown prince. He sought an interview with the exiled general. Ching K'o well knew that there would be no hope of getting into the actual presence of the formidable king of Ch'in unless he carried with him credentials of such weight and importance as to waive considerations of security. The idea of the map was good; it meant that the prince of Yen was prepared to cede the territory of Tu-k'ang to Ch'in. But this in itself was not enough. If, in addition, he could present the king with the severed head of his defecting general, then there was a reasonable chance of getting into the actual presence of the Son of Heaven.

Ching K'o's psychological preparation of the general was ruthless. He began by informing him that "Ch'in's treatment of you cannot be said to be a generous one. Your father, mother, and family have all been executed, and now I hear that a reward of one thousand catties of gold and a city of ten thousand families have been offered for your head. What are you going to do?"

> Fan Yu-ch'i looked up to heaven, heaved a great sigh, shed some tears, and said, "Each [day] I think about this and suffer constantly unto my very bones and marrow. But whatever plan I consider, I know not where it will lead me."

Ching K'o's reply was simple. "I have here a single word," he said, "which can free the state of Yen from its tribulation and avenge you of your hatred. How are you toward it?" Fan Yu-ch'i came forward and asked, "What is it?"

> Ching K'o replied, "I should like to have your head to present to the king of Ch'in. Then the king of Ch'in would be delighted to see me. With my left hand I should seize his sleeve, and with my right I should stab his breast. . . ."

Then follows a passage which bears comparison with Homer. General Fan, defeated, exiled, bereft of parents, wife, family, and friends, has nothing left but a bitter determination to be avenged upon his oppressors. Baring his arm, he seizes Ching K'o's wrist and draws nearer to him.

> "Day and night," he said, "I have been grinding my teeth and beating my breast on this account. But now I have heard my instructions." And with this he cut his throat.

> Naturally the crown prince was grieved by this second tragedy.

> But the deed was already accomplished, and there was nothing to be done, so he placed the head of Fan Yu-ch'i in a container and closed it. After this, the crown prince set about to look for one of the world's sharpest daggers, and [he] obtained one belonging to a man of Chao, Hsu Fu-jen.

Next he set about finding an accomplice for Ching K'o, presumably in the belief that if his principal agent failed to kill the king of Ch'in, his companion might achieve it. Ssu-ma Ch'ien is again careful to delineate the character of the crown prince's two agents. Having emphasized Ching K'o's mildness, he tells us that the accomplice, the youth Ch'in Wu-yang was a "bravo." This is Mr. Derk Bodde's translation of the original Chinese word, which might perhaps be interpreted in modern teen-age terms as

a "tough guy." Ch'in Wu-yang, before he was thirteen years of age, had already killed a man "so that no man dared to eye him contrarily." But, as we shall see, when the two reached the presence of the Son of Heaven, it was the tough Ch'in Wu-yang, and not Ching K'o, who lost his nerve.

The success of the plan depended on three main factors: (1) that the would-be assassins should be admitted to the actual presence of the king; (2) that the dagger should be concealed in the map case (since, obviously, their clothes would be searched for hidden weapons); and (3) that the courtiers surrounding the king would not carry weapons. Carrying weapons was, in reality, forbidden to courtiers, and the royal guard in the lower part of the audience hall would be too distant from the scene of the murder to intervene before it was too late. But Ching K'o's chances of survival were infinitesimal, and thus it was not at all surprising that this music-loving artist and litterateur continued to dally with the court ladies of Yen while his master fumed at the delay.

> The crown prince felt that [Ching K'o] was procrastinating, and suspected that he regretted [his decision], so he again requested him, saying, "The day is already done, and what are your intentions? I beg to be allowed to send Ch'in Wu-yang in advance."

This request Ching K'o rejected, remarking that, "This one who will go, never to return, is a mere boy. And he will be entering an immeasurably powerful Ch'in, carrying only a single dagger. I have delayed in order to await my visitor and be with him. But now that you say I am procrastinating, I beg to bid farewell."

Political assassination is supposed to be repugnant to Western

minds, but how many of us have secretly longed for some brave and desperate man to "liquidate" a Hitler, a Mussolini, or a Stalin? If we are prepared to "clear our minds of cant," there is an aura of the noblest heroism in the attempt by Ching K'o to save his country by striking at the heart of her enemy's power. Ssu-ma Ch'ien describes how the high officials of Yen accompanied the two would-be assassins on the road, the entire procession wearing white, which was the funeral color of ancient China:

> The crown prince and those of his pensioners who knew about the affair all [put on] white clothes and caps, so as to see him off as far as the bank of the river I. Having offered a sacrifice to the god of the roads [*i.e.*, Tsu], they took [to] the highway. While Kao Chien-li played the lute, Ching K'o joined with him in a song in the tone of *pien-chih* [corresponding to our F-sharp], and all the gentlemen shed tears. . . .
>
> Once more, moving forward, he sang a song which said:
>
> The wind sighs softly,
> On the river I 'tis cold;
> Once our young hero has gone,
> He will never return.

Then Ching K'o's friend Kao Chien-li retuned his lute and played an air in a more martial key, that of *Yu* (corresponding to our A), whereupon "all the gentlemen assumed a stern gaze and their hair bristled up against their caps. At this point Ching K'o entered his carriage and departed; until the end, he did not look back."

Then, presumably, the Crown Prince Tan returned to his

pleasant place and awaited news of the success or failure of the mission.

After a long and difficult journey, Ching K'o and his young accomplice arrived at the capital of the state of Ch'in and sought audience with its king. Ching K'o undoubtedly used bribery, since we are told that a certain Meng Chin, a high official of the king of Ch'in, was induced to present to his royal master a petition on behalf of the crown prince of Yen, couched in suitably humble terms:

> "Verily the king of Yen trembles with terror before the majesty of the Great King," said Meng. "He dares not raise soldiers to oppose your military officers, but wishes, [offering] his kingdom, to become your inner vassal; to set an example to the other feudal lords; to send in tribute like one of your own commanderies or prefectures; and so be allowed to sacrifice to and preserve the temple of his ancestor kings. Being fearful, he does not present himself, but has cut off the head of Fan Yu-ch'i and placed it in a closed box, together with a map of [the territory of] Tu-k'ang in Yen, which he respectfully presents."

The king of Ch'in was so delighted by this apparent act of surrender that he commanded Meng to bring the two emissaries of the crown prince of Yen before him in order to present the head of General Fan, and the map, in person. So far the plot had worked, and Ching K'o, bearing the head, and his accomplice Ch'in Wu-yang, with the map in its case, duly presented themselves at the royal palace. But once inside the audience chamber, where the great king sat with his nobles, Ch'in Wu-yang, the "tough guy" who, at the age of thirteen, had already slain a man,

went pale, and might have given away the whole scheme. Ssu-ma Ch'ien writes:

> When they came to the steps of the throne, Ch'in Wu-yang changed color and shook with fear. The courtiers wondered at this. Ching K'o looked at him with a smile and went forward to excuse him, saying "He is a common man of the northern barbarians, and [he] has never seen the Son of Heaven. Therefore he shakes with fear. May it please the Great King to excuse him for a little and allow me, his humble emissary, to come forward?"

So Ching K'o, still urbanely smiling, approached the throne of the Son of Heaven, carrying the map case (the container with the head of General Fan having already been presented). Then, the Chinese historian tells us, "Ching K'o . . . brought the map and presented it. The king of Ch'in took out the map, and, when it was entirely [exposed], the dagger appeared. [At this moment, Ching K'o] seized the sleeve of the king of Ch'in with his left hand, while with his right hand he grasped the dagger and struck at him."

Now it is clear that Ching K'o was no bungling amateur. Ssu-ma Ch'ien has already assured us that "Master Ching liked to read books and handle the sword" and that he had "held a conversation with one Ko Nieh about swords." His plan was sound: to grasp the sleeve of the king with his left hand and to strike with his right hand. But something went wrong. The king, in terror, leaped backward, and his sleeve tore off in Ching K'o's hand. However, there was still time. The unarmed courtiers could do nothing; the Royal Guard, in the lower part of the hall, awaited call, but the sudden attack had taken the courtiers off their guard,

and thus no one gave the alarm. Ching K'o pursued the terror-stricken king of Ch'in around the pillars of the audience hall, while the king struggled to draw his sword from its sheath. But, hampered by his robes and by the fact that his long sword hung vertically at his side, he could at first do nothing to defend himself:

> At this moment an attendant physician, Hsia Wu-chü, struck Ching K'o a blow with his bag of medicine, which he was to have presented [to the king]. The king of Ch'in was running round and round the pillar and had completely lost his wits, so that he did not know what he was doing. The bystanders then cried out, "Put your sword behind you, King!" [The king] did so and thus [had room] to pull it out. He struck Ching K'o with it and cut his left thigh. Ching K'o, being disabled, then raised his dagger and hurled it at the king of Ch'in. It missed him and hit a bronze pillar. The king of Ch'in struck at Ching K'o repeatedly so that the latter received eight wounds.
>
> [Ching] K'o realized that his attempt had failed. He leaned against the pillar and laughed; then, squatting down, he cursed the king, saying, "The reason my attempt did not succeed was that I wished to carry him off alive. [Someone else] must be found [to carry out] the pledge to avenge the crown prince." At this point, those about him rushed forward and killed [Ching] K'o.

2

Background to China

Ching K'o's heroic attempt had failed. Within a short time the king of Ch'in had subdued Yen and driven its crown prince into exile. No one remotely connected with the plot escaped punishment. Even Kao Chien-li, the lute-player who used to delight Ching K'o in the market place with his songs, was blinded before being permitted to entertain his new master.

I have chosen to tell this story in my first chapter mainly because it is a moving description of human heroism, superbly told by Ssu-ma Ch'ien; it is a story which will bear comparison with the epic poems of Homer or with such legends of European chivalry as that of Roland at the pass of Ronçesvalles. Yet, at the same time, it indicates some of the difficulties which hinder Western understanding of ancient China. On the one side, there is the elaborate Confucian ritual and ceremonial: "T'ien Kuang sat down and settled himself [on the mat], and there was nobody around them. . . . The crown prince bowed twice, knelt, moved about on his knees, and wept," and so on. This is all part of the conventional European stereotype of China, as is the "face-saving" convention under which T'ien Kuang committed suicide because he believed that the crown prince had betrayed lack of trust in him. Then there is the apparent indifference to human life and

suffering; the ruthless manner in which Ching K'o induces General Fan to commit suicide; and the blinding of the innocent lute-player Kao Chien-li, who, nonetheless continues to entertain his new master.

Against this, one must set the humane attitude of the crown prince toward the exiled General Fan. "General Fan was in great straits in the world when he gave himself to me, and never, to the end of my life, could I, because of pressure from a powerful Ch'in, cast aside the bonds of pity and compassion. . . ." Followers of Jesus Christ, who was born over two hundred years after Crown Prince Tan, could not have behaved with more humanity. Many of them fell, and continue to fall, far below the standards of this obscure Chinese princeling who died twenty-two centuries ago.

The fact is that any Western writer attempting to write a "popular" book on China, and especially ancient China, has to try to remove a mountain of prejudice and misunderstanding. This book will attempt to describe the events leading up to the building of the Great Wall of China; but, to the writer, the famous Great Wall is much more than a physical obstacle. It might almost be regarded as a symbol of the barrier separating East and West. Most Europeans and Americans interested in history and archaeology feel that they have something in common with the ancient civilizations of Europe and the Near East. Greece and Rome are in our flesh and bones, and even Egypt and Babylonia are familiar because of the Bible. But China, and the Far East generally, appear to be different. Ignorance, prejudice, bad films, and bad novels have established in too many minds that depressing stereotype, the "cruel, enigmatic, slant-eyed Oriental." Of course, there is an element of distorted truth in all stereotypes. The Chinese were cruel—almost as cruel as our ancestors were

in the sixteenth century.[1] In addition, they undoubtedly have slanting eyes and a yellow color. As for their "enigmatic" qualities—*i.e.*, patience, self-control, and courtesy, carried to what appear to us extravagant lengths—are these any more than extensions of the code of good manners which civilized Europeans have also tried to follow with greater or lesser success?

In contrast with this stereotype, we have another one which is more common among Americans than among Europeans: the extreme pacifism of the Chinese; the code of Confucius with its emphasis on gentleness, good manners, and "detachment." There is all that delicate Chinese poetry, some of it good, much of it sentimental and effete like some of our own. Then there is the hoary myth of the age of Chinese civilization: "far older than ours." This again is false, if we regard the roots of our own civilization as extending back to ancient Egypt and Babylonia, as we should. In this respect, China is a late starter. When the Shang dynasty began to rule a small part of what is now China, round about 1500 B.C., Egypt had been civilized for at least fifteen hundred years, as had the city states of the Tigris-Euphrates valleys. On the other hand, China has a longer *continuing* tradition of civilization than almost any European or Middle Eastern country—extending back in time almost thirty-five hundred years. The exception is, of course, Egypt, whose ancient culture lasted almost as long.

But does all this matter? I think not. After one of its long periods of somnolence, the Chinese giant has awakened again and is stretching his limbs. This has happened before, on several

[1] Readers whose flesh creeps at the thought of "Chinese tortures" might reflect on the fact that as recently as four hundred years ago, the hangman at Smithfield, London, entertained the crowd by cutting out the living heart of his victim and burning it.

occasions, and I suggest that we shall be in a better position to understand "modern" China (which is really the old, eternal China equipped with Western technology and a Western ideology) if we take the trouble to learn how China became a nation. That is the purpose of this book. Before the building of the Great Wall, there was no China, only an assemblage of warring feudal states. After the conquests of the ruthless, efficient, and not very attractive state of Ch'in, there was little room left for such individual acts of heroism as that of Ching K'o. He and his like became anachronisms, like Hector of Troy, or Roland at Ronçesvalles. But, like them, he has his permanent place among the myths by which we all live. Not that Ching K'o is a romantic fabrication. He was real enough, as, no doubt, were Hector and Roland. They belong to myth only insofar as the gestures they made and the standards by which they lived have little contemporary relevance.[2]

There remains the problem of *names.* Throughout this book there will be names like Ch'in, Wang and Wu, all, alas inevitably, arousing the stereotyped image of the Chinese with his silk robes, his genuflections, and his long, drooping mustache. It cannot be helped. I wish I could rename them Smith and Brown, if only to obliterate the stereotype and enable Western readers to think of these far-off people as likable and unlikable human beings like themselves. But that would be hurtful to any Chinese reader who may chance to pick up this book (and I hope there will be one or two). In any case, the names are beautiful, far more beautiful than most Anglo-Saxon names. All that I can recommend is that whenever my readers see the horrid apparition of the

[2] And yet, having written this, one thinks about the Japanese kamikaze pilots and the desperate sacrifices of some of our own fighting men in World War II, and wonders. . . .

"Chinese" stereotype rising before them, they imagine the position reversed; that some thoughtful, sympathetic Chinese in Peking is trying to identify himself with a hero whose name is Robinson, or Corelli, or Steinhaus, or Simonides, and whose skin, unfortunately, is a dirty shade of pink.

When Ching K'o lay bleeding to death at the feet of the king of Ch'in, and explaining that "the reason my attempt did not succeed was that I wished to carry him off alive," Rome had still to come to grips with Hannibal in the Second Punic War; ancient Greece was decadent, as were the formerly mighty empires of Persia, Babylon, and Egypt; Britain was still sunk in barbarism; in South America, the Amerindians were beginning to raise their sun temples, and, in India, the Mauraya Empire had established its dominion in the Indus Valley. In Palestine, the Hebrews, after centuries of suffering and persecution, were re-established in their ancestral, sacred city of Jerusalem; in just over two centuries Jesus Christ would walk its streets. But, apart from the trade goods, mainly silk garments, which were brought by caravan across the Syrian desert, it is certain that none of the ancient civilizations of the Middle East and Europe knew anything about China. For Europe, China's history, philosophy, religion, and art might never have existed.

In these days of radio communication and jet travel, when scarcely a square mile of the earth's habitable surface remains unknown, this fact cannot be too often reiterated. In 200 B.C., no one in civilized Europe had heard of the hero Ching K'o, though they had all heard of "the sly Odysseus." Hardly anyone in Europe had heard of the philosophers Confucius, Mencius, and Lao-tse, or even of Gautama Buddha, though all four had as profound an influence on the Far East as had Socrates, Plato, and

Democritus on Europe. Today the ponderous clichés of some petty politician in London, Leopoldville, or Lagos are relayed within matters of minutes to radio listeners in Marseilles, Manchester, and Milwaukee; two thousand years ago a mighty civilization, that of Egypt, could have already passed through three thousand years of growth, development, and decay without knowing that, less than eight thousand miles away, another group of human beings, living in a similar environment, had for some fifteen hundred years passed through a very similar period of growth, tackling almost identical problems in an almost identical way. The same was equally true of that other great riverine culture, Babylonia, yet it is certain that the farmers, builders, irrigators, astronomers, and scribes of the Tigris-Euphrates valleys knew as little about ancient China as we do of the inhabitants of Mars (if they exist).

Is not this, perhaps, the answer to our problem of abolishing the stereotype: to try to see ancient China not from the standpoint of European- or Middle-Eastern-derived culture, but as the Chinese themselves saw it? For the purpose of this story, may we forget that Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome existed? Or, if we do occasionally glance at them, may we consider them only as curious, distant, parallels to the Chinese pattern of development? When we talk of prehistoric man, we will think not of Le Moustier in France but of Chou Kou Tien, near Peking; the Bronze Age will mean not Memphis in Egypt but Anyang, on the river Huan; the Iron Age will not immediately recall La Téne, in Switzerland, but a period later than 500 B.C., when the secret of the new, harder metal, first discovered in Anatolia, had at last penetrated to the valleys of the Yangtze and the Yellow River.

There can be little doubt that these metallurgical techniques, so vital to the development of civilization, originated in the

Middle East and thence spread east and west, to Europe and the Orient. There can be equally little doubt that man's apelike ancestors appeared in the Far East not long after they began chipping stone tools in Africa and Europe.

Later we shall again take up the story of the death struggle of the decadent feudal states against the imperial ambition of Ch'in. Meanwhile, it will help us to understand this story if we consider, however summarily, the early development of what we now call China, from the Old Stone Age to the third century B.C.

Not far from Peking is a village called Chou Kou Tien. In nearby hills are a number of large clefts once thought to be caves. Just after World War I, a Swedish scholar, Dr. Andersson, noticed pieces of quartz in these clefts, and, realizing that quartz would not occur naturally in a limestone district, he suspected that they might have been brought there by man. From 1921 onwards, archaeologists dug in the clefts and discovered a considerable number of primitive quartz tools. In 1927, they found a human tooth and, later, they discovered the remains of forty-five *hominids* in association with a large number of fossil animal bones, many of them from extinct species of horse, buffalo, bear, rhinoceros, and hyena. The human remains, which were given the name *Sinanthropus,* have been estimated to be nearly half a million years old. The skulls, which were incomplete, had been broken open at the base, possibly to extract the brain; these men were almost certainly cannibals. They were also the hunters of many kinds of game, especially deer, and they were sufficiently advanced to make crude flake and core tools from pebbles of quartz collected from river beds. They also used fire.

All over the world, in America, Europe, Africa, and the Middle and Far East, the course of human development follows a broadly similar pattern. First come creatures which we call *homi-*

nids (as distinct from members of the ape family, which we call *pongids*), who have learned to control fire and make simple stone tools. They are hunters and food-gatherers, few in number, but able, by the exercise of a higher intelligence, to hold their own against fellow animals of superior physical power.

In South Africa, there was *Australopithecus;* in Tanganyika, there was *Zinjanthropus;* in Europe, there was Heidelberg man, and later, in the Cro-Magnon cave in Dordoyne, France, appeared the first fully evolved specimen of the modern human species, *Homo sapiens,* who spread across Europe between forty and thirty thousand years ago. No one can yet be certain if there was a common stem for all these creatures. All we need to note is that, whereas Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, and Bertrand Russell are descended from Cro-Magnon Man, the ancestors of Confucius, Lao-tse, and Mao Tse-tung were almost surely those primitive creatures who inhabited the limestone clefts at Chou Kou Tien.

At the time of which we are writing, there was no China, or Africa, or Europe, all of which are relatively modern conceptions. But in what we now call China members of the human species had evolved and, for hundreds of thousands of years, maintained a precarious existence as hunters and food-gatherers. Archaeologically, there is an enormous gap between the *hominids* of Chou Kou Tien and the much later inhabitants of the Central Plain of China and of the "loess" country to the northwest. It may be that climatic changes either destroyed the earliest representatives of the human species in China or that these conditions forced them to migrate to more habitable regions for a time. But some prehistorians believe that these representatives survived, pointing out that the physical characteristics of *Sinanthropus* show a marked resemblance to the Mongolian races.

By about 10,000 B.C., there were human beings living in what

is now China who had begun to advance beyond the nomadic hunting state and become farmers, the next stage along the road to civilization. How this began, we can only guess. But, from what has been observed in other areas of the world, it would appear that two phenomena aided the process. The first was the discovery that the seeds of wild grasses could be deliberately sown and the resultant crops reaped. The second was that certain animals, formerly wild, had begun to linger around the tribal camps, and, being fed and tamed (probably by the women), became, as the late Professor Childe said, "living larders and walking wardrobes." This certainly happened in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and probably in China, too. Surely it is also significant that, just as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the earliest civilization grew beside a great river, so, in China, the earliest evidences of a settled, civilized life appeared along the banks of the Yellow River.

The land to the northwest was mountainous and difficult to farm, but on the lower hills approaching the Central Plain there were (and are) vast terraces of yellowish earth of very high fertility. This earth, a compound of sand, clay, and limestone, is called "loess." Through it, great canyons have been cut by water and erosion, leaving cliffs in which are many cave dwellings. When there is sufficient rain, this loess is as fertile as the Central Plain itself, and here millet and wheat can be grown in great quantities.

The earliest farmers in China discovered that this earth could be made highly productive by careful terracing and irrigation. But there seems no doubt that the generative center of Chinese civilization was the central Plain. It covers an area of more than 125,000 square miles, approximately the size of England and Ireland. It stretches "from Peking in the north as far as the Huai River in the south, from the approaches of the Loyang in the west

to the mountain spur of Shantung. In the same way that Egypt [was], according to Herodotus, 'the gift of the Nile,' so the Central Plain [was] the gift of the Yellow River and its tributaries."[3]

The resemblances between the development of civilization in ancient Egypt and that which took place in China are interesting. In both areas there were at first nomadic hunters who eventually settled near a great river. In both countries, once it became possible to produce food in excess of that required by the producers, the surplus wealth was used to support a nonproducing class of priests, intelligentsia, craftsmen, and artists. In both countries the most ancient myths described god-kings who taught the people the elements of civilization. In the Egyptian creation myth, there were Geb, god of the earth; Shu and Tefnut, deities of the atmosphere; Nut, the sky-goddess, and Osiris, the fertility god. The earliest Chinese gods were also nature deities, but others, though mythical, seem to personify the stages in the advance of China from barbarism to civilization.

> "Ah, they are clearing the land!" sings an ancient poet. "Thousands of couples are digging up roots, some in the lowlands, others in the high ground." And another asks, "Why have they torn up the thorny brushwood? So that we may plant our millet." The ancients gave names to the divine rulers who taught these crafts and techniques. One was "Shen Nung, who taught men how to burn the brushwood and use the hoe" to break up the soil. Then there were Hou Chi (Prince Millet), and Yu the Great, who "led the rivers back to the sea" and taught the craft of ditching and draining the land.[4]

[3] Grousset, René, *The Rise and Splendor of the Chinese Empire.* London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1952.
[4] *Ibid.*

The ancient Egyptian gods were half animal, half human; *e.g.*, Amun-Re had the body of a man and the head of a ram. Lord Divine Peasant, an early Chinese god, had a human body and the head of an ox. He is said to have been the first to teach people how to till the soil and use the plow. The queen Nu Wo had a human head on the body of a serpent, and had formidable powers. When one of the petty rulers of China almost destroyed the world, Nu Wo "cast a five-colored stone, with which she mended the cracked sky. She cut off the four feet of an animal called Ou and placed one foot at each of the four corners of the universe to stabilize it. A black dragon was executed. The ashes of the burnt grass she scattered into the floods and dried them up. Thus the sky was made complete forever, the water ebbed, and wild animals were driven away. Peace returned like spring to the earth."[5]

Then there was the Yellow Emperor, "the grandfather of the Chinese race." He and his empress are notable figures in Chinese legend. The Yellow Emperor's chief opponent was Chih-yu, who was armed with bronze weapons, whereas the emperor's army had only bows and arrows. Nevertheless, the Yellow Emperor was victorious, because he possessed a magnetic compass, which enabled him to direct his army through a fog. Chih-yu was defeated and killed. There is a rational explanation of this myth, as Tsui Chi points out in his excellent book, *A Short History of Chinese Civilization:*

> The climate of South China is often wet and misty; that of the North, dry and clear. A Southern army invading the North would be at an advantage if [it] planned an attack during some unexpected spell of bad weather. It is not unlikely, therefore,

[5] Tsui Chi, *A Short History of Chinese Civilization.* London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1942.

that this event had its historical existence in some very remote time.

And it is a fact that the magnetic compass was a Chinese invention, along with printing and gunpowder. Sir Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum*, written in 1620, noted:

> It is well to observe the force and virtue and consequence of discoveries. These are to be seen nowhere more conspicuously than in those three which are unknown to the ancients, and of which the origin though recent, is obscure and inglorious; namely printing, gunpowder, and the magnet. For these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world, the first in literature, the second in warfare, the third in navigation; whereat have followed inevitable changes; insomuch that no empire, no sect, no star seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical discoveries.

None of these inventions, as Professor Joseph Needham points out,[6] were of European origin, though Bacon was unaware of this. Books were being printed in the Far East seven hundred years before printing was "invented" in Europe.

There was a time, not long ago, when myths and legends were regarded by scholars as charming fairy tales and nothing more. We now know that the myths of Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, India, and America contain a hard kernel of truth. So do those of China, fantastic as they seem to the modern "rational" mind. These stories, which stem from a root far older than the earliest recorded

[6] Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilization in China*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

history of China, admit us to a dim, remote period of time, between ten and fifteen thousand years ago. At that time, the ancestors of the modern Chinese were struggling, through century after century, to learn the arts of civilization, to change themselves from wandering hunters, at the mercy of natural forces, to civilized men who could, to a limited extent, control their environment; to do, in fact, what other human beings had done, or would do from the Nile Valley to the mountains of Peru. Then, as now, there were inventors, fighters, leaders of thought and action, but, living long before the invention of written records, they survive only in folk tales which later, more sophisticated minds adapted and molded into poetic myths.

Nevertheless, the researches of modern archaeologists help us to fill in the picture. Like the peoples in Europe, Africa, and the Near East, the "Chinese"[7] passed through Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) and Neolithic (New Stone Age) phases. The primitive hunters whose remains were found at Chou Kou Tien were Paleolithic, using crude stone tools. But even twenty thousand years ago there were other human beings, much more advanced, who were living in northern China, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Siberia. Their tools, though still of stone, were much superior; they could make needles for sewing, they frequently carried building-stone over considerable distances, and they lived in small communities. Archaeologists have discovered many of their living sites on top of the primary loess soil, and these suggest that these early men had begun to combine hunting and fishing with a primitive form of agriculture.

By about 5000 B.C., the successors of these people were living

[7] I have put this word in quotation marks because there was at this stage no "Chinese" nation or people. In the present context, it should be taken to mean "people living in what is now China."

in much larger settlements, had domesticated the pig and the dog, and were manufacturing coarse pottery vessels for food storage. They lived in pit dwellings, used a stone-bladed hoe for breaking the soil, and were armed with bows and arrows. As Professor K. A. Wittfogel has observed, "agriculture can feed between twenty and fifty times as many people as the hunt." So, inevitably, the population increased, the communities grew larger, and new techniques were developed. From the headlands of Shantung to Honan province, a great many such settlements sprang up, of which about seventy had been investigated by Chinese archaeologists up to the outbreak of World War II. L. C. Goodrich writes:

> The chief occupation of these people was farming, but they also hunted, fished, and herded animals. In addition to the pig and dog, they had horses, sheep, and cattle. They divined the future by scapulimancy, the art of prophesying on the basis of the cracks formed when heat is applied to the scapulae [shoulder blades] of oxen and deer. They buried their dead face down in rectangular pits in the midst of their settlements.[8]

> Then suddenly [writes J. G. Andersson], at the very end of the Neolithic [Age], at a time only four thousand years distant from our own, the hitherto seemingly empty land becomes teeming with busy life. Hundreds, not to say thousands, of villages occupy the terraces overlooking the valley bottoms. Many of these villages were surprisingly large and must have harbored a considerable population. Their inhabitants were hunters and stock-raisers, but at the same time agriculturalists, as is evidenced by their implements and by the finding of husks

[8] Goodrich, L. C., *A Short History of the Chinese People.* New York: Harper & Bros., 1943.

> of rice in a potsherd at Yang Shao Tsun. The men were skilled carpenters, and their womenfolk were clever at weaving and needlework. Their excellent ceramics, with few or no equals at that time, indicate that the then inhabitants of Honan and Kansu had developed a generally high standard of civilization. There must have been, by some means or other—*i.e.*, by new inventions or the introduction of new ideas from abroad—a rather sudden impetus that allowed the rapid spread of a fast-growing population.[9]

When we try to compare the earliest Chinese chronicles with the results of archaeological investigation, a difficulty arises. As in the case of the other ancient cultures, *e.g.*, Egypt and Babylonia, there is a confusion of history and legend, and it is difficult to disentangle one from the other. If the early development of "Chinese" civilization followed a course similar to those of other ancient cultures, there would be, first, small communities based on the family, growing imperceptibly into larger tribal units with a higher organization. This would be followed by intertribal warfare and the conquest of the weaker by the more powerful tribes. Thus, as in Sumer, there would arise, in time, a number of independent city states, sometimes linked in alliances for the purposes of aggression or defense, until finally one group of states would become predominant and its ruler would be entitled to call himself "emperor," or "Son of Heaven."

This is apparently what happened, but, unfortunately, although the later chroniclers give the name of the First Dynasty as that of Hsia, there is at present no archaeological evidence to prove

[9] Andersson, J. G., *Researches into the Prehistory of the Chinese.* Bulletin No. 15 of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, 1943.

that such a dynasty ever existed. The first firmly defined period begins at about 1500 B.C., with the advent of the Shang Dynasty. A Chinese document fixes the date as approximately from 1523 to 1027 B.C. This corresponds, roughly, with the first half of the New Kingdom in Egypt, from Tuthmosis III down to the Tanites. Whereas no Hsia site has yet been discovered, there is no doubt that the Shang Dynasty existed. Moreover, it appears fully developed, "a peasant civilization with towns."[10] There was a ruler's palace, surrounded by the houses of his dependents, notably craftsmen. These artists were skilled workers in bronze, and the vessels they made will stand comparison with the finest products of the Middle East at the same period. Writing had been invented, with about two thousand characters. Silk was already in use, and among the crops grown were rice, wheat, and millet. The people of the Shang Dynasty had wheeled vehicles, including a war chariot, and the burials of the kings and nobles were of a magnificence which recalls ancient Sumer.

And yet, so far, scholars have been unable to trace the immediate antecedents of this high civilization, the first to appear in China. How it originated remains a mystery. How it was discovered will be described in the next chapter.

[10] Eberhard, W., *A History of China.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950.

3

The Mounds of Yin

In the year A.D. 1079, thirteen years after the Battle of Hastings in Britain, there was a very heavy storm near the town of Anyang, in what is now North China. Anyang was not at that time a very important town, and this storm would have gone unrecorded except for one fact. Near the town were a number of mounds, and, after the night of the storm, the inhabitants discovered that one of these hillocks had caved in, revealing a splendid tomb in which were buried not only human remains, but those of horses and chariots. There were also a number of magnificent bronze vessels, which the practical people of Anyang promptly collected and sold on the market.

And that was that. A few years later, in A.D. 1092, a Chinese archaeologist noted the find and its circumstances, and we hear nothing more about the "Mounds of Yin" until eight hundred years later. Forty generations were born, grew up, died. Then, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the mounds became well known as a source of "curios," notably fragments of turtle shells and animal bones bearing peculiar cracks and scratches. These were sold to the local chemist as "dragon bones" and were regarded highly as a cure for certain illnesses. Eventually the news reached the imperial court, and certain savants, having examined

the bones, thought that they might be examples of very early Chinese writing; how old, no one knew. Thousands of examples were collected, and the merchants sold them at a considerable profit.

Eventually the news of these inscribed bones reached the West, and two travelers, an American and an Englishman, bought large numbers of them and presented them to the British Museum, the Chicago Museum, and the Scottish Museum. A Chinese scholar, Lo Chen-yu, "took impressions of shell and bone inscriptions from the 'Mounds of Yin' on wintry nights by the fireside" and subsequently published them, thus bringing these discoveries to the general notice of the Chinese public. Then, in 1914, writes Tsui Chi:

> . . . a Canadian gentleman arrived at Anyang in search of Yin bones. He became a familiar and picturesque sight to the people of the locality, for he used to ride an old white horse, and to wander day after day along the bank of the stream which winds past the "Mounds of Yin." During these romantic-seeming excursions, he collected more than fifty thousand pieces of inscribed shell and bone, and acquired a great many more from a small farmer who lived nearby and had dug them out of his vegetable garden.[1]

The climax came in 1927 when the *Academia sinica,* the central research academy of the Chinese government, took over the site and began to organize excavations. The days of the amateur private collector were over; and not a moment too soon. For what the villagers of Anyang had accidentally discovered, in A.D. 1079, was the tomb of one of the kings of the Shang Dynasty,

[1] Tsui Chi, *op. cit.*

who had died more than two thousand years before they had been born. The bronze vessels which they had carelessly sold were part of his funerary equipment, the first full flowering of bronze art in China. And the thousands of bones and turtle shells were inscribed, as had been suggested, with examples of the very earliest known form of Chinese writing.

In the last chapter, we mentioned that the Neolithic ancestors of the Chinese, about 5000 B.C., "divined the future by scapulimancy, the art of prophesying on the basis of the cracks formed when heat is applied to the scapulae of oxen and deer." Under the Shang kings this method of divination had developed into a sacred mystery, needing a special class of priests or soothsayers for its interpretation. Inevitably, one is reminded of the oracles of Greece, such as that of Delphi, and of Roman soothsayers, divining a course of conduct by examining the entrails of a slaughtered animal. In ancient China, human beings, faced with a problem, tried to solve it in a similar way: by attempting to draw aside the curtain which concealed their personal destinies; destinies already known to those mysterious forces which governed the world (*i.e.*, the gods), but hidden from man. There might be ways by which this curtain could be sneaked aside. If only man could *know* . . .[2]

In ancient China, during the period of the Shang Dynasty, the method was roughly as follows. Let us imagine that we are living about 1500 B.C., along the fertile river Huai which flows southward into the Hwang-ho, the "Yellow River." You may be a fisherman wanting to find out the best time to fish, or a farmer

[2] Those of us who are tempted to raise our eyebrows at this "credulity" might consider a certain international racing motorist who, equipped with one of the finest products of Western engineering and his own superb talent as a driver, prefers not to come to the starting line without a "lucky mascot," which anthropologists call "a fetish."

anxious about the harvest. You are an army commander preparing to fight a vital battle, or a young man in love with a maddeningly unpredictable girl. Or you have had a disturbing dream and want to know its meaning. You have to embark on a long, dangerous journey. What will be its outcome? Whoever you are, whatever your personal problems, your method will be the same. You will go to a man who is known to be skilled in the interpretation of oracles: a "soothsayer," priest or magician. He must not be envisioned as a carnival quack or a newspaper astrologer. To you, he is more like a modern Western doctor.

You put your question to him. He takes a piece of turtle shell, never the back (which is discarded) but the belly. He has already made careful incisions at various places in order to weaken the shell. To one of these places he carefully applies the red-hot point of a needle, while you anxiously watch. Suddenly the fragile shell cracks, and fissures appear on its surface, forming a pattern of lines. This is the answer to your question, but only the soothsayer can interpret it correctly, according to his art and knowledge. After a long, long time, during which he painstakingly scrutinizes the cracks in the shell, he writes your answer on another piece of shell or bone, which he hands to you after collecting his fee. You take it home, read it, and then bury it. Thirty centuries later it will be found by archaeologists.

The archaeologists are not in the least interested in your personal problems; only in the fact that you were a fisherman, or a farmer, or a hunter. The fact that the character of a bird pierced by an arrow, or of a spear piercing an animal, appears on the "oracle bones" indicates that the verb "to hunt" was delineated in this way. Deer and wild boar were abundant; next came the wolf and then the rhinoceros, a species long extinct in this part of modern China. Elephants were known, too. One "oracle bone"

states: "Tonight it will rain, and an elephant is to be caught." The climate must have been warmer in northern China in those days, to support elephants.

The sign for *yu* ("fish" or "to fish") represents a rod and line. The word *nan* ("man") is particularly interesting. The ancient Chinese word combines the symbols for "strength" (a plow) and "field," an indication that in those days the principal male occupation was plowing the land. *Li*—the word for "harvest"—shows the act of threshing. One hand holds a bundle of wheat, the other beats it with a rod. *Chiu*—"wine"—is represented by an overflowing jar. Similar "pictograms" and "ideograms" existed in ancient Egypt, but whereas the ancient Egyptian language ceased to be used some two thousand years ago, that of the ancient East, modified and "streamlined," is still used in the China of Mao Tse-tung.

Before the discoveries at Anyang and at other places in the north of Honan Province, our only knowledge of the Shang Dynasty came from written records. Archaeology proves that, so far as the chronology of the Shang kings is concerned, these records are correct. As Professor Watson observes:

> It was the custom in Shang times to consult the gods on crops, rain, military campaigns, and the royal comings and goings, by interpreting cracks formed in the shoulder bones of animals and in tortoise shell by applying a hot point. Frequently the questions, and sometimes the answers, were inscribed on the bone. From the all-important questions about sacrifices to ancestral spirits (*e.g.*, "Will such-and-such a sacrifice be acceptable to so-and-so?"), the list of Shang kings has been reconstructed. It is found to correspond almost exactly with the list preserved in history. Thus is confirmed the founding of the

capital near Anyang by King P'an Keng, whom history reports to have moved there from further east. . . ."[3]

Excavations at Anyang, interrupted by war, were resumed in 1950 under the auspices of the Academy of Science at Peking. Other sites of the same period have been unearthed at other places, for the Shang empire covered a large area, from the borders of modern Ssuch'uan, Honan, and Hupei to the eastern seaboard. In many ways it was not unlike the early civilizations of the Middle East, *e.g.*, Sumer. In the royal tombs were found holocausts of human and animal victims, as in the "royal" graves discovered by Woolley at Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia. As in Egypt, a dead monarch became a god; during his life he was also High Priest, intermediary between gods and men. These kings lived in magnificent pillared palaces, with outbuildings for officials and craftsmen, surrounded by defensive walls. In war the main weapon was the bow, and, like the warrior aristocracy of Homer, the nobles fought from the chariot, the lesser men on foot.

Even at this remote period, over three thousand years ago, the mulberry tree and silkworm were already being cultivated (an artificially pierced cocoon[4] was found at one site). The "oracle bones" reveal several symbols connected with silk. One records "the silkworm sacrificial offering, three cattle, the Eighth Moon." So the industry for which China was to be famous down to the present day was already in existence fifteen hundred years before Christ. The Chinese living under the Shang Dynasty also grew

[3] Watson, William, *The Archaeology of China.* London: Max Parrish & Co., Ltd., 1960.

[4] When silk is cultivated artificially, the silkworm is killed after it has spun its cocoon.

corn and millet, and stored their food in earthenware jars of great beauty, some of which had been painted, while others had been subjected to intense heat to produce a bright glaze.

But the most astonishing technical and artistic achievement of these people was bronzework. "It is astonishing," writes Tsui Chi, "that such a mastery of metalwork could have been reached in those very early times. The barb of an arrow, for example, on being analyzed, was found to be composed of copper, tin, iron, silver, and lead."[5] Earthenware vessels were used every day, but when the Shang kings were buried in their splendid tombs, with their horses and chariots, slaves and concubines, they took with them bronze vases, tripods, wine vessels, and harness mountings of a magnificence which will bear comparison with the finest products of Sumer and Egypt of a comparable date.

One of the Shang tombs, "the great tomb" at Wu Kuan Ts'un, Anyang, was excavated in 1950, and, although ancient tomb robbers had penetrated the central chamber and removed its contents, the ceremonial burials of slaves and servants were intact and remind one of graves found by Woolley in Mesopotamia. In the foreground is the deep central chamber—now empty—which once contained the body of one of the Shang kings. A little pit at the bottom contained the skeleton of a dog. Approaching the central chamber is a flight of steps, with a platform at the top surrounded on three sides by the pits containing the skeletons of horses and perhaps the remains of a chariot. Descending these steps, one comes to another broad step or platform which would be about level with the top of the wooden coffin containing the royal body. On this "step" you can see the bodies of the persons sacrificed at the time of the

[5] Tsui Chi, *op. cit.*

royal burial—concubines, no doubt, and palace servants; pallid little skeletons lying like the discarded pupae of moths in the scrupulously excavated earth, with a measuring rod nearby. A modern Chinese archaeologist looks curiously at the relics of human beings who were once warm flesh and blood like himself.

Among these skeletons—as at Ur of the Chaldees—would be court musicians. The Chinese love of music, evidenced by the story of Ching K'o and the lute-player Kao Chien-li, is obvious as the result of one discovery made in this royal tomb. On the "step," among the slaughtered servants, is the only "worked" object found in the sepulchre, a *ch'ing* or "sounding stone," decorated with a conventionalized tiger and pierced with one hole. Later these sounding stones were to become a regular feature of Chinese ceremonial music. One might compare them to a modern tuning fork, and in the Chou period, which followed the Shang Dynasty, they were used in sets corresponding to notes of the Chinese musical scale.

A considerable number of these great tombs were found within a few miles of the city of the Great Shang. There were also a number of sepulchres near the village of Ta Ssu Kung. Though these were not royal, they contained undisturbed burials of people of some importance, who were buried in a prone position; one of these graves was particularly interesting because the skeletons of two horses were symmetrically laid near the left side of the tomb's owner, with the mountings of the chariot they drew.

These equine skeletons are interesting because they show that the domesticated horse, first introduced into Egypt about 1500 B.C., apparently appeared in the Far East at approximately the same time. Its origin was somewhere in Central Asia, and from there it spread east and west. The same is true of the wheeled vehicle, and especially of the war chariot, which was equally

deadly in the hands of the Hyksos invaders of Egypt, the Mycenean aristocracy of Greece, and the charioteers who fought under the Shang kings of China. To mid-twentieth-century man, conditioned by the internal-combustion engine, the horse-drawn vehicle is a quaint anachronism. It is difficult to realize that, to our ancestors of over three thousand years ago, it represented a military potential of terrifying power, able to bring down empires.

The question remains to be answered: how did these new weapons and techniques come to China in 1500 B.C.? There now seems little doubt that they came from the West. Watson says:

> The sudden appearance in China of accomplished metallurgy might indicate that the main elements of Shang culture came to China from outside in an already developed form, or that an "Early Bronze Age" which has so far eluded archaeologists must still be sought for. But in recent years it has become increasingly clear that a third view must be entertained; while it seems undeniable that the knowledge of bronze-casting came to China from the West, this need not imply that any considerable culture came with it. Bronze seems from the start in China to have been used with astonishing skill to cast vessels decorated with animal and geometric patterns which had already reached an evolved stage in wood- or bone-carving.[6]

In other words, the technique of bronze-casting came from outside; the skill in applying it from inside China. One has only to look at those heavy, solid broad-based goblets, wine vessels, and tripods, each decorated with unmistakably Chinese motifs, to realize that this was an art which sprang from the soil of China and owed nothing to the influences of India or the Middle East.

[6] Watson, *op. cit.*

Yet, at the same time, one must also recognize that in certain articles, notably the socketed ax, some chariot equipment, and a type of animal-headed knife (modeled on South Siberian specimens), there is an unmistakable foreign influence.

1500 B.C. . . . In the Nile Valley, the Pharaoh Tuthmosis III was about to launch Egypt on her course of imperial expansion. In Mesopotamia, the Hittites of Asia Minor were moving south and had captured Babylon itself. Homer's "fair-haired Achaeans" were moving into Greece; their hill fortresses dominated the land, and the first of the royal graves at Mycenae, "rich in gold," had been dug. The Minoan empire of Crete had reached out as far as the Syrian coast. And, in China, another theocracy ruled from Anyang over an area bigger than Egypt. There, too, there were divine monarchs whose lives were identified with the fertility of the soil upon which the community depended. In Egypt, the fertility god was Osiris; in Syria, it was Adonis; in China, at the beginning of each spring, the divine emperor, the "Son of Heaven," ceremonially broke the first furrow and walked behind the plow.

Yet, despite the researches of modern archaeologists and the written records compiled by Chinese historians, we actually know very little about the mysterious Shangs who dominated northern China for some four hundred years. Their kings lived in splendid palaces; they had a priestly technocracy which recorded the yield of the land, studied the stars, and endeavored to predict the annual rise and fall of the great river. They were a literate people who set great store by what we would call "magic" or "superstition." They understood the art of irrigation, cultivated crops, and bred domestic animals. The language they used was a primitive form of the writing system still used in China down to the present day.

Yet they remain mysterious. How was it that, after centuries of neolithic barbarism, there suddenly arose this great civilization in which we can already discern nearly all the elements that have characterized the culture of China for more than three thousand years? So far, no one has found a satisfactory answer.

4

The Girl Who Couldn't Smile

We grasp our battle spears: we don our breastplates of hide
The axles of our chariots touch: our short swords meet.
Standards obscure the sun; the foe roll up like clouds.
Arrows fall thick; the warriors press forward.
They menace our ranks; they break our line.
The left-hand trace-horse is dead; the one on the right is smitten.
The fallen horses block our wheels; they impede the yoke-horses!

They grasp their jade drumsticks; they beat the sounding drums.
Heaven decrees their fall; the dread Powers are angry.

The warriors are all dead; they lie on the moor field.
They issued but shall not enter; they went but shall not return.

The plains are flat and wide; the way home is long.
Their swords lie beside them; their black bows in their hand.

Though their limbs were torn, their hearts could not be repressed.

They were more than brave; they were inspired with the spirit of "Wu."[1]
Steadfast to the end, they could not be daunted.
Their bodies were stricken, but their souls have taken Immortality—
Captains among the ghosts, heroes among the dead.[2]

Except for the word "Wu" and the reference to "jade drumsticks," this could easily be part of a Greek heroic poem. There is the same lustful joy of battle; the same terse realism, the same technique of fighting; chariots, short swords, bows and arrows. There is even the same pathos, which recalls the lament for the Spartans who fell at Thermopylae. Yet why restrict the comparison to ancient Greece?

> They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old.
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

—as Laurence Binyon wrote about the soldiers who fell during World War I in the twentieth century.

The poem I have quoted above, by Ch'u Yuan (332–295 B.C.), is pitched in the familiar key of romantic heroism—of man glorying in his courage and strength, fighting against impossible odds, and triumphing even in death. In spirit, it recalls the Hebrew patriarch's "he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." Yet, in Chinese poems written as far back as 700 B.C. (a century or so after the time of Homer),

[1] *i.e.*, military genius.

[2] Waley, Arthur, *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems.* London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1918.

you will find other war poems written in a mood of astringent realism:

> Are we buffaloes, are we tigers
> That our home should be these desolate wilds?
> Alas for us soldiers,
> Neither by day nor night can we rest.[3]

And:

> How few of us are left, how few!
> Why do we not go back?
> Were it not for our prince and his concerns,
> What should we be doing here in the dew?
>
> How few of us are left, how few!
> Why do we not go back?
> Were it not for our prince's own concerns,
> What should we be doing here in the mud?[4]

And

> I climb that wooded hill
> And look toward where my father is.
> My father is saying, "Alas, my son is on service;
> Day and night he knows no rest.
> Grant that he is being careful of himself,
> So that he may come back and not be left behind"

[3] Waley, Arthur, *The Book of Songs*. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937.
[4] *Ibid.*

I climb that bare hill
And look toward where my mother is.
My mother is saying, "Alas, my young one is on service;
Day and night he gets no sleep.
Grant that he is being careful of himself,
So that he may come back and not be cast away. . . ."[5]

Are not these human beings like ourselves? Is there any parent with a son who fought in World War II who does not sympathize with that young soldier who died twenty-six hundred years ago? As for the first "glory of battle" poem, if one eliminates the archaic weapons, is its spirit any different from that of the Americans manning the tank landing craft which stormed ashore at Iwo Jima? Or of a squadron of Spitfire pilots plunging into a formation of Heinkels over Kent in 1940?

Archaeologists, quite rightly, make much of their science, emphasizing how much can be learned from the study of dwelling sites, buildings, and "artifacts" made centuries before human beings learned to express themselves in writing. The discoveries at Anyang, described in the previous chapter, are a case in point. Yet, however much we can learn about methods of government, about techniques of agriculture, about building, bronze-working, and religious ceremonial, the authentic voices of individual human beings are absent. We are looking at humanity en masse as we look at ants. But, once man has learned to write, the philologist comes to our aid with translations of poems, official chronicles, or personal documents which bring us into direct contact with individual human minds.

The period we are considering is that which stretched between

[5] *Ibid.*

approximately 1000 B.C., when the eastward invasion by the Chou Dynasty overthrew the rule of the Shang kings, down to about the third quarter of the third century B.C., when the aggressive state of Ch'in was about to make its successful bid for power. It spans a period of some eight hundred years, and it ended with what Chinese historians describe as the Period of The Warring States.

This chapter will deal only summarily with the political developments, because it seems to me more important to highlight those individual expressions of religious belief, personal morality, love, ecstasy, courage, pain, and suffering which comprise *The Book of Songs,* ancient folk poems collected and edited by Confucius. Let us therefore dispose of the purely political history as briefly as possible.

During these eight centuries, the history of what is now China was the history of the rise and fall of warring states. As we have seen, the first firmly defined historical epoch, confirmed by both literary and archaeological evidence, was that of the Shangs, who, after changing their capital city several times, finally ruled from Anyang. But their territory, even including its empire, comprised about one-fifth of what is now China. In the United States of America, the Shang domain could be related to an area stretching from the Mississippi to the East Coast, and from the Canadian border down to the Gulf of Mexico. In Britain, allowing for the disproportionate size of the two countries, the Shang kingdom might be compared with Scotland in relation to the combined area of England and Wales. It occupied part of the valley of the Hwang-ho, the "Yellow River," and its northern tributaries; and, like its contemporaries, it began as a city state. Professor Goodrich states:

> According to traditional history, the first Shang princes succeeded in subduing eighteen hundred city states; that they had periodic difficulties with the more powerful aggregations of these city states is clear. On several occasions they were forced to shift their capital, possibly because of raids or the difficulty of defending it, or because of some calamity like a flood.[6]

The Shangs lasted about four hundred years, until, in the eleventh century B.C., they were overwhelmed by a new power which had developed in the west, the Chou.

According to legend, the last of the Shang kings, Shou Hsin, was brought to ruin by his own misdeeds. He seems to have been a Chinese Nero, "a monster of debauchery, supported in his atrocities by his notorious concubine, T'a Chi." He was so powerful physically that he could fell wild animals with a single blow and at the same time so agile intellectually that, in the words of one Chinese historian, "with his eloquence he refused good advice, and with his wit veiled his faults." Faced with a popular rebellion which he could not subdue, he put on his finest robes and jeweled regalia, retired to his palace, and set fire to it, perishing in the flames. Thus the Shang empire passed to the house of Chou, which ruled for nearly nine centuries. And during that time immense developments took place in China. The area of the realm was continually extended, until it included not only the Yellow River in the north but also the Yangtze River in the south, and the eastern frontiers of what is now Szechwan. Agriculture developed, together with improved irrigation and the regular division of lands. Literature flourished, and the stories and poems quoted in this chapter date from this period.

But it was never a unified, fully integrated empire. There was

[6] Goodrich, *op. cit.*

no entity which could be described as "China." There were no clearly defined frontiers to the country as a whole, although borders were drawn between such individual sovereign states as Chao, Ch'in, Han, Lu, Wei, and others. Each of these city states developed along its own lines. Each had a ruling prince who owed nominal allegiance to the emperor, very much as the feudal lords of medieval Europe accepted the sovereignty of their Christian kings. Another parallel can be drawn between the Chinese states of the eighth century B.C. and those of Mycenean Greece.

Like the hosts of Agamemnon who fought under the walls of Troy, the Chinese noblemen of 700 B.C. rode in chariots and were armed with spears. The commoners fought on foot. As in Homeric Greece, every soldier fought under hereditary chieftains. As in Homeric Greece, the bards hymned the heroic deeds of their patrons in the great halls where the wine flowed:

Yes, Fang-shu has come
With his bandsmen beating the drums,
Marshaling his armies, haranguing his hosts.
Illustrious truly is Fang-shu,
Deep is the roll of the drums,
Shaking the hosts with its din.

Foolish were you, tribes of Ching,
Who made a great nation into your foe.
Fang-shu is old in years
But in strategy he is at his prime.
Fang-shu has come,
He has bound culprits, captured chieftains.
His war chariots rumble,
They rumble and crash
Like the clap of thunder, like the roll of thunder.

Illustrious truly is Fang-shu,
It was he who smote the Hsiung-nu,
Who made the tribes of Ching afraid.[7]

This poem, and that quoted at the beginning of the chapter, epitomize the heroic, martial poetry of ancient China. For many centuries after the last charioteer had drawn his bow, and the last chariot driver had pitched into the bloody dust of the battlefield, such poems continued to delight and inspire warriors. In just the same way, the sophisticated Greeks of the fifth century B.C. revered the poems of Homer, even when the chariot and the tall hide shield had become as antiquated as cavalry is to us, and when the Greek hoplites advanced into battle on foot with their small round shields tightly interlocked.

But why did these ancient Chinese lords go to war? For revenge? For territorial gain? For glory? Sometimes. The states frequently made war on each other. But there was another enemy so powerful in his menaces as to compel some of the warring states to form alliances. To the north and northwest of the fertile, cultivated land which the Chinese had arduously won from swamp and desert were the nomadic barbarians, the "Demons," the *Hsiung-nu,*[8] the hunting people who inhabited the steppe country. And at this time there was no permanent, continuous northern frontier to protect China as a whole from these people. There was no Great Wall. There were walls erected by individual states for their own protection, but these were not connected, nor did they follow any common plan of defense. So, when the dread Hsiung-nu attacked, on their swift steppe-bred horses, the only defense was to locate the major force of the enemy and destroy it.

[7] Waley, *The Book of Songs.*

[8] From which the Huns were probably descended.

To achieve this, temporary alliances were sometimes necessary, and stern defensive fighting had to be done.

The following poem describes one of these defensive campaigns against the Hsiung-nu:

Our team of blacks is well matched,
A pattern of perfect training.
It is the sixth month;
We have finished all our fieldwork
We have finished all our fieldwork
Throughout the thirty leagues.
We are going out to battle
To help the Son of Heaven.

Our four steeds are tall and broad,
Hugely high they stand,
We fall upon the Hsiung-nu,
We do great deeds.
So stern, so grim
We fulfill the tasks of war,
Fulfill the tasks of war,
That the king's lands may be at rest.

The Hsiung-nu were scornful of us,
They encamped at Chia-huo
They invaded Hao and Fang
As far as the north bank of the Ching,
With woven pattern of bird blazonry
Of silk banners brightly borne.
Big chariots, ten of them,
Went first, to open a path.

Those war chariots were well balanced
As though held from below, hung from above.

Our four steeds were unswerving,
Unswerving and obedient.
We smote the Hsiung-nu
As far as the Great Plain,
Mighty warrior is Chi-fu,
A pattern to all the peoples. . . .

The king then returns to his palace, feasts, and is happy.

"Here I am back from Hao;
I have been away a long time
And must give a drinking party to my friends,
With roast turtle and minced carp". . . .[9]

To me, one of the most satisfying of these warrior poems is the one from which the following quotation is taken. Chung Shan Fu was a war leader who had been sent by his king to "fortify the eastern land":

When Chung Shan Fu went forth,
His four steeds quivered,
His warriors so nimble,
Each determined to keep his place.[10]
His four steeds so strong,
The eight harness-bells tinkling.
The king charged Chung Shan Fu
To fortify that eastern land.

His four steeds so fine,
The eight harness-bells chiming,

[9] Waley, *The Book of Songs.*
[10] *i.e.,* the chariots were in line, like a squadron of fighting aircraft.

Chung Shan Fu went to Ch'i,
And swift was his return.
Chi-fu made this ballad
Gentle as a clean breeze.
Chung Shan Fu has long been burdened with care;
May this calm his breast.[11]

But the most romantic episode described by the Chinese chroniclers concerns a woman, the favorite concubine of the Emperor Yu, "the gloomy." Yu was in love with his beautiful mistress, but he was unable to satisfy her whims. She enjoyed the sound of tearing silk, and, in order to gratify her fantasies, he ordered bales of the precious fabric to be brought before her and mutilated. Yet she still did not smile, even for her lover. Eventually, the doting emperor thought of a trick which might win her favor. It was customary, when the Hsiung-nu, the northern barbarians, threatened the Chinese states, to light beacon fires to summon the feudal lords and their armies. The emperor's concubine persuaded him to give the order to light the fires for her amusement.

Throughout China, from the Hwang-ho to the Yangtze, from the seacoast to the Ordos steppes, the watchmen reported the beacon signals to their lords. The peasants, roused from their beds, took down their arms and marched to join their battalions. The young gallants armed themselves and bade their farewells. Horses were brought from the stables, chariots wheeled out and their mountings polished. As the dawn light crept over the mountain ridges and dimmed the flaring beacons, tens of thousands of warriors were on the road, marching under their silken banners to the emperor's capital, ready to do battle with the dreaded

[11] Waley, *The Book of Songs.*

Hsiung-nu, who, if not quelled, would pour across the lightly defended frontier like a destroying flood.

But when they reached the capital city, and their leaders presented themselves before Yu, they saw only their dissipated ruler with his arm around his concubine. And when she informed them that the royal summons was nothing more than a royal joke and saw the expressions on their faces, she laughed—for the first time in her life.

And for the last time. For when, not long afterward, the father of the legitimate queen aspired to the throne of Chou and marched against the emperor, the beacons were lit again. But this time no one marched to the emperor's assistance. The Hsiung-nu poured across the frontier, destroying the emperor's capital, killing him, and carrying off his harem. Thus, as a Chinese poet expresses it, "the smile of beauty overturned an empire."

5

Divided China

Strictly speaking, the title of this chapter is inaccurate, since one cannot divide what does not exist, and between 1000 and 250 B.C.—the period of which we are writing—there was no such country as China. The conglomeration of independent city states which embraced part of what is now China bore the poetic title "All that is under Heaven." This area extended roughly between the sea on the east, the Yellow River on the north, and the Yangtze Kiang on the south. During the period of the early, middle, and late Chou Dynasty, the western frontier moved gradually farther west, until it ran north and south through the modern provinces of Shensi and eastern Szechwan. All the rest, about half of modern China, including such provinces as Yunnan, Kuangsi, Kuangtung (in which lies Canton), and Fukien, were barbarian lands.

The natural frontiers which inhibited further expansion were the mountains and jungles of the south, and the arid steppes of the north. Of these natural frontiers, that to the north and northwest was the most vulnerable, for beyond it lived the dreaded Hsiung-nu, ever ready to swoop down on the rich agricultural valleys of the Yellow River and its tributaries. At this period, however, one must not imagine a rigid frontier like the Roman

Wall in Britain, but a continually flexing line, sometimes bending under pressure. The power which held that line was, in the main, not a rigid barrier of stone and brick, but the living bodies of Chinese warriors of the kind celebrated in the poem about the Hsiung-nu quoted in the previous chapter. South of that wavering northern line, there was as yet no united Chinese empire; there were only some nine or ten separate states, each with its own prince and ruling aristocracy governing from a walled capital city. Each had its slaving peasantry, sweating almost naked in the fields of wheat, millet, and rice, or cultivating the mulberry trees on which the silkworms fed. Above the peasants, higher in social status but still inferior to the aristocracy, were the builders, carpenters, workers in metal and fabric; the men who made the fine armor, weapons, chariots, and harness; the men who fashioned the splendid bronze vessels with which their rulers adorned their homes or went to their tombs. Then there were the women, whose patient hands made the warm woolen garments to protect the privileged against winter cold, or embroidered those gorgeous robes of colored silk worn by men and women of the higher ranks.

There were craftsmen who made the musical instruments in which the ancient Chinese delighted: drums and flutes which kept time for the marching armies; lutes and harps of various kinds, which could accompany songs at Court, or assist one in serenading a lady. There were painters and sculptors. There were scribes, men who had mastered the secret, difficult art of writing, and who not only kept records (the original purpose of writing) but were able to preserve for posterity the songs of the people, the chronicles of princes and rulers, and the reflections of the sages. For an intelligentsia arose which, freed from manual toil, was able to apply its mind to philosophy, seeking, as did the Greeks, an answer to many questions. "What is man?" asked the philoso-

phers. "How did he originate?" "What form of conduct will produce happiness?" Or, more frequently, "How should men be governed?" Most of these philosophers, some of whom we shall consider in the next chapter, wandered from feudal court to feudal court, offering their advice to harassed rulers and often making themselves an intolerable nuisance.

Of course, there were technical advances, too. Lacquer was developed, probably in South China; gold filigree was used to decorate mirrors of bronze; jade, the stone most closely associated with China, was carved into necklaces, belt buckles, ornaments, and statuary of a beauty which has delighted the world for centuries and will continue to entrance it as long as man survives. Among the tools recorded as already existing in the fourth century B.C. are axes, saws, wheels, drills, and chisels for the carpenter; hoes, plows, and scythes for the farmer; knives, needles, and awls for the seamstress. On the battlefield, the Chinese soldier's most formidable military weapon was the crossbow, unknown in Europe until medieval times. Chinese astronomers had calculated that the year had 365¼ days, and Halley's comet was recorded as having been observed in 240 B.C.

While all this was happening, between about 1000 and 250 B.C., Egypt gradually declined, the once-great Mycenean empire of Greece collapsed under the Dorian invasion, the Persian empire rose and fell, Greek fought Persian at Thermopylae, Greek fought Greek at Chalchis, Plato wrote his "Symposium," and Phidias built the Parthenon. Yet, apart from most tenuous trade contacts, East and West were completely unaware of each other. If the charioteer, Chung Shan Fu, with his "four steeds so strong" and his "eight harness-bells tinkling" had suddenly appeared among the Greeks besieging Troy, he would have created a sensation equal to

that which New Yorkers would experience if a Martian suddenly alighted in Times Square.

We are still some way from the building of the Great Wall, but moving gradually toward that crisis in Chinese history which made the construction of the wall almost inevitable. We can regard that Wall simply as a piece of military architecture, as a monument of tyranny, or as a man-made marvel outrivaling any of the "Seven Wonders" of the Mediterranean world. It was all of these things. But it was also much more. It was made, not only of stone and earth and brick, but of the very heart and mind and blood of the Chinese people; it was an affirmation of the strength, unity, and national cohesion toward which they had been struggling through the long centuries of contending states, contending sects, contending philosophies. Like other great human achievements, it was the product of an *idea,* a philosophy of government, one of several which fought for possession of the Chinese mind and which will be considered in subsequent chapters.

But first, it might be asked, why did this apparently homogeneous region, defined within natural frontiers of sea, rivers, desert, and mountains, not coalesce earlier into an integrated empire? Why did it crystallize at first into a number of separate, autonomous states? The reasons, as given by Mr. G. E. Hubbard, were partly political:

> The development of feudal society in China can be explained on two grounds. Firstly, as the development of the soil progressed, wealth in the form of grain stocks began to accumulate and granary cities sprang up which offered a tempting bait to bands of marauders. This induced a widespread demand for a system of organized protection on a scale beyond the capacity

> of the people on the spot. . . . In the second place, extensive conquests and the rapid pace of territorial expansion had left the Chou leaders with the problem of satisfying the claims of loyal adherents, including many of the former Shang chieftains. This could best be accomplished by the bestowal of estates with the rights of hereditary succession. Thus the times were ripe for the adoption of a feudatory system giving protection to the masses, powers and privileges to the newly created nobility, and liege service to the reigning house.[1]

There was, however, another—economic—reason, one which is cogently explained by Professor Owen Lattimore in his article "Origins of the Great Wall of China."[2] He points out that there was nothing new in the idea of a walled frontier, even in China's feudal period (*i.e.*, between 1000 and 250 B.C.). "Among the earliest," he writes, "were walls that ran north and south, between one Chinese state and another. There was even a wall blocking the approach from the Yellow River to the Yangtze Valley [*i.e.*, in the south], between the headwaters of the Han River and those of the Huai, which divided the dominant southern state of Ch'u from the states of North China." There was, in fact, a Chinese bias toward rigid frontiers, the reason for which was that there was a natural economic limit to the expansion of those early city states. In China, agriculture almost certainly began in the loess region of Shensi, and in the tributary streams of the Yellow River such as the Wei, because there was no heavy forest to be

[1] Hubbard, G. E., "Chinese History," in *Chambers' Encyclopaedia,* Vol. III, London, 1955.

[2] Lattimore, Owen, "Origins of the Great Wall of China," in *Geographical Review,* Vol. XXVII, The American Geographical Society, New York, January, 1937.

cleared. Loess soil needs only water to retain its fertility, so that quite primitive irrigation would be adequate. Even the members of one large family could make the small irrigation ditches, using simple stone implements. And the family was the foundation of Chinese society. Gradually, these family groups began to expand into the Yellow River Valley where they found conditions were different, but not too different.

> Irrigation was less important than the building of dykes to limit floods and ditches to drain marshes. It was easy to adapt to these purposes not only the technique developed by irrigation enterprises in the loess country but the social forces which had been promoted, in an agricultural community, by the importance of engineering problems. . . . Irrigation and drainage could be originated on a primitive scale by family labor, but they could not change the agricultural character of wide regions *except by collective labor*. The society that eventually made itself permanent in China was therefore one that provided large reserves of manpower for public works, notably by means of unpaid *corvée* labor.[3]

In primitive times, the family or tribe could not move far from the land which it cultivated; the land fed the people and there was little or no surplus. But with the improvement of agricultural techniques, and especially irrigation, grain was produced in great quantities, stored in granaries in the principal city, and used to feed workers employed on major public works. At the same time irrigation canals were enlarged to serve as transport canals, making the transport of grain cheaper and discouraging road building. Lattimore writes:

[3] Lattimore, *op. cit.*

> Whereas grain was eventually transported over very great distances, in order to provide a sufficient accumulation at the capital city, commerce as a whole, except for a few commodities like salt, tea, and iron, was conspicuously an exchange, over short distances, of agricultural produce and the artisan manufactures of provincial cities. In the political landscape of China, as a consequence, the rural village has always been dominated by the walled city, set in the country and not very distant—in some places reached by a journey of only a day or two, over bad roads, according to the intensiveness of agriculture and the density of population—from an exactly similar walled city. . . .
>
> The later evolution of national states was accomplished by creating a "royal" pyramid, at the base of which was a group of small regional units, each dominated by a walled city. It was the effort to make these larger units as permanent as the walled city unit that led to the building of the early "Great Walls," dividing state from state, and also, on the north, dividing agricultural China and its walled cities from the open steppe, in which were neither walled cities, nor rivers to supply irrigation, nor canals for the transport of grain.[4]

During the nine centuries of the Chou empire, the Chinese states were able to expand continually toward the south, even taking in the rice cultivation of the Yangtze Valley, which differed from the millet and wheat culture of the north. The "barbarian" tribesmen of the south and east could either be driven out or absorbed, and the empire could go on expanding, even in times of weak or divided rule, by the inevitable process of economic growth; there was always a swarming, multiplying peasant class which needed new land, and a "self-perpetuating bureaucratic class, interlocking with the landed gentry" from which most of

[4] Lattimore, *op. cit.*

its members were drawn. The "divine" Emperor, though nominal ruler of "All that is under Heaven," had, in fact, little real temporal power; his function was mainly religious. This southward and eastward movement could continue indefinitely provided that "the new territory could be acquired in homogeneous units, each with its short-range economy of local exchange between country and city and each with a surplus for long-range contribution to the imperial centers of grain accumulation and garrison concentration."[5]

But if the southern frontier was "soft," that to the north was "hard." North of the Yellow River and the cultivable loess country lay the arid steppes of Mongolia and Manchuria, where agriculture was impossible, and from which hordes of barbarian horsemen would periodically descend into the settled lands of China, ravaging, burning, and plundering. As the Chinese peasant leaned over the plow, with his eyes to the south, he must have been constantly aware of the menace at his back. Like the founding fathers of Rome, these farmers were also, of necessity, soldiers.

Fortunately, the voices of these long-dead pioneers of Chinese civilization can still be faintly heard, since later scholars took the trouble to collect their folksongs:

> Work, work from the rising sun,
> Till sunset comes and day is done.
> I plow the sod
> And harrow the clod
> And meat and drink both come to me;
> So what care I for the powers that be?[6]

[5] Lattimore, *op. cit.*
[6] Waley, *The Book of Songs.*

From the family to the tribe; from the tribe to the forced-labor gang and communal effort on behalf of the state. That was how ancient China progressed between three thousand and two thousand years ago. Heavy, backbreaking toil under the burning sun, cutting and maintaining irrigation canals to preserve the precious water, breaking up the soil with primitive plows and hoes, while the women cooked the food and bore children who, as soon as they were old enough, took their place beside the bent-backed men in the fields of wheat and millet. How many women died in childbirth? How many children survived disease to grow to manhood? Lattimore says:

> The family system encouraged the production of children at a rate that ensured a plentiful and cheap supply of manpower. This, in turn, both minimized the demand for labor-saving machinery and promoted the application of human labor for intensive agriculture. . . .[7]

And what did these simple people think, as they worked from dawn to dusk in the fields or snatched a few hours' sleep in their cave dwellings in the cliffs of yellow loess?

From one of those dwellings, you climbed through a hole in the roof, which opened onto your fields. You threaded the path through the wheat to the edge of the valley, and there, to the south, lay the river, and beyond that the slowly advancing frontier of agricultural cultivation. Below, in the valley, myriads of one's fellow human beings, men, women, and small children, were working, working to keep alive.

Farther south, beyond the rim of the horizon, other people like

[7] Lattimore, *op. cit.*

yourself were cutting down the trees and brushwood, and preparing the virgin land for the plow.

> Ah, they are clearing the land! . . . Thousands of couples are digging up roots, some in the lowlands, others in the high ground. . . .
>
> Why have they torn up the thorny brushwood? So that we may plant our millet.[8]

An overly romantic picture? Perhaps. And yet, if we can forget for a moment the cool estimate of historians, who must look at these anonymous human beings with professional detachment, is not their story as splendid as that of "an army with banners"? For agriculture is the basis of civilization. Without the work of those unknown millions, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, Europe, and China, there would have been no writers and artists, no skilled artificers in stone, wood, gold, and precious stones. There would have been no Ur of the Chaldees, no Tomb of Tutankhamen, no Taj Mahal, no Phidias to design the sculptures for the Parthenon, no Socrates nor Shakespeare, no Confucius nor Mencius. In fact, no civilization.

[8] Grousset, *op. cit.*

6

The Voice of China

I would like to quote briefly from two sensitive writers who have come directly under the spell of China: Mr. Peter Fleming and Sir Osbert Sitwell. I have taken care to select only those extracts which illustrate the unchanging Chinese landscape known also to the ancients.

First, the mountains of the northeast, as described by Peter Fleming:

> We roared up into the hot blue sky and flew west into the mountains. There was no longer below us a curious pattern stamped by men upon the earth. Sprawling, rearing, falling away, the hills ruled turbulently. There seemed no end to them, no boundary to their kingdom. Wave upon wave of reinforcements marched up over the horizon to meet us. Our shadow, which had glided so serenely with us on the plains, now had to scramble wildly, racing up screes, to meet us as we skirted a cliff face, then plunging down the shoulder of a mountain to switch back, diminished, across the gullies at the bottom of a valley. The plane, which before had lorded it unchallenged in the void, now seemed a puny, vulgar intruder, a little quivering minnow among immobile Tritons.[1]

[1] Fleming, Peter, *One's Company.* London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1934.

Those were the mountains wherein lurked the barbarian tribes. Here is a picture of the fertile plains which these tribes coveted.

> How neat the Chinese are! The country below us was patterned intricately and with affection, like a patchwork quilt. Here, in the North, the fields are mostly larger than in the rice-growing South. The country is less crowded; there is more elbow room. Even so, none of it is wasted. Symmetry and economy of space ruled in that meticulously quartered land. The different greens of the different crops were partitioned by paths and dikes which might have been drawn with a ruler. Their nice pattern was a natural growth, the gradual but spontaneous product of many years and long traditions; it did not bore or repel, as does the tailor-made, the rather parvenu regularity of English garden suburbs and small American towns. It lent the land dignity and made you think of its people with respect.[2]

Here is one of the great rivers, the Yangtze Kiang seen from a mountain near Kiukiang:

> A path wound up into the mist, changing, as the gradient grew steeper and more abrupt, into an illimitable flight of steps such as you find on any Chinese mountain. Presently we left the mist. The air grew cooler and sweeter than I had known it for months. Pagodas standing out in the wooded foothills dwindled as we climbed. The sun came out, and below us the Yangtze Valley offered a fine combination of land- and water-scape. The great river on which we had been traveling twisted away into the distance, its color a curious alluvial red. Between it and the mountains lay a lake, filled, as it seemed, with some quite different element, for here the water was an untroubled blue.

[2] *Ibid.*

> Junks crawled on the river like stiff-winged insects. The elaborate crisscross of the dikes stretched like a net across the waterish land.[3]

Unfortunately the great cities of classical China are lost to us, having either been destroyed or buried beneath their modern successors. Yet such is (or was, until recently) the continuity of tradition in China that I believe a description of Peking in 1937 would be recognizable, in part, by a man who had seen the Chou capital in, say, 500 B.C., particularly if he happened to have the sensitivity of Sir Osbert Sitwell:

> On arrival there, all save the Forbidden City seemed a bare, Breughel-like world of brown lanes, squat and narrow, of ribbed brown roofs, and of tall, naked trees posing their neat but weblike intricacies above them against a deep-blue sky (except when a duststorm whirled down from the Gobi Desert, carrying its load a thousand feet in the air, overcasting the sun with a thin yellow cloud . . .) and of figures in padded blue robes, or patched blue canvas, and crowned, many of them, with triptychal fur hats that framed faces in a new way; when I left, it was a sighing, young summer forest, the gardens were full of blossoms and on the stone paving stood plants, molded to the fashion of the trees on a Chinese wallpaper, and large earthenware bowls of goggling goldfish, engaged in their eternal skirt-dance of flowing fins and veils, while figures in the thinnest silk gowns fanned themselves beneath the tender, quivering shadow of young leaves. . . .[4]

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Sitwell, Osbert, *Escape with Me.* London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1949.

And:

> If you descend into these streets you will find a blue figure or two in every alley, and the larger streets thronged, mostly with men; young men hurrying about their business and old men, with scanty beards and with the happy faces of the old (for, in China, age is respected; perhaps because it is respectable), so different from the broken, sad look of old eyes in Europe. Here all wear the traditional dress of the Chinese, thick padded robes, sometimes with fur collars, surmounted at this [winter] season with triangular fur hats, similar to those in the portraits of Flemish merchants by Van Eyck or his followers. . . . From every street rise the sounds of gongs and drums being beaten in a thousand different ways (each with its own significance to the initiated), of flutes and pipes and multifarious cries, the wooden clack of rattles, the jingle of bells, the hum of the tuningfork, the clink of metal on metal. . . .[5]

Towering mountains and watery plains, vast, slow-moving rivers crowded with shipping; mulberry orchards and bamboo groves; rough roads, muddy in winter, dusty in summer, leading through mud villages to proud walled cities with roofs of colored tiles which dazzle the eye; naked peasants laboring in the fields; the young noblemen driving fast chariots drawn by sleek horses with jingling bells; coaches and carrying-chairs for the older, richer citizens; palaces stretching around cool, shadowed courtyards with fountains and a multitude of rooms, some for affairs of state, others for pleasure. Temples where the silk-clad worshipers make offerings to the ancestors; market places full of chattering crowds and throbbing with noise; civil servants in carefully graded ranks, taxgatherers, officials, agricultural experts; princes

[5] *Ibid.*

and noblemen, landowners and factory-owners; craftsmen, artists, musicians, philosophers, and poets.

This was not the China which Marco Polo visited in the thirteenth century A.D.; not the familiar medieval China of the Tang, Sung, and Ming Dynasties. It was the China which existed some twenty-five hundred years ago, when Cyrus the Persian had conquered Egypt and Babylon, when Greece was approaching her prime, when the liberated Jews had returned from their Babylonian exile. All these peoples, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, can speak to us through their literature; so can ancient China, but how many of us are familiar with its voice? In order that we may be, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to some representative poems of this period. Some of the poems, originally collected by Confucius, may be as old as 700 B.C. The most recent are not later than the first century B.C.

Here is a courtship song of the seventh century B.C.:

A very handsome gentleman
Waited for me in the lane;
I am sorry I did not go with him.
A very splendid gentleman
Waited for me in the hall;
I am sorry I did not go with him.

I am wearing my unlined coat, my coat all of brocade.
I am wearing my unlined skirt, my skirt all of brocade.
Oh sir, oh my lord,
Take me with you in your coach!

I am wearing my unlined skirt, my skirt all of brocade.
And my unlined coat, my coat all of brocade.

Oh sir, oh my lord,
Take me with you in your coach![6]

Here is a poem in a more sophisticated vein. The singer is a girl who, like Juliet, wishes to send her lover from her before the household awakes and they are discovered:

GIRL: "The cock has crowed;
The Court by now is full."

MAN: "It was not the cock that crowed;
It was the buzzing of those green flies."

GIRL: "Eastward the sky is bright;
The Court must be in full swing."

MAN: "It is not the light of dawn;
It is the moon which is going to rise.
The gnats fly drowsily;
It will be sweet to share a dream with you."

GIRL: "Soon all the courtiers will go home;
Why get us both into this scrape?"

A wedding song:

My lord is all aglow.
In his left hand he holds the reed pipe,
With his right he summons me to make free with him.
Oh, the joy!

[6] All the poems in this chapter are, unless otherwise indicated, from Waley's *Chinese Poems*.

My lord is carefree.
In his left hand he holds the dancing plumes,
With his right he summons me to sport with him
Oh, the joy!

A young man's song:

Outside the Eastern Gate
Are girls as many as clouds;
But though they are many as clouds
There is none on whom my heart dwells.
White jacket and grey scarf
Alone could cure my woe.

Beyond the gate tower
Are girls lovely as rush-wool;
But though they are lovely as rush-wool
There is none with whom my heart bides.
White jacket and madder skirt
Alone could bring me joy.

Obviously, these are not peasant songs, but the practiced art of a cultivated aristocracy. Similar poems have come down to us from ancient Egypt and Babylonia produced by similar leisured classes. There is, however, something characteristically Chinese about the following song, in which a young girl expresses her love for her young gallant in his chariot:

Look at that little bay of the Ch'i,
Its kitesfoot so fresh.[7]

[7] Presumably refers to a bay where a plant called kitesfoot grows.

Delicately fashioned is my lord,
His ear ornaments are of precious stones,
His cap gems stand out like stars.
Oh, the grace, the elegance!
Oh, the luster, the light!
Delicately fashioned is my lord;
Never for a moment can I forget him!

Look at that little bay of the Ch'i,
Its kitesfoot in their crowds.
Delicately fashioned is my lord,
As a thing of bronze, a thing of white metal.
As a scepter of jade, a disc of jade.
How free, how easy
He leaned over his chariot rail!
How cleverly he chaffed and joked,
And yet was never rude!

But behind and supporting all this delicacy and refinement are the peasants. The following is a typical example of their robust songs:

Who says you have no sheep?
Three hundred is the flock.
Who says you have no cattle?
Ninety are the black-lips.
Here your rams come,
Their horns thronging;
Here your cattle come,
Their ears flapping.

Some go down the slope,
Some are drinking at the pool,
Some are sleeping, some waking.

Here your herdsmen come
In rush-cloak and bamboo hat,
Some shouldering their dinners.
Only thirty brindled beasts!
Your sacrifices will not go short.

Your herdsman comes,
Bringing faggots, bringing brushwood,
With the cock game, with hen game.
Your rams come,
Sturdy and sound;
None that limps, none that ails.
He beckons them with raised arm;
All go up into the stall. . . .

This might well be a pastoral idyl of Theocritus. In fact, the more often one reads these poems of ancient China the more sadly one reflects upon the permanence of the human condition; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is no human situation—love fulfilled or unfulfilled, pain, loss, bereavement, parting, reunion, all the joy and agony of living—which was not experienced and expressed by those long-dead people of China. For instance, we still live under the threat of war, as did the Chinese. The civilization which they had arduously created could be defended only by sacrifice. There were always the barbarians on the frontier; again and again the drums thundered out the call to battle, and young men had to leave their wives, arm themselves, and take the long road to the North, where, as one poet wrote:

. . . trees and grasses dare not grow:
Where the river is too wide to cross
And too deep to plumb,
And the sky is white with snow
And the cold cuts and kills. . . .

Here is a poem, dating from about 100 B.C., written by General Su Wu, in which he expresses what millions of twentieth-century soldiers have felt at parting from their wives:

Since our hair was plaited and we became man and wife,
The love between us was never broken by doubt.
So let us be merry this night together,
Feasting and playing while the good time lasts.

I suddenly remember the distance that I must travel;
I spring from bed and look out to see the time.
The stars and planets are all grown dim in the sky;
Long, long is the road; I cannot stay.
I am going on service, away to the battleground,
And I do not know when I shall come back.
I hold your hand with only a deep sigh;
Afterwards, tears—in the days when we are parted,
With all your might enjoy the spring flowers,
But do not forget the time of our love and pride;
Know that if I live, I will come back again,
And if I die, we will go on thinking of each other.[8]

This might be set beside the plea of the common soldiers previously quoted in Chapter 4:

How few of us are left, how few!
Why do we not go back?
Were it not for our prince's own concerns,
What should we be doing here in the mud?

Again and again, in Chinese literature of the "feudal" period, one finds this note of revulsion toward war and all that it involves,

[8] From Waley's *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems.*

although admittedly there are also heroic poems which hymn the joys of battle and triumph. Yet, when one compares this early Chinese poetry with the Greek epic verse of approximately the same period, it seems that the ancient Chinese attitude to war approximates our own much more closely. Any Grecophile like myself must be loath to confess to such a heresy, and one can always put forward in defense such moving interludes as Hector's conversation with his wife Andromache in the *Iliad:*[9]

> Thus as he spoke, great Hector stretched his arms
> To take his child; but back the infant shrank,
> Crying, and sought his nurse's sheltering breast,
> Scar'd by the brazen helm and horse-hair plume,
> That nodded, fearful, on the warrior's crest.
> Laugh'd the fond parents both, and from his brow
> Hector the casque remov'd, and set it down,
> All glitt'ring on the ground; then kissed his child,
> And danc'd him in his arms; then thus to Jove
> And to th' Immortals all address'd his pray'r;
> "Grant, Jove, and all ye gods, that this my son
> May be, as I, the foremost man of Troy,
> For valor fam'd, his country's guardian king . . ."

I have yet to find anything in Chinese poetry to equal this passage, and yet, even in this, Hector is already thinking of his infant son as a warrior:

> That men may say, "This youth surpasses far
> His father," when they see him from the fight,

[9] Translated by Edward, Earl of Derby (George Geoffrey Smith Stanley). Published by J. M. Dent & Sons in the Everyman Library, London, 1910.

From slaughter'd foes, with bloody spoils of war
Returning, to rejoice his mother's heart!

Is it that the Chinese of this period were, in the banal phrase, "overcivilized" compared with the robust Mycenean Greeks; that they valued too highly the delicate refinements of the civilization which they had created? Yet, if there is no Chinese parallel to the *Iliad,* is there anything in Greek poetry to equal the following passionate apotheosis of Chinese civilization, which dates from the third or fourth century B.C.? In it, the anonymous poet invokes the soul of a man who is either dying or already dead. "Go not to the East," he implores, "where a mighty water drowneth Earth's other shore," nor to the South, where "poisonous serpents slither through the flames, where on precipitous slopes or in deep woods, tigers and leopards prowl." Similarly, in the West, "level wastes of sand stretch on and on," and in the North, where "the cold cuts and kills," there is no refuge. How powerfully these phrases describe the frontiers within which the Chinese had created their paradise called "All that is under Heaven." Then the poet paints a picture of what civilization was like to the aristocratic Chinese of his own class—a picture which reminds one of the luxurious life of the Theban nobles of ancient Egypt in 1500 B.C., a life dedicated to all the sensual delights of love, food, wine, art, and music:

O Soul, come back to idleness and peace.
In quietude enjoy
The lands of Ching and Ch'u.
There work your will and follow your desire
Till sorrow is forgot,
And carelessness shall bring you length of days.
O Soul, come back to joys beyond all telling!

Where thirty cubits high at harvest time
The corn is stacked;
Where pies are cooked of millet and water grain,
Guests watch the steaming bowls
And sniff the pungency of peppered herbs,
The cunning cook adds slices of bird flesh,
Pigeon and yellow heron and black crane.
They taste the badger stew.
O Soul, come back to feed on foods you love!

Then the drinks are described:

The four strong liquors are warming at the fire
So that they grate not on the drinker's throat.
How fragrant rise their fumes, how cool their taste!
Such drink is not for louts and serving-men!
And wise distillers from the land of Wu
Blend unfermented spirit with white yeast
And brew of *li* of Ch'u.
O Soul, come back and let your tremblings cease!

With wine and exquisite food go music:

Reed-organs from the lands of Tai and Ch'in
And Wei and Cheng
Gladden the feasters, and old songs are sung:
The "Rider's Song" that once
Fu-hsi, the ancient monarch made;
And the shrill songs of Ch'u.
Then, after prelude from the pipes of Chao,
The ballad singer's voice rises alone.
O Soul, come back to the hollow mulberry tree![10]

[10] *i.e.,* the lute.

Eight and eight the dancers sway,
Weaving their steps to the poet's voice,
Who speaks his odes and rhapsodies;
They tap their bells and beat their chimes
Rigidly, lest harp and flute
Should mar the measure.
Then rival singers of the Four Domains
Compete in melody, till not a tune
Is left unsung that human voice could sing.
O Soul, come back and listen to their songs!

Then women enter whose red lips and dazzling teeth
Seduce the eye;
But meek and virtuous, trained in every art,
Fit sharers of playtime,
So soft their flesh and delicate their bones.
O Soul, come back and let them ease your woe!

Then enter other ladies with laughing lips
And sidelong glances under moth eyebrows,
Whose cheeks are fresh and red;
Ladies both great of heart and long of limb
Whose beauty by sobriety is matched.
Well-padded cheeks and ears with curving rim,
High-arching eyebrows, as with compass drawn,
Great hearts and loving gestures—all are there;
Small waists and necks as slender as the clasp
Of courtiers' buckles.
O Soul, come back to those whose tenderness
Drives angry thoughts away!

I have quoted from this enchanting poem at some length because it evokes a more vivid picture of life in the feudal courts of

China twenty-five centuries ago than anything I could describe. Some readers will disagree with my belief that this picture represents high civilization: Puritans will abhor the frank sensuality; feminists will deplore its acceptance of women as sexual virtuosi, "trained in every art, fit sharers of playtime," though they should not delude themselves into thinking that intellectual pleasures were not enjoyed equally with those of the body.

The only remaining point I wish to make is that this was a regional, not a national culture; that its enjoyment was confined to a very tiny minority which, while prepared to defend itself, could do so only with the support of thousands of underprivileged peasants who did not share in its delights. This explains why, when the northern barbarians attacked, the farmers on the frontier were as likely to retreat with their families and livestock as to stand and fight the invaders.

Again, many of the intellectuals were bored by those never-ending frontier wars. One of them wrote:

> However great a country may be, . . . if it loves war, it will perish. Arms are ill-omened instruments. The territories which have been wrested from the Huns are unsuited for cultivation; and furthermore, these brutes are incapable of assimilation. It is better to ignore them, and leave them to pasture their flocks in the solitary wastes.[11]

But there was another reason why some members of the Chinese intelligentsia doubted the values of their own hard-won civilization, just as today there are voices which decry Western culture and seek solace in savagery—whether that of primitive

[11] Grousset, *op. cit.*

Africa or New York's West Side. This disillusionment, and particularly the abhorrence of war, may have arisen from the fact that all too frequently, when the drums beat for war, the armies did not march against the outer barbarians but against some equally civilized Chinese state. (The parallel with Christian Europe needs no emphasis.) As in medieval Europe, war seems to have developed into an elaborate game played by professionals according to strict rules. René Grousset writes:

> When the army of one seigniory invaded a neighboring principality, the seigneur of the latter, from defiance and bravado, would send a convoy of provisions to the invading army. Sometimes this defiance took a more sanguinary turn; the barons would send messengers to their enemy, braves who would cut their throats in his presence. Sometimes a war chariot would come at full speed to hurl insults at the gate of an opposing city. Then followed a mêlée of chariots in the Assyrian manner. "The thousand chariots charge pennon against pennon, honor against honor."[12]

When the armies met, their leaders exchanged "haughty compliments" with each other from their chariots. At times, foes would drink together and even exchange weapons before the battle. Is not this all only too familiar to us, from Homer to Malory? And just as we have reacted to it, so did the Chinese. The last three centuries of the Chou Dynasty degenerated into a never-ending conflict between state and state, with the usual concomitants of power, lust, treachery, intriguing royal mistresses, and soldiers dying miserably in the northern wastes while army contractors made fat profits. The poets might still write heroic verses on the

[12] *Ibid.*

glories of battle, but many of the literati saw through the shoddy mask to the rottenness within. Mo Tzu wrote:

> To kill a man in order to save the world is not acting for the good of the world. To sacrifice oneself for the good of humanity, that is acting rightly![13]

And the book *Chuang Tzu* opens with a breath-taking passage which puts petty, warring humanity in the greater perspective of the cosmos:

> The great bird rises on the wind to a height of a thousand miles. What does it see from on high there in the blue? Is it droves of wild horses galloping? Is it primeval matter whirling in an atomic dust? Is it the exhalations that give birth to all things? Is it the blue of the sky itself, or is it only the color of infinite distance?[14]

Minds which could soar to such metaphysical heights could not fail to be disillusioned by a refined but minuscule civilization constantly threatened with extinction by its own crass folly. Something had to take its place, and, just as today, the jealous states would either have to learn to live together or be crushed out of existence by an authoritarian power. It is not surprising, therefore, that a Chinese poet, faced with this problem, took refuge, as Rousseau one day would, in a revulsion against civilization itself. The following poem was written approximately twelve hundred years ago:

[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*

To the southeast—three thousand leagues—
The Yuan and Hsiang form into a mighty lake.
Above the lake are deep mountain valleys,
And men dwelling whose hearts are without guile.
Gay like children, they swarm to the tops of trees;
And run to the water to catch bream and trout.
Their pleasures are the same as those of beasts and birds;
They put no restraint either on body or mind.
Far I have wandered throughout the Nine Lands;
Wherever I went such manners had disappeared.
I find myself standing and wondering, perplexed,
Whether Saints and Sages have really done us good.[15]

[15] Waley, *Chinese Poems.*

7

The Soul of China

Readers will have noticed that the first part of our story is describing a circle. We began with the story of Ching K'o and his attempt to assassinate the king of Ch'in in the third century B.C. We then followed the birth and development of Chinese civilization through the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, through the feudal age of the Chou Dynasty down to the Period of the Warring States, near the end of which Ching K'o heroically tried to kill the Ch'in spider at the heart of his web. The chief actors in that drama, the Crown Prince Tan, General Fan, the king of Ch'in, and Ching K'o himself, behaved in the way they did, not only because they were human beings faced with a not-unfamiliar situation, but because they had been conditioned by certain religious and philosophical ideas, themselves the product of China's growth.

To those for whom the word "philosophy" suggests an academic abstraction, it is worth remembering that ideas both build walls and tear them down. For instance, the struggle now shaking the world and threatening it with destruction began with a conception of society born in the mind of a German scholar and brought to fruition in the silence of the reading room of the British Museum.

So ideas functioned in ancient China, and readers may be surprised to find, in certain passages quoted in this chapter, the same basic ideas which we have come to associate with our own troubled century: disarmament, both "multilateral" and "unilateral"; pacifism; authoritarianism; a belief in outright self-indulgence; and a belief in self-abnegation for a great cause.

There were those who believed that man was naturally bad and others who believed he was naturally good. There were those who advocated strong government and others who believed in as little government as possible. There was a realistic school, to which the royal tutor Chu Wu evidently belonged, which believed that the end justified the means; and there were others, like the Crown Prince Tan, who thought that an evil act—*e.g.*, handing the exiled General Fan over to his enemies—could never justify an apparently good end, the appeasement of the Ch'in king. Where the hero Ching K'o stood, we cannot quite be sure. Certainly he did not subscribe to the Mohist school, which believed that all men were good, and his ruthless treatment of General Fan suggests that he was a Realist. He certainly did not accept the ideas of the Quietists, who advocated a renunciation of all sensual delights, including music. But he would almost certainly have approved of the following words from the philosopher Lieh Tzu:

> Let the ear hear what it longs to hear, the eye see what it longs to see, the nose smell what it wants to smell, the mouth speak what it wants to speak, let the body have every comfort that it craves, let the mind [rove] as it will. Now what the ear wants to hear is music, and to deprive it of this is to cramp the sense of hearing. What the eye wants to see is carnal beauty; and to deprive it is to cramp the sense of sight. What the nose craves for is to have near it the fragrant plants *shu* and *lan;* and if it cannot have them, the sense of smell is cramped. What the mouth desires is to speak of what is true and what false; and if

it may not speak, then knowledge is cramped. What the body desires for its comfort is warmth and good food. Thwart its attainment of these, and you cramp what is natural and essential to man. What the mind wants is the liberty to stray whither it will, and if it has not this freedom, the very nature of man is cramped and thwarted. Tyrants and oppressors cramp us in every one of these ways. Let us depose them, and wait happily for death to come.[1]

Lieh Tzu subscribed to the doctrine of *yang-sheng, i.e.,* "nourishing the living." What most "nourishes life" is happiness, and what leads to happiness is freedom to satisfy desire. We would call this doctrine "hedonism." By way of contrast, here is a passage from the *Tao Têh Ching,* a famous book of philosophy ascribed to Lao-tse, though it was probably the work of several writers and expresses the Quietist view of life.

Banish wisdom, discard knowledge,
and the people will be benefited a hundredfold.
Banish human-heartedness, discard righteousness,
and the people will be dutiful and compassionate.
Banish skill, discard profit,
and thieves and robbers will disappear.
If, when these three things are done they find life too plain
and unadorned,
Then let them have accessories. Let them have
Unadornment to look upon and Unwrought Simplicity to
hold. Let them have
Selflessness and fewness of desires.[2]

[1] Waley, Arthur, *The Way and Its Power.* London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1934.
[2] *Ibid.*

And:

> The five colors confuse the eye,
> The five sounds dull the ear,
> The five tastes spoil the palate.
> Excess of hunting and chasing
> Makes minds go mad.
> Products that are hard to get
> Impede their owner's movements.
> Therefore the sage
> Considers the belly not the eye.[3]
> Truly, "he rejects that but takes this."[4]

Yet a third point of view is expressed by Han Fei Tzu, who sternly reproves the Quietists for selfishness and indifference to state affairs. He writes:

> They walk apart from the crowd, priding themselves on being different from other men. They preach the doctrine of Quietism, but their exposition of it is couched in baffling and mysterious terms. I submit . . . that this Quietism is of no practical value to anyone and that the language in which it is couched is not founded on any real principle . . . I submit that man's duty in life is to serve his prince and nourish his parents, neither of which things can be done by Quietness. I further submit that it is man's duty in all that he teaches, to promote loyalty and good faith and the Legal Constitution. This cannot be done in terms that are vague and mysterious.[5]

[3] *i.e.,* relies on "what is inside him," or his own inner powers.
[4] Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* translated by Derk Bodde, Princeton University Press. London: George Allen & Unwin.
[5] Waley, *The Way and Its Power.*

It is an interesting fact that the Age of the Great Philosophers in China (*circa* 600–200 B.C.) coincided approximately with that of ancient Greece. But there was a notable difference. Unlike the Greeks, the Chinese never seem to have been interested in knowledge for its own sake. There was always a practical bias (as in Egypt).

"Chinese philosophers," writes Professor Fung Yu-lan, "for the most part have not regarded knowledge as something valuable in itself, and so have not sought knowledge for the sake of knowledge; and even in the case of knowledge of a practical sort that might have a direct bearing upon human happiness, Chinese philosophers have preferred to apply this knowledge to actual conduct that would lead directly to happiness, rather than to hold what they considered to be empty discussions about it."[6]

This explains why, in nearly all these writings, even those of the Quietists, there are frequent references to "the ruler." The Chinese philosopher was not devising a system of ethics or personal morality which could be regarded in the abstract. He was not primarily interested in writing books. He was an official, or would-be official, seeking to advise the prince of some feudal state whose patronage he sought to obtain.

"In China, therefore" continues Professor Fung Yu-lan "it was only when a sage [*i.e.*, a philosopher] had failed to gain the position of a ruler (or at least an official) in which he might carry his principles into practice, that he turned to the writing of books as a means of establishing his doctrines; and hence this last course was looked upon by Chinese philosophers as one to be followed when no alternative offered."[7]

These sages were the spiritual descendants of those far-off

[6] Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*
[7] *Ibid.*

soothsayers of the Shang Dynasty who purported to read the future from the cracked shells of tortoises. Their ancestors were the magicians and oracle readers, who also understood the art of writing and could therefore assimilate, record, and transmit knowledge (as did the scribes of ancient Egypt). The sages were the archivists,

> . . . so much in demand at the imperial and princely courts, where they occupied the most honored and influential positions. Their posts may have been hereditary, for it appears that the difficult accomplishment of writing in the literary style was largely confined to certain families, as is illustrated by not a few cases among the early historians where the son, or occasionally the daughter, carried on the father's work after [his] death.[8]

Of these men, the one best known in the West is, of course, Confucius, whose Chinese name is K'ung Fu-tzu (*i.e.*, "K'ung the Master"). He was born in 551 B.C., in the state of Lu, not far from the present town of Ch'u Fu in the province of Shantung. According to tradition, his father, a noted military officer, died while Confucius was still a child, and the boy was brought up by his mother. At nineteen, he married and at about the same time entered the service of the Duke of Lu, first as keeper of grain stores and later as custodian of the public lands. In 501, he became prime minister of Lu, and such was his influence over the duke that the ruler of the neighboring state of Ch'i decided to undermine it in an amusing way:

> Eighty beautiful girls, skilled in dancing and singing, decked out in gaudy costumes, together with a hundred and twenty of

[8] Hubbard, G. E., "Chinese History," *op. cit.*

> the finest piebald horses that could be found, were sent as a present to the Duke of Lu. The latter, quite overcome by the sight of so much loveliness, forgot all his lessons of propriety. For three days no audience was held at the Lu court. "Master," said one of his favorite students to the sage, "it is time for you to be going."[9]

Much as one admires Confucius, one cannot escape the impression that he was something of a prig, out of his depth in the sophisticated, decadent society of China in the sixth century B.C. After shaking the dust of Lu from his feet, the sage entered the state of Wei, where the reigning duke was even more dissipated than the ruler of Lu. This duke, at the time of Confucius' visit, was preoccupied with the charms of his favorite concubine, a woman noted for her wit as well as her beauty. She insisted on being granted an interview with the itinerant philosopher.

> As she rose to greet him, her countless pendants of precious stones tinkled like little bells. His students apparently made vexing insinuations to the philosopher about this event, so that he was driven to call Heaven to witness that he had not behaved improperly.[10]

On another occasion Confucius was obliged to drive through the capital city of Wei immediately behind the lighthearted duke, who rode with his mistress beside him. "Lust in front, virtue behind!" shouted a bystander, a comment which must have embarrassed the sage very much. But such occurrences were inevitable, for Confucius was too closely associated with the rulers and their concerns to be able to take an independent line. Not

[9] Tsui Chi, *op. cit.*
[10] *Ibid.*

long afterward, the duke was engaged in serious conversation with the philosopher when a flight of swans crossed the sky. The bored duke stared vacantly at the birds. Confucius realized it was time to move on, and did so. But wherever he traveled, he was rebuffed. Few of the rulers would listen to him for long, some because they were disturbed by the power of his intellect, but most because they were bored by his solemnity.

Sir Harold Nicolson quotes the following example of Confucius' behavior:

> He himself displayed many idiosyncrasies which his disciples recorded with puzzled awe. His nightshirt was longer than the customary Chinese nightshirt; when out driving he refrained from looking around and in his opinion it was vulgar, in any circumstances, to point. If his mat were not at an exact right angle with the wall, he would refuse to sit on it, disliking all asymmetric things. His behavior at court was such as to remain for long in the memory of observers. After speaking to his sovereign, Confucius did not permit himself to assume "a satisfied expression" until he had descended the first step of the throne. "When," we are told, "he had reached the last of the steps, he would hurry to his place, with his arms stretched out on each side of his body as if they were wings." On resuming his seat, his manner and facial expression indicated "respectful uneasiness." On the rare occasions when his master . . . was so kind as to allow Confucius to carry the royal scepter, his deportment became odd indeed. "His countenance," we are told, "seemed to change and to become apprehensive. He dragged his feet one after the other, as if they were tied by something to the ground."[11]

[11] Nicolson, Harold, *Good Behavior*. London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1956.

Another example of Confucian etiquette:

HOST: "You, sir, are demeaning yourself by coming here. I pray that your honor will return home, where I shall hasten to present myself before you."
GUEST: "I cannot bring disgrace upon you by obeying this injunction. Be good enough to end by granting me this interview."
HOST: "I do not dare to set an example as to how a reception of this kind should be conducted, and I must therefore persist in asking your honor to return to your own house, where I shall call upon you without delay."
GUEST: "It is I who do not dare to make a precedent. I therefore must persist in asking you to grant me an interview."
HOST: "As for me, as I have failed to obtain your permission to refuse this honor, I shall press my objection no further. But I hear that your honor is offering me a present, and this at least I must decline."
GUEST: "Without a present, I dare not venture into your presence."
HOST: "I am not sufficiently expert in such ceremonies and I must persist in declining."
GUEST: "Without the support and confidence given me by my gift, I have not the courage to pay this visit. I must persist in my request."
HOST: "I am also decided in declining. Yet, as I cannot secure your consent that I should visit you in your house, how dare I not now respectfully obey?"[12]

When one comes to examine the Confucian philosophy, what did it amount to? He, like Socrates, never wrote a book, and what

[12] *Ibid.*

we know of his teachings is derived from the writings of his students and associates. He did not found a religion or invent a philosophy, and, among the "great ones" of his time, he was treated with little respect. Loved by his own students, he was regarded by the rulers whom he sought to advise as a pompous bore—which he probably was. Unlike Mo Tzu and Lao-tse, he was no revolutionary with a fresh and exciting message. One of his opponents said of him:

> "You are a mere wordmonger, who talks nonsense about Kings Wen and Wu [founders of the Chou Dynasty]. . . . You have many words, which only mislead. You do not sew and yet you are clothed. Your lips patter and your tongue wags, and you produce your own rights and wrongs, with which to mislead the rulers of the world and prevent scholars from reverting to the fundamentals of things. You make a deceiving show of filial piety and brotherly love, so that by good chance you may secure some fat fief or post of power."[13]

What emerges from the recorded statements of Confucius is conformity. I see no reason to doubt that he would have accepted the following statement from the *Tso Chuan,* written within his own lifetime:

> As the days have their divisions in periods of ten each, so men have their ten ranks. It is by these that inferiors serve their superiors, and that superiors perform their duties to the spirits. Therefore, the king has the ruler [of each feudal state] as his subject; the rulers have the great prefects as their subjects; the prefects have their officers; the officers have their subalterns; the

[13] Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*

> subalterns have their multitude of petty officers; the petty officers have their assistants; the assistants have their employees; the employers have their menials. . . . etc., etc.[14]

Confucius believed sincerely in this carefully graded hierarchy of rank; indeed, to him it was essential to ensure a stable society, and he was constantly harking back to the mythical days of "Kings Wen and Wu" as examples of an ideal social organization which the rulers of his own time should follow. He did not wish to change anything, only to persuade the feudal rulers of his own time to return to the perfect pattern of government said to have been established by the ancient kings of China, the very existence of which is now doubted. It was for this reason that he carefully collected and recorded the writings of former chroniclers and even the folk songs of the people, some of which have been quoted in this book. Grousset writes:

> Confucianism may be summed up in the notion of *jen*, a notion which implies at the same time a feeling of humanity toward others and a feeling of human dignity in one's self; in brief, a respect for one's self and others with all the subsidiary virtues that this ideal involves; magnanimity, good faith, and charity. In external relations, *jen* is expressed in a constant self-control, a respect for ritual, and a formal politeness which . . . is but an external manifestation of the politeness of the heart.[15]

All this sounds very splendid, especially if read quickly. But what, in fact, did the Confucian "respect for ritual" and "formal politeness" really mean in terms of everyday living? We can get some idea from the criticism voiced by the philosopher Mo Tzu,

[14] Grousset, *op. cit.*
[15] *Ibid.*

who attacked a Confucian teacher, Kung Meng Tzu, in the following way:

> Kung Meng Tzu said, "I mourn for three years in imitation of the affection that my son shows to his parents." Mo Tzu said, "The baby knows only to love its parents. Therefore, when the parents are no longer to be had, it continues to cry without ceasing. Why is this? It is the height of foolishness. And so, then, is the intelligence of the Confucian any higher than that of the baby?"[16]

And of the elaborate funerary ritual upon which the Confucians insisted, Mo Tzu makes these practical comments:

> . . . if elaborate funerals and extended mourning are adopted as a rule, . . . then upon the death of a parent, there will be three years' mourning; upon the death of the wife or for the eldest son, there will be three years' mourning. . . . Besides, there will be one year for uncles, brothers, and the other sons; five months for the near relatives; and also several months for aunts, sisters, nephews, and uncles on the mother's side.
>
> Further, there are set rules to make one's self emaciated. The face and eyes are to look sunken, and the complexion is to appear dark. Eyes and ears are to become dull, and hands and feet to become weak and useless. Again, it is said that, if the mourner is a high official, he has to be supported to rise and lean on a cane to walk. And this is to last three years if the doctrine is adopted and such a principle is practiced.[17]

Now I am well aware that, by quoting carefully selected extracts out of their context, it is easy to make practically any system

[16] Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*
[17] Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*

of philosophy sound absurd, and it would be impertinent for any Western writer to condemn Confucianism on such superficial grounds. There is, in fact, no Chinese word for "Confucianist." The sage was primarily an educationalist, "a transmitter, not a creator, a believer in and lover of antiquity." He was the first man in China to make teaching his profession; he popularized culture and education. "It was he," writes Professor Fung Yu-lan, "who inaugurated, or at least developed, that class of gentleman in ancient China who was neither farmer, artisan, merchant, or actual official, but was a professional teacher and professional official."

His insistence on the importance of form, ceremony, and the due observance of ritual also had a practical basis. Confucians believed, probably rightly, that in a country such as China, with its teeming population and crowded cities, order could be maintained only if each citizen recognized and accepted his place in society. Children must respect their parents and maintain them in their old age. The graded ranks of officials must not only show responsibility for those placed in their charge but also due respect for those above them, up to the ruler himself, who was the father of his people. Any disruption of this hierarchy of rank could only lead to chaos and misery; therefore, it must be maintained by the careful observance of traditional customs. A fair parallel would be the traditions of a "good" army regiment: some of them may seem pointless to the raw recruit, yet they bind the regiment together and make it into an effective fighting unit.

When all this has been recognized, it must still be admitted that the doctrines advocated by Confucius and his disciples implied an aristocratic form of government, created by officials for officials. Professor Eberhard writes:

> Confucius was fully conscious of his membership in a social class whose existence was bound up with that of the feudal

lords. With their disappearance, his type of scholar would become superfluous. The common people, the lower class, were in his view in an entirely subordinate position. Thus his moral teaching is a code for the ruling class.[18]

It is a relief, therefore, to turn from the teachings of Confucius to those of rival philosophers, some of whom bitterly opposed his doctrines. For example there was Mo Tzu, whose criticisms of Chinese funerary customs have already been quoted. Unlike Confucius, Mo Tzu seems to have sprung from the peasant class. He is believed to have lived sometime between 479–381 B.C., and he may have been a native of the state of Sung (within the present province of Honan) of which many stories are told illustrating the naïveté of its inhabitants. For instance, it is recorded that a farmer of Sung discovered a dead rabbit at the foot of a tree, against which it had stunned itself. The innocent farmer then abandoned his plow and waited by the tree, hoping that more rabbits would kill themselves in the same manner so that he would not need to work any more. Of the same state of Sung, Mencius, another Chinese sage, wrote, "There was a man of Sung who was grieved that his growing corn was not longer, so he pulled it up."

I am not familiar with folk traditions in, for example, America, Germany, or France, but from personal experience I can vouch for the two following stories originating from the English midlands; and these might well have been told about the people of Sung. The first concerns a farmer in the Cotswold hills of Gloucestershire, England, who, it is alleged, built a high wall around his orchard in order that the swallow could not escape and would therefore sing all the year round, ensuring a perpetual spring. The

[18] Eberhard, *op. cit.*

other story concerns an inhabitant of Staffordshire, in the heart of England, who was so entranced by certain visiting musicians that he hauled his pig onto the wall of his orchard so that it could "see the band go by." Similar stories of human stupidity can be found in practically every country of the world, and in most cases this primal innocence is associated with what, in Christian Europe, is called "saintliness."

So it was in the province of Sung in ancient China. For example, the Duke of Sung (650–637 B.C.) was severely criticized in the book called *Tso Chuan* because he refused to wound twice, or to make prisoners of gray-haired men.

> "If one wants not to wound a second time," asks the sage, "would it not be better not to wound at all? If one spares old men, would it not be better to make one's submission?"

"These concepts of universal love and antimilitarism," writes Professor Fung Yu-lan, "would thus seem to have been characteristic of the people of Sung. They are reflected in the *Lu Shih Ch'un Ch'iu* when it says, 'The idea of ending war springs out of a mind holding universal love toward the world.' The *Tso Chuan* tells us that, after the death of Duke Hsiang, his efforts toward peace were continued by other men of Sung, some of whom proposed a disarmament of all states."[19]

Some Chinese scholars believe that Mo Tzu, the pacifist, was born in this state of Sung, though he may possibly have emigrated there from Lu. His doctrine demanded that "one must feel toward all people . . . exactly as one feels toward one's own people, regard other states exactly as one regards one's own state."

Mo Tzu appears to have believed that men, left to themselves,

[19] Fung Yu-lan, *op. cit.*

would naturally follow "the path of righteousness" and that wars were artificially fostered and unnatural. For instance, he said:

> When everyone regards the houses of others as he regards his own, who would disturb the others' houses? Others would be regarded like one's self. Now, when states and capitals do not attack and seize each other, and when clans and individuals do not disturb and harm one another, is this a calamity or a benefit to the world? We must say that it is a benefit. When we come to consider the origins of the various benefits, how have they arisen? Have they arisen out of hate of others and injuring others? We must say not so. We should say that they have arisen out of love of others and benefiting others. If we should classify all those who love others and benefit others, should we find them to be partial or universal? We must say that they are universal. Now, since universality is really the cause of the major benefits in the world, therefore Mo Tzu proclaims universality to be right.[20]

But Mo Tzu's philosophy of universal benevolence went much further than the abolition of war. In the following quotation, one may detect the theory of the welfare state:

> Let us again consider the matter from both sides. Suppose there are two rulers. Let one of them hold universality and the other partiality. Then the partial ruler would say, "How can I take care of the people as I do myself? This would be quite contrary to commonsense. A man's life on earth is of short duration; it is like a galloping horse passing by a crack in the wall." Therefore, when he found his people hungry, he would not feed them, and when he found them cold, he would not clothe

[20] *Ibid.*

them. When they were sick, he would not minister to them, and, upon their death, he would not bury them. . . . But the words of the universal ruler are not like this, nor are his deeds. He would say "I have heard that to be an enlightened ruler in the world, one should first attend to one's people and then to one's self. Only after this can one be an enlightened ruler in the world." Therefore, when he found his people hungry, he would feed them, and when he found them cold, he would clothe them. In their sickness, he would minister to them, and, upon their death, he would bury them. Such would be the word and such the deed of the universal ruler.[21]

Is not there something familiar about this? As the succession of sentimental platitudes beats upon the mind, wave after wave, the intellect becomes dulled. It is all so true, and yet so completely unrelated to the world as one knows it. The rulers of the feudal states to whom these literati offered their advice were faced with direct, urgent problems. Hordes of enemy soldiers were at the gates; men and women were rotting to death in besieged towns; prisoners were being beheaded or buried alive in thousands. The days of chivalry were over. The enemy no longer attacked in chariots after exchanging courtly compliments but used all the techniques of total war. Whole populations were massacred.

The courtesies of feudal warfare were a thing of the past. The struggles between the warring states were implacable. Instead of nobly holding their prisoners to ransom, from now on conquerors put them to death in mass executions. The soldiers of the kingdom of Ch'in, the most bellicose of the warring states, received their pay only on the presentation of the severed heads of their enemies. In towns taken by assault, or even in those

[21] *Ibid.*

that capitulated, the whole population, women, old men and children, were often put to the sword. Reverting once more to the cannibal practices of primitive humanity, the chiefs, in order to "increase their prestige," did not hesitate to throw their conquered enemies into boiling caldrons and drink this horrible human soup, and even force the kinsmen of their victims to drink it.[22]

What Mo Tzu and his fellow pacifists could never bring themselves to realize, but what the harassed feudal princes knew as well as we do, was that there is a strain of devilishness in most men which actually permits them to *enjoy* killing and destroying.

Meanwhile, there had been a revolution in the technique of war, brought about mainly because the Chinese states on the northern frontier, who were in regular contact with the Hsiung-nu, had observed and copied their methods. Mounted archers were far more efficient than the old-fashioned feudal chariots. A standing army of lightly armed infantrymen were much more efficient killers than the clumsy feudal levies. At about the same time, ingenious siege machines were introduced to reduce fortified towns; there were towers on wheels, battering rams, mines, and a variety of powerful catapults capable of smashing down the strongest walls or plowing lanes through massed armies. Applied science had transformed warfare from an aristocratic sport, played according to rules, into a deadly business in which there was only one rule—to win.

In the midst of this horror, the sages—Quietists, Mohists, Confucians—traveled from court to court, offering their elevating but unhelpful advice. Only occasionally such a voice as that of Yang

[22] Grousset, *op. cit.*

Chu broke through the fog of sentimental theory with a note of bitter realism:

> A hundred years is the extreme limit of human life. A helpless infancy and a driveling dotage take up half. Sickness and suffering, loss and trouble, fear and anxiety, occupy the rest. What is the life of man, where is the pleasure? Dead, he is stinking corruption, but how much worse eternal life![23]

[23] *Ibid.*

8

The Rise of the Legalists

Out of this chaos and misery—of which Yang Chu's words are an agonized expression—a new order eventually arose, but it was an iron discipline imposed from above, quite unlike the gentle Confucian system based on harmony, tolerance, mutual loyalty, and respect for authority. It broke up the ancient feudal states and destroyed much of their refined civilization; it made China a nation, gave her unity for the first time, and provided her with a defense against her external enemies; but the cost in human suffering was great. The physical power which made this possible came from the semibarbaric state of Ch'in, which, as Ssu-ma Ch'ien wrote, "ate up its neighbors as a silkworm devours a leaf." But the ideology which enabled Ch'in not only to conquer, but to consolidate its conquests, was a system of philosophy which considered government *not from the standpoint of the governed, but from that of the governors;* its goal was not what would necessarily produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number, but what would produce efficient rule. The advocates of this philosophy, who were opposed not only to the Confucian school but also to the Quietists and pacifists, were called Legalists or, sometimes, Realists.

Confucius and his followers believed in an aristocratic state, in

which order and happiness were preserved by every man's accepting his status in life and showing responsibility toward his inferiors and respect to his superiors. The Quietists, in revolt against this idea, advocated nonactivity and "desirelessness"; happiness could be achieved only if men abjured the things of this world and sought within themselves for the "still center." Mencius, a moralist of the Confucian school, taught the doctrine of the "golden mean." Mo Tzu and his followers, believing in the natural goodness of men, advocated self-sacrifice, pacifism, and universal love. The Legalists, who were particularly strong in the state of Ch'in, reacted against all these conceptions. Men, they said, were not naturally good. It was futile, in their view, to hark back, as Confucius did, to the ideal society which was alleged to have existed in the days of the legendary Chinese emperors Yao and Yu. One Legalist wrote:

> When Yao held the empire, his reed thatch was not trimmed, and his oak roof beams were unsmoothed. . . . In winter he wore deerskins, and in summer clothing of dolichos fiber. Had it been the clothing and nourishment of a porter, it could not have been worse than this. When Yu held the empire, he himself plowed so as to set an example to his people. His thighs were without fat and his shanks worn of all hair. Had these been the labors of a servant or a slave, they could not have been more arduous than this.
>
> . . . Those of old, therefore, who handed over the empire, are not to be praised. But nowadays when even a district officer dies, his descendants can maintain private carriages for many generations. Therefore, as regards the attitude of people toward abdications, the reason why those of old lightly declined the position of emperor, while today they part with reluctance from

> the position of district officer, is *because of the altered amount of respective advantages.*[1]
>
> . . . It was not because of moral excellence that [in the past] a man lightly declined the position of emperor, but because of the limitations of his power. And it was not because of moral decadence that [today] a man strives fiercely for government employment but because of the weightiness of the authority.[2]

What is it that makes a man work for his master, asked the Legalists? Love, respect, pride in his work? No; just self-interest:

> He exerts his skill in cultivating the fields. This is not because he loves his master, but he says, "In this way I shall have good soup, and money and cloth will come more easily."

And why, asked the Legalists, does the master pay the farm hand with good food, money, and cloth? Because he loves the farm hand? No. It is, he says, because "in this way, his plowing of the ground will go deeper and his sowing of seeds will be more active."

The author of these reflections, Han Fei-tzu, was probably the greatest of the Legalists. All men, he insisted, act from motives of self-advantage, and it is foolish to consider otherwise. All, he wrote "show calculating minds in their attitudes," whether they be kings, noblemen, officials, farmers, or menials. Therefore, the only satisfactory way to govern them is by appealing either to fear or self-interest. Han Fei-tzu wrote:

[1] Author's italics.

[2] For this quotation and those which follow in this chapter, I am, unless otherwise indicated, indebted to Professor Fung Yu-lan, whose book entitled *A History of Chinese Philosophy,* translated by Derk Bodde, Princeton University Press (London: George Allen & Unwin), is warmly recommended to students.

> The severe household has no fierce slaves, while it is the affectionate mother who has the prodigal son. From this I know that awe-inspiring power [*i.e.*, "*shih*"] can repress outrage, whereas virtue and kindness are insufficient to halt disorderliness.

For similar reasons, Han Fei-tzu rejected the Confucian doctrine of the equal division of land. It is interesting to note how he demolished this theory with the same arguments used by those who oppose the modern welfare state:

> Men of learning who discuss government in the present age say, "Give land to those who are poor, so as to give something to those who are helpless." But suppose, there is a man whose circumstances are similar to those of others, and there has been no profit from a prosperous year or from other sources, yet he alone is self-sustaining. This means that he must either have been industrious or economical. Now suppose that there is a man whose circumstances are similar to those of others, and there has been no tribulation or famine, disease or calamity, yet he alone is poor. He must have been either wasteful or lazy. The wasteful and lazy person is poor, while the industrious and economical person is rich. Now for the superior to collect from the rich man so as to distribute to the poor home, is to take from the industrious and the economical and give to the wasteful and the lazy. To wish thus to lead to people to increased activity and frugality is impossible.

The method of government which would be most efficient, thought Han Fei-tzu, was not one based on paternalism, nor one which relied on the natural goodness of men.

> If we had to depend upon an arrow being perfectly straight of itself, there would be no arrows in a hundred generations. If we

had to depend on a piece of wood being perfectly round of itself, there would be no wheels in a thousand generations. . . . How is it, then, that everyone in the world rides carriages and shoots birds? It is the result of applying the art of stretching and bending. . . . Likewise, the intelligent ruler does not value people who are of themselves good without rewards and punishments. . . . Therefore, the ruler who possesses methods of government does not follow the good that happens by chance, but practices according to necessary principles.

The "necessary principles" were *laws* which everyone must obey:

The intelligent ruler unifies measures and weights, sets up different standards, and steadfastly maintains them. . . . Laws are the models for the empire and the representative standards for all affairs. Officials are those on whom the people depend for their lives [*i.e.*, the officials have powers of life and death over the people]. Therefore, the government of the intelligent ruler carries out punishments according to the law. Hence, when crimes are punished according to law, the people will go to their deaths without resentment, and when meritorious deeds are measured according to law, the people will accept their rewards without being under a sense of obligation. This is the merit of achievement by means of law.

But behind all this was a firm authoritarian principle:

The people vie with one another in offering their services, not because they love their ruler, but because they fear his laws and commands. Therefore, the intelligent ruler keeps the invincible measure in his own hand, with which to govern the people who must be at his service. He rests in an authority ["*shih*"]

requiring obligatory respect, so as to keep in order the subjects who must obey him. . . . The ruler is honored and his subjects are meek.

It is interesting to speculate whether or not the doctrines of that secluded scholar, Karl Marx, would ever have gained such widespread application had they not been taken up by a man of action, Lenin. Not only had the Marxist doctrine been adopted by the left-wing intellectuals of nineteenth-century Europe, but it was also understood by their political opponents. Yet it made little headway in Britain, France, Germany, or any other European country until the Bolsheviks took it up and used it like a sword. I am not suggesting that there is more than a superficial resemblance between Leninism and the teachings of the Legalists in ancient China, but it is possible to draw a parallel. Just as Russia was ripe for revolution in 1917, so the state of Ch'in was ready for expansion in the fourth century B.C. And just as Russia threw up a national leader steeped in Marxist theory, so Ch'in produced a Lenin in the second century B.C. His name was Li Ssu, prime minister under the ruler of Ch'in whom we have met as King Cheng, the man whom Ching K'o tried to assassinate. Li Ssu was deeply attracted by the doctrines of the Legalists, just as Lenin was by the theories of Karl Marx. Li Ssu's master, King Cheng, who was a mere twenty-five when he escaped death at the hands of Ching K'o, was later to become the "First Emperor" Shih Huang Ti, the "Tiger of Ch'in," the Caesar of ancient China, a man whom Grousset describes as:

. . . a personality without equal . . . not only a conqueror, but an administrator of genius . . . an achievement equal to that of Caesar or Alexander the Great, but . . . was to endure

> much longer than theirs. . . . he was one of the mightiest geniuses to whose lot the reshaping of humanity has fallen.[3]

There are some Sinologists who believe that it was the intellectual Li Ssu, and not the Emperor Shih Huang Ti who can best lay claim to being "China's First Unifier." But Shih Huang Ti was unquestionably a redoubtable warrior, conqueror, leader, and inspirer of armies; he was a powerful ruler who laid his imprint on Chinese history for another two thousand years.

We shall meet both Shih Huang Ti and Li Ssu in the following chapters.

[3] Grousset, *op. cit.*

9

"Go West, Young Man"

Li Ssu was a native of Shang-ts'ai in the state of Ch'u. His biographer states:

> When a young man, he became a petty clerk in his district. In the toilet room belonging to his official quarters he noticed that there were rats that ate the filth, and that the approach of man or dog would repeatedly frighten them. But upon entering the granary, he observed that the [other] rats there were eating the stored-up grain. They lived beneath the great side galleries and did not evidence any uneasiness from man or dog. Thereupon, Li Ssu sighed and said, "A man's ability or non-ability is similar to [the condition of] these rats. It merely depends on where he places himself."[1]

That reflection—a typical oversimplification of the very young—had momentous results; it led, in the end, to the unification of China and to the founding of a system of government which lasted more than two thousand years, down to A.D. 1912. The biographer continues:

[1] The quotations in this and the following two chapters are, unless otherwise indicated, reprinted from Derk Bodde's *China's First Unifier,* published by E. J. Brill in Leiden, 1938.

He [Li Ssu] thereupon became a follower of Hsun [Tzu] Ch'ing [a noted Confucian philosopher] in studying the methods of emperors and kings. Upon completing his studies, he judged that the king of Ch'u was of insufficient worth to be served, and that, as the Six States were all weak, there was none which would give him the opportunity of performing great deeds [in its service]. Hence, he wished to go westward to enter Ch'in. Upon taking his departure from Hsun Ch'ing, he said: "I have heard that when one attains the opportune moment one should not be tardy. Now is the time, when ten thousand chariots are at war, and when the traveling [politicians] control affairs. At present, the king of Ch'in desires to swallow up the world and rule with the title of Emperor. This is the time for the commoners to be busy. It is the golden age of the traveling politicians. One who [at such a time], abiding in a mean position, decides to remain passive, is like a bird or deer that will merely look at meat [but not touch it]. But one who possesses a human countenance can act vigorously. Hence there is no greater shame than meanness of position, nor deeper grief than poverty. . . . Therefore, I intend to go westward to give counsel to the king of Ch'in.

Li Ssu was born somewhere around the year 280 B.C., though the date is uncertain. He was probably in his thirties when he entered the service of the king of Ch'in, whom he served for thirty-nine years. It is interesting that, though he became the leading exponent of the Legalist or Realist theory of government, he received his training under one of the greatest of Confucian philosophers. His teacher, Hsun Tzu, has been compared by Professor Fung Yu-lan to Aristotle, within the triumvirate in which Confucius stands for Socrates and Mencius for Plato. Alone of these three Chinese philosophers, Hsun Tzu expressed his ideas not in

sayings and conversations recorded by his disciples but in essays written by himself. Like Confucius, he believed in a benevolent, aristocratic form of government based on a feudal society; but, unlike him, he believed that "the nature of man is evil; his goodness is only acquired training." Civilization, he taught, could be achieved by culture and education. Through these aids, men learned to control their instinctual drives and become morally conscious human beings.

It is typical of Li Ssu's character that he accepted the first part of Hsun Tzu's dictum—that men are naturally evil—while denying the second part, which implied that educational and moral teaching alone could make them into good citizens. He believed that men must be driven, not led. That was why, when he left Hsun Tzu, he turned his face westward, to the king of Ch'in.

This is clear from his contemptuous rejection of the decaying rulers of Ch'u, and of the feeble "Six States" of Han, Wei, Chao, Ch'u, Ch'i, and Yen, all weakened by interminable warfare. Had not Mencius himself written that "sage-kings cease to arise; the feudal lords give rein to their lusts, and unemployed scholars indulge in unreasonable discussion"? Li Ssu determined to waste no more time in discussion, unreasonable or otherwise, but to seek service with a ruler powerful enough to employ his gifts effectively.

The state of Ch'in was in the far west of ancient China, the area now roughly corresponding to Kansu and Shensi. In former times, it had been regarded as semibarbarous, and its inhabitants, living on the wild frontier, may have had Tartar as well as Chinese blood. Other Chinese states had regarded Ch'in as being outside the pale of culture, and, even as late as 361 B.C., Ch'in was not represented at the conferences held by the other feudal rulers. Chinese customs and ceremonial observances were not established

in Ch'in until relatively late times, and at one period their music consisted of:

> . . . beating on earthen jugs, knocking on jars, plucking of the *cheng* and striking on thigh bones, the while singing and crying "Wu! Wu!" . . .

as Li Ssu himself records.

Their rulers were warrior leaders, often men of great physical power. One of them, King Wu, loved to surround himself with men famous for feats of strength. One day, when competing with another strong man in lifting a heavy bronze tripod, the king tore his vitals and died. Stories such as this shocked the Confucians, for the Master "would not discuss prodigies, feats of strength, lawlessness, or the supernatural." No wonder the civilized Chinese states despised and feared these western barbarians. "Ch'in," one nobleman exclaimed, "has the same customs as the Jung and the Ti [barbarian tribes living beyond the frontiers]. It has the heart of a tiger or a wolf. It is avaricious, perverse, eager for profit, and without sincerity. It knows nothing about etiquette, proper relationships, and virtuous conduct, and, if there be any opportunity for material gain, it will disregard its relatives as if they were animals."

Even the gentle Confucian Hsun Tzu, Li Ssu's teacher, felt obliged to comment that "the people of Ch'in were less observant of the proper conduct between father and son and husband and wife than were the people of certain other parts of China, because they failed to follow the traditional rules of etiquette and the proper relationships."

But such criticisms were only to be expected from upholders of

the feudal societies which stood in terror of Ch'in; for Ch'in was bitterly opposed to feudalism. And by the fourth century B.C., the Six States had also come to fear Ch'in's economic power. In 361 B.C., a notable statesman named Shan Yang, an alien, arrived in Ch'in, gained the confidence of its ruler, and put into operation a number of economic reforms which resulted in greatly increased wealth. He was so successful that a later Chinese historian estimated that Ch'in possessed six-tenths of the wealth of the empire. Meanwhile, these westerners had also made considerable cultural strides. Chinese sacrificial ceremonies were performed "in order that Ch'in should be like the rest of China" and, in a "Throne Memorial"[2] of 237 B.C., Ch'in's musical progress is noted:

> The beating on earthen jugs, knocking on jars, plucking of the *cheng,* and striking on thigh bones, the while singing and crying "Wu! Wu!" as a means of delighting the ear and eye, such indeed was the music of Ch'in . . .

-the writer admits, but adds proudly—

> ". . . today [the people of Ch'in] have done away with this beating on earthen jugs and knocking on jars, and have introduced [the music of] Cheng and Wei. . . ."

It is the familiar story of nearly all barbarian or semibarbarian peoples when they come into contact with peoples of a higher civilization. First, they imitate the superior culture of their neighbors while retaining their own hardiness. Next, they conquer their neighbors, absorb their culture, but lose their own vitality.

[2] *i.e.,* a letter to the king.

Sometimes, as in the case of the ancient Egyptians, they end by losing both culture and vitality.

But in the time of Li Ssu, Ch'in had reached a stage in its development when it was neither completely barbarous nor completely civilized; when the primitive hardness of its people had mellowed somewhat under the influence of Chinese culture, but still retained its vigor and energy. When Hsun Tzu visited the western state, he praised the discipline of its people in a manner which recalls the admiration of the Athenians for the Spartans:

> "Its people are simple and unsophisticated. Their music is not corrupting or licentious, and their clothing is not frivolous. They stand in deep awe of their officials, and are people who follow precedent obediently. When I reached . . . its cities and towns, I saw that their officials are dignified and that there are none who are not courteous, temperate, honest, serious, sincere, and tolerant. They are worthy officials."

And of the great prefects, Hsun Tzu said that they did not "engage in private business, have partialities, or form cliques. They are high-minded and there are none who do not have understanding of the common welfare." An overly idealized picture, perhaps, for Hsun Tzu was disposed to look only for the best in his fellow men; but the picture was probably nearer the truth than were the exaggerated accusations of savagery put out by the decadent nobility of the feudal states. One imagines a puritan sternness and austerity which usually distinguishes a military people.

One fact is certain: the people of Ch'in were ruthlessly efficient in making war. For centuries they had been fighting the fierce nomads, the Hsiung-nu, who lived in the desert wastes beyond

The only known contemporary likeness of the great "Tiger of Ch'in" (*above*) appears in an ancient stone tomb engraving at Wou Leang Tseu, from which this charcoal rubbing was made.

Plate 1

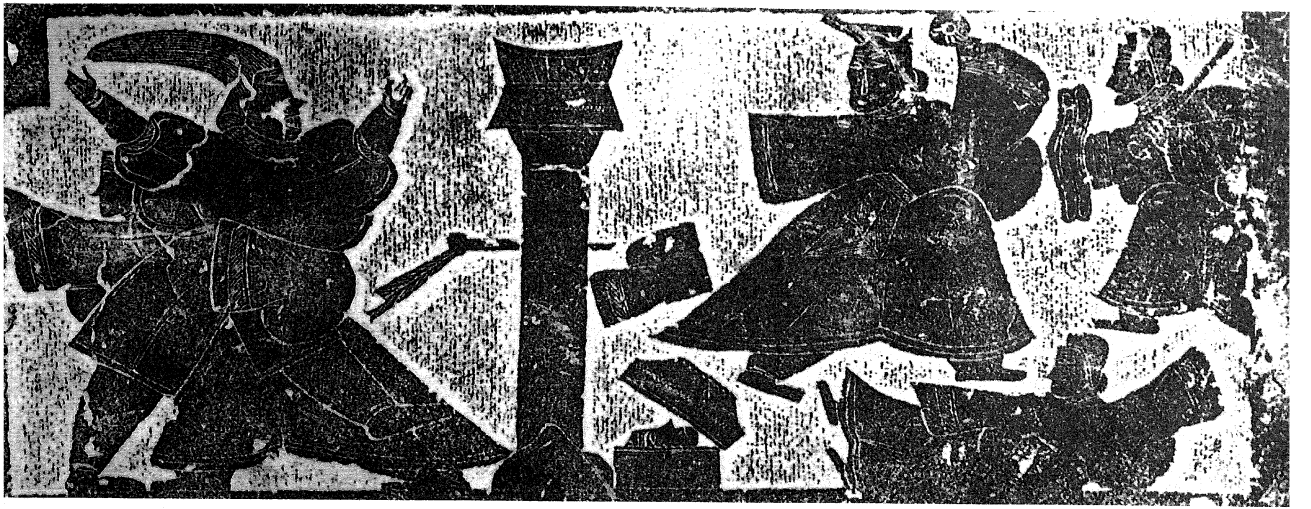
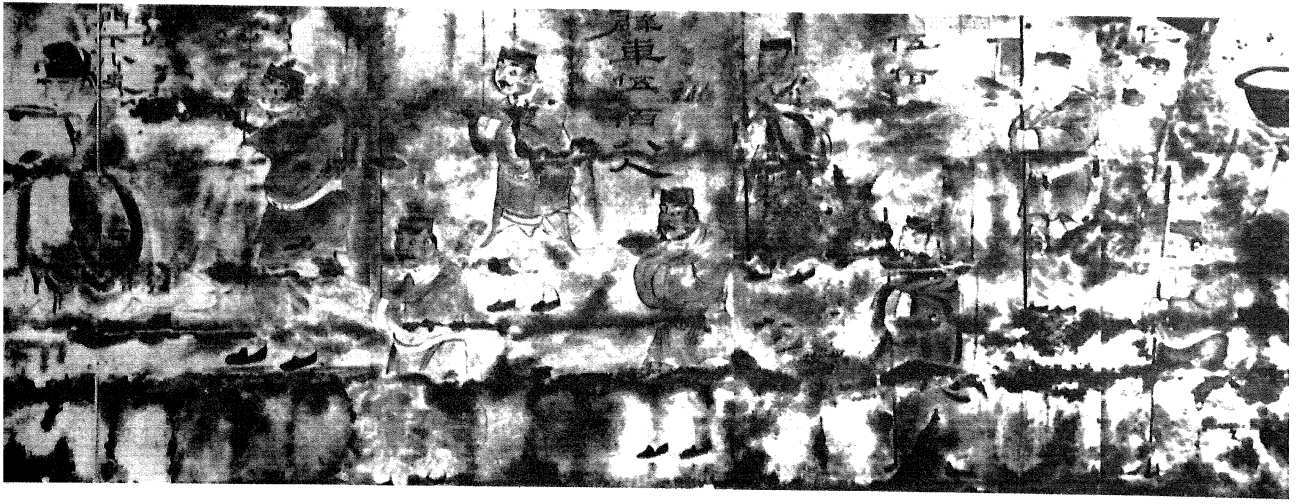


Plate 2 The unsuccessful assassin Ching K'o (*left*), having cut off the emperor's sleeve (*center*), hurls his dagger into a wooden pillar, missing the "Tiger of Ch'in." Scene is from stone engraving at Wou Leang Tseu.

Plate 3 In a mural of the first century A.D., the dignitaries of an ancient Chinese court move deferentially toward the grave of their emperor. This painting was discovered in a tomb at Wang Tu, Hopei Province.



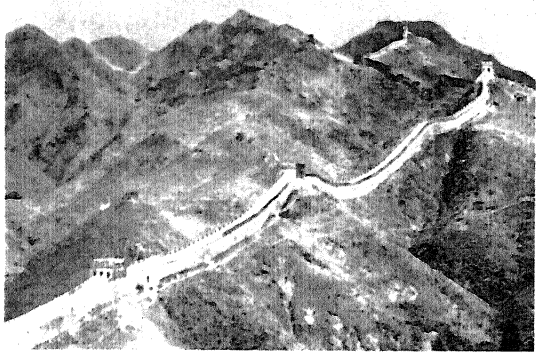
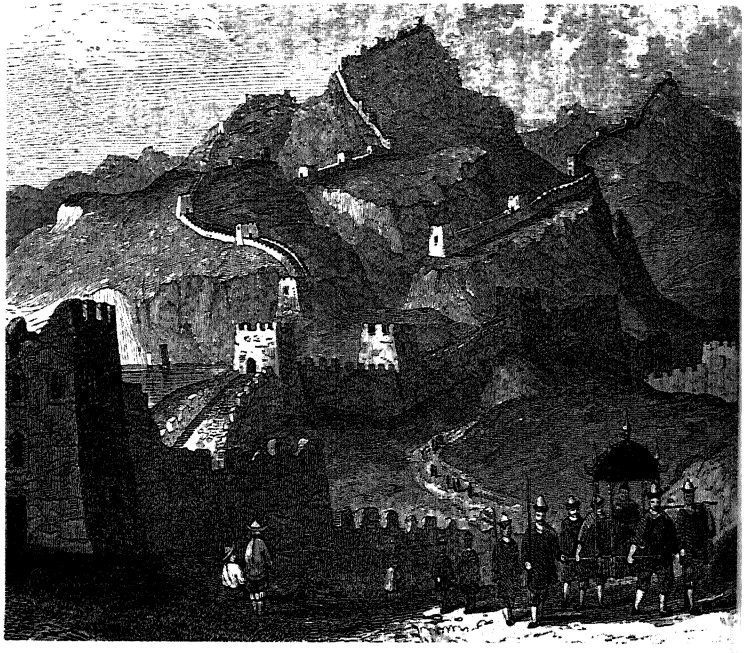
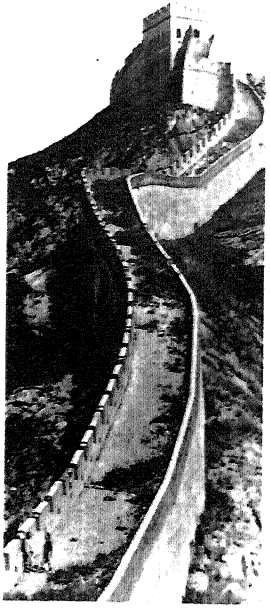


Plate 4 The Great Wall of China, more than two thousand miles long, was built by the "Tiger of Ch'in" as a barrier against barbarian tribes.

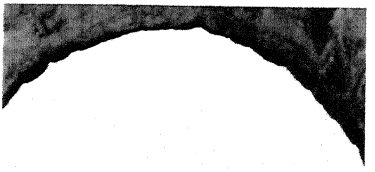
Massive watchtowers like those shown in this drawing were built at intervals of every few hundred yards along the entire Great Wall.





A stone tablet at Shan Hai Kwan describes the building of the Great Wall.

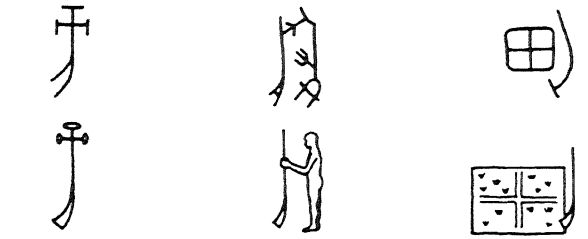
Plate 5



The top of the Great Wall forms a wide roadway over which troops could march.

Plate 6 These wooden grave figures, dating from the first century A.D., were discovered during excavations in the tombs at Ch'ang Sha, Hunan.

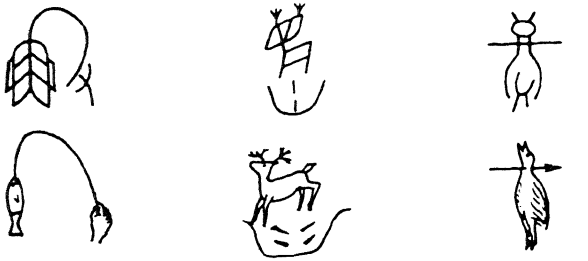
Plate 7 An early Chou Dynasty bronze tiger symbolizes the power and the majesty which the ancient Chinese peoples have traditionally ascribed to the figure of this animal.



Fang, Li
(*Plow, Strength*)

Chieh
(*Plow*)

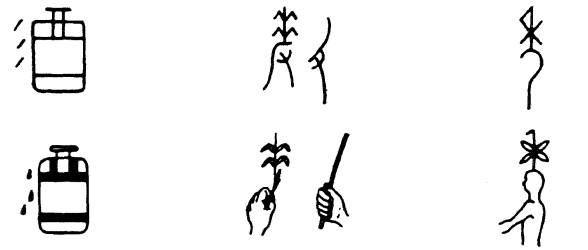
Nan
(*Man*)



Yu
(*Fishing*)

Ching
(*Trapping a Deer*)

Lieh
(*Hunting*)



Chiu
(*Wine*)

Li
(*Harvest*)

Nien
(*Year*)

Plate 8 Early Chinese Ideograms

Chinese seers foretold the future by interpreting the cracks on oxen scapulae. Later, prophecy was carved onto the bone in ideograms.

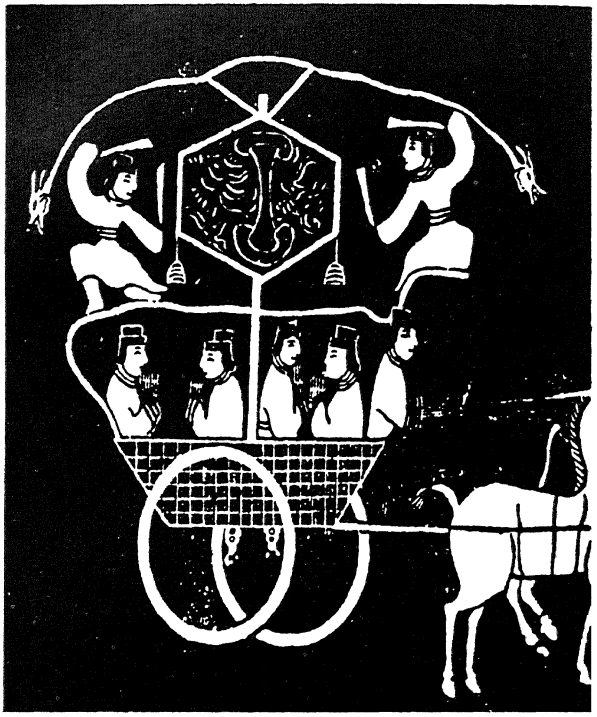
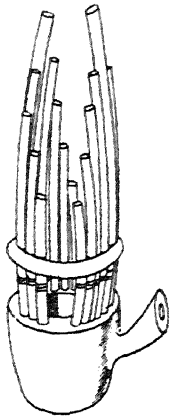
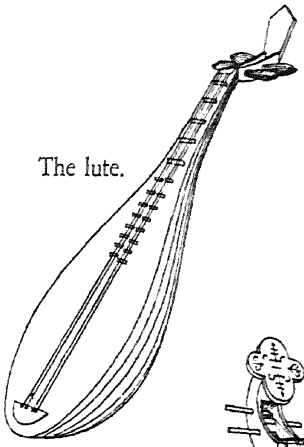
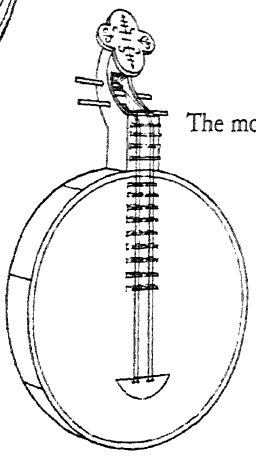


Plate 10 In the time of the "Tiger of Ch'in," the royal musicians rode from one to another of the emperor's numerous palaces in their own horse-drawn carriages.

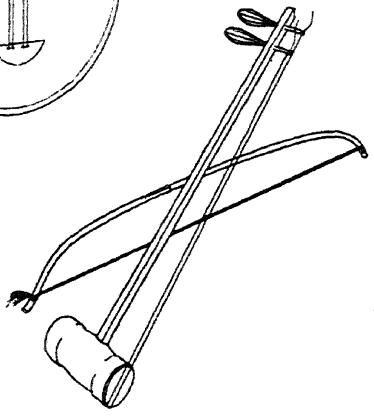


The lute.





The moon guitar.



The violin.

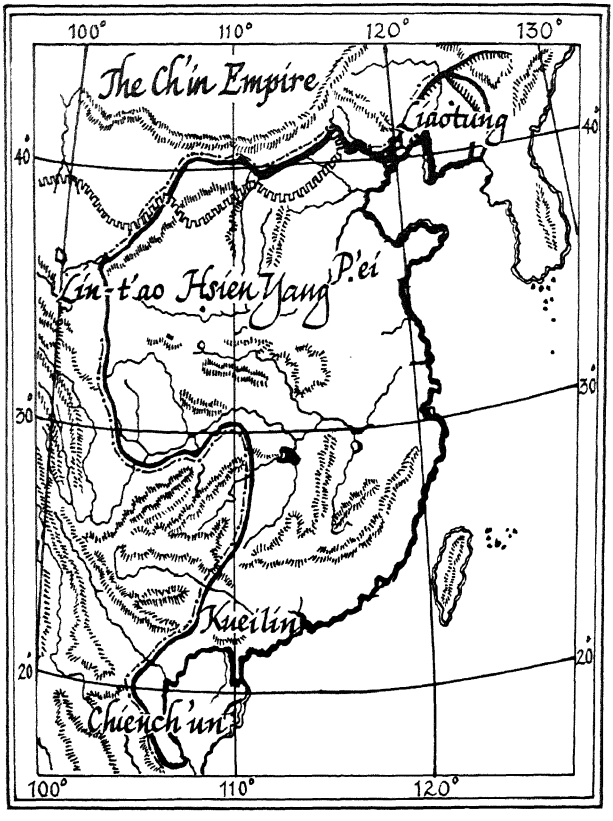
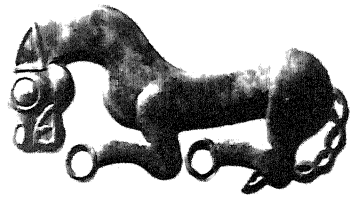
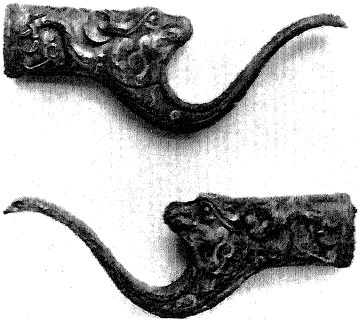


Plate 12 The boundaries of the Ch'in empire stretched westward along the Great Wall from Liaotung in the north to Lin-t'ao, then south to Chiench'un. The barbarian Hsiung-nu tribes lived north of the Wall.



A silver applique tiger from the Han period, 206 B.C.–A.D. 220. *Plate 13*



Bronze chariot fittings from approximately the fifth century B.C.

A bronze wine vessel from the era of the early Chou Dynasty (*below left*) and a bronze pole finial from the era of the Han Dynasty (*right*).

Dignitaries of carriage service stand with hands folded, ready to serve the court. The painting is a detail from the mural at Wang Tu.

Plate 14

Confucius helped to establish conservative traditions of government and elaborate court etiquette two centuries before the Ch'in era. *Plate 15*

Plate 16 The Emperor Wu typified the extreme love of luxury of the early Chinese sovereigns. He lived five centuries after the warring Ch'in era.

the frontier. The Hsiung-nu knew no civilized rules of war; they fought to win, and their only rule was "kill or be killed." They did not fight from clumsy chariots according to complicated rules, but on light, swift horses which moved in clouds across the vast plains. They had no towns—at least not in the early period. They did not grow crops and therefore had no vulnerable settlements and villages to defend. Instead, they moved from place to place according to the water and grass. As soon as their children were old enough to sit astride a sheep, they were given bows and arrows and taught to shoot rats and birds "from the saddle." The young and robust got the best food; the aged and infirm ate what was left.

Other Chinese states often sent contingents to fight these Hsiung-nu barbarians, as is clear from the poem on page 55 of Chapter 4. But the people of Ch'in, a frontier state, had to fight them almost constantly to survive; and, in doing so, they were forced to adapt their fighting methods to those of their enemy. In time, the people of Ch'in developed a military machine far more deadly and more efficient than anything known in China. In time of peril, they conscripted every citizen. In defending a town, they used three armies: one, consisting of the ablest warriors, for defense; a second, consisting of able-bodied women, to build defenses and carry supplies; and a third body of older men and women to guard the cattle and horses and gather plants for food. In attack, they were merciless. Discarding the war chariot, they swooped from their mountain-girt stronghold on fast horses, a swarm of mounted spearmen and archers led by officers who had gained their posts, not through hereditary right, but by skill and bravery in battle. One chronicler states that Ch'in soldiers were honored and promoted in proportion to the number of heads of slain enemies they brought back to their general. They were ex-

pected to fight to the death; desertion or flight was cruelly punished; courage was rewarded.

There was another reason for Ch'in's military supremacy. This lay in its geographical position. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the Herodotus of ancient China, wrote of it:

> The country of Ch'in was a state whose position alone predestined its victory. Rendered difficult of access by the girdle formed around it by the Yellow River and the mountains, it was suspended a thousand *li* above the rest of the empire. With twenty thousand men it could hold back a million spearmen. The position of its territory was so advantageous that, when it poured out its soldiers on the seigniories, it was like a man emptying a jug of water from the top of a high house.

The result of this combination of military efficiency and geographical advantage can be seen in Ch'in's successes during the fourth and third centuries B.C., as recorded by Chinese historians:

318 B.C.	Han, Chao, Wei, Yen, and Ch'i defeated, with a loss of 82,000 men.
312 B.C.	Ch'u defeated, with a loss of 80,000 men.
293 B.C.	Han and Wei again defeated, with losses of 240,000 men.
274 B.C.	Wei again suffers a loss of 150,000 men.
260 B.C.	400,000 of Chao's soldiers executed after surrendering to Ch'in.[3]

[3] All figures were doubtless exaggerated by the Chinese historians, since it would have been impossible for the feudal states to have amassed, fed, and directed such huge armies. Nevertheless, Ch'in must have inflicted crippling losses on its enemies.

At the time of the last massacre recorded above, Li Ssu would have been about twenty years of age, working as a petty clerk in Shang-t'sai and reflecting on the advantage of being a rat in a granary rather than a rat in a latrine.

There are men who have a nose for power; they sniff the scent unerringly. Li Ssu was such a man. When he set out on the road to the western mountains, he must have known that he was taking a big risk. The rulers of Ch'in were suspicious of aliens, and more than one foreign adviser had ended his life tragically and painfully. Even the great statesman Shan Yang, despite his honorable service to the king of Ch'in, had met a shameful death.[4] Again, even if Li Ssu succeeded in gaining the confidence of the king, he might well be sent on a dangerous mission, as emissary to one of the neighboring states. The feudal lords did not invariably respect diplomatic immunity; torture, mutilation, burial alive were among the possible fates of an unlucky ambassador.

But Li Ssu knew that if the penalties were great, so were the possible rewards. Ch'in was powerful. Ch'in was ruthless. Ch'in was efficient and expanding. "This is the time for the commoners to be busy," Li Ssu had said to his great teacher. "It is the golden age for the traveling politicians." Hsun Tzu's pupil was destined to travel farther, and higher, than any of them.

[4] Shan Yang fell a victim to treachery when intriguing courtiers turned the king against him. He was tortured to death.

10

"This Is the Time of Ten Thousand Generations"

Earlier in this book I mentioned the difficulty of destroying the depressing stereotype of the "cruel, enigmatic, slant-eyed Oriental" and of revealing the ancient Chinese as human beings very like ourselves. Some of the characters we have met are recognizable enough: *e.g.*, the lovers, soldiers, courtiers, and farmers who speak so movingly in Chinese verse. But when we come to consider Li Ssu, there is a danger of the stereotype looming up again.

A superficial reading of his life, as described in the *Shih Chi* and other Chinese historical works, fascinates yet repels. The world it reveals is one of duplicity, treachery, cunning, and cruelty. In this world Li Ssu moves as a man of obvious genius yet apparently devoid of human feeling, a man willing to sacrifice anything and anybody in his struggle to gain and hold power. There is much truth in this portrait, but in some ways it is misleading. I believe it would be wrong to seek obvious modern parallels in such men of power as Hitler, Stalin, or even Goebbels. My theory may well be wrong, but I would place Li Ssu, in a modern context, at a less exalted level. His modern counterpart is the brilliant, ambitious careerist in a large industrial group, an "organization man," a senior civil servant, or a highly placed official in some public corporation.

To see him as a politician in the modern parliamentary sense would be to distort the picture, for nowadays politicians—in Western countries at least—have first to be voted to power. Li Ssu never had to appeal to the masses. He went to the seat of power well equipped by education and talent. There he gained increasing authority, partly by his ability, but also by using that "nose for power" which is the mark of all successful courtiers—an instinct for knowing who is "in" and who is "out" and which boat to climb aboard when storms threaten. Couple this with his ability to choose and use men, and I fail to see any fundamental difference between the career of Li Ssu and that of an outstandingly brilliant modern careerist.

The only real difference lay in the severity of punishment which had to be endured by the unsuccessful or unlucky participants in the power struggle of Li Ssu's time, but this difference should not destroy our sense of proportion. Li Ssu was probably not a cruel man, but he lived in times during which the penalties of being outmaneuvered were apt to be more drastic than they are today. In modern England the worst that can happen to an unsuccessful government official is dismissal disguised as "resignation" (usually accompanied by "full pension rights," a "golden handshake," or perhaps a knighthood). In the China of 250 B.C., such a man would, if he were lucky, be presented with a sword and "invited" to commit suicide. If he were unlucky, he would first have to endure what Chinese historians tactfully veil behind the phrase "The Five Punishments"—and then be sawed in half in the public square.

Li Ssu happened to arrive in Ch'in at about the time of the death of its king, Chuang Hsiang. That king's Grand Councilor, the most powerful man in the land next to the monarch, was the

notable statesman Lu Pu-wei, who, like Li Ssu, was also a foreigner. Lu Pu-wei met and liked the young scholar (who probably brought letters of introduction) and took him onto his staff. This was fortunate for Li Ssu, because Lu Pu-wei was mainly responsible for bringing to the throne the young prince who was to become the formidable "First Emperor" Shih Huang Ti[1] or "Tiger of Ch'in," whom Li Ssu was to serve throughout the rest of his life. This was the same king whom Ching K'o later attempted to assassinate, as described in the first chapter of this book.

The Legalists, of whom Lu Pu-wei was one, were strong in Ch'in political circles; they therefore welcomed a young man whose parting words to his teacher, Hsun Tzu, were as follows:

> "Ch'in's armies for four generations have been victorious; it is the strongest state within the seas. It has overawed the feudal lords. This has not been done by 'benevolence' and 'righteousness,' but simply by taking advantage of the course of events."

When, through Lu Pu-wei's good offices, Li Ssu gained audience with the young king, Shih Huang Ti, he developed the following theme which, at great length, he proclaimed to the king very ceremoniously:

> "The small man is one who throws away his opportunities, whereas great deeds are accomplished through utilizing the mistakes [of others], and inflexibly following them up. Why is it that in ancient times Duke Mu of Ch'in [659–621 B.C.],

[1] There were rumors that King Shih Huang Ti was the natural son of Lu Pu-wei and thereby not the legitimate successor of Chuang Hsiang.

being Lord Protector, did not . . . annex the Six States in the east? It was because the feudal lords were still numerous and the power of Chou had not yet decayed. Hence the five princes who rose one after the other still continued to honor the house of Chou. But from the time of Duke Hsiao of Ch'in onwards, the House of Chou has declined, and the feudal lords have been annexing one another's [states]. East of the pass lie the Six States, and Ch'in, availing itself of its victories, has now indeed for six generations brought the feudal lords into servitude.

The feudal lords at the present time are paying allegiance to Ch'in, as if they were its commanderies and prefectures. With Ch'in's might and its great king's ability, [the conquest of the other states would be] like sweeping [the dust] from the top of a kitchen stove. [Ch'in's power] is sufficient to obliterate the feudal lords, bring to reality the imperial heritage *and make of the world a single unity. This is the time of ten thousand generations.*[2] If now you are negligent and do not press to a finish, the feudal lords will return to strength, and will combine to form north-to-south alliances against you, so that although you had the ability of the Yellow Emperor, you would be unable to bring them into unity."

Thus, after more than five thousand years of painful development, from the Old Stone Age to the Period of the Warring States, from the first faltering beginnings of agriculture, through the Ages of Stone, Bronze, and Iron, the millions living between the Yellow River and the Yangtze-kiang were to be welded into one nation. The iron fist which would finally shatter the decaying states into fragments and impose this unity was the terrible army

[2] Author's italics.

of the king of Ch'in, with its myriads of mounted archers, its battering rams and siege equipment, and its battle-hardened veterans of frontier warfare. But the brains behind the machine were to be such men as Lu Pu-wei and the petty clerk from Shang-t'sai.

When Li Ssu had left Hsun Tzu, the great Confucian had reproved him in the following words:

> "It is not as you think, [Li Ssu]. What you call 'advantage' is an unadvantageous advantage. What I call 'benevolence' and 'righteousness' are the most righteous advantage. This benevolence and righteousness are the qualities wherewith to reform government. When the government is reformed, the people are attached to their ruler; they rejoice in their prince and readily die for him. Hence, it is said: Of all military affairs, generals and leaders are what come last. Ch'in for four generations has been victorious, but it has been continually fearful that the whole world would unite to crush it. Now you do not seek for what come first [that is, benevolence and righteousness] but seek what come last [that is the generals and leaders]. This is why the present generation is in disorder."

But it is doubtful if Li Ssu ever gave a thought to Hsun Tzu's words when, as a result of his audience with the king, he watched his own ideas come to fruition. The king of Ch'in conferred upon him the office of Senior Scribe, and, in the words of the *Shih Chi:*

> He [the king] listened to his plans, and secretly commissioned plotters, bearing gold and precious stones, to travel about and advise the feudal lords. They were liberally to reward and thus ally those of the feudal lords and the officers of note whose submission could be won by material lucre; as for those who were unwilling, these were to be stabbed with sharp swords.

The Ch'in armies did not suddenly pour out of their mountain homeland and engulf all China in a flood. The states which the king of Ch'in coveted, besides covering an enormous area, were meshed in a tangle of constantly changing alliances, mainly directed against Ch'in itself. It was the work of Lu Pu-wei, Li Ssu, and other councilors to sever or at least weaken these alliances by various means; bribery, espionage, threats, and diplomatic intrigue were all cards to be played, with the Ch'in armies as the ace. Li Ssu learned this game quickly. He was fortunate, also, in gaining his first experience in statecraft at a time when the king was very young and inexperienced; during Li Ssu's early years of service, Lu Pu-wei was regent and virtual ruler of the country.

Later, as the king grew to manhood, Li Ssu had to keep a sharp eye on his own safety, for the king was susceptible to influence from other councilors, and there were members of the Ch'in court who hated and suspected foreign advisers and who would have seized any opportunity to disgrace them. In 237 B.C., for example, Li Ssu found himself, along with other aliens, threatened with expulsion. A man of Han had "come to sow dissension in Ch'in by constructing a drainage canal." When the plot was discovered, the members of the royal household and the great dignitaries all spoke to the king of Ch'in, saying:

> "The men of the feudal lords who come to serve Ch'in are for the most part acting on behalf of their own rulers, and merely travel to Ch'in to sow dissension. We request that there be a complete expulsion of all aliens."

The king signed an expulsion order, which included the name of Li Ssu, but the latter then sent to the king a "Throne Memorial" which was a masterpiece of subtle and eloquent pleading.

He began in the usual Chinese fashion by appealing to precedent and by recalling the number of kings of former times who had employed foreign advisers and profited thereby. He went on to argue:

> Let us suppose that, in the past, these four rulers had sent aliens away instead of receiving them, and had discarded these officials instead of employing them. The result would have been that the state would be without the actualities of wealth and profit, and Ch'in would be without the name of power and greatness.
>
> At present, your Majesty causes the jade of the K'un mountains to come to him and possesses the treasure of Sui and Ho. [From his girdle] he hangs pearls brilliant as the moon, and wears the T'ai-o sword. He rides Hsiung-li horses and puts up banners [decorated with] green phoenixes. He sets up drums [made from the skin] of the divine crocodile! Of these numerous treasures, Ch'in does not produce one. Why, then, does your Majesty delight in them?
>
> If they must needs be the products of the state of Ch'in before they become permissible, then these jewels that make bright the night would not ornament the Court, and there would be no utensils of rhinoceros horn and ivory as delightful playthings. The women of Cheng and Wei would not fill the rear palaces, and good horses and rapid coursers would not occupy the outer stables.

Thus Li Ssu tactfully reminded his young sovereign that the material and cultural advantages which he enjoyed were mainly due to foreign influences. Then he drove home the moral:

> "Why is this so? It is simply that whatever pleases us we must have before us, and that [these are the things that] meet our taste.

> Yet when, at the present time, it comes to selecting men, this is not the case. Without discussing whether they will do or not and without deciding whether they be deceitful or not, persons not of Ch'in are to be sent away and aliens are to be expelled. This being the case, it is feminine charms, music, pearls, and jade that are held as weighty, while human beings[3] are esteemed lightly. Such is not the policy by which to straddle [what lies] within the seas and to rule over the feudal lords. . . .
>
> You send away outsiders so that they may serve the feudal lords. And you cause the gentlemen of the world to retire without daring to face westwards, and to halt their feet without entering Ch'in. This is what is known as offering weapons to brigands and presenting provisions to robbers.

The king canceled the order of expulsion and returned Li Ssu to office. But, not long after this incident, Li Ssu had another narrow escape. This time he completely reversed his argument in favor of foreign councilors by throwing suspicion on his former fellow student, the great Legalist philosopher Han Fei-tzu, who had come to Ch'in as emissary of the king of Han. The danger here was that Han Fei might gain the favor of the king of Ch'in at Li Ssu's expense. Bearing this in mind, and remembering the grisly penalties of failure, one can understand—if not condone—Li Ssu's treatment of a man who sat with him at the feet of Hsun Tzu. The *Shih Chi* states that:

> Someone transmitted his [Han Fei's] writings to Ch'in. When the king of Ch'in saw the writings . . . he said, "Alas! If

[3] An interesting revelation of the ancient Chinese attitude to women, who are bracketed with "music, pearls, and jade," *i.e.*, as ornaments, not as human beings.

I could once catch sight of this man and move with him, I should die without regret."

Li Ssu said, "These writings have been made by Han Fei."

Not long afterwards, and probably at the instigation of Li Ssu, the ruler of Ch'in seized on some pretext to attack the state of Han. The *Shih Chi* continues:

> Ch'in, in order to meet a critical situation, attacked Han. The king of Han . . . sent [Han Fei] as an emissary to Ch'in. Although the king of Ch'in was delighted with him, he did not yet trust him enough to use [his counsel]. Li Ssu and Yao Chia did him injury and slandered him, saying: "Han Fei is one of the princes of the House of Han. At present, your Majesty wishes to annex the feudal lords. But, until the end, [Han] Fei will act for Han and not for Ch'in. Such is human nature. If your Highness now does not use [his counsel] but returns him after detaining him for such a long time, you will bring disaster upon yourself. The best thing to do would be to punish him for transgressing the laws."
>
> The king agreed to this and sent an officer to judge [Han] Fei. Li Ssu sent a man who gave Han Fei [poisonous] drugs, and induced him to commit suicide. Han Fei had wished to state his own case but was unable to secure an interview. Later the king of Ch'in felt regret and sent a man to pardon him, but by that time [Han] Fei had already died.

It is difficult to get at the facts behind this unsavory story. Against its probability must be set the fact that later Chinese historians hated and vilified Li Ssu for having ordered "the burning of the books" (see page 148) and may have wished to place him in the most unfavorable light. But we know from other

sources that Li Ssu had been jealous of Han Fei even when they were students together. He may well have feared that if this distinguished scholar (whose writings were admired by the king of Ch'in) had succeeded in winning the latter's favor, Li Ssu's own position, and possibly his life, would have been in jeopardy.

Li Ssu himself did not lack courage. Han Fei's proposal to the Ch'in ruler had been that he should abandon his war against Han and attack the state of Chao instead. Li Ssu countered this with the argument that Han, though nominally an ally, had in former times allowed the forces of enemy states to cross its territory on their way to attack Ch'in. Han was unreliable, he said. He likened the situation to that of a disease of the heart or stomach: whilst the sufferer lay still, he would be at ease, but the moment he moved, he would again feel pain. Li Ssu proposed that the king of Ch'in should invite the Han ruler to visit his capital for diplomatic talks and then detain him on some pretext. Later the other members of the Han Government would be invited, as if to confer with their ruler, and they, too, would be detained. "Thus," said Li Ssu, "by using the king of Han as a pawn, we shall be able to make a deal with the Han people." To show his confidence in his own scheme, Li Ssu asked to be allowed to journey to Han and seek an audience with its king.

The king of Ch'in gave permission, and Li Ssu went to Han. But something went wrong; all his diplomatic arts failed to secure him an interview with the Han king. He was reduced to putting forward his plan in the form of another "Throne Memorial," and, from certain phrases in this document, it is clear that Li Ssu realized his own life was in peril. The main part of the letter sets out the argument that the rulers of Han had been misled by former "evil ministers" and that Li Ssu, if only he was granted an interview with the king, would show him how to correct their

errors and restore good relations with Ch'in. But the interview was not granted, and one can imagine the unfortunate emissary's anxiety as he waited in the outer chambers of the king's palace while blandly smiling messengers went to and from the king, always returning with a polite "No." Li Ssu had no illusions about his own probable fate, as is clear from the concluding paragraphs of his letter:

> "I fear that your entourage continues the policy of former evil ministers which will result in Han's once more suffering the disaster of losing territory. Your servant, [Li] Ssu, having failed to obtain an interview, requests leave to return to report [what has happened], whereupon the alliance between Ch'in and Han will unquestionably be terminated. . . .
>
> Your servant, [Li] Ssu, desires to obtain a single interview. If, after first having advanced to outline his stupid plan, upon retiring, he were to suffer death [in Han] by being cut to pieces, he would wish your Majesty to have an idea [of the consequences]. Should he be executed in Han, then you, Great King, would not thereby be able to become strong. . . . Once having sent forth its armies, Ch'in will not delay its march, and then there will be sorrow indeed for Han's altars of the soil and grain! If the corpse of your servant [Li] Ssu should be exposed upon the market place of Han, then even should you desire to examine the stupid but sincere proposal of your humble servant, it would be impossible. When your border towns are in ruins, when you are busy protecting the state defenses, and when the sound of the drums and the bells [of battle] ring in your ears, then indeed it will be too late to make use of [Li] Ssu's plan. . . ."

His last plea to the king shows a gambler's courage:

"If in what I have said there be anything not in accord with the facts, may you, great king, have the kindness to allow me first to finish my words, after which it will still not be too late to have me executed by an official."

Han Fei had "failed to secure an interview" and died. Li Ssu also failed, but lived. Evidently the threats so forcefully expressed in the emissary's letter persuaded the Han ruler or his advisers to let Li Ssu go. He returned to Ch'in a disappointed man, his spirit possibly shaken by its traumatic experience, but at least with his entrails intact.

11

"The First Emperor"

After this brief close-up of a great Chinese official, it is time to step back and look at the broader picture. Among the figures in the foreground we still see Li Ssu, but his master Lu Pu-wei soon disappears from the scene; the victim of a court intrigue, he takes poison in the year 235 B.C. Later Li Ssu rises to become the Minister of Justice, the second step in his climb to power. But, as the years pass, King Cheng himself, who was to become known as Shih Huang Ti or the "Tiger of Ch'in," increasingly dominates the scene.

Scholars differ greatly in their estimate of Cheng. By the Chinese historians of later years—all Confucians—he was detested, as was his lieutenant Li Ssu, because they ordered the burning of the classical Chinese writings collected by Confucius. Cheng is described by one Chinese writer as "a man with a high-bridged nose, long narrow eyes, the breast of a bird of prey, and the voice of a jackal; of an ungrateful disposition and the mind of a tiger or wolf. Usually he behaved decently to his men, but in the intoxication of success he only made them his victims." This portrait, attributed to one of Cheng's officials, strikes a note of truth. He probably was a megalomaniac monster; but how able was he? And how much of his success was due to himself and how much

to his ministers? To some Western writers, *e.g.*, Grousset, he was "a personality without equal. This Chinese Caesar was not only a conqueror, but an administrator of genius." To others, *e.g.*, Eberhard, Cheng was "a very average man without any great gifts . . . he was superstitious and shared the tendency of his time to mystical and shamanistic notions."

But tyrants of genius are often superstitious, including, among others, Nero and Hitler. In the balance, I am inclined to believe that Cheng was a man of immense will, courage, and energy; he was probably not a "great administrator," in the strictly technical sense, but a man who felt his way almost instinctively to the solution of unprecedented problems and then left his able subordinates to work out the details. I find it hard to see him as "a very average man without any great gifts." Civil servants can run great empires, but they do not create them.

As at other crises in the history of civilization, the times had produced the man (or men). It is tempting to regard Cheng as a mere megalomaniac, crushing his weaker neighbors to gratify his personal lust for power. But, in the long perspective of history, it now appears probable that, if China had not been unified in this way, the civilization which had been laboriously created over a period of two thousand years might have perished at the hands of the barbarian Hsiung-nu, who by this time had become extremely powerful. Whether by accident or design, or by a combination of both, Cheng's conquests enabled the entire threatened land to face northwestward, to hurl back its predatory foes, and then to seal off a united country behind a barrier which has preserved it down to the present day. This is not to suggest that the Great Wall was in itself sufficient to protect China from invasion. It was frequently breached in later centuries, and many battles took place both in front of and behind it. Like the Roman *limes*

along the Rhine, the Danube, and across northern Britain, it was a place of deployment for protecting troops, a rallying point for the country's defense; but, even more than that, it became an unchanging symbol of China's new-found unity.

It is well to remember that in this period of blood and battle, the most militant in ancient Chinese history, there still remained that other strain of gentleness and pacifism which has been emphasized in Chinese character since the days of Confucius and his followers. The following story will illustrate this fact, and it will perhaps also help to explain why the king of Ch'in was able to conquer the whole country in a relatively short time. Less than a century before the birth of Cheng, the philosopher Mencius was walking in the palace gardens of the king of Liang. The king said:

"In all the kingdom there was not a stronger state than mine, as you, sir, know. But since I have been ruling over it, we have been defeated on the east by [Ch'i] and my eldest son was killed; on the west we have lost much territory to [Ch'in], and on the south Chu has disgraced us. I have brought shame upon my ancestors and I want to wipe away this shame. How can I do it?"

"A very small state," replied Mencius, "can gain the royal power. If your Majesty will rule kindly, imposing light punishments and light taxes, causing the fields to be plowed deep and well weeded, and educating the people in the Five Relationships,[1] you will then have a people who can resist, with nothing but sticks in their hands, the armor and the sharp weapons of

[1] The Five Relationships, as taught by Confucius, were (1) affection between parents and children, (2) righteousness between ruler and subordinates, (3) distinction of function between husband and wife, (4) order between elders and young, (5) good faith among friends.

[Ch'in] and Chu. There is an old saying 'The kind man has no enemy.' I beg your Majesty not to doubt what I say."

Another king asked Mencius, "How can the country be settled?"

"It will be settled by being united under one rule," said Mencius.

"Who can so unite it?"

"He who has no pleasure in killing men can so unite it. Now, among the leaders of men in the kingdom, there is not one who does not find pleasure in killing men. If there were one who had no pleasure in killing men, the people would flock to him, as water flows downward with a rush which no one can stop."[2]

Chinese historians make no mention of Li Ssu's career during the twelve years following his unsuccessful mission to the king of Han. We know that, shortly after Han Fei's death in 233, Li Ssu had become Minister of Justice, a post in which he would be able to put into practice his Legalist theory of government by "punishments and rewards." He would also have had ample opportunity of studying the character of his ruler, who certainly had no aversion to killing men, often very unpleasantly. There is a story that Cheng, upon discovering a plot to depose him, had the leader of the conspiracy killed, together with the man's entire family and every person, from slaves upwards, who was remotely connected with the plot. He exiled four thousand families and even banished his own mother from the country, suspecting that she had also been implicated. After that, when he sat in council, he held his naked sword on his knee and announced that anyone who dared to criticize his actions would immediately be killed. Twenty-seven

[2] Seeger, Elizabeth, *The Pageant of Chinese History.* New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1947.

were unwise enough to so oppose him, and each of these died. Finally a very old gentleman approached the throne, bowed low, and asked permission to address the king.

> "Your Majesty," he said, "has a violent and presumptuous character. You do not control yourself. You have banished your mother, and you have refused the advice of wise and virtuous men. This will be known all over the land and no one will respect you. I am afraid for you and for your dynasty. That is all I have to say."[3]

In the corner of the throne room was a boiling caldron into which offenders were often thrown. The old man took off his robe and walked over to the caldron, expecting the slaves to throw him into it. Instead, the king stepped down from the throne, took the man's hand, forgave him, and asked him to be his councilor.

In the presence of such violent, arbitrary power, it is not surprising that Li Ssu and his fellow ministers were ruthless when their own interests were threatened; it also explains their uninhibited relish of the sweets of office—palaces, slaves, and concubines—when, at any moment, the bright flame of their glory could be snuffed out in an agonizing death.

In 221 B.C., after twenty years of ruthless warfare and Machiavellian intrigue, Cheng had succeeded in wiping out the last surviving feudal state and was able to proclaim himself emperor of all China. Thus China's first unifier was not Mencius' ideal ruler, "one who had no pleasure in killing men." Unification had come, as Li Ssu believed it would, by treachery, intrigue, and naked force. Now Li Ssu was a man in his late fifties or early sixties, rich, powerful, secure in his office, and trusted by the king whose tri-

[3] *Ibid.*

umphs he had helped to bring about. It was the proper time for putting into operation those theories of government which he had debated with Hsun Tzu and Han Fei-tzu some thirty years before. His teacher and fellow student were now both dead, and it was the petty clerk from Shang-ts'ai who was still alive and nearing the top of the ladder. From Chief Scribe to Alien Minister, from Alien Minister to Minister of Justice, he had climbed each rung. Only a few rungs remained before he would reach the rank of Grand Councilor, the highest office next to the king. That last rung was almost within his grasp.

The king called a council of his ministers to decide how the newly created empire would be governed. But first, and most important, the king had to choose the title under which he would rule. Fortunately, part of this momentous debate, which decided the future of China for two thousand years, has been preserved in the *Shih Chi* or "Annals." The councilors, after recalling the anarchy and the misrule of former times, praised the king in suitably fulsome terms:

> ". . . but now your Majesty has raised his armies of righteousness and put to death oppressors and brigands. He has pacified the world and has laid out all within the seas into commanderies and prefectures.[4] Laws and ordinances emanate from one center. Such a thing has never existed from high antiquity until now; it is something the Five Emperors did not attain to.

[4] This puzzling passage suggests that Shih Huang Ti had already adopted the principle of splitting up the empire into units—*i.e.*, "commanderies and prefectures" independent of the old state divisions. Perhaps he had done this only within Ch'in itself. Or perhaps there is a confusion between this speech, made in 221 B.C. and another allegedly made in 213 B.C., by which time the emperor would have had time to make these administrative reforms.

We, your ministers, having carefully deliberated with the scholars of wide learning, would say, 'Of old there were the Celestial Sovereign, the Terrestrial Sovereign, and the Great Sovereign.' The Great Sovereign was the most honorable. We, your ministers, at the risk of death [for our words], would propose, as an honorable appellation, that the king be called 'The Great Sovereign,' that his mandates be called decrees, and his ordinances be called edicts. And let the Son of Heaven term himself in his speech as *chen*."[5]

The king's reply was terse.

"I reject 'Great.' I adopt 'Sovereign.' From high antiquity I choose the title 'Emperor.' My title will be 'Sovereign Emperor.' As for the rest, let it be as you deliberated."

From this time Cheng became known as *Ch'in Shih Huang Ti,* which implies divinity. The title is almost an exact equivalent of the Roman *Divus Augustus,* or "The Divine August One." At, or shortly after, this meeting, the councilors found themselves at variance with Li Ssu when they discussed with Shih Huang Ti the future government of his empire. The Grand Councilor (Prime Minister) advocated a return to feudalism: *i.e.,* the king should appoint members of his family to rule over the states formerly governed by the feudal lords.

"The feudal lords now for the first time have been destroyed," said the Grand Councilor. "The territories of Yen, Ch'i, and [Ch'u] are far removed, and, if kings are not established for them, there will be no means of keeping them in order. We beg

[5] *i.e.,* having the right to use the royal "We."

that the sons of the imperial family be established in these positions. May it but please your Majesty to give his consent."[6]

Shih Huang Ti handed over his Grand Councilor's proposals to his ministers. All except one "considered the proposal advantageous." The dissenting minister was, of course, the Minister of Justice, Li Ssu, who once again risked his career by opposing the majority of the emperor's advisers. In an eloquent speech to the throne, he pointed out that, in the past, the relatives of the king of Ch'u (*i.e.*, his former feudal overlords) had at first obeyed the commands of their emperor but that, in a short time, they had discarded his authority and fought among themselves as independent princes. The same thing would happen, Li Ssu warned, if Shih Huang Ti were to adopt the same outmoded system. And he went on:

"More and more, the feudal lords have killed and warred with one another, without the Son of Heaven" (*i.e.*, the king of Ch'u) "being able to prevent them. Now, owing to the divine power of your Majesty, everything within the seas is bound into one unit, and all has been laid out in commanderies and prefectures. The sons of the imperial family and the meritorious ministers have been amply rewarded by being given the title of duke and by receiving an income from the taxes. This greatly facilitates easy government. Let there be no varying opinions concerning it in the empire. This is the way to have peace and tranquility. The establishment of feudal lords would not be advantageous."[7]

Shih Huang Ti reflected on this and then said:

[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*

> "If the whole world [*i.e.*, China] has suffered from unceasing warfare, this comes from there having been feudal lords and kings. Thanks to the aid of my ancestors, the empire has for the first time been pacified, and for me to restore feudal states would be to implant warfare. How difficult then to seek for peace and repose! The advice of the Minister of Justice is right."[8]

This speech of Shih Huang Ti, if authentic, seems to me very significant. It does not sound like the speech of a blood-lusting neurotic, but of a man who used war ruthlessly to gain his ends, though, once these were achieved, he was anxious to build his empire on secure foundations. Accordingly, instead of following his Grand Councilor's advice and making members of his family feudal lords, he divided the realm into thirty-six "commanderies" (*i.e.*, provinces), each under the command of three officers selected on a basis of proven ability without regard for rank or family connection. One was responsible for defense, and this one commanded the local armed forces; a second took charge of civil administration, economics, and industry; the third was "directly responsible to the emperor," a phrase which can only mean that, though devoid of military or administrative responsibility, he was empowered to spy on the other two officials and to keep them in order. Parallel functions in modern dictatorships come readily to mind.

Is it too fanciful to see Li Ssu's mind at work behind these reforms? He, having been a commoner, may well have nursed a grudge against the aristocracy; and, besides, he knew that an intelligent and efficient commoner, whatever his ancestry, was worth any number of well-born but inept officials. It is to Shih Huang

[8] *Ibid.*

Ti's credit that he recognized the soundness of Li Ssu's argument, even though the demands of the emperor's large family for positions of power must have been strong; and there were compensations, for he could remove any of his provincial governors at will, thus exercising absolute control over every part of his empire.

Shih Huang Ti's superstitious tendencies show themselves in the number of commanderies into which the new empire was divided—six times six. Six was his favorite number. His megalomania was revealed in the steps he took to establish and demonstrate his personal mastery of the new kingdom. He collected the weapons of the defeated states, melted them down, and cast the metal into "bells and bell-supports," thus depriving his former enemies of the arms they would need if they were to rise against him again. It could be dismissed as a harmless piece of royal extravagance that he used some of the captured bronze to cast "twelve metal human figures, each weighing one thousand *tan*" (*i.e.*, about seventy tons). It was in the next step that he truly revealed his megalomania, for every time he captured one of the feudal states, he had a replica of its palace built near his own capital of Hsien Yang. As for the subjects of these former rulers, he had many of them transferred bodily to his capital: the powerful and the rich of the empire, amounting to 120,000 families, were moved to Hsien Yang, an early example of the principle adopted by another "Sun King" Louis XIV, who arranged for his aristocracy to live in or near his palace at Versailles.

Placed beside the extravagances of Shih Huang Ti, however, the efforts of European monarchs seem puny, and even the royal palaces of Rameses II of Thebes, Ashurbanipal of Nineveh, and Sennacherib of Babylon cannot be compared. If we are to believe the Chinese historians, Shih Huang Ti's agglomeration of palaces —his own and those built in imitation of those of the conquered

states—extended for *seventy miles*. Within that distance there were *two hundred and seventy* royal residences, each filled with gorgeous furniture, skillful musicians, slaves, dancing girls, and other ministries of delight. In addition, there was also

> . . . at a little distance from the capital . . . the emperor's royal park, called "His Majesty's Forest" and in it his summer residence. This magnificent palace, the Palace of A-Fang, on the banks of the river Wei, backed by the beautiful Black Horse Hills, had taken the labor of seven hundred thousand prisoners to build! The stones were brought from the Northern mountains, and the wood from the forests in the far-distant south.[9]

How much faith can one place in these apparently fantastic accounts? Two hundred and seventy rich palaces within a distance of seventy miles! Is it possible? One must make allowances for the Oriental imagination with its addiction to fairy stories and other tales of wonder. On the other hand, it is geographically possible, and the statement that, at a later date, the emperor joined the buildings with covered corridors indicates that they must have been built fairly close to each other. If we consider what was achieved by the kings of Assyria and Babylon, whose monuments can still be subjected to archaeological examination, and then reflect on the greater wealth of ancient China, both in material goods and manpower, it would be unwise to dismiss these stories as pure fantasy. Bear in mind what an absolute monarch like Sennacherib or Rameses II could achieve in Mesopotamia or Egypt, and then think of the equivalent absolute power wielded between the Yellow River and the Yangtze in 220 B.C. It is not impossible

[9] Tsui Chi, *op. cit.*

that Shih Huang Ti did manage to accumulate, in one small spot on the earth's surface, a higher concentration of artistic and material wealth than has ever been seen before or since. I believe that had we had the opportunity of seeing the palaces and tombs of ancient Egypt before they were robbed and plundered, or the royal residences of the kings of Assyria and Babylon in their prime, we would not dismiss the achievements of the "First Emperor" as a fabrication. Nowadays the power which will raise a guided missile thousands of miles into space is probably produced by a few score thousand men; but those hands and brains command technical resources resulting from centuries of scientific development, whereas a considerable proportion of the ancient Chinese were *individual* craftsmen. They were builders, engineers, smiths, carpenters, gardeners, decorators, or those trained in the more esoteric skills of archery, animal-training, or the schooling of women in the fine points of allurement. A ruler who could gather in one place such a concentration of skill, talent and labor could do much.

Even if, however, the claims for Shih Huang Ti's palaces are exaggerations, there can be no doubt that the "First Emperor" and his ministers did achieve another kind of greatness. For they put into force reforms and improvements which changed the course of Chinese history and have lasted down to the present day. The most important of these changes, though the least spectacular, was that of language. Since the days when the soothsayers of the Shang Dynasty had scribbled on "oracle bones" a thousand years earlier, the Chinese script had developed into a fine and flexible instrument of communication with thousands of characters capable of conveying the subtlest shades of meaning. But, unfortunately, it had also developed wide variations in different regions, so that, apart from the official writing system known as "Great

Seal," which could be understood by all educated Chinese men, there were such divergences that the men of one state could hardly understand the language of another. Li Ssu remedied this by developing the "Small Seal" system of writing which gradually became standardized throughout the empire. The modern Chinese script is based upon it. For this achievement alone he deserves to rank beside Imhotep, Vizier under the Pharaoh Djoser who, in about 2800 B.C., helped to standardize the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Other forms of standardization were adopted at the same time. The wheels of wagons and other vehicles had to be made to a standard gauge; weights and measures were made uniform, as were agricultural implements. Local customs and ceremonies which did not fit readily into the new system were repressed. All this was accompanied by a campaign of road- and canal-building, such as China had never seen before. Shih Huang Ti constructed "royal roads" throughout his vast domain so that "all the scenery of the rivers, the lakes, and the sea might unroll before his eyes." These were also named "straight roads" or "racing roads." They were two hundred and fifty feet broad and were bordered by trees to shade them. We are told that valleys were filled in and hills leveled in order to avoid twists and turns. It is also stated that these great highways were reserved purely for the emperor and his entourage; the common people and their animals still had to use the old rough tracks of their ancestors. Though this sounds farfetched, it may be true.

In the year 213 B.C., the thirty-fourth year of the reign of Shih Huang Ti, Li Ssu persuaded his royal master to take the logical last step in the foundation of the new empire. At a banquet held at the capital—Hsien Yang—one P'u-yeh Chou Ch'ing-ch'en, a scholar of wide learning, and other senior officials rose one by

one to praise the emperor "for his majesty and virtue." But there was one courageous, if ill-advised, protest. Shun-yu-yueh, a native of the former state of Ch'i, attacked Shih Huang Ti's defeudalizing policy in these terms:

> ". . . At present your Majesty possesses all within the seas, yet your sons and younger brothers remain common men. If, eventually, there should occur such disasters as those of T'ien Ch'ang, or of the Six High Dignitaries, and your subjects were without means of assistance, how could they save you? *Of affairs which, unless modeled on antiquity, can endure for long, I have never heard.* At present Chou Ch'ing-ch'en, together with his associates, nevertheless flatters you to your face, thus aggravating your Majesty's error. Such are not loyal subjects."[10]

The relevant phrase is the one I have italicized. It sounded a warning note to Li Ssu and his Legalist theories. By this time, he had attained the highest rank, that of Grand Councilor (or Prime Minister). The emperor submitted the criticism to him for comment. The Grand Councilor regarded this advice as misleading and rejected its expressions. He thereupon submitted a "Throne Memorial" which said:

> "Of old, the empire was scattered and in confusion, and there was none able to unite it into one. Therefore, the feudal lords all became active together, and in their discussions they harped on the past so as to injure the present, and made a display of empty words to confuse the truth. Men valued what they had themselves privately studied, thus casting into disrepute what their superiors had established. At present, your Majesty possesses a unified empire, has laid down the distinctions between

[10] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*

> right and wrong, and has consolidated a single position of eminence. Yet there are those who with their private teachings naturally abet each other and who discredit the decrees of law and instructions. When they hear orders promulgated, they criticize them in the light of their own teachings. Within the Court, they mentally discredit them, and, outside, they criticize them upon the streets. To cast disrepute upon their ruler they regard as a thing worthy of fame. . . . If such conditions are not prohibited, the imperial power will decline and partisanships will form below. It is expedient that these be prohibited."[11]

Thus, having played on the emperor's vanity and neurotic fear of criticism, Li Ssu played his trump card. With one contemptuous gesture, he kicked away the ladder up which he himself had climbed, the ladder of learning. His rise from poor scholar to the second highest rank in the empire would have been impossible had he not been grounded in the classical literature of China. But he feared that both his master's position and his own might be threatened if other minds were allowed to draw from these same wells of knowledge. So he persuaded his sovereign to order the decree which has earned the condemnation of generations of Chinese historians—the notorious burning of the books.

To us, the total destruction of the world's great literature is difficult to conceive. Even if only one copy of each important work survived, it would not be impossible to reprint and redistribute them. But in the China of 213 B.C., printing had not been invented. Books had to be laboriously copied, and they were treasured by educated men above all other possessions, since they enshrined the wisdom and knowledge of seventy generations.

[11] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*

These were the books which Li Ssu advised his sovereign to have destroyed, all save a few copies which were to be preserved in the royal libraries. His purpose—which naturally appealed to the man who called himself the "First Emperor"—was to erect an impassable barrier between the present and the past. History was to begin with Shih Huang Ti; everything that had happened before was to be discarded and forgotten, save by a handful of officials. Then there could be no "dangerous thoughts," and no one could use "the past to discredit the present." It is also essential to remember that, to Shih Huang Ti and his adviser, China *was* "the world." They had no idea of the existence of Egypt, Sumer, Babylon, or Greece, all of which had passed their prime when Shih Huang Ti issued his order. The rewriting of history in the present day to fit Marxist theories offers an inexact parallel, since even Communists do not go so far as to advocate the destruction of all pre-Marxist works.

In his "memorial," Li Ssu continued:

> Your servant suggests that all books in the bureau of history, save the records of Ch'in, be burned; that all persons in the empire, save those who hold a function under the control of the bureau of the scholars of wide learning, daring to store the *Shih*, the *Shu*, and the discussions of the various philosophers, should destroy them with the remission of all penalty.
>
> Those who have not burned them within thirty days after the issuing of the order are to be branded and sent to do forced labor. Books not to be destroyed are those on medicine and pharmacy, divination by the tortoise and milfoil, and agriculture and arboriculture. As for persons who wish to study the laws and ordinances, let them take the officials as their teachers.[12]

[12] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*

Shih Huang Ti approved the Grand Councilor's recommendation, and forthwith issued an order forbidding anyone to retain the *Shih,* the *Shu,* and the discussions of the philosophers on pain of severe punishment.

Not all the scholars were willing to throw their precious books onto the imperial bonfire.

> They believed that the empire itself would fall, if the works of Yao and Tan and Confucius were lost. Give up to be burned the very heart and soul of their people? . . . Many chose to die rather than to betray their books . . . but many men, out of fear, brought their books to Hien Yang, and the fires burned day after day. . . ."[13]

Some hid their volumes in walls or in the ground, so that a few did actually survive. But those whose crime was discovered were either killed outright or branded on the face and sent to work on the Great Wall, then being built. According to certain writers, four hundred and sixty scholars were buried alive in pits specially dug for the purpose. Such was the hatred of Shih Huang Ti that we cannot be positive that all these stories are true. But for twenty centuries the verdict of the scholastic world on Shih Huang Ti was "Fen Shu K'en Ju" (He burned the books and he buried the scholars).

As for Li Ssu, now in his sixties, his eldest son, Li Yu, became administrator of the province of San-ch'uan; other sons married daughters of the ruling house, and Li Ssu's daughters "became affianced to the princes of the king of Ch'in."

Ssu-ma Ch'ien says that, on the return of Li Ssu's eldest son to the capital, the Grand Councilor gave a great banquet.

[13] Seeger, *op. cit.*

The heads of the various offices all came before him to wish him long life, and the chariots and horsemen at his door could be counted by the thousand. Li Ssu, heaving a sigh, exclaimed, "Alas, I have heard Hsun Tzu [his old teacher] says 'Things should not be allowed to become too flourishing.' I was a commoner of Shang-ts'ai, an ordinary man from the village. The emperor did not realize that his nag was inferior and so finally promoted me to this [position]. Among the ministerial posts at the present time, there is none higher than mine, which may indeed be called the peak of wealth and honor. But when things have reached their peak, they decline. I do not yet know where I shall unharness."

12

"They Have No Faces . . . Only Eyes . . ."

In addition to building his intellectual barrier against the past, Shih Huang Ti also built a second, physical rampart—the Great Wall. So much has been written about this stupendous monument that it is difficult to look at it with fresh, unprejudiced eyes. As a piece of ancient military engineering, there is nothing with which it can be remotely compared. Visitors to Britain are still awed by the remains of the wall which the Romans built across some seventy miles of northern Britain, and there are similar frontier defenses along the Rhine and the Danube. But, allowing for its numerous loops and spurs, the total length of the Great Wall is about 2,240 miles. If built in Europe, in the form of a rectangle, the wall would enclose large parts of France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and a segment of Russia. In the United States, it would completely surround the combined area of Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. It passes through twenty-two meridians, from the ninety-eighth to the one hundred and twentieth degree between the thirty-fifth and the forty-first parallel, and according to astronomers it would be visible from the moon, with the naked eye.

When completed by Shih Huang Ti, the Wall was about twenty-four feet high and wide enough for eight men to march

abreast along its top. In places, there was room for two chariots to pass each other. At intervals varying between one hundred and five hundred yards there were massive watchtowers about forty feet high, with battlemented platforms from which flame or smoke signals could be sent along the line of ramparts to warn the defending soldiers against enemy attack. At less frequent intervals were garrison towers, each capable of holding between one hundred and two hundred men with their weapons, stores, and provisions. In the mountain passes, these garrison towers were themselves defended by advance posts built in the territory outside the Wall, which was also defended in places by additional earth ramparts and ditches.

All this would be remarkable enough if the Wall had been built in relatively flat land, with occasional low hills, as in the case of the Roman Wall in Britain. But to appreciate the full wonder of Shih Huang Ti's achievement, one must imagine this enormous and massive system of defenses traversing the peaks of the highest Scottish mountains, or running halfway up the Rockies. Near the Tibetan frontier, the Wall climbed to a height of six thousand feet, and in this section there was a triple line of defense protecting an area particularly vulnerable to invasion. One simple way of visualizing the might and extent of the Great Wall is to imagine riding from London to Moscow, or from New York to Salt Lake City, along the top of a rampart four times the height of a man. You would cross plains, steppes, river valleys. Sometimes you would scorch in the heat of the plains. Other times, you would climb mountains where the eagles rode the screaming wind and winter snow smothered the masonry. Yet, during the entire journey, which would take you a month or more on horseback, you would never be out of the sight and sound of men, and hardly ever would your feet touch the earth.

By day you would pass, every few hundred yards, through arched gateways where weather-beaten sentries with tired eyes wearily saluted you. Every hour you would pass the larger forts, each with its huddle of huts where the soldiers' families lived and where there perhaps existed a few scraggly animals and a bit of cultivated land. On and on, day after day, and always the Wall winding on before you like a stone serpent, a never-ending line of watchtowers and forts, clamped to the barren rock on slopes which one would think only a goat could climb. At night, before you took your rest, you might see varicolored lights winking and glowing far across the mountains, the signal beacons by which the watchers on the Wall kept in touch with each other. These lights emanated from blazing logs which were sprinkled with metal oxides to make the flames burn different colors—in a country whose people are usually credited with the invention of fireworks.

During the day, the sentries gave the alarm in other ways: by blowing trumpets, sounding gongs, waving banners, or putting up smoke signals by means of lighting damp straw. The enemy was always the same one, whatever he called himself. He belonged to one of the barbarian tribes which lived beyond the frontier. For the Great Wall divided civilization from barbarism. If you were riding from the sea to the Tibetan mountains, you would know that on your left was civilization: roads, canals, settled agriculture, and the walled cities with their temples, palaces, and gardens. There, over your left shoulder, was everything which a fortunate section of mankind had achieved in more than twenty centuries of cultivation—poetry, philosophy, art, music, engineering, and an orderly system of government. Beyond your right shoulder lay a region whose people were quite different —a people of courage, hardihood, virility, of rugged little men on

swift horses, men without towns and cities and fields, but men of the same species as the civilized Chinese whose lands they coveted. The chief difference was that, whereas the ancestors of the Chinese had passed from a nomadic to a pastoral civilization, the Hsiung-nu and the rest of the tribes beyond the Wall still lived as most of man's ancestors once lived, by hunting and raiding.

When two such peoples met—one nomadic, the other pastoral—the result was usually the same, whether in China, India, Mesopotamia, or Egypt. Seeing the rich, fertile lands of the agricultural peoples, the hunters seized every opportunity to sweep down from their steppes and deserts and plunder the settled peoples. And since the hunters were tougher, more mobile, and less encumbered, they often won. In Mesopotamia, India, and Egypt, the vast deserts offered partial protection against invasion. This was not true for the Romans, who were forced to build and man frontier defenses which protected them for more than five centuries. The ancient Chinese, who at this period had never heard of the Romans, were faced with the same problem and met it in a similar way. The difference was only one of scale: though the unified Chinese state created by Shih Huang Ti was approximately the same size as the Roman empire, it nevertheless, unlike the latter, had to be defended, not at a few vulnerable points, but along a frontier of nearly two thousand miles. Hence the Great Wall.

It is important to remember that an over-all picture of frontier warfare can be completely misleading. It can be so for the same reason that Sir Walter Scott's picture of the Middle Ages was—because it can be so easily idealized. Scott catered to Victorian readers who wished to escape from the realities of the Industrial Revolution by pretending to be knights in shining armor and

"damozels" waiting to be rescued. We may sneer at such fantasies, but are we any more sophisticated? "Realistic" movies in color and "Cinerama" take us back to the days of Genghis Khan and Atilla the Hun. We see the tomato catsup flow; we see burning cities, hordes of clean-limbed warriors killing, dying, and being wounded. We may think we are seeing a re-creation of the past, and comfort ourselves with the thought that war between man and man, weapon against weapon, was much more "romantic" than a war fought with bombs and guided missiles.

I suggest that frontier warfare in the China of 250 B.C. was about as romantic as the hydrogen bomb. Fortunately we have sufficient facts from which to build up a realistic picture, without any need to call upon imagination.

You are living in a city of northern China before the building of the Great Wall. You might be a farmer or a clerk or a minor official. Your city is surrounded by a high wall, and there is a permanent garrison supplied by the king. Outside the wall lie the quiet fields where the brown-backed peasants stoop over the furrows. It is a civilized little place. The rich and cultivated are respected. Chariots and carrying-chairs throng the streets. The well-to-do merchants and officials have their elegant homes with their concubines, slaves, servants, musicians, and dancing girls. The gardens are bright with flowers; the ornamental pools shimmer under the blue sky. Visiting scholars and poets are welcomed and respected. After enjoying rare and delicate food, the literati become animated over their wine. They discuss poetry and philosophy, and, while musicians sing and play, the younger and more frivolous seek the shaded arbors and make love. . . . The music plays on, the stars shimmer in the calm night, and the hum of conversation drifts across the gardens, mingling with the music,

until it is lost in the darkness which lies beyond the city wall where the lazy sentries watch.

You creep into bed in the early hours of the morning. Before dawn, you are awakened by a sound such as you have never heard before. There are cries and shouted orders from the soldiers, but these are almost drowned in the howls of the barbarians who have surrounded the city. When dawn comes, you climb on to one of the watchtowers. On every side the fields are black with men, foot soldiers, and horsemen, and more are arriving every minute. They are little, rough, dirty men on shaggy horses. They carry bows, swords, and spears. They are in no apparent order, not organized in disciplined ranks like your own soldiers; and there are no chariots. On the outer fringe of this mob of warriors, you can see black tents and fires upon which ragged women are roasting the animals captured from the peasants who once supplied the town with its food. . . . Whichever way you turn, you see the smoke of burning farms curling up to the sky. Your enemies are quite close; they have come right up to the city wall; you can see their fierce eyes, hear their barbarous voices, even smell them. A man who had met the Hsiung-nu wrote of them, "They have no faces . . . only eyes. . . ."

There is no hope of getting help. The army commander has told you that he tried to send messengers before the Hsiung-nu closed in, but too late. He invites you to look at the mutilated bodies which the enemy has exposed for inspection, just below the city wall. You look, and turn away.

The streets are jammed with those peasants who have managed to reach the shelter of the city before the barbarians trampled over their fields and set fire to their homes. Troops are marshaling them; some are being armed, others set to work strengthening the defenses; officials make their way with difficulty through the

jammed streets, preceded by servants who keep back the crowd with staves; the granaries are heavily guarded; all food is strictly rationed; occasionally there is a night skirmish near one of the gates, and arrows whistle over the walls.

Day after day, week after week the sentries on the watchtowers look in vain for relief; the water supply fails, and disease breaks out. The starving people become mutinous; a mob tries to storm the granaries, and many are killed. The governor tries to reason with the crowd, but in vain. All domestic animals, including the governor's hunting dogs, have been killed and eaten; then the poor, driven to desperation by hunger, begin eating the bodies of their comrades. The end comes in one of two ways; either the barbarians scale the walls and overcome the weakened defenders, or else the governor orders the gates to be opened. In either case, the result is the same. The fierce-eyed horsemen pour through the streets and then begin ransacking every house. The women are raped and killed, save a few who are carried off as spoils of the conqueror. Every man is slain, the luckiest outright, others after torture. One of the fat Chinese officers is turned into a human lamp. A wick is inserted in his navel and lit. It burns for three days. All children are put to the sword.

For days afterwards, the barbarians riot among the once-beautiful villas, palaces, and gardens, getting drunk on the captured wine and enjoying such women as have been allowed to live. Then the trumpets ring out again; the warriors mount their horses and begin pouring out across the plain, taking with them every piece of loot which they can carry. As they ride away, smoke billows up behind them; at night, when they look back, the horizon is red with flame. Sometime afterward, when a Chinese relief force arrives at the city, they see only the blackened walls; within those walls there is nothing save burned-out buildings and piles of

putrefying human bodies. The Hsiung-nu are far away, hidden among the empty wastes which roll to the horizon; that is, unless they are attacking another Chinese city.

This was the reality of frontier warfare before the building of the Great Wall. This is why the Great Wall was built. Individual states had built walls before, sealing off mountain passes or other points where the barbarians could attack. But these were at best only a partial protection; the enemy could always outflank them, since they did not protect the whole of China. The states had also tried stationing permanent garrisons of troops at certain strategic points; but these, too, were only partially effective, because the frontier of the settled lands was over sixteen hundred miles long, and the barbarians, swift, mobile, and numerous, could attack at any unguarded point.

Shih Huang Ti and his advisers, having unified the empire, decided to shield it along the entire length of its weakest side, the north and northwest. On the west, it was protected by the Tibetan mountains. On the south, it was faced by peoples who could be assimilated, unlike the desert nomads; and on the east was the sea. The "First Emperor" decided that, at whatever cost in human suffering, the vulnerable north and northwest must be sealed off from the barbarians by the mightiest fortification ever devised by man; "the most warlike barrier in the world" is the description which he himself had inscribed on a stele which stands near the Tibetan end of the frontier. It would run uninterruptedly from Chiayukuan, near Tibet, to Shanhaikwan, on the coast. Then, and only then, could Shih Huang Ti hope that his newly won Empire would last "for ten thousand generations."

13

The Great Wall: Fact

The Great Wall, over two thousand miles long allowing for the already existing walls incorporated in it, took about twelve years to build. The Great Pyramid, the only comparable ancient monument in the Middle East, took about twenty years. However, there is no real comparison between the two. The Great Pyramid was a religious monument, a tomb, built more than twenty-five hundred years before Shih Huang Ti's time. Although the Great Pyramid contained enough material to build a ten-foot wall around the whole of France, its main claim to fame is the precision with which it was built. The outer facing stones, each weighing about two and a half tons, were so accurately joined that a piece of cigarette paper could not be inserted between them. The mean error in orientation, in a building seven hundred and fifty feet along each side, was about one-twentieth of a degree. Its main burial chamber was roofed with granite blocks of an aggregate weight of more than six hundred tons. These and similar facts attest to the true wonder of the Great Pyramid. Judged by such standards, the Great Wall of China falls far behind; it is doubtful if the ancient Chinese, even twenty-five centuries after the Pyramid was built, could have achieved the standards of the Egyptians.

The distinction of the Great Wall is of a different kind, and one which is often wrongly attributed to the builders of the Great Pyramid. The legend of the Egyptians as cruel taskmasters dies hard, thanks largely to Hebrew and Christian tradition. But in fact it is doubtful if the Great Pyramid entailed more hardship than was normal among those who labored for the ancient monarchs of western Asia and Africa. It was built during the three months of each year when the fieldworkers were idle because of the annual flooding of the Nile. Most of the building material was readily at hand, and there were no problems of transport or climate. Its creation was due to technical skill and to the superb organization of readily available manpower controlled by an absolute ruler and his officials over a period of two decades. The amount of human suffering involved in its building must have been infinitesimal compared with the building of the Great Wall, sixteen hundred miles of which had to be erected in regions where it was difficult enough even to live, let alone build.

Ancient historians tell us hardly anything about the building of the Great Wall. There are a few brief written statements, mainly concerning dates and personalities; there is a mass of legend, some of which may rest on fact. As for the rest, we have to rely purely on the evidence of modern explorers and archaeologists who have examined the Wall. In this chapter, we shall stick entirely to known facts; in the next, the legends will be examined.

The Great Wall runs through three main areas. The first of these is the mud region within the big loop of the Yellow River, where also lie the Ordos steppes consisting of forty thousand square miles of quicksand. The second is the western desert regions between the Gobi desert and the Tibetan frontier. Today much of this part of the Wall has disappeared, save for isolated forts and watchtowers; even here, however, there is a spur of the Wall

which runs up into the mountains to a height of six thousand feet. The third area through which the Great Wall runs is the mountainous region in the east. It is in this last region that the Wall is best preserved, for parts of this section lie near Peking, which, as the later capital, had to be protected, so that the Wall in that region has been rebuilt several times. Beyond Peking, the Wall convolutes across the mountain chain until it reaches the sea at the Gulf of Liaotung, where an inscription states that "Heaven created the Seas and the Mountains." This is the section of the Wall seen by most visitors to China, and it also is the most impressive. Comparatively few people have journeyed along the Wall's entire length. W. E. Geil, an American explorer, made the journey over fifty years ago, and his account is still one of the best if one can stomach his "hearty" style.[1]

The fact that even in 1962 one has still to rely mainly on a handful of explorers for a full description of the Wall is surely significant comment. A modern tourist can examine the most interesting sections of Hadrian's Wall in a day. The visitor to Cairo can survey the Great Pyramid between breakfast and luncheon. But anyone wishing to see the entire length of the Great Wall on foot would have to undertake a long journey of considerable difficulty. What, then, must it have been like to build it?

The Chinese historians tell us that the core of Shih Huang Ti's

[1] Geil, W. E., *The Great Wall of China.* London: John Murray, 1909. The other two descriptions which I have found most useful are Owen Lattimore's "Origins of the Great Wall of China," *op. cit.,* and Adam Warwick's "A Thousand Miles along the Great Wall of China" in *National Geographic Magazine,* Vol. XLIII, Washington, D.C., Jan.–June, 1923. It is important to remember that the Wall we see today is not Shih Huang Ti's original rampart; it has been rebuilt many times, but much of it probably follows the ancient line, and parts of the "First Emperor's" structure are incorporated in it.

labor force was an army of three hundred thousand men under the command of one of his ablest generals, Meng T'ien, "Conqueror of the Tartars." But the total number of men (and women) who slaved and died on the Wall must have been much greater, probably over a million. One writer states that four hundred thousand men died building what has been described as "the longest cemetery in the world"; this may well be an exaggeration, but certainly such a monument could not have been built except at a terrifying cost in human suffering. One needs to look back no further than World War II, and consider the number who perished on the Burma Road and in slave-labor camps, to realize that in the conditions of 221 B.C. the wastage of human life must have been enormous.

Apart from the problem of building the rampart, there was that of supplying food and materials to the builders, for much of the Wall was to run across mountains and desert wastes. Weather conditions, too, especially in winter, were cruel; Meng T'ien's myriad laborers had to chisel rock, drag stones, make bricks, and pound clay in regions where in summer sandstorms blinded the eyes and in winter freezing gales blasted down snow from Siberia. Human life being of little account, it was surely expended without mercy, and, as men died, there were many more from the hinterland of China to take their places. The gaols were emptied, prisoners of war from the conquered states were pressed into service, and any offender against the harsh laws of Ch'in was sent to labor and die on the Wall. Among those who suffered were scholars who were found in possession of the forbidden classics.

Another problem was defense, for it is unlikely that the Hsiung-nu would have stood idly by while the Chinese built this formidable barrier against them. So, while lines of sweating laborers worked to build the Wall, soldiers stood by, partly to

prevent escape, but mainly to guard the workers against attack. Of course, Meng T'ien would also send scouting parties into the regions beyond the rampart to give warning of any suspicious enemy movement.

Meng T'ien is said to have built thirty-four enormous supply bases or command headquarters, and, wherever the local land was suitable for cultivation, it was plowed and planted to provide food for the laborers. Such supplies, however, were insufficient in themselves, and food convoys moved continually from the fertile regions of China northward toward the slowly growing barrier. Here again, the wastage was tremendous; one authority states that of one hundred and eighty-two loads of grain sent from Shantung, only one reached the Wall. The rest were eaten or stolen in transit. Thousands of women accompanied the workers, some to carry loads, others to weave the canvas for the tents. Stone blocks for the foundations often had to be brought from considerable distances, and even the clay filling for the interior of the Wall was not always available in the immediate neighborhood. It was carried by armies of coolies in baskets slung from each end of a pole which rested on the shoulders, a method one sees in parts of China to this day. In the steeper and more inaccessible places, building stones were dragged into position by teams of goats specially trained for the purpose.

Allowing for the geological variations in the land on which the Wall was built, it followed a fairly consistent pattern of construction. It was not a solid rampart of earth or stone, such as the Roman walls of northern Britain. It was laid on stone foundations, except when, as was usual in the mountainous districts, it was built on solid rock. It was really two walls, an inner and an outer one. Each of these two walls was of hard-baked brick. A clay filling was then placed between the walls and a brick platform on

top of the clay. The platform was crowned by at least one parapet and sometimes by two parapets, one on each side. A cross section of the Wall would look like a brick box with a hard crust and a somewhat softer center. The surface was iron-hard, the bricks being bonded together by a lime mortar of such toughness that a nail could not be driven into it.

We do not know exactly how the work was planned, for we do not know if the builders began at one end of each section and worked through to the opposite end, or whether they began at each end and gradually approached until they met. But we do know some of the construction details. Some earlier walls already existed, as we have seen, and these were incorporated into the completed structure. For the new sections, the builders began by making two parallel furrows in the ground, about twenty-five feet apart. In the mountains these were chiseled out of the solid rock. Within these furrows were laid blocks of stone forming foundations about four feet, six inches wide and between six and twelve feet high. On these foundations, the inner and outer walls were built, each about four feet, six inches wide at the base, tapering to eighteen inches at the top. The hollow space between was then filled with the clay, which was rammed down by the trampling feet of men or, in some cases, by timber pile drivers. The final stage was to build the brick platform which joined wall to wall, thus providing a smooth causeway for men and horses, and this in turn was protected by the parapets, which were loopholed for archery. The upper surface of the Wall was built in such a way as to allow rain water to drain off into gullies which led to holes or spouts in the outer surface.

Every few hundred yards a tower rose above the Wall itself and projected in front of it, and these towers also were provided with loopholes from which crossfire could be directed at attackers.

It is these towers used for defense, more than the Wall itself, which most impress visitors; thousands of them still remain, and it has been estimated that, when the Wall was complete, there were twenty-five thousand such towers, each about forty feet square and forty feet high. Other towers—the watchtowers as opposed to the defense towers—were built outside the Wall as advance posts, and of these many must have been built long before the days of Shih Huang Ti. Peter Lum, traveler and author, writes:

> Even now, when long stretches of the Wall are neglected and forgotten, some twenty thousand defense and watchtowers are believed to be still standing. Nor will anyone who has seen the Wall where it crosses the mountains north of Peking be inclined to question such an estimate, for there the towers seem to stand on every peak, and you must strain your eyes to guess whether the rough silhouette of some distant summit is that of rock or of watchtower. From one point above Nankow alone, twenty-eight towers are visible, some surmounting heights so lofty that it is not hard to believe in the story of the Chinese philosopher who climbed up to the moon from the highest of these.[2]

Generations of travelers have left impressions of the Great Wall. Among them is a Chinese who inscribed on the stele at Chiayu-kuan the words:

> "This wall is the ancient frontier between the Flower People and the barbarians. The winds of spring and the soft breezes of autumn desire to reach the barbarians of the West."

[2] Lum, Peter, *The Purple Barrier*. London: Robert Hale, 1960.

Near it is another Chinese inscription, written evidently by a believer in those pacifist ideals to which Shih Huang Ti and the Legalists were opposed. It reads:

> "Without violence we should establish patriotism, and without sorrow we should awaken the ancient race."

Here is Professor Arnold Toynbee's impression of the Wall, following his visit to it in the 1930's.

> No photograph or picture that I have ever seen gives any adequate impression of the way in which the Wall strides across these mountains. For these are not mountains of the form with which we are familiar in our world. So unfamiliar to our eyes are those sugar-loaf peaks and serrated hog's backs and ridges running in all directions at once, like a choppy sea, that when we find them faithfully portrayed in Chinese landscape painting we assume that they are creations of the same fantastic imagination that conceived the dragon and the kylyn. . . . Even a Roman military engineer, I believe, would have left those mountains alone and have trusted to Nature to do his work for him. But not so the men who were responsible, two thousand years ago, for the guardianship of "All that is under Heaven." Just as they did not hesitate to delineate that tangled labyrinth of mountains with the brush, so they had the hardihood to trail their great wall across [these] pinnacles for hundreds and thousands of miles.[3]

But for a more detailed description we must turn to those hardy explorers who have actually traveled the length of the Wall from

[3] Toynbee, Arnold, *A Journey to China.* London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1931.

the seacoast to the western mountains. Mr. Frederick G. Clapp, who, with two other Americans, made such a journey over forty years ago, thus describes what he saw:

> The height of the Great Wall is not uniform throughout its extent. It averages twenty-two feet but varies from twenty to fifty feet; the base is fifteen to twenty-five feet thick, and the top twelve feet or more; in places the wall is solid and level enough to support an automobile; but in others it consists of massive flights of steps. . . . At Nankow Pass, and generally in the mountains, the wall is composed of granite blocks for a height of twenty feet above its base . . . set in the solid rock. The blocks are not rough stone but are accurately cut and have evidently been hauled long distances from the quarries. Some blocks are as much as fourteen feet long by three or four feet thick. . . . The towers are carefully numbered by the builders, as, for instance, "Tower No. 55 of the Black Letter Wu Series." The top of the wall in the Nankow section is a roadway fourteen feet wide.[4]

Clapp also estimates that the Great Wall proper is twenty-one hundred and fifty miles long, but that, with its branches and loops, its length totals nearly *four thousand miles.*

Clark and Sowerby, who visited the Wall about 1910, describe the section near Niuchwan Ho, which looks north across the Ordos Desert and the great Desert of Gobi, as follows:

> The country . . . is wild and inexpressibly dreary. Very few trees are to be seen, and the bare brown cliffs and yellow

[4] Clapp, F. G., "Along and Across the Great Wall of China" in *Geographical Review*. New York: American Geographical Society, April, May, June, 1920.

sand are devoid of any vegetation, save an occasional tuft of sage scrub. In places, especially where, as in the northeast, [landscape] rises to any prominence, gloomy chasms, with deadly quicksands lurking in their depths, gape in the sandstone and the half-formed shale. To north and west the prospect is heartbreaking. Sand dunes and sand dunes and again sand dunes, shifting with every storm and obliterating every landmark. Only here and there, as tiny islands in a sea of desolation, [are] small clusters of mud huts, where some little oasis marks the site of a spring or well.[5]

Although this section is designated on maps as part of "The Great Wall," local tradition asserts that the real "Great Wall" is buried deep in the desert sands a hundred or more miles to the north. The section now standing is said to have been built not more than five hundred years ago.

The past greatness and prosperity of the region [writes Clapp] is attested by numerous walled cities, ancient buried or ruined highways, and the frequent presence, under the sand dunes, of a rich soil which must have constituted a great fertile valley in some distant period. On this region the northern sands have been encroaching, passing one wall after another, and are now far beyond the southernmost one, relentlessly conquering a once prosperous country on which the fiercest Mongol onslaughts were of little avail.[6]

Here is Geil's description of the part near the Pass of Kupehkow, where many sections are in good repair:

[5] Clark, R. S., and Sowerby, A. de C., *Through Shen-kan.* London and Leipzig: T. F. Unwin, 1912.
[6] Clapp, F. G., *op. cit.*

> Standing on the highest point at Kupehkow, one sees the cloud-capped towers extending over many declivities in single files, both east and west, until, dwarfed by miles and miles of skyward perspective, they dwindle into minute piles, yet stand in solemn stillness, as though condemned to wait the march of Time until their builders return.
>
> The winding dike at their feet may be followed as it leaps across gorges or lies buried in some chasm or scales the cliffs and slopes in very exuberance of power and wantonness to vanish in thin, shadowy lines at the horizon.
>
> The entire extent of the main and cross walls as visible from the [Pass of] Kupehkow is over twenty miles, and in one place they cross a peak 5,225 feet high.[7]

Twenty-three miles west of Suchow is Chiayukwan, the western terminus of the Great Wall, where stands the tablet describing it as "the most warlike barrier in the world." But, according to Geil, the real terminus is about five miles southwest of this point on the banks of the Tapai Ho (Big White River), in sight of the Tibetan mountains. He writes:

> Not a sign of human life exists in this desolute spot. The Wall stops short at the brink of a precipice two hundred feet high, below which flows the great river. The color of the stream is in great contrast to that of the Huang Ho, this river being the product of melting snows in the neighboring mountains of Tibet flowing through limestone. . . .[8]

[7] Geil, *op. cit.*
[8] Clapp, F. G., *op. cit.*

14

The Great Wall: Tradition and Legend

I have always held strongly to the belief that, in examining and describing the great monuments of the ancient world, it is best to stick to known facts, which, correctly interpreted, are more wonderful than all the dreams and fantasies which have been woven around them. Yet there exists a half-world between fact and fantasy which should be explored, though with caution. This is the world of tradition and legend. At one time archaeologists and historians tended to dismiss all such material as fabrication. Nowadays they tend to treat it with greater respect. The Trojan War is an example. Until Heinrich Schliemann made his discoveries at Troy and Mycenae, such historians as George Grote treated all Greek historical traditions of the period before 800 B.C. as myth. But when Schliemann found at Troy, Mycenae, and Tiryns the remains of buildings, furniture, and weapons very like those described by Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and when, sometime later, Sir Arthur Evans dug up the Palace of Minos in Crete, it became clear that the folk poems upon which Homer had modeled his epics contained considerable elements of truth. Even more remarkable was the fact that Homer, who lived at least five centuries later than the objects he described were made, could never have seen them himself. The memory of them had been preserved in the folk traditions he had inherited.

It is unwise to underestimate such folk memories. One recent example concerns an investigation by two young sociologists into the songs and games of British schoolchildren. The sociologists were able to prove that some of these games and rhymes could be traced back for many centuries, having been passed on by generation after generation of infants. One particular game had been played by Roman children over seventeen hundred years ago! If such traditions can survive in so highly industrialized a society as that of Great Britain, how much more likely are they to survive in a peasant culture which, until recently, changed little over a period of three thousand years? The sweat and agony of millions built the Great Wall, and thus a scar has been left on the minds of the Chinese people which will take more than twenty centuries to heal. The peasants still talk about their tyrant emperor to this day along the length of Shih Huang Ti's terrible rampart. In describing the Great Wall, therefore, it would be wrong to rely only on the scanty written records and to neglect the testimony of those anonymous toilers whose mouths are now "stopped with dust."

There is a story told that, as men sickened and died, they were buried in the wall, often while still alive. Some were pounded into the clay as human building material. In the region of the Ordos steppes they will tell you that certain of the workers, seeing their comrades thus treated, managed to escape into the distant mountains, where their descendants still live—a race of little wild men who even now live in terror of being dragged back to the Wall. It is also said that a sorcerer told the emperor that the Wall would never be completed until ten thousand men had been buried in it. Even Shih Huang Ti hesitated to do this, so he searched for a man whose name contained the character *wan* (10,000): having found

him, he had the unfortunate man buried in the foundations of the rampart, and the work proceeded.

The Chinese gift for poetic fantasy shows itself in a more pleasing tale. When a traveler asked why the Wall curved at a certain point, he was told that one day, while the workmen had paused "to take tea," a dragon lay down beside the Wall and fell asleep. Its great bulk caused the structure to bend; the workmen, regarding this as an omen, continued to build the Wall on the same curve.

There is another type of legend which evidently arose in later years when men could no longer believe that such a work could have been achieved without miraculous aid. In these stories, Shih Huang Ti has become a magician. Before beginning the work, he ascends to the moon in order better to survey his empire and plan the course of the Wall. He also possesses a magical whip which would move mountains; in fact, its name was "Drive the Mountains." With this, he could even halt the flow of the Yellow River so that his men could work unhindered.

The legend goes on to describe how the emperor lost his magic whip. He fell in love with the daughter of one of his foremen, a girl of extraordinary beauty; but she refused to accept him unless he agreed to stop driving his suffering laborers with his terrible whip. When he refused, she committed suicide, but upon her arrival in Heaven, the Dragon King heard her story, and, full of sympathy, sent his own even more beautiful wife to seduce Shih Huang Ti. At the critical moment, this lady stole the enamored emperor's whip and flew back to Heaven. From then onward, Shih Huang Ti had to manage without his instrument of power. He had others, however: a magic spade which would throw up a third of a mile of earth at a time, a pair of "Ascend-the-Cloud Boots," and a magic horse which could cover one thousand *li* a

day and fly over mountains; whenever the horse stamped the ground, up sprang a tower. Some versions of the story say that the animal was white; others that it was black with a red mane, and that it had eyes which lit up at night like head lamps.

The wandering course of the Wall was ascribed to the horse's erratic movements. Shih Huang Ti tied to its tail a saddle which dragged on the ground. Wherever the animal wandered, through gorges and up mountainsides, the architect and surveyors followed, pegging out the line of the Wall. This, of course, accounts for the fact that, at one point, there is a considerable length of wall running at an angle from the main line of the rampart and then ending suddenly. What apparently happened was that when the workmen paused (again to have tea) a violent duststorm arose, and when it ceased the horse was nowhere to be seen. The men continued along the original line until they became aware that something had gone wrong. Suddenly one of them sighted the magic horse far off on a distant peak, and realized that they had been following the wrong course; so they had to abandon the stretch they had built and start again. There is a touching irony in the way the Chinese have turned even their most tragic sufferings into fairy stories to delight their children.

One of the most beautiful of the legends of the Wall concerns a princess from one of the conquered states whose husband had been sent to work on the Wall. There he died, and, like thousands of others, was buried within it. Overcome with grief, the widow set out on the long journey to the Wall, determined to find her husband's body. After many weeks she reached the great barrier and rode along it, asking repeatedly, but in vain, for the site of her husband's grave. No one knew. How could she, or anyone, hope to discover the body of one man among the thousands who had perished building those endless miles of stone and brick? But

when she had almost abandoned hope, a spirit appeared and told her to cut her finger. "Hold it before you," he said, "and watch where the blood falls. Follow the trail and you will find your husband's body."

The princess obeyed the spirit's instructions, and, after a time, the trail of blood drops led her to a gap in the Wall, wherein lay the body of the prince. She took it away to be buried in her native land. The place where the railway from Mongolia passes through the Wall is still pointed out as the site of this miracle.

W. E. Geil quotes a number of folk tales which he alleges were told him by Chinese whom he met on his journey along the Wall. One concerns the emperor's "red dog," which was

> . . . as large as a Suchow Cow! It had a chameleonlike skin, but of a new kind. Instead of changing color according to the object it was on, it suited the light or the night, by becoming black in the evening and red in the daytime. The red dog was blest with miraculous nostrils, for it could smell out bad officials. China is now badly in need of a supply of red dogs!

This wonderful animal, Geil's informant went on, told Shih Huang Ti what persons who were talking with him were really thinking about. In addition, the dog had long ears and could understand any language. By a clever wagging of its tail, it acted as an interpreter for Shih Huang Ti. When Shih Huang Ti died, the dog died, first signaling by a wag of his tail that Shih Huang Ti's son would be no good.

On another occasion, when Geil was talking to a group of road menders, he questioned them about the Wall:

> How long did [the emperor take to build it]?" he asked.
>
> "No time at all," was the reply. "He rode a strange horse

which made the valleys and the hills equal. Where his horse's hoofs trod, the Wall sprang up."

"Did he not use men to build it?"

"There were thousands of mouths working there."

"How did they get the Wall across the Yellow River?"

"The water was parted for a hundred *li*, and so the masons did their work."

"Has the Wall got any end to it?"

"No, it is a circle, and the Central Kingdom is surrounded on all sides by the Wall."

"What else do you know about [the Emperor] Ch'in?"

"Ch'in passed here building the Great Wall, but he has never come back; he is going on still."

"How do you know that?"

"There was God-breath in him."[1]

Of all the books by travelers who have actually explored the Wall, Geil's *The Great Wall of China*, published in 1909, is still the most entertaining. It is also the most exasperating, with its schoolboy humor, its digressions, repetitions, purple patches, and outbursts of belligerent Christianity. Geil is always digging one in the ribs, and I suspect that some of his folk tales, though authentic, were lifted from literary sources and then put into the mouths of convenient passers-by. Yet one cannot help liking this rambunctious, confident, enthusiastic American scholar-traveler of fifty years ago. I wish that someone with his gifts, but without his prejudices, would make the same journey today.

When one examines these legends, which roused Geil to gales of laughter, is it not possible that one finds a tiny core of truth in them? Take first Shih Huang Ti's magic whip; it seems to me

[1] Geil, *op. cit.*

possible that such a man, if he ever visited the Wall, might well have carried an enormous whip as a symbol of his power, in the same way that the pharaohs of ancient Egypt carried batons and that their officials bore staffs of office. In any case, it was the power of the emperor which the laborers felt on their backs, whoever actually wielded the whips. It seems to me possible also that Shih Huang Ti would ride one of the finest horses in the empire, and that, if he visited the Wall during its building, he would be seen riding this horse; and, under such circumstances, the animal might then be thought by the peasants to have supernatural powers, like Shih Huang Ti himself. As for the "red dog," might not this be a symbol of the emperor's powerful espionage service? We know that, when he reorganized the government of the empire, he divided it into provinces, each ruled by three officials, one of whom was put there to report on the other two. The red dog, we are told, "smelled out bad officials" and "had long ears and could understand any language. . . ."

I wonder if Li Ssu had red hair?

15

The Son of Heaven

Dr. Geil, who was mentally nearer Carlyle than Freud, hero-worshiped the "First Emperor" with an ardor which may astonish those who remember another book-burner, Adolf Hitler:

> When the antiquity-loving scholars protested against his wanton unconcern for the precious past, [the First Emperor] deliberately treated them with scant courtesy; he unceremoniously buried about five hundred of them alive and carried out his riotous resolve to eliminate the cautious classics. The "useful" books which treated of fortunetelling, astrology, agriculture, and medicine were spared. If anybody was found whispering or insinuating that his *edition de luxe* was uncanonical, the unlucky individual was promptly decapitated. Not only were the blind followers of ancient usage beheaded, but their faithful families were exterminated like pestiferous rats, and the officials of the districts were held responsible for not stamping out all vestiges of the pesky, moldy, rusty, dusty past.[1]

In case anyone suspects that Geil is being satirical, he makes his attitude clear in a later passage:

> Men were obliged to behave in a certain way because a Duke of Chou a thousand years earlier had recommended this way;

[1] Geil, *op. cit.*

> and his *Book of Rites* prescribes what every person ought to do in every conceivable situation. Ch'in saw that his kingdom was stereotyped on a pattern already three hundred years old, and he wanted men to think for themselves and adapt their lives to the ever-changing problems of life. . . . The paralyzing *Book of Rites* was to go; the *Book of Changes,* which is an incomprehensible system of philosophy supplemented by some inexplicable chapters by Confucius; the *Book of History,* which professes to begin twenty-two hundred years before Ch'in, but details chiefly imaginary conversations between kings and their viziers; the *Book of Odes,* which, indeed, [contains] rather harmless and beautiful folk songs; the dreariest *Book of Annals* conceivable. . . . Add to these Five Classics the *Four Books,* whose refrain is "Walk in the trodden path" and you see that Ch'in was not badly advised when he decided to warm up his people with the bundles of bamboos [books of this period were written on bamboo] that inculcated such teaching.[2]

And Geil ends this diatribe (which, admittedly, contains truth) with the following prophetic statement, written in 1908:

> But the spirit of Ch'in is awake today. The halls of the schools are once more swept of the classical rubbish, and the people are being taught again to face the living present. . . . Ch'in was the man of his age, and if another Ch'in arises today to attract the veneration of his people, China will be the first of the nations.

One may smile at Geil's unquestioning admiration of the "First Emperor." But at least he faced honestly a question which still

[2] *Ibid.*

troubles us in our age of doubt and uncertainty; from the viewpoint of practical government, how important *is* the past? Was Shih Huang Ti right after all? Less assured than Geil, we would hesitate to dismiss the Chinese classics as "rubbish," but, after offering due reverence to Confucius' moral teachings, the fact remains that even in 221 B.C. there *was* a great deal of dead wood in his Tree of Knowledge.

In trying to assess the character of the "First Emperor," it would be dangerous and misleading to draw parallels too closely with the present. Shih Huang Ti was not a dictator or a party leader. He was the head of the national religion, a god-king, the "Son of Heaven," as the Egyptian pharaoh was the "Son of the Sun." Some of his actions were those of a ruthless and efficient soldier-statesman. There were others which may strike a modern mind as those of a madman. Writers on China have often harped on the "First Emperor's superstitious" practices, and Geil especially deplores them, since they mar the fair portrait of his hero. Yet, what is superstition if not the debased survival of earlier religions? Witchcraft, which still survives in odd pockets of Europe and America, is only the dregs of the old pagan faiths in which, at one time, millions ardently believed. Looked at in this way, Shih Huang Ti's endless perambulations of his empire, his fanatical building operations, his search for the elixir of immortality, were all manifestations of religious beliefs which he shared with his subjects, who in turn regarded him as a god.

No doubt, as his critics have said, he was morbidly suspicious and terrified of death, as many of us are today. But this is understandable. From childhood he was brought up in the religious traditions of generations of Chinese rulers; he was surrounded by priests and soothsayers who regarded him as the Son of Heaven, a

semidivine being. He was not merely above the law; he *was* the law. Most human beings have secret fears, hates, and appetites which they keep under control for reasons of conscience, religious belief, or, more often, fear of punishment. Remove all these obstacles, and even the most stable mind can be thrown off balance. A powerful but neurotic personality such as Hitler's will realize its fantasies in destruction. It is to Shih Huang Ti's credit that, cruel and ruthless though he was, the products of his tyranny were, in the main, constructive.

Nor was this a historical accident. Judging by the numerous inscribed stelae which the emperor erected, many of which still survive, his aim was unity and peace. The inscription at T'ai-shan reads impressively: "For the first time he has united the world."

The inscription at Chieh-shih reads:

> The inner ramparts have been cast down and destroyed. He has regulated and made equal the laws, measures, and standards for all men; . . . he has quelled the battles. . . . The black-haired people [*i.e.*, the Chinese] enjoy calm and repose; arms are no longer necessary and each is tranquil in his dwelling. The Sovereign Emperor has pacified in turn the four ends of the earth.[3]

A tireless administrator, Shih Huang Ti is said to have handled "one hundred and twenty pounds of reports each day"—an assertion which seems to contradict Eberhard's statement that the emperor allowed his ministers to act for him while he became a religious symbol. It is true that the Legalists believed that the ruler should do as little as possible for himself, but it is difficult to imagine the masterful Shih Huang Ti allowing this to happen. Be-

[3] Grousset, *op. cit.*

sides securing the northern frontier, he also sent expeditions to the south, occupying Canton and "Sinicizing" its neighborhood. During the period 221–214 B.C., his armies overran the regions of Fukein, Kuangtung, Kuangsi, and Tongking. To do this, they had to dig a twenty-mile waterway connecting two streams, making it possible to transport supplies by water from the Yangtze to the West River. This waterway was named "The Marvelous Canal." The emperor then ordered vagrants to be rounded up and sent to the far reaches of these regions so as to populate his newly won territory.

These actions, whether we admire or deplore them, can at least be understood by modern man. It is only when we come to consider Shih Huang Ti's other activities that we find ourselves wandering in an alien world in which there are no landmarks. We can appreciate these other activities only if we keep in mind the supreme importance to the ancients of religious observance. To them, such observance was essential to the survival of the human race. To most Western minds today, the word "religion" has acquired a meaning which I believe would have been incomprehensible to the peoples of ancient Egypt, Sumer, India, or China. To them, religion had very little to do with morality, and there was nothing "mystical" about it. Religion was essentially a practical matter, concerned with propitiating and winning the support of those unpredictable elements which caused the rivers to flood, the rain to fall, the soil to bear crops; which gave a man health or rotted his body with disease; which made one woman barren and another fertile. Today, we think of these things in terms of "natural forces," and we give them scientific labels. Our ancestors called them gods.

The people of Ch'in, a frontier state, appear to have adopted some of the beliefs of their nomad neighbors of the north. Peoples

living in settled, cultivated areas usually worship the gods of the earth, rivers, and streams. Wanderers in the deserts and steppes, with no permanent homes, tend to fix their attention on the sun, moon, and stars. It is difficult to discover from the writings of Chinese historians what the religion of Ch'in actually was; but we do know that it was associated with the astral bodies. Some writers have suggested that Shih Huang Ti's perambulations around his empire, and even his movements within his chain of palaces, may have been prompted less by what we would call "practical" considerations than by religious observance. Eberhard points out that the emperor's journeys "corresponded to the course of the sun" and that "within the palace the emperor continually changed his residential quarters, probably not only from fear of assassination but also for astral reasons. His mausoleum formed a hemispherical dome, and all the stars of the sky were painted on its interior."[4]

These facts may help to explain certain activities of Shih Huang Ti in later life which otherwise sound like a record of mental aberration. We hear of his ascending the Sacred Mountains of T'ai-shan in order to commune with the celestial spirits who lived there, and of his erecting near the peak a plain granite shaft, fifteen feet high, which he called "the letterless mountain." With his gorgeous entourage of horses, coaches, and chariots, he moved eastward along his splendid roads until he could gaze out across the sea, which he loved. The state of Ch'in attributed its sucess to the guardian spirits of the Yellow River; water was its element. From the terrace of Lan-yeh, the emperor looked out across the ocean, a barrier even more formidable than his Great Wall. Beyond the horizon, he had been told, lay "The Three Islands," where spirits drank from "the sweet-wine fountain of jade," making themselves

[4] Eberhard, *op. cit.*

immortal. If one could only reach those sacred isles, his advisers told him, one might discover the elixir of eternal life.

Shih Huang Ti, who was terrified of death, determined to obtain this magic elixir. He sent two expeditions in search of it, the first being commanded by a notorious charlatan named Hsu Shih. This man returned without the elixir but advised the emperor to send a second expedition equipped with "youths and maidens of good family" and with weapons, tools, and ample provisions. The second expedition set out, but was never seen again. Some people believe that its members eventually reached Japan and became that country's first colonizers.

In his declining years, the "First Emperor" is said to have become obsessed by fear of assassination. He had many enemies; he had caused millions to suffer and die; and already there were murmurs of rebellion within the empire which he had created. Ssu-ma Ch'ien writes of these later years:

> Having united the empire, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti [formulated a policy of] public works within, and expelled the I and the Ti tribes without. He received a tax . . . and sent forth as soldiers [all those living] to the left of the village gate. The men's exertions in cultivation were insufficient for the grain taxes, and the spinning of the women was insufficient for clothing. The resources of the empire were exhausted in supplying his [Shih Huang Ti's] government, and yet were insufficient to satisfy his desires. Within the seas, there was sadness and dissatisfaction, and this developed into disorder and rebellion.[5]

Whatever one's judgment of Shih Huang Ti, there is for me something pitiable in the story of the great emperor's last years.

[5] Bodde, *China's First Unifier.*

He was a man of infinite power, surrounded by servile courtiers who shuffled toward his throne on their knees, with heads bowed. He commanded an empire as great as that of Rome. He had only to flick a finger and he could kill his Grand Councilor, Li Ssu himself. Or he could destroy a city, ravage a province, uproot ten thousand families and send them to populate the remotest of his southern colonies. He was the Son of Heaven, and, when he walked on the terraces of his palace and looked at the star-scattered sky, he may perhaps have believed that, after his death, he might take his place among the gods. And yet he was afraid; probably he remembered that day when, as a young man, he had seen Ching K'o's dagger glittering as the would-be assassin drew it from the map case, and heard again the courtiers' shouts of "Put your sword behind you, King!" There had been that ridiculous doctor Hsia Wu-chü, with his medicine bag, muffling the murderer's aim; the struggle to get the bright sword from its scabbard; the desperate blows, slash, slash, slash; then the sudden silence and the inert body welling blood over the floor of the throne room.

So long ago. How long ago was it . . . thirty, forty years? Shih Huang Ti could hardly remember.

Around him, for a distance of seventy miles, lay two hundred and seventy palaces, each with its pillared halls, gardens, audience rooms, dining rooms, bedchambers. In each palace the transported inhabitants of the states he had conquered were waiting to offer the most exquisite food and the most delectable wines of their country. There were the finest musicians and the most skillful dancing girls; and the concubines were so numerous that, had he slept with only one for each night of his remaining life, he would never have been able to enjoy them all.

And yet Shih Huang Ti was a lonely and a terrified man. During the latter years of his life, he rarely ventured beyond his capi-

tal. Night after night he moved along the covered corridors from palace to palace, never sleeping in the same place for more than one night. It may be, as the Chinese historians say, that he did these things from fear of assassination. But it is just as likely that the emperor was guided purely by religious motives, that his capital and its surrounding palaces were a model of his kingdom,[6] and that he moved within it, "following the sun," as once he had journeyed along the "racing roads" from the Yellow River to Yangtze, and from the Tibetan mountains to the distant sea.

[6] Although it is dangerous to draw parallels too closely, there is a curious resemblance here, between Shih Huang Ti and the Pharaoh Djoser (2800 B.C.). Djoser's pyramid was surrounded by a replica of his palace, including temples, each of the latter of which was dedicated to one of the gods of his various provinces. He also had two tombs within the pyramid enclosure, one for the Northern Kingdom and one for that of the South. The question is: Were Shih Huang Ti's two hundred and seventy palaces full size, or were they merely large-scale models, such as the model of the Palace of Angkor Wat which one can still see near the palace of the kings of Siam?

16

Chao Kao's Plot

Shih Huang Ti had more than twenty sons, of whom the eldest, Fu Su, was his legitimate heir. But Fu Su had offended his father by critizing his action in putting to death four hundred and sixty scholars. So the emperor sent Fu Su to join General Meng T'ien, who commanded the troops on the Great Wall. Thereafter, Shih Huang Ti transferred his affection to his youngest son, Hu Hai, and it was this young man who accompanied him on what was to be his last tour of the empire. Li Ssu, the Grand Councilor, also went with the party, together with a certain eunuch, Chao Kao, who had risen from obscurity to become an official, though far inferior to Li Ssu in rank. Chao Kao was Keeper of the Chariots, and he was also in charge of "the sending of letters and of sealed orders."

When death overtook the Emperor in 210 B.C., he was more than a thousand miles from Hsien Yang. He died after an illness, leaving behind him an empire already simmering with revolt, an heir who was then far away on the northern frontier, and a group of anxious officials grouped around the corpse of their once-mighty ruler.

Inevitably, in such circumstances, there was a struggle for power, and into this Li Ssu, who had served Shih Huang Ti faith-

fully for more than thirty years, was unwillingly drawn. The chief plotter was the eunuch Chao Kao, of whom the Chinese historians had said practically nothing until this moment. Yet he must have been a man of some authority and influence to have done what he did. As eunuch, he was probably connected with the royal harem and other sources of entertainment. This would be an office of minor importance under such a monarch as Shih Huang Ti. Under a more hedonistic ruler, his influence would be correspondingly greater, which may explain why he gambled his life on a desperate and cunning proposal. Apart from Li Ssu and Chao Kao, we know little about the chief characters in this drama, but I would guess that Chao Kao was personally unpopular with the Grand Councilor and other officials. His trump card was his influence over the young prince Hu Hai, and he played it brilliantly.

Ssu-ma Ch'ien tells us about the emperor's last order:

> He [Shih Huang Ti] commanded Chao Kao to write a letter to be sent to Fu Su saying, "With the soldiers belonging to Meng T'ien, accompany my funeral cortege to Hsien Yang and bury me there." The letter was already sealed but had not yet been delivered to the messenger when Shih Huang Ti died. The letter and the imperial seal were at that time both in the quarters of Chao Kao. Only the son Hu Hai, the Grand Councilor Li Ssu, and Chao Kao, together with five or six of the favorite eunuchs, knew that Shih Huang Ti had died, and none of the other officials knew about it.
>
> Because the emperor had died outside [*i.e.*, far from the capital] and because there was no definite crown prince, Li Ssu concealed the matter and pretended that Shih Huang Ti was keeping to his sleeping chariot. The various officials continued to submit their affairs, and [a pretense was kept up that] the emperor ate food as before. The eunuchs who directly accom-

panied the sleeping chariot pretended to transmit the royal approval on the affairs which were submitted.

Chao Kao, using the fact that he had retained the letter and seal which would have been sent to Fu Su [the legitimate heir], spoke to Prince Hu Hai, saying: "The emperor has died without giving instructions as to the enfieffing of his sons as king, and has only given a letter to his eldest son. When this eldest son arrives, he will become established as Sovereign Emperor while you will remain without a foot or inch of territory. What are you going to do about this?"

Hu Hai replied: "I have certainly heard that the intelligent ruler knows his subjects and the intelligent father knows his sons. If my father has departed this life without enfieffing his sons, what can I say or do about it?"

"Not so," said Chao Kao. "At the present time the salvation or ruin of the empire depends only on you, myself, and the Grand Councilor. I beg you to consider this. Moreover, when it comes to making others one's subjects, or being the subjects of others, ruling over others or being ruled over by others, how can the two be discussed in the same breath?"[1]

There are two particularly interesting points in this story. First, the fact that Shih Huang Ti, despite his estrangement from his eldest son, still preferred that Fu Su should succeed him, suggests that the old emperor was a shrewd judge of character. He loved his younger son, Hu Hai, we are told, but probably recognized that Fu Su, with his greater strength and independence of mind, was better fitted to rule the empire. Of course, Fu Su, as eldest son, was the legitimate heir in any case, but would this fact have influenced Shih Huang Ti very much in choosing a successor?

[1] All the quotations in this chapter are from Bodde, *China's First Unifier.*

The second point is the cunning with which Chao Kao baited his hook. Although the young prince's reply to Chao Kao's question was morally impeccable, we know from Hu Hai's later actions that he was weak and sensual. Chao Kao, a much stronger character, was well aware of this fact. In recognizing that Hu Hai would not want to forfeit the sweets of power, Chao Kao showed how well he knew his man. Here imagination must fill in the gaps left by the official chroniclers. I see Chao Kao as a kind of Chinese Pandarus, a willing and efficient supplier of sensual delight, highly intelligent and completely corrupt.

Weak though he may have been, Hu Hai showed considerable character in resisting Chao Kao's wiles. Ssu-ma Ch'ien continues:

> Hu Hai said: "To remove an elder brother and establish a younger one is contrary to what is right. Not to transmit a father's edict—being afraid of death—is against the duties of a son. When one's ability is limited and one's talents shallow, to make forcible use of other men's achievements is to be lacking in ability. These three acts are the very opposite of [a ruler's] proper qualifications, and the empire would not submit to them. I myself would fall into peril and the spirits of the soil and grain would not accept my sacrifices."[2]
>
> "Great conduct," replied Chao Kao, "does not consist in petty caution, nor does admirable virtue lie in polite refusal." He cited a number of cases in which sons murdered their fathers and had received not only the approbation of their subjects but of Confucius himself. "One who is decisive and dares to act, him even spiritual beings avoid, so that eventually he accomplishes something of merit. I beg you to agree with this."

[2] Of course, we cannot be certain that Hu Hai ever expressed these noble Confucian sentiments. We have only Ssu-ma Ch'ien's word for them.

Whereupon Hu Hai "heaved a sigh" and eventually agreed to Chao Kao's proposal. Having thus won over his prince, Chao Kao approached the major obstacle in his path to power, the Grand Councilor Li Ssu, a much more difficult nut to crack. But here again Chao Kao knew his man, and the arguments he put to the minister have a Machiavellian cunning and plausibility. He knew Li Ssu loved power above all things, so he began by hinting that the latter might have to surrender that power to Meng T'ien, commander of the troops on the Wall and a close associate of the rightful heir:

> "If your Lordship will make an estimate of ability, who compares with Meng T'ien? In worthiness, who compares with Meng T'ien? In the making of far-reaching and unfailing plans, who compares with Meng T'ien? In freedom from resentment of the empire, who compares with Meng T'ien? In enjoying the intimacy and trust of the eldest son, who compares with Meng T'ien?"

Li Ssu replied :

> "In all these five respects, I indeed do not come up to Meng T'ien. How deeply, sir, do you reprove me?"

The craven servility of Chao Kao's answer evokes a revolting picture of the eunuch, probably fat, greasy, and ingratiating, shuffling forward on his mat and groveling before the great official.

> "I am indeed but a menial of the inner offices who, through the writings of his pen, has been fortunate to obtain entry into the Ch'in palace. I have conducted affairs for more than twenty years, and have not yet seen a Grand Councilor or meritorious

minister whom Ch'in has dismissed and who has retained his feudal investiture down to the second generation. All have eventually died by execution. . . ."

Having planted that barb of fear, Chao Kao went on to plead eloquently for the Grand Councilor to agree to his plot:

"The eldest son is firm, resolute, warlike, and courageous. He is a sincere man and a spirited gentleman, and, when he succeeds to the throne, it is inevitable that he will use Meng T'ien as his Grand Councilor. Hence it is inevitable that your lordship will not possess for an entire lifetime your seal as Marquis of the Highest Rank, but will someday be returning to your village."

"I have received our late monarch's decree," replied Li Ssu, "and listen obediently to the Will of Heaven. What doubts can there be as to what should be decided?"

But Chao Kao was persistent. He knew that without Li Ssu's connivance the plot was impossible, and that, now he had revealed it, his own life might become forfeit. "What is secure may become perilous," he argued, "and what is perilous may become secure. If what is secure and perilous is not decided on, what means is there of honoring the sages?" Throughout this formal dialogue, the two contestants must have been warily watching each other. Loyalty, morality, and honor hardly entered into the discussion, even though it was larded with edifying quotations from the sages. The great state machine which Li Ssu and his king had created was temporarily running free, with no hand on the controls. Whose hand was to take over? If Hu Hai was made emperor, Chao Kao's own personal position would be immensely strengthened, probably at Li Ssu's expense, for the Grand Councilor could have had

no illusions about the eunuch's character and ambitions. On the other hand, if the plan succeeded, Li Ssu would still be Grand Councilor, and in Hu Hai he would have more malleable material to work on than he had had in Shih Huang Ti. Against this was the fact that the young prince was weak and sensual and therefore more likely to yield to Chao Kao's corrupting influence. But if Fu Su, a strong man of proved integrity and ability, became emperor, it was highly likely, as Chao Kao said, that Meng T'ien would become Grand Councilor. Whither, then, would Li Ssu retire?

He fingered his jade rings, frowned, and looked out through the open door of the tent, beyond which he could see the lines of tethered horses, the coachmen lounging on the grass, and the sunlight flooding the rich land of China. Laughter floated into the dim interior of the tent, the careless voices of common men who were quite unaware that the strictly guarded royal coach now contained only a rotting corpse. Common men; he, Li Ssu, had once been a common man; so had this venal eunuch.

> Li Ssu sighed. "I was but a commoner of the lanes and byways of Shang-t'sai," he said, "who, through the imperial favor, has attained to the position of Grand Councilor. . . . My sons and grandsons all hold the most honorable positions and greatest revenues. Therefore, the measures pertaining to the salvation or ruin [of the dynasty], its security or peril, have fallen upon me. How then can I turn my back [upon my duty], for the loyal subject does not hope to reach perfection while shunning death. . . . Do not repeat your words, sir, or you would be causing me to do evil."
>
> "And yet," Chao Kao replied, "I have heard that the sage shifts his course without having an infallible rule. He accords with changes and follows the time. . . . Things certainly

> have [this law of change]. How can there be unchanging rules [for conduct]? . . . If you, sir, will listen to my plan, you will long hold your title as a marquis. . . . But now if you renounce this plan and do not follow it, disaster will overtake your descendants sufficient to chill your heart. He who is skillful makes good fortune out of disaster. What, sir, is your position?"

It must have galled Li Ssu to hear this upstart official plying him with the same specious arguments which he himself had used during his early climb to power. Then he had been a rebel against feudalism and had encouraged Shih Huang Ti to destroy it. Now he found himself having to defend the power and privilege he had won for himself and his children. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, in the most moving part of his narrative, tells us that at this breaking point the Grand Councilor "looked up to heaven and groaned." Dropping some tears, he exclaimed with a sigh:

> "Alas, since I alone of all my line have encountered this unsettled age, if I cannot bring myself to die, on what am I to rely for life?"

After this, says Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Li Ssu listened to Chao Kao.

The plan was to destroy the letter left by the dead emperor, and, using the royal seal, send to Fu Su a false message purporting to come from his father, stating that Hu Hai was to become crown prince and severely criticizing both Fu Su and General Meng T'ien for military ineptitude.

> "At the present time," the letter stated, "Fu Su stays with the army commandant Meng T'ien who, for more than ten years, has had charge of several hundred thousands of troops along

the military posts of the frontier. There he has been unable to come before us [with news of] his advance, and many soldiers have been destroyed without the winning of a foot or inch [of territory]. But he has been repeatedly sending frankly worded letters, speaking evil of what we have been doing. . . . As a son Fu Su has been unfilial, and herewith is presented with a sword with which he may cut short his existence. The commandant of the army, [Meng] T'ien . . . has been lacking in rectitude. . . . As a subject he has not been loyal, and so it is hereby granted to him to die. As for his soldiers, let them be attached to Lieutenant General Wang Li."

The letter was signed with the imperial seal and carried by a nobleman to Fu Su at his frontier post on the Great Wall. Meanwhile, the emperor's death was kept secret from the people. The plotters let it be known that Shih Huang Ti was indisposed and compelled to keep to his coach. But it was high summer, and, as the royal entourage moved slowly back to the capital, Chao Kao and his colleagues were faced with another problem—how to smother the odor of the decaying corpse. They solved this in an ingenious way. The ancient Chinese, including Shih Huang Ti, were very fond of dried fish, even when it had passed what modern food experts call "the limit of edibility." So the "First Emperor" of "All that is under Heaven" made his last journey surrounded by chariot-loads of stinking fish. And when the cortege passed under the great gateway of Hsien Yang, less than a dozen of China's millions knew that the Son of Heaven was dead.

17

"I Have Cut the Veins of the Earth"

Far away on the northern frontier, Fu Su, the legitimate heir of Shih Huang Ti, rode along the Wall with the army commandant Meng T'ien. A cooling breeze blew in from the desert, tempering the heat of the summer sun which glared down on the shining new rampart. Ahead of and behind them, an endless line of towered battlements snaked across the hills until the Wall was lost over the horizon's rim. As Meng T'ien and the prince rode through the arched gateways of those watchtowers, the sentries saluted; from far off came the murmur of men, the shrill bray of military trumpets, and the whinnying of horses. This was the frontier of the new China, and to men of hardihood and courage it must have had the appeal of all frontiers in all ages.

The Chinese historians give us only the faintest character sketches of these two men, but from the recorded actions of the great general and the emperor's eldest son we can form a fair picture of them. Both were evidently men of action. We know from Chao Kao's description that Fu Su was "firm, resolute, warlike, and courageous . . . a sincere man and a spirited gentleman." Of the army commandant, who had three hundred thousand troops and to whom Shih Huang Ti had entrusted the building of the Wall, it was said that "in worthiness . . . in the making of far-reaching and unfailing plans . . . in freedom

from resentment of the empire," there was no one to compare with him; also that he enjoyed "the intimacy and trust of the eldest son."

From these and other statements, I think it is fair to conjecture that Fu Su and Meng T'ien were close friends. For years they had fought side by side against the barbarous Hsiung-nu, and there had sprung up between them the kind of brotherhood which often joins men who have shared the same perils. Fu Su was probably a humane man, since he quarreled with his father over the killing of the scholars. Meng T'ien, despite his responsibility for building the Wall, with all its attendant miseries, was evidently popular, since Chao Kao says that he was "free from resentment of the empire." He was not only a capable soldier and administrator, but also an inventor. He discovered the secret of capillary attraction, the basis of the modern fountain pen. He found that the hair of a goat, soaked in limewater, formed a brush which would "run," thus making writing infinitely easier; and this discovery had far-reaching effects on the development of Chinese writing for more than two thousand years.

As the two companions rode along the Wall they had, of course, no idea that the emperor was dead, nor that a messenger was already riding day and night toward the Wall, bearing the faked letter. There is no indication that either of them would have preferred the luxurious life of the capital to the rough comradeship of the frontier. They probably despised Li Ssu and the other politicians, and therefore underestimated their subtlety. At least Fu Su did. When he received the letter, he never doubted its authenticity; he took the sword and "entering into an inner apartment prepared to kill himself." Meng T'ien, an older and worldlier man, remonstrated with him:

"When His Majesty lived outside the capital and had not yet established a crown prince, he employed me to command a host of three hundred thousand to protect the frontier, and you, his son, to be overseer. This is a way to responsibility in the empire, and yet now, upon the coming of a single emissary, you are about to kill yourself. How do you know that this is not a trick? I beg of you to send back a request for confirmation of this letter. If, after sending back the request, you should then die, it would not be too late. The emissary will hasten the message."[1]

But Fu Su would not be persuaded.

"When a father allows his son to die [he said to Meng T'ien], how can there be any question about sending back the request?"[2]

With this Fu Su killed himself.

Meng T'ien, who obviously suspected a plot, refused to die. But his loyalty was such that he allowed the emissary to imprison him and his senior officers, when he could have had the man killed on the spot. The fortunate messenger then returned to the capital, bearing the news of Fu Su's suicide. Chao Kao, Li Ssu, and Hu Hai were "greatly delighted." Now that the true heir was dead, it was safe for them to announce the death of Shih Huang Ti, order official mourning, and proclaim Hu Hai emperor under the title "Erh Shih Huang Ti." The new monarch immediately appointed Chao Kao his palace chamberlain, which meant that the instigator of the plot now had the nearest access to the young ruler, constantly waiting upon him in matters of importance.

[1] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*
[2] *Ibid.*

Despite the initial success of their coup, however, the plotters were still insecure. Hu Hai was the youngest son of the late emperor, and, though Fu Su had been disposed of, there were at least eighteen other sons, some with strong claims. They and their relatives held positions of great power, and they would resent giving allegiance to a younger brother of notoriously unstable character. Moreover Shih Huang Ti's iron rule, and the demands he had made on the people, had aroused hatred toward the ruling house. It was less than fifteen years since the country had been unified, and the old ruling families of the former feudal states were still bitter. A rebellion, once begun, would not lack leaders.

The building of the Great Wall and the vast program of conquest and colonization had stretched the economy of the empire to breaking point. Scores of thousands of the strongest men had been taken from the land and sent to work on the Wall, on new roads, canals, and other public works. Yet those who remained had to work even harder to pay the crushing taxes demanded by the state. All these facts must have been well known to Li Ssu, who, unlike Chao Kao, was no mere politician but a major statesman. He had made his decision: Fu Su, whom Shih Huang Ti had nominated as his successor, and who might have been an able ruler, was dead; his great lieutenant, Meng T'ien, who might have replaced Li Ssu, was a prisoner. If only the trouble could have ended there! But as the Grand Councilor watched Chao Kao's increasing domination of the weak, self-indulgent youth whom they had made emperor, he may sometimes have wondered if, this time, he had chosen the greater evil.

Erh Shih Huang Ti, or Erh Shih, as Hu Hai was now called, was as unlike his father as it was possible for any son to be. He was devoted to pleasure, took no interest in the government of his empire, and, being himself devoid of character, was unable

correctly to assess the character of others. Like a spoiled child, he showed greatest favor to those who were readiest to gratify his sensual appetites. Chao Kao, who, as palace chamberlain, was responsible for providing these delights, therefore had the greatest influence, and, though Li Ssu was still the second greatest in the land, it was the eunuch who had the ear of the king. From the beginning, his policy was to indulge Erh Shih Huang Ti's weakness and thus gain sufficient influence over him to control policy.

Both Meng T'ien and his brother Meng I, another of the former emperor's trusted advisers, were brought to Hsien Yang for trial. Possibly Erh Shih and Li Ssu would have let them live, but Chao Kao persuaded the young emperor that, until all his father's powerful friends had been eliminated, his throne would not be secure. Meng T'ien was ordered to commit suicide by drinking poison.

The imprisoned general took the potion in his hand and remarked bitterly:

> "My family has served the Ch'in family faithfully for three generations. Had I wished to rebel, with three hundred thousand men under my command, nothing could have been easier! Yet I would rather die than ever take up arms against the imperial house. . . . What crime have I before Heaven? I die without fault!"[3]

He then swallowed the poison, but it took some time to act. Awaiting death, he reflected on his last remark and then added:

> "Yes, indeed, I *have* committed a crime for which I must answer. Beginning at Lin-t'ao, and extending to Liaotung, I

[3] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot and General.*

have built ramparts and dug ditches over more than ten thousand *li*, and in that distance it is impossible that I would not have cut through the veins of the earth at some point. That is my crime."[4]

So died General Meng T'ien, the actual builder of the first Great Wall. His last words, which were certainly meant seriously, bring us close to that primitive worship of the Earth-mother which is the foundation of most early religions.

Meng T'ien's great master, Shih Huang Ti, was buried in a tomb, the construction of which reveals elements of that other, astral religion which he probably inherited from the desert nomads who may have been his ancestors. The description of this mighty sepulcher, as given by the ancient Chinese writers, is so fantastic that one hesitates to believe in it. On the other hand, a man who was capable of building two hundred and seventy palaces, stretching for seventy miles around his capital, and who built the greatest military rampart in the world, would certainly have been able to outrival the pharaohs in tomb-building. Skeptics might ask themselves this question: If they had been told that two thousand years ago there had existed a wall twenty-five feet high and twenty-five feet wide, crossing mountains six thousand feet high and extending over a distance equivalent to more than half the width of the United States, would they have believed it? Yet the Wall is there.

The tumulus which contained the sepulcher still exists near the town of Lint'ung. Called locally "The Mound of Ch'in," it is an artificial hill of sand brought from the river Wei, which flows some miles to the north. South of it rises Mount Li, to which it was said to have been connected by subterranean passages. The tumulus, now worn and weathered by more than twenty cen-

[4] *Ibid.*

turies, is over one thousand feet along each side, and was orientated, like the Great Pyramid, to the four points of the compass. It was even larger than the pyramid, which measured seven hundred and fifty feet along each base-line. There is however, no real comparison between these two monuments, since the Great Pyramid was built entirely of accurately masoned stone blocks, whereas "The Mound of Ch'in" is a huge hill of sand covering stone- or brick-lined chambers which are no longer visible.

These chambers may still exist, but I have been unable to trace any record of an archaeological excavation. We are, therefore, forced to rely on the descriptions left by the ancient Chinese. These state that Shih Huang Ti planned his eternal home to represent the empire which he had governed. It contained a huge relief map of China, modeled in bronze and showing mountain ranges, valleys, and plains. The two great rivers, the Yangtze and the Yellow River, were reproduced as channels twelve feet deep filled with quicksilver, the flow being regulated by machinery. Along the banks of these artificial rivers were models of palaces, gardens, and cities, copied exactly from reality and elaborately furnished. Above this simulacrum of the world (as the emperor knew it) was poised a huge copper dome representing the night sky. There glowed the moon and constellations, and the whole huge chamber was lit by lamps fueled with seal fat[5] and designed to burn for many years.

On one of the rivers of quicksilver floated the boat-shaped sarcophagus containing the body of the emperor. Elaborate and ingenious precautions are said to have been taken to protect the tomb from violation. There were machines which reproduced the sound of thunder to terrify intruders. If anyone dared to open the

[5] The literal translation of the Chinese word is "man-fish." It probably means a seal.

door, hidden spring-guns automatically fired stones and arrows, and hidden knives sprang from the walls.

Dr. Geil, who naturally visited the tomb of his hero, quotes a story told to him by one of the inhabitants of the district:

> "The great mound [said his informant] is only the 'great gate' of the grave . . . the grave is in the mountains . . . is a quicksilver sea, on which the body moves, so that, if you want to grasp it, you can't. Those who made the Mound were buried alive in it, as were also Ch'in's wives and concubines."[6]

Another of Geil's informants told him that "inside the Mound are buried Ch'in's 'Ascend-the-Cloud Boots' which enabled him to go up to heaven, his 'Drive-the-Mountains Whip,' also his 'Measure-the-Fields Rod' which, when he waved it in the air, caused his enemies to suffer defeat."

It is time to return to earth. What is the truth about the tomb of Shih Huang Ti? Remembering some of the stories which Arab historians have woven around the Egyptian pyramids (one of which was supposed to contain a golden cock which crowed a warning when the tomb was entered), one may discount part of this story as Oriental fantasy. My own guess is that the tomb was at least as costly and elaborate as the greatest Pharaonic sepulcher, and that it probably *did* contain the bronze models of the earth and sky, perhaps even the floating sarcophagus. The Chinese of this period were undoubtedly more advanced mechanically than the peoples of the ancient Near East, and the tomb may even have contained automatic weapons. But I am sure that its size was greatly exaggerated. The Chinese, like the Japanese, have always been skillful miniaturists. They are the world's finest model-

[6] Geil, *op. cit.*

makers. The bronze model of the earth and sky sounds authentic, but its true wonder probably consisted in delicate craftsmanship rather than size.

However, there can be little doubt that some of Shih Huang Ti's slaves and concubines accompanied him in death. This was a common practice in western Asia, as we know from the holocaust of victims which Sir Leonard Woolley discovered in the royal tombs at Ur. The ancient Chinese, who were equally indifferent to the sacrifice of human life, were quite capable of carrying out the final act which is alleged to have taken place after the burial of the emperor. When Shih Huang Ti's body had been laid in the burial hall, together with those of his favorite concubines, the workmen made their way back along the tunnel leading to the entrance. Before they reached it, however, hidden portcullises suddenly crashed down, and the terrified artisans were left to suffocate in the eternal darkness of the tomb.

18

Devil's Advocate

Now that the new emperor's father was honorably buried and his brother and Meng T'ien were dead, Erh Shih wished to relax and enjoy the fullness of his power. One day, while reclining on his couch of state, he summoned Chao Kao before him, and said:

> "Man's life in this world is but an instant. . . . It is like the pressing onward of six chargers which instantaneously pass by a crack [in the wall]. Now that I govern the empire, I desire everything that the ear and eye enjoy and the utmost of whatever my heart's desire delights in. Thus shall I bring repose to my ancestral temple and give pleasure to the myriad clans. [But at the same time I wish] long to hold the empire and to bring my span of years to a natural conclusion. Is such a course possible?"
>
> "I beg to speak out [replied the eunuch] without daring to avoid execution from the axe."[1]

Permission being given, Chao Kao reminded the young ruler of the peril in which he stood.

[1] Quotations in this chapter are from Bodde, *China's First Unifier.*

"I am anxious that your Majesty pause a little in his ideas, for indeed all the princes and great ministers are suspicious about the consultations at Sha-ch'iu [where the plot had been hatched]. At the same time, every one of the princes is an older brother of your Majesty, besides which the great ministers are men who were established by the former emperor. . . . None of them pays allegiance, and they may, I fear, make some disturbance. . . ."

"What can I do about this?" asked Erh Shih. Chao Kao's remedy was to make the laws even more severe, so that for the slightest offense, real or pretended, not only the offender but his entire family would suffer. It was to be a rule of terror.

"Exterminate the great ministers [he urged] and exile your own flesh and blood. Enrich the poor; give honor to the humble, and completely do away with the old ministers of the former emperor. Appoint, furthermore, those with whom your Majesty is intimate, and bring near those whom you trust. When this is done, all the hidden influences will turn to your Majesty. . . . Your Majesty will then [recline peacefully] on a lofty pillow, giving free vent to his desires and favoring what he takes pleasure in. No plan can surpass this one."

Erh Shih approved, and he gave Chao Kao power to arrest and try those suspected of plotting against the throne. The result, of course, was a "purge" like those which have taken place under modern dictatorships. Twelve of the royal princes, brothers of Erh Shih, were executed, and "their bodies were exposed on the market place." Ten of the royal princesses were killed at Tu "by being torn limb from limb." The families of these unfortunate people were also exterminated down to the smallest child. One of

Erh Shih's brothers, Prince Kao, had made plans for flight, but, fearing that in this event his family would suffer, he sent a "Memorial" to the emperor, saying:

> "When the former emperor was in good health, I was granted food upon entering [the palace], and upon leaving I rode in a chariot. Clothing from the imperial storehouse and valuable horses were bestowed upon me. [When the emperor died], I should have followed him in death but was unable. As a son, I have been unfilial, and as a subject have been disloyal. Being disloyal, I have no renown to establish in this world, and so request that I may follow him in death and be buried at the foot of Mount Li [*i.e.*, near the tomb of Shih Huang Ti].

The prince then took his own life. When Erh Shih received the "Memorial," he and Chao Kao were highly delighted, and the emperor commented: "This, indeed, may be called prompt." To which Chao Kao replied: "If [all] the ministers would thus die from grief without delay, who would there be to plot disturbances?" Erh Shih then granted "one hundred thousand [ounces] of money" for the funeral.

The historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien does not tell us what Li Ssu thought of these measures, or whether he was a party to them. Probably he was not, although they were only the final, logical extension of the Legalist theories of government which he had taught the former emperor. If men were to be ruled by force and terror, as he had advocated for more than thirty years, he had no reason to complain if bloody massacre was necessary to secure Erh Shih in power. In any case, he had connived with the plotters in order to retain his position as Grand Councilor. At the same time he may have had misgivings, knowing that he was the greatest of those ministers who "were established by the former emperor."

He may also have reflected that his theories worked very well under a ruler such as Shih Huang Ti, whom he could influence, but that, applied by such a man as Erh Shih, they might be turned against himself.

Again, despite his belief in autocracy, Li Ssu must have learned from experience that there were limits beyond which the people could not be driven, and, when he saw the harsh new edicts promulgated by Erh Shih, he may have trembled not only for his own safety but for that of the empire which he had helped Shih Huang Ti to create. Ssu-ma Ch'ien writes:

> The collections of taxes became even more burdensome, and there were exactions of forced military service without cease. But this time the frontier guards of Ch'u, led by such men as Ch'en Sheng and Wu Kuang, revolted and arose east of the mountains. Men of ability established each other, set themselves up as marquises and kings, and revolted against Ch'in. Their soldiers arrived as far as Hung-men before halting. . . ."

The empire was beginning to disintegrate; members of the old ruling families were leading revolts, and the long-suffering people were ready to follow them. If only a man of courage and intelligence such as Fu Su had succeeded to the throne, he might possibly have eased the people's burdens, retained the loyalty of the high officers, and perhaps saved the empire. Under such a ruler, Li Ssu, had he been allowed to retain office, could have done much. But in his desperate determination to retain power, the Grand Councilor had put himself in the hands of a feeble sensualist, who thought of the empire only as a means of gratifying his desires. It is evident from Ssu-ma Ch'ien's history that, at this time, Li Ssu was trying to call the young king to his responsibilities, but Erh Shih, doubtless prompted by Chao Kao, would not even

grant him an interview. Instead, a long and tedious correspondence ensued, in the course of which the young king taunted his chief minister by flinging his own Legalist theories in his face.

It would appear that Li Ssu had quoted the examples set by such mythical early emperors as Yao and Yu, who were supposed to have lived a Spartan existence in the service of their people. This did not suit Erh Shih at all. He wrote to Li Ssu:

> ". . . why should he who is honored by holding the empire wish to . . . weary his spirit? . . . When an able man possesses the empire, he does nothing else but use the empire exclusively so that it will accord with his own [desires]. This is the value of possessing the empire . . . but if, at the present time, I am even unable [to obtain] what is profitable for myself, how shall I be able to rule the empire? This is why I should like to give free play to my impulses and broaden my desires so as long to enjoy the empire without harm to myself."

In addition to this, someone, probably Chao Kao, had discovered a weak spot in Li Ssu's armor. One of the Grand Councilor's sons, Li Yu, was administrator of the province of San Ch'uan, which had been overrun by a horde of bandits on their way to the east. Yu had been unable to stop them, and this fact had been reported to the Grand Councilor by an emissary who had been sent to investigate. On being reproached by this emissary for having permitted the bandits to behave in this fashion, Li Ssu "became alarmed and increased the man's rank and revenue" in order to shut his mouth.[2] But somehow this story had leaked out, and Li Ssu must have realized that it gave Erh Shih and his palace chamberlain a pretext to act against him.

[2] Presumably Li Ssu was held responsible for his son's actions.

This was the climax in the drama of Li Ssu's career. He had reached a "point of no return," and his situation was similar to that of all men of power who have had to face, and are still facing, similar decisions. It was an agonizing decision. As a junior minister, Li Ssu could well have been present on that occasion in past days when the other old councilor, having courageously reprimanded Shih Huang Ti to his face, had walked over to the boiling caldron, expecting to be flung into it. Li Ssu, faced with an intransigent ruler who would not listen to his advice, could have taken the same course. He could have said (or written) to Erh Shih, as one old man had said to Erh Shih's father, "Your Majesty has a violent and presumptuous character. You do not control yourself . . . you have refused the advice of wise and virtuous men. . . . I am afraid for you and your dynasty."

Li Ssu did not take such a step. Why? Because he lacked courage? This is possible, and it is even excusable in view of the penalty he would probably have had to suffer. Yet he had shown courage in his youth, when, as an emissary to the king of Han, he had known that he might be tortured and killed. Was he concerned about the fate of his family? This is more likely. And add to this concern the knowledge that, as long as he continued to hold office as Grand Councilor, there was a chance he could ride the storm and steer the threatened empire to safety. As Chao Kao had truly said, "There are times when the sage shifts his course." Li Ssu may have decided to humor the young emperor by appearing to accede to his wishes. Or he may have been so anxious to retain his high office that he tried to outdo even Chao Kao in venality and so win Erh Shih's confidence. We can never be certain of his true motives, since the histories on which we must depend were all written by Confucians, who were naturally hostile.

The step which he did take was actually the Legalist theory pushed to its extreme limit. In a "Memorial" to the emperor, he professed agreement with Erh Shih in believing that the "intelligent ruler" must use the empire for his own pleasure. This, he argued, could be achieved by a policy of "supervising and holding [one's subjects] responsible."

> "When one supervises and holds them responsible [he wrote], subjects dare not but exert their ability to the utmost so as to devote themselves to their ruler. . . . In this way, the ruler alone will rule in the empire and will be ruled by none. He will succeed in reaching the apex of pleasure. . . . To possess the empire and yet not throw off all restraints is called making shackles for oneself out of the empire. There is no other reason for this than the failure of rulers to supervise and hold responsible. There are men who labor with their own bodies for the empire, as did Yao and Yu, and therefore the empire is called their shackles. Now if one is unable to practice the intelligent methods of Shen Pu-hai and Han [Fei-tzu] . . . and if on the contrary one busies oneself to no purpose with distressing one's body and wearying one's spirit in order that one may devote oneself to a hundred clans, then one is but a servant of the Black-headed Ones. . . .[3] If you make definitely severe punishments, then the empire will not dare to transgress the laws."[4]

A superficial reading of this "Memorial" suggests that Li Ssu would sink to any depth rather than appear to put restraints on Erh Shih. The statement may, however, be ambiguous; dependent on the reader, it could be taken either as an invitation to unrestricted license or as a subtle attack on such behavior:

[3] *i.e.*, the common people of China.

[4] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*

". . . When men who are abstemious, self-controlled, virtuous, and righteous stand in the Court, then wild and unrestrained revels are cut short. When remonstrating ministers who prate of reason appear at one's side, then abandoned and reckless aims become curbed. When patriots whose aims are those of men ready to die for their principles appear in the world, all thought of dissolute pleasures becomes obliterated. Therefore, the intelligent ruler is able to expel these three classes of men and to hold the methods of the ruler in his own hands alone, issuing his decrees to ministers who will listen and follow him, and thus practicing his clear laws. . . . This is why the intelligent ruler makes decisions solely himself, and hence his authority does not lie in the hands of his ministers. Only when this is so can he obliterate the path of virtue and righteousness, close the mouths of irresponsible speakers, hinder the activities of the patriots, and bottle up wisdom and intelligence so that, within the palace, only he sees and listens."[5]

Whether or not Li Ssu was merely being the devil's advocate, Erh Shih was highly delighted by these suggestions and proceeded at once to put them into practice.

[5] Bodde, *Statesman, Patriot, and General.*

19

A Chinese Iago

The euphemistic phrase of "supervising and holding responsible" meant, in fact, government by violent coercion. Ssu-ma Ch'ien tells us that when Erh Shih began to put it into action, "those who taxed the people heavily were regarded as intelligent officials, Erh Shih saying, 'such as these may be considered capable of supervising and holding responsible.' Persons who had suffered corporal punishment made up half of those to be seen on the roads, and the men who died daily formed a heap in the market place. Those who executed the people in large numbers were regarded as loyal ministers."

During this period, Chao Kao took the opportunity of eliminating as many as possible of his personal enemies, and those who might become dangerous. Though he must have realized that Li Ssu was potentially the most dangerous of all, the Grand Councilor was still too powerful and well entrenched to be vulnerable. Reading and rereading the bare facts as given by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, one cannot help speculating on the reasons for Li Ssu's actions. He was a highly intelligent, farsighted statesman with a lifetime's experience of power politics. If one may hazard a guess, I would suggest that he gambled on Erh Shih's repressive measures sparking off a palace revolt. If such a storm arose, he might be able to ride it out until the emperor was driven from the throne. Then he

could play the part of mediator, gain personal popularity by relaxing the laws, and thus secure his own position and that of his family.

But in this deadly game, it was Chao Kao, and not Li Ssu, who held the ace; and that was access to, and domination of, the young king. Chao Kao's greatest fear was that, in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's words, "the great ministers who entered the Court might submit matters that would vilify him." If only he could succeed in isolating the emperor from state affairs, and dissuade him from granting interviews with Li Ssu and other ministers, the pliant Erh Shih would be his tool. Then he could deal with Li Ssu.

Fortunately for Chao Kao, the emperor needed little persuasion to withdraw into the seclusion of his luxurious palace, where he would be free to indulge in his pleasures without being bothered by problems of government. Chao Kao, of course, could offer convincing reasons why such a course was advisable. He said to Erh Shih:

> "What makes the Son of Heaven noble [in the eyes of his people] is that they hear only the sound [of his voice], and none of the subjects can obtain a view of his countenance. Therefore, he designates himself as *chen*. Moreover, your Majesty is rich in his years [to come] and is not yet necessarily conversant with all affairs. If now he were to sit in Court and some error were to occur in the criticisms or recommendations [that were submitted], he would show his shortcomings to the great ministers, which would not be the way to display his spiritlike intelligence to the empire. However, if your Majesty were to keep himself in reserved dignity within the forbidden [part of the palace], and leave it to me and to palace attendants practiced in the laws, to attend to matters, then, when matters came up, there would be someone to decide them. In this way,

the great ministers would not dare to bring up doubtful affairs and the empire would acclaim you as a sage-ruler."[1]

Erh Shih complied, and from that time onward only Chao Kao and his eunuch attendants had direct access to him. He no longer gave audience to his ministers in the throne room but stayed in the private, forbidden part of the palace. Even so it was almost impossible for Chao Kao, a mere palace chamberlain, directly to prevent the emperor from meeting the great minister who had been his father's chief adviser for many years and who was still the second most powerful man in the empire. So Chao Kao tried a more subtle method. He sought an interview with the Grand Councilor, which was granted. Then, having prostrated himself before Li Ssu, he asked for his advice on a certain matter concerning the emperor. "There are," he said, "many bands of brigands east of the pass, and yet at present the emperor impresses more and more forced labor for the building of the O-pang palace. He collects dogs, horses, and useless things. I should like to remonstrate, but my position is lowly. Really this is a matter for your lordship. Why do you not see him?"

Li Ssu replied that he was aware of this matter, and had intended to speak to Erh Shih about it, but that "at present the emperor no longer sits in Court but stays within the inner palaces. . . . When I wish to see him, he has no leisure." Chao Kao urged the Grand Councilor to make every effort to see the emperor and assured him that when Erh Shih was at leisure he would immediately inform Li Ssu. After the usual exchange of courtesies, the palace chamberlain bowed himself out and hurried back to the palace. Ssu-ma Ch'ien describes what followed:

[1] The quotations in this chapter are from Bodde, *China's First Unifier.*

Chao Kao then waited until Erh Shih was in the midst of feasting and merriment, with women before him, to send a man to tell the Grand Councilor that at that moment the emperor was free and that he [Li Ssu] might submit his business. On arriving at the palace gate, the Grand Councilor had the announcement of his visit sent up. This happened three times, until Erh Shih angrily said, "I have many days of leisure when the Grand Councilor does not come, but as soon as I am feasting in private, the Grand Councilor straightway comes requesting business. Why does the Grand Councilor slight and force me in this way?"

Chao Kao took this opportunity to say, "If he is like this, he is dangerous. The Grand Councilor was a participant in the Sha-ch'iu plot, and now your Majesty has already been established as emperor, whereas the dignity of the Grand Councilor has not been advanced. His idea is one looking forward to becoming a king by making a petition of the country. Furthermore, since your Majesty did not ask me, I did not dare to tell you that it is the Grand Councilor's eldest son, Li Yu, who is Administrator of San Ch'uan and . . . the Ch'u brigands . . . are all fellows of the prefecture adjacent to [that of the birthplace of] the Grand Councilor. On this account, the Ch'u bandits have acted quite openly, and when they traversed San Ch'uan, the administrator in the city [Li Ssu's son] was unwilling to attack them, . . . but, having been unable to make an investigation, I have not ventured [until now] to tell you about it. . . ."

If Shakespeare had been Chinese, he might well have modeled his Iago on this superb villain.

Li Ssu must have had friends at court, because he managed to hear of Chao Kao's slander. He tried to see the emperor, but Erh Shih was away from his capital, "witnessing contests of strength

and theatricals," so that Li Ssu "failed to obtain an interview." Nor, apparently, did he ever see the emperor again; from then onward he fought his battle for life with his pen, using the same splendid eloquence—with many learned appeals to precedent—which had won him the confidence of Shih Huang Ti. Evidently he was still able, at this stage, to ensure that his "Throne Memorials" reached the king; Ssu-ma Ch'ien quotes from them and also from the king's replies. In the first of these letters, Li Ssu openly attacked Chao Kao, recalling several historical precedents for ambitious ministers deceiving their sovereigns and eventually overthrowing them.

> "Your servant has heard [he began] that there is no case of a minister deceiving his ruler which has not endangered the state, or of a concubine deceiving her master which has not endangered the home."

He then went on to give several such examples: Tzu Han, the minister of Sung, had "expelled his prince"; the minister of the Duke of Chen "maintained a household equal to that of the ducal house," and by "scattering his favors . . . obtained the good will of the clans below . . . secretly gained control of the state of Ch'i, and then killed Tsai Yu in the court and murdered the Duke of Chen in his audience chamber"; and so on. If there is anything which distinguishes political mayhem in ancient China from that of modern Europe, it is the learning and scholarship with which the former was conducted.

Thus, using history as his canvas, Li Ssu proceeded to draw a sinister—and accurate—portrait of the emperor's palace chamberlain: "His actions are dangerous and subversive, like those of Tzu Han when he was the minister of Sung. The wealth of his

private household is like that of the T'ien clan in Ch'i. He is following the seditious ways of T'ien Ch'ang and Tzu Han at the same time. . . . If your Majesty does not consider this matter, your servant fears that this man will cause revolt."

"How can this be?" replied Erh Shih. "It is true that [Chao] Kao was formerly [a mere palace] eunuch, yet he did not exert his ingenuity [merely] with a view to his own peace, nor did he, in face of danger, change his heart. . . . He obtained approach to us because of his loyalty, and exercised his position with good faith. We truly esteem him, yet you, sir, doubt him. How is this? Moreover, when still being young, we lost our forebear, we were without wisdom and were unaccustomed to ruling people, whereas you, sir, were old, and, as we feared, out of contact with the empire. . . . Lord Chao, furthermore, is a man of incorruptible spirit and strong vitality. He understands the natures of the men below him, and is able to accord with us above. Be you, sir, without doubt on that score."

Did Li Ssu, when he read the phrase "old . . . and out of contact with the empire," feel the ground giving way beneath him? Had he indeed lost touch? Had increasing age destroyed the mental agility which had once enabled him to leap from position to position of power without ever slipping? And was he now to be outwitted by a mere palace eunuch with a glib tongue? He fought on with the courage of the cornered rats he had once watched in the latrines of Shang-t'sai. He wrote:

"[Chao] Kao comes of mean origin. He has no understanding of reason, and his avaricious desires are without satiation. He seeks for profit unceasingly; his rank and power are only second to the ruler, and the pursuit of his desires is without limit. I therefore say that he is dangerous."

Evidently the palace chamberlain was not at first aware of this correspondence, but when the emperor, "fearing that Li Ssu would kill him," showed the letters to Chao Kao, the final outcome was certain. With those letters in his hand, it was not difficult for the palace chamberlain to twist Li Ssu's words in such a way that the susceptible young monarch saw them as a threat to his own authority. Said Chao Kao: "It is only I whom the Grand Councilor fears. Were I once dead, the Grand Councilor would forthwith wish to do what T'ien Ch'ang did."

The emperor then spoke the fatal words, "Let the matter be referred to the palace chamberlain." Li Ssu was "seized, bound, and thrown in prison. Raising his eyes to Heaven, he exclaimed with a groan, 'Alas, for an unprincipled ruler. How can one make any plans?' "

While awaiting trial, Li Ssu had time to reflect on the excesses of Erh Shih and their effect on the empire: "He has executed loyal ministers and honored base men . . . He has carried out great constructions of palace buildings, and has heavily taxed the empire, without regard for the expenditure. Because these . . . things have gone on, the empire no longer obeys him, and the rebels at the present time already possess half the empire. Yet still his mind has not awakened, so that he makes Chao Kao his assistant. Therefore I shall certainly see the outlaws at Hsien Yang, and deer wandering through the palace courts."

He was spared that experience, though he would probably have preferred it to what actually followed. At his "trial," presided over by Chao Kao, he was accused, with his eldest son, of plotting against the sovereign and conniving at the raids of the Ch'u bandits. All Li Ssu's relatives were arrested, and the Grand Councilor himself, then over seventy years of age, was ordered to be

flogged "with one thousand strokes." Unable to endure the pain, he made a false confession.

Again, the modern parallels are only too obvious. But besides the forced "confession," he secretly prepared a second appeal:

> So as not to die [writes Ssu-ma Ch'ien], Li Ssu undertook to give an exposition of his merits, and to say that he was in truth without seditious intent, thus hoping that with good fortune he might yet be able to submit another "Memorial" of self-exposition, and with good grace Erh Shih might yet waken [from his blindness] and pardon him.

In this "Memorial," his last appeal to the emperor, Li Ssu described his long life of service to the state of Ch'in. He recalled the day when, as a young, unknown scholar, he had entered the service of the minister Lu Pu-wei. In those days, he wrote, "Ch'in's territory did not exceed a thousand *li* and its soldiers did not number more than a hundred thousand." He reminded the emperor of his early exploits, when he "sent out plotters . . . causing them to travel about and advise the feudal lords, and secretly to prepare armor and weapons"; of how he "spread the teachings of imperial government and gave positions to men of arms, and honored meritorious officials"; of his achievements as a "lawmaker," and of how, in the end, he "enabled Shih Huang Ti to destroy the feudal states and establish a unified empire."

Li Ssu also recalled how he had "reformed the measures of weight and size and the written characters" and made these universal throughout the empire. He had also "laid out imperial highways and inaugurated imperial tours of inspection" and "reduced the collection of taxes in order to further his ruler's efforts to win the hearts of the masses."

Erh Shih, of course, was not allowed to see this letter. Chao Kao took care of that. Pretending that the "Memorial" was "not fit to be presented," Chao Kao sent more inquisitors to question Li Ssu, and when that one did not give satisfactory answers, Chao Kao again ordered him to be flogged. The Grand Councilor's original forced confession of guilt was all that the emperor was ever allowed to see. Ssu-ma Ch'ien concludes:

> In the seventh month of the second year of Erh Shih [July 30–August 27, 208 B.C.], they prepared the five punishments for Li Ssu, and he was condemned to be cut in two at the waist upon the market place of Hsien Yang. While Li Ssu was being taken out from the prison together with his second son, he looked at him and said, "Even if you and I wished once more to lead a yellow dog and go together out of the East Gate of Shang-ts'ai[2] in pursuit of the crafty hare, could we indeed do so?" Thereupon father and son both wept. [Their execution was followed by] the extermination of their kindred to the third degree.

[2] Li Ssu's birthplace.

20

The Fall of Ch'in

While Li Ssu and Chao Kao were engaged in their death struggle, the empire, which was the prize of that struggle, had already begun to crack and fall apart. The process had, in fact, begun soon after the death of Shih Huang Ti. The harsh laws which he had introduced, and which were enforced with even greater severity by his successor, had produced so much suffering throughout China that sooner or later revolt was inevitable. In 209 B.C., an ex-farm boy named Ch'en Shê inspired a rebellion in what is now southern Honan; his followers called themselves partisans of Fu Su, the displaced heir. They captured some important towns and in a short time gained so much popular support that Ch'en Shê was able to call himself king of Ch'u and appoint certain of his followers as subordinate generals. Ch'in armies under a general named Chang Han put down this revolt and killed its leader; but, like an uncontrollable fire, the rebellion was smothered in one place only to flame up in another.

Throughout eastern China, far from the capital, ambitious men seized their opportunity, incited their neighbors to revolt, killed the Ch'in government officials, recruited peasant armies, and captured towns. It was a wholesale uprising which soon threw up natural leaders to whom the lesser rebels subordinated themselves.

Although the Ch'in general, Chang Han, continued to win battles against the insurgents, he could make little headway against such a widespread revolt.

If Shih Huang Ti had been alive, he would certainly have led his armies in an all-out effort to smash the rebellion; one cannot imagine him staying in his capital while, one by one, the eastern provinces revolted and the old feudal families reasserted their ancient claims.

Yet neither Erh Shih nor Chao Kao, who had now replaced Li Ssu as Grand Councilor, moved from Hsien Yang. To the east of the Ch'in capital lay the formidable Han-ku Pass, which was well guarded and easy to defend. Behind their mountain barrier, these two may have felt safe, while relying on Chang Han to suppress the rebellious states beyond. Li Ssu had been well aware of the danger threatening the empire, but he was dead, and Chao Kao now devoted all his attention to destroying the one remaining obstacle in his path to power—the emperor himself. Ssu-ma Ch'ien tells a story which illustrates the terror in which the new Grand Councilor was held:

> [In order] to find out how far his authority carried, [Chao] Kao presented a deer to [Erh Shih], the while calling it a horse. Erh Shih then inquired of those about him, "But this is a deer!" His entourage all replied, "It is a horse." Believing he was suffering from some delusion, Erh Shih became alarmed and summoned the Great Diviner to prognosticate the matter. The Great Diviner said, "When performing the suburban sacrifices in spring and autumn and making offerings in the ancestral temple and to spiritual beings, your Majesty has not been pure in his fasting, and that is why he is come to this. . . ."[1]

[1] Bodde, *China's First Unifier*.

This was the first of a series of "brainwashing" operations designed to destroy what little self-confidence Erh Shih possessed. Chao Kao's next move was to implicate the emperor in a killing. Whilst on a hunting trip, Chao Kao shot one of the bystanders and pretended that the fatal arrow had sped from Erh Shih's bow. Then he played on the young man's religious terror—already aroused by the deer incident—by saying:

> "The Son of Heaven has killed an innocent man without cause. Such is forbidden by God and [is reason enough for] spiritual beings not to accept [your sacrifices]. Moreover, Heaven will be sending down calamities for this. You must go away from the palace in order to make a sacrifice so as to ward off the evil."[2]

Three days after Erh Shih had retired to one of his remoter palaces in order to make the necessary acts of contrition, Chao Kao arrived in haste, and with well-simulated terror informed the emperor that rebels had stormed the palace and were about to kill him. As he spoke, the angry shouts of men were heard outside; then an armed mob burst into the room. But by that time Erh Shih was already dead, having been "induced by Chao Kao to commit suicide." He never knew that the "rebels" were only members of the palace guard whom Chao Kao had dressed in ordinary clothes and ordered to act this charade.

Then the Grand Councilor removed the imperial seal from the body and hung it around his own girdle, hoping in this way to proclaim himself emperor.

But of the officials around him, none would follow him, and, when he ascended the audience hall, three persons there wished

[2] *Ibid.*

to do him harm. [Chao] Kao himself realized that Heaven refused to grant him the empire and that the body of officials would not consent. Hence, he summoned a younger son of Shih Huang Ti and conferred on him the imperial seal.[3]

Chao Kao did not long survive this last act of treachery. The new emperor, Tzu Ying, feared him and shortly afterward contrived to have him assassinated.

The man who brought the Ch'in Dynasty to an end and founded the ruling house of Han was a peasant named Liu Pang.[4] Fortunately Pan Ku, who wrote a history of the Han Dynasty, has left us sufficient biographical material, beginning with his early life, to form a picture of Liu Pang's appearance and character.

He was a man with a prominent nose and a dragon forehead. He had a beautiful beard on his chin and cheeks. On his left thigh were seventy-two black moles. He was kindly disposed to others, benevolent, and liked people. His mind was vast. He always had large ideas and so did not follow the same productive occupations [as those followed by] the members of his family. . . . He liked wine and women. He frequently went to an old dame Wang and an old lady Wu to buy wine on credit. While he was sleeping off the effects of the wine, the old lady Wu and the old dame Wang frequently saw wonderful sights above him [usually a dragon]. Every time [Liu Pang] came to buy wine, he would stay and drink, and they would sell several times [as much as usual], and when they saw the wonderful sights, at the end of the year, these two

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Also known as Liu Chi.

> shopkeepers often broke up his accounts and forgave his debt. . . . In his capacity as the chief of a *t'ing,* [he] had to escort convict laborers on to Mount Li for the prefecture. Many escaped on the way. He thought to himself that before he arrived [at his destination], all of them would have escaped. When [the party] got to the Tse-chung *t'ing,* west of Feng, he stopped to drink. At night, he unbound and set free all the convict laborers he was escorting, saying, "Gentlemen, all go away. From this time on I, too, will abscond!" Some ten odd of the stout fellows among the convict laborers were willing to follow him.[5]

That was Liu Pang's first army—ten ex-convicts.

This incident occurred during the early days of the rebellion, not long after the death of Shih Huang Ti.

In the area which is now southern Kangsu two men, uncle and nephew, had led a successful revolt; their names were Hsiang Liang and Hsiang Yu, both descended from the former kings of Ch'u. They began by killing the commandery administrator, taking his army and marching north. On their march other rebel leaders joined them, including Liu Pang, who had started with his army of ten. By this time, however, he had gathered a sizable force and captured the town of P'ei, a city in the present northern Kiangsu; from that time onward he was called the "Lord of P'ei." Hsiang Liang was killed shortly afterward fighting the Ch'in general Chang Han, and from that time onward the two most important of the rebel generals were Hsiang Yu and Liu Pang. The two men were totally unlike each other. Hsiang Yu was an aristocrat and a professional soldier; Liu Pang was of peasant stock,

[5] The above quotation is reprinted from the historian Pan Ku's *The History of the Former Han Dynasty,* as translated by Homer H. Dubs and published by the Waverly Press, Inc., Baltimore, 1938.

a minor official with little education but with a large popular following and some military skill.

At first, Liu Pang put himself under Hsiang Yu's command, and after several successful operations he was made a marquis by the king of Ch'u. The rebellion spread throughout present-day Shantung and Hupei, where Ch'in forces were besieging the town of Chu-lu. The main rebel forces then divided; Hsiang Yu went to raise the siege of Chu-lu, while Liu Pang, with a totally inadequate force, marched west with orders to capture the Ch'in capital. It took him a year to get there; but in that time, such was the appeal of this people's leader, with his rough, genuine personality, that he persuaded thousands to rebel against Ch'in and follow him. With this greatly augmented force, he pushed up into the mountains which guarded the Ch'in stronghold. Avoiding the heavily guarded Han-ku Pass, he stormed the lightly defended Pass of Wu, and then the peasant leader and his ragged thousands looked down on the greatest capital city in the world; there lay its two hundred and seventy palaces and gardens stretching for seventy miles, all at his mercy.

Yet Liu Pang, tough though he was, had humanity in him. Instead of sacking and burning the helpless city, as Genghis Khan would have done, he kept control of his troops, received the surrender of the emperor (who appeared before him wearing the symbolic cord round his neck), and then sealed up the palaces and treasuries, forbidding his angry followers to touch anything; and he was obeyed. Then he

> . . . took the charts and registers out of the imperial chancellor's office. Through their possession, Liu Pang was later able to know the strategic points of the empire, the size of the population, and the people's grievances. Liu Pang gathered the

leaders of the region and announced to them that he was going to agree with them on a code consisting of only three articles: death for murder, proportionate punishment for robbery and assault, and the repeal of all other penal laws.[6]

Not long afterward, his superior officer Hsiang Yu, appeared at the entrance of the Han-ku Pass and found it guarded. Angrily he summoned Liu Pang, who appeared before him, made his apologies, removed the guard, and allowed the army of Hsiang Yu to enter the capital. Then the holocaust began. It was not the commoner Liu Pang but the aristocrat Hsiang Yu who destroyed the capital of the Ch'in empire. The imprisoned emperor, Tzu Ying, was immediately executed, together with his chief officials. The marvelous tomb of Shih Huang Ti was broken down and ransacked. Then Hsiang Yu ordered the palaces to be set on fire. An area as big as Greater London, and twice that of New York, was soon ablaze. Oriental buildings, being mainly of wood, burn quickly, but it was three months before the flames of Hsien Yang had died down. So perished an imperial capital greater than Rome, Babylon, and Nineveh put together, at a time when no one in western Asia and Europe even knew that it had existed.

Hsiang Yu, in attempting to carve up the conquered empire, aroused such resentment by his appointments that there was a second revolt in which Liu Pang's personal popularity carried him to such a position that eventually he had to fight his former commander. And, since Liu Pang was not as skillful a general as Hsiang Yu, he suffered several defeats at the latter's hands. On one occasion his enemy challenged him to a duel, to be fought in sight of the two armies. The peasant leader refused, probably

[6] *Ibid.*

realizing only too well that Hsiang Yu was a superior swordsman.

On another occasion, at a time when the two men were still nominally allies, a certain Fan Tseng urged Hsiang Yu to assassinate his rival. But Hsiang Yu, much as he hated Liu Pang, could not agree to this, since the latter was his guest; whereupon Fan Tseng urged a brother officer to undertake the deed:

> "Our lord is not hardhearted in character [said Fan Tseng]. Do you enter in order to dance a sword dance, and take the opportunity to attack the lord of P'ei [*i.e.*, Liu Pang] and kill him."[7]

How different is this scene from the sweet-scented chambers of the imperial palace of Hsien Yang, where Chao Kao and Li Ssu had intrigued, while Erh Shih feasted with his concubines! Here we are in a camp, among soldiers. The treacherous officer, Hsiang Chuang, entered and drank a health to Liu Pang. Then he said:

> "In our camp is nothing to use [as entertainment], I crave permission to dance a sword dance."[8]

Evidently, according to the historian Pan Ku, Hsiang Chuang's plan was "accidentally" to strike Liu Pang with his sword during one of the movements of the dance. He was somewhat disconcerted, therefore, when one of Liu Pang's own comrades, named Hsiang Po, suddenly decided to join him in the performance.

> . . . Hsiang Po also arose and danced, always protecting and covering the lord of P'ei with his own body.[9]

[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*

Meanwhile another of Liu Pang's comrades, Fan K'uai, hearing of the plot, forced his way into the room, "very angry." The historian Pan Ku continues:

> [Hsiang] Yu admired his [strength and courage], and therefore granted him [a cup of wine]. . . . After some moments, the lord of P'ei [Liu Pang] arose and went to the toilet. He beckoned to Fan K'uai and went out. Leaving his chariot and official retinue, he mounted alone, with Fan K'uai, Chin Ch'iang, and the Lord of T'eng . . . and fled to his army by unfrequented paths, ordering Chang Liang to stay and make apologies to [Hsiang] Yu. . . .[10]

After this, the two rivals entered into open war with each other, and eventually Hsiang Yu died during a battle. Having crossed and recrossed the river several times with his cavalry, cutting through the enemy lines and suffering many wounds, he had found himself cornered at last. Recognizing a former comrade among the enemy soldiers, he shouted to him, "I know there's a price on my head. Take it!" With that, he cut his own throat.

There is about these and similar tales an earthy reality which compels belief, whereas those stories concerning Shih Huang Ti's enormities may be tinged with Confucian bias. The literati had almost been hounded out of existence by Shih Huang Ti and Li Ssu, whereas Liu Pang, coarse and semi-illiterate though he was, at least tolerated the scholars, even though he disliked them. It is not surprising, therefore, that they gave him what would nowadays be called "a good press."

They tell us that when, after years of fighting, Liu Pang found himself in control of the empire, and his followers wished to make

[10] *Ibid.*

him emperor, he refused three times. When at last he accepted the crown, he issued an order which said:

> "The troops have not had rest for eight years. All the people have suffered severely. Now my efforts in settling the control of the world have been brought to completion. Let an amnesty [be proclaimed] throughout the world [for all crimes] below [those deserving] capital punishment."[11]

Before settling at Lo-yang, his new capital, where, as the "Son of Heaven," he would inevitably be beyond the reach of ordinary people, he insisted on visiting his former village, where he had got drunk in the wine shop of the "old dame Wang and the old lady Wu." This story is surely one of the most moving in the history of ancient China, or indeed of the world. The founder of a dynasty which was to last four hundred years

> . . . invited all those, young and old, whom he had known in former times and passed around the wine. He drank and danced with them. Old men, married women, and all the former friends of Liu Pang passed days in drinking and rejoicing. They laughed and made merry, telling stories about the old days.[12]

Before taking his leave, Liu Pang could not restrain his tears.

> "The traveler is sad [he said] when he thinks of his native land; although I must go and take up residence in the west,

[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *Ibid.*

when I am dead my spirit will still be thinking of this land of yours."[13]

Liu Pang then became emperor. The Han Dynasty which he founded was one of China's greatest, and to this day the Chinese call themselves the "Sons of Han." Yet the name "China," by which the country is known to the rest of the world, is almost certainly derived from the state of Ch'in, whose great emperor was the first to bring the entire land into unity. It is doubtful if Liu Pang, a man of much greater humanity, could have achieved such a feat, which required qualities of cold ruthlessness as well as of superb military and administrative skill. The old truism that "out of evil may come good" was never more true than in the case of ancient China. For Liu Pang was able to take over an administrative machine which, though damaged, was still in working order. The old feudal rulers never regained the earlier power; the empire did not split up into independent states. China had become a nation and remained one.

At first, Liu Pang was forced to reward his fellow leaders by grants of territory. But they were not allowed to establish rival princedoms on the former pattern.

> . . . what he gave with one hand, he took away with the other; he took advantage of the least pretext to transfer the local princes that he had been obliged to create, as if they were mere prefects. Alternatively, he drove them to revolt and then got rid of them. In the end, the new Han feudatories, tamed and deprived of all administrative power, were reduced to the state of a mere court nobility which in no way hindered the absolute power of the emperor.[14]

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Grousset, *op. cit.*

Pan Ku tells a number of amusing stories concerning Liu Pang's attitude to his subject princes. One describes how he received the Marquis of P'ei, one Liu P'i, who, his advisers told him, was "dignified and sincere" and worthy to be made king of Wu. The emperor called the man before him and said:

> "You have the look of a rebel." So he patted him on the back and said "If, within the coming fifty years, the Han [Dynasty] has a revolt in the southeast, would it be you? The world is however [now subservient] to one house and is all one family; you must be careful not to rebel." Liu P'i knocked his head on the ground[15] and said, "I would not dare."[16]

Nor was the learning and scholarship of former generations obliterated, as Shih Huang Ti had hoped it had been. Despite the "burning of the books" and the even more disastrous fire which destroyed the palace libraries at Hsien Yang, a few copies of the Confucian classics had survived, besides which there were a few aged scholars who had committed large parts of them to memory. Timidly at first, the literati emerged from their hiding places, approached Liu Pang, and asked that the order banning the books should be rescinded. The peasant emperor had little use for scholars, but he did not persecute them. One or two even managed to gain his confidence, for he was always a man to recognize and use ability, and among these was Lu Chia, who once advised Liu Pang to model his rule on the ancient emperors, only to receive the retort: "I got the empire on horseback; why should I bother with the *Book of Odes* or the *Book of History?*" To which Lu Chia replied: "You got it on horseback, but can you rule it from horseback?"

[15] *i.e.*, kowtowed.

[16] Dubs, *op. cit.*

After that, Liu Pang listened to Lu Chia, took his advice, and even asked him to write a book explaining why certain of the earlier rulers had lost their kingdoms.

Under Liu Pang's successors, the literati returned to full authority and continued to dominate the social and intellectual life of China for more than two thousand years. It is due to them that we know the facts without which neither this nor any other book on early China could have been written. We also owe to them the preservation of the Confucian and other philosophical teachings which encouraged those elements of gentleness, pacifism, and humanity which have always been present in the Chinese character.

Yet, would the great civilization which produced them have survived but for the "Tiger of Ch'in," who forged an empire out of a chaos of warring states, protected it by the greatest military barrier in the world, and enabled it, alone among all the ancient cultures, to last to the present day?

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(Continued from front flap)

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