

## Dynastic Legitimacy during the Eastern Chin: Hsi Tso-ch'ih and the Problem of Huan Wen

"A satisfactory study of Chinese monarchy in the medieval period... still does not exist and is an urgent necessity."  
Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers* (Leiden, 1965), p. 174

Eberhard's plaint, repeated by Dennis Grafflin in 1990,<sup>1</sup> remains relevant at the close of the century, as scholars of early-medieval China still search for useful paradigms with which to interpret the nature of the medieval monarchical system. In hopes of spurring scholarly discussion of the theory and practice of political legitimacy in the early-medieval period, this article explores the political thought of Hsi Tso-ch'ih 習鑿齒 (fl. 347–373 AD), a historian whose ingenious but iconoclastic formulation of dynastic legitimacy has been thoroughly misinterpreted by later Chinese scholars and the Western scholars who have depended on them.

Hsi Tso-ch'ih lived between two periods dominated in general by historical orthodoxy and by historians far more famous than himself: the Western Chin 晉 (265–316), represented by such figures as Ch'en Shou 陳壽 (*San kuo chih* 三國志) and Ssu-ma Piao 司馬彪 (*Hsi Han shu* 續漢書), on the one hand, and the Yüan-chia era of the Liu-Sung 劉宋 dynasty (424–453), when the imperial court sponsored the work of Fan Yeh 范曄 (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書) and P'ei Sung-chih 裴松之 (annotations to the *San kuo chih*), on the other. In the intervening chaotic years of the Eastern Chin (317–420), Hsi stood out from other, mostly private, historians as an especially meticulous and provocative thinker. His long-term legacy has largely rested on his striking declaration that the Three Kingdoms state of Wei 魏 (220–265) should not be considered a legitimate dynasty, nor the forbear of Chin rule. Hsi instead privileged the claims of the otherwise much less impressive southwestern state of Shu-Han

<sup>1</sup> "Reinventing China: Pseudobureaucracy in the Early Southern Dynasties," in Albert Dien, ed., *State and Society in Early Medieval China* (Hong Kong U.P., 1990), p. 169.

蜀漢 (221–264).

In Hsi Tso-ch'ih's day, the prevailing theory of dynastic legitimacy held that the transfer of the "Mandate of Heaven" was proven by the appearance of omens and portents that signaled both the weakness of the existing dynasty and the identity of the new one through its identification with, among other things, the proper color and element of the "five phases" cycle. The interpretation of such portents, accompanied by the proper performance of a sequence of abdication and succession rituals, was supposed to lead to general acquiescence to a takeover by a new dynastic line. This theory, rooted in Wang Mang's 王莽 successful seizure of power from the Western Han in 9 AD, had powerful and recent precedents in the enthronement of both the Ts'ao 曹 clan, the rulers of the Wei, and subsequently the Ssu-ma 司馬 clan, rulers of the Chin.<sup>2</sup>

Hsi rejected this quasireligious method of legitimation, arguing that ritual abdication was an insufficient, even unnecessary, part of any legitimation strategy. Instead, he offered the first comprehensive formulation of an alternative theory, in which the principal criterion was the acquiescence, by military means or otherwise, of the entire sphere of civilization as it was then understood. This theory was rooted in the precedents of the greatest dynastic founders – kings Wen and Wu of the Chou (ca. 1100–256 BC), and Liu Pang 劉邦, the founding emperor of the Western Han (202 BC–8 AD); it eventually found an authoritative voice in Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and the great historiographical tradition of the Sung period (960–1279). It was not regarded as orthodox in between those eras, however, since the standard of ritual abdication was more attainable and therefore allowed at least the appearance of continuity among various ruling houses.

By comparison, the standard of unification, by giving priority to military achievements over civil and cultural ones, would imply a criticism of the Eastern Chin, who had lost control over the northern heartland of Han civilization and seemed unable or even unwilling to retake it. Moreover, it would create gaping unanswered questions about the legitimacy and propriety of the Wei and the Chin, thus throwing into doubt the course of over a century of imperial politics since the fall of the Han. It was Hsi's singular contribution to demonstrate how the standard of unification could be applied in a manner that actually glorified the heritage of the Chin throne and strengthened their position vis-à-vis insubordinate ministers and external challengers, while at the same time demanding that they uphold a more ambitious and assertive de-

<sup>2</sup> By far the most comprehensive discussion of this development is by Howard L. Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998).

fense of their mandate.

Scholars of the political legitimation of dynasties have presumed that the theory of ritual abdication was universally accepted during the early-medieval period, supported not only in the official historical compendia of the Wei, Chin, and Southern Dynasties, but also in the writings of private historians such as Hsi Tso-ch'ih. In fact, Hsi's defense of the legitimacy of the Three Kingdoms state of Shu-Han has been regarded as the most distinctive hallmark of the theory's preoccupation with the proper "lineage" of succession, or *cheng-t'ung* 正統.<sup>3</sup> Here I demonstrate that Hsi was largely unconcerned with lineage: his writings say nothing whatsoever about the Five Phases, disdain ritual abdication, and instead stress unification and moral leadership as the central criteria for legitimacy. It was the rejection of Wei, the representatives of the ritual abdication theory, that was central to his argument; the elevation of Shu-Han was, by comparison, a secondary point about which he was somewhat ambivalent.

The original context, uniqueness, and subtle nuances of Hsi's formulation have been misinterpreted, however, due to the course of later historiography. After seven hundred years of relative obscurity, the question of the legitimacy of Wei versus Shu-Han became one of the most incendiary issues in Chinese historiography, for it symbolized the difference between the historical formulations of the great Ssu-ma Kuang (1018–1086) 司馬光 and Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Chu Hsi used the legitimation of Shu-Han as a way to defend the legitimacy of the contemporary Southern Sung regime and its supposed lineage of traditional culture against northern invaders, for him the Jurchens, but for his successors, the Mongols and Manchus as well. In this way the historical status of Shu-Han became a rallying cry for the defense of traditional Chinese values against rule by non-Chinese peoples.<sup>4</sup> The editors of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* 四庫全書總目提要, balancing their appreciation of Chu Hsi and Chinese intellectual tradition on one hand with the reality of Manchu rule on the other, finessed the issue by claiming that Chu Hsi and Hsi Tso-ch'ih both were products of their times, concerned with legitimating their weak southern regimes by paralleling them with Shu-Han.<sup>5</sup>

Although this argument has much truth in the case of Chu Hsi, it utterly misrepresents Hsi Tso-ch'ih's writings and the motivation behind them. Hsi

<sup>3</sup> E. g., Richard Davis, "Historiography as Politics in Yang Wei-chen's 'Polemic on Legitimate Succession,'" *TP* 69.1–3 (1983), p. 35; Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China: Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty (1115–1234)* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 1984), pp. 33–36.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, "Historiography as Politics," pp. 40–42.

<sup>5</sup> Chi Yün 紀昀, ed., *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao* (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959), p. 987.

was not concerned with the proper lineage of traditional culture, and was not writing to defend the legitimacy of the southerners against the "barbarians" in the north; in fact, his work stands very much in opposition to this sort of formulation. Instead, the principal motivation came from a much different quarter – the problem of ministerial usurpation, which plagued the Eastern Chin throne. In Hsi's view, the root of this problem lay in the granting of legitimacy to court-ritual abdication, since the rituals required for a transfer of the mandate could be engineered at court through manipulation, intrigue, and the support of a sufficient faction of high officials and other powerful members of the capital elite.

This issue loomed especially large in Hsi Tso-ch'ih's own career, for he served in the entourage of Huan Wen 桓溫, a provincial governor with ambitions to retake the north by force, but who ultimately turned to direct manipulation of the Eastern Chin throne, possibly with the intent to usurp. A proper understanding of Huan Wen's career and the political context of the Eastern Chin period is thus essential for the appreciation of Hsi's work. Below, I argue that Huan Wen gained early support, including Hsi's, by appealing, in an intuitive, charismatic way, to the standard of unification; he became drawn toward the alternative of ritual abdication only with the failure of his military efforts. He thereby lost Hsi's backing and other potential supporters who found that his manipulations of the court lacked the high purpose of his earlier, grander ideals. Moreover, the very nature of ritual abdication, which hinged on gaining enough political support to redefine mere ministerial insubordination as a transfer of the mandate, left Huan Wen open to eventual reclassification as a rebel and traitor when the politics of imperial historiography turned against him.<sup>6</sup>

Hsi Tso-ch'ih's historiography is critical of Huan Wen, to be sure, but he was insightful enough to recognize that a standard for determining political legitimacy that was based on ritual abdication tended to invite challenges from powerful ministers, reducing monarchical authority to the level of a sort of personality contest that undermined trust and threatened the ruling house and the minister alike. In response, he worked through the difficult political ramifications of the standard of unification and laid out its first systematically argued defense. This position led him to take a deeply critical position towards the conservative military stance of the Eastern Chin throne; he offered instead an appeal to idealistic universalism rooted firmly in the strong precedent of the Han empire. Hsi Tso-ch'ih's striking alternative to the dominant formulation

of dynastic legitimacy offers us a critical insight into the politics of the Eastern Chin and the Southern Dynasties, as well as a perspective on the early history of what eventually became a prominent strand of historiographical thought.

#### LEGITIMACY AND INSUBORDINATION DURING THE EASTERN CHIN ERA

The early development of varying ideas about dynastic legitimacy, like so much else in Chinese thought, reached an eclectic, synthetic pinnacle in the early years of the Western Han period. Military and political unification, righteous leadership, positive portents and omens, Five Phases correlations, and a grab-bag of other ideas were all variously touted as components of the Han's all-encompassing delineation of its mandate to rule.<sup>7</sup> The practical, but far more contentious, question of how that mandate might be transferred to another lineage was naturally left unanswered. As Carl Leban has demonstrated, it was Wang Mang who first developed a set of rituals and omens by which a new heir to the mandate could be recognized and yielded to, and it was through the enactment of this new ritual that he channeled support for his Hsin (New) dynasty (9–23 AD).<sup>8</sup> Wang Mang's personal failure to make his dynasty endure left him branded a usurper, but the ritual mechanism by which he had taken power was not unequivocally discredited. Instead, the accession of Liu Hsiu 劉秀 as emperor Kuang-wu 光武 of the Eastern Han in 25 AD allowed the issue to be glossed over, for he neither accepted the legitimacy or abdication of his immediate predecessor, nor claimed to found a new dynasty; his was merely a restoration of the unquestionably legitimate Han. Moreover, since he ultimately reconquered all of the old empire, later historians did not need to explain away any lingering challenges to his mandate to rule: he qualified as legitimate by the same broad, eclectic range of criteria that the Western Han had enjoyed.

The accession of Ts'ao P'i 曹丕 to the imperial throne therefore became the first truly challenging application of the theory of mandate-transfer by ritual abdication. It was closely modeled on Wang Mang's precedent: increasingly exalted offices and adulation by Ts'ao P'i's subordinates gave way to reportings of signs and portents of the decline of the Han and the rise of a new

<sup>7</sup> See Davis, "Historiography as Politics," pp. 33–34.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Leban, "Managing Heaven's Mandate: Coded Communications in the Accession of Ts'ao P'ei, A.D. 220," David T. Roy and Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, eds., *Ancient China: Studies in Early Civilization*, (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 1978), pp. 315–41. See also Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>6</sup> An excellent discussion on the politics of historiography surrounding Huan Wen is that of Michael Rogers, *The Chronicle of Fu Chien: A Case of Exemplar History*, Chinese Dynastic History Translations 10 (Berkeley: U. California P., 1968), pp. 60–61.

dynasty. Surviving documentation illustrates the step-by-step process by which Ts'ao P'i's subordinates urged him to "yield to the will of Heaven" and receive the ritual abdication of the last Han emperor; for his part, Ts'ao P'i played the role of the reluctant minister, declining three times before finally being persuaded to accept the mandate. Although there was substantial debate at the time and throughout the Wei about various ritual details of the process, there was widespread consensus on the basic righteousness of a wholly ritualized transfer of power.<sup>9</sup>

The Ts'ao court's ritualized foundation of the Wei dynasty, however, was accompanied by their failure to reunify all of the territory that the Han had controlled. As a result, they could not make the critical assertion that they had unified "all under Heaven" and appeased all challengers. For the Wei, and for other regional states in the succeeding four centuries, the standard of unification remained unobtained, and proper ritual form gained official sanction as a less-demanding criterion for justifying their rule. This strategy left the ruling house vulnerable, however, since the proper form of a mandate-transfer could be accomplished by manipulations at court, regardless of the condition of military or administrative control in the provinces. Once the Ts'ao had legitimated a strong minister's usurping the throne from a weak emperor under the guise of transferring the mandate, there was little ideological defense against the same fate befalling themselves. The old code of ethics that enforced the sanctity of the bond between minister and sovereign, even if the latter was weak and incompetent, had been seriously undermined, for if a minister considered himself better suited to rule, and could garner enough support, then he could engineer a transfer of the mandate and usurp the throne with the full weight of precedent behind him.

In fact, it took only a few decades for this to happen to Ts'ao rule; the powerful Ssu-ma clan ultimately deposed them in precisely the same way that the Ts'ao rulers had deposed the royal Liu family of the Han.<sup>10</sup> Ssu-ma Yen 司馬炎 (Chin emperor Wu 武; r. 265–290) was more aware than his predecessors of the problems this new code of legitimacy had spawned; he tried to counteract it by building up the wealth and resources of his clan, and by appointing his own relatives to key strategic positions in the provinces. This served merely to transfer the tension from the official court to within the Ssu-ma clan itself, however, and the War of Eight Princes (ca. 290–305) so weakened the

clan that it was wide open to irruption from the nomad cavalry forces its members had employed in their intrafamilial struggles. Ssu-ma Jui 睿, one of those princes, managed to perpetuate the dynasty only by retreating south of the Yangtze to found the Eastern Chin in 317.<sup>11</sup>

The Eastern Chin rulers, however, were just as beset by insubordinate ministers as those of the Wei and Western Chin had been before them. The frequency and persistence of ministerial insubordination can be attributed at least in part to the weakened basis for dynastic legitimacy that had prevailed since the succession of the Ts'ao. It is notable that, when we look past the judgment of history applied to rebellious ministers well after the fact, we find evidence that their contemporaries routinely expressed tacit approval for their efforts at usurpation. One striking example of this is the rebellion of Wang Tun 王敦, which came within a half-dozen years of the founding of the Eastern Chin. Along with his cousin Tao 導, Wang Tun was a key leader of the Lang-yeh 琅邪 Wang clan, close allies and potential rivals of Ssu-ma Jui in his bid to reestablish Chin rule. Wang Tun's large and independent base of power in Ching 荆 province (modern Hupei and Hunan) provided the perfect launch pad for an assault on the throne, and with the rise to prominence at court of Liu Wei 劉隗, who was opposed to the hegemony of the Wang clan, Wang had immediate cause to strike. According to an anecdote in *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* 世說新語, however, his first move was to "dispatch an aide to inform the court and to announce his intentions to the worthies of the time." Although several key figures were opposed to Wang Tun's plot, the reaction of most people at the capital was that it was of no significance. One of the leading literati of the time, Wen Ch'iao 溫嶠, is recorded as having said, "This action by Wang Tun is within the bounds of right, and does not transgress them." That such anecdotes could circulate with credibility suggests that widespread tolerance of the pretensions of an insubordinate minister was a well-understood and expected phenomenon in the southern courts, and was part of what allowed Wang Tun's rebellion to proceed as far and last as long as it did.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, although he ultimately did tarnish his reputation by his excesses (in the years 322–324), he was nonetheless considered an acceptable person

<sup>11</sup> See Grafflin's discussion of the imbalance in Ts'ao Ts'ao's "new political order" by the Western Chin period, in "Reinventing China," pp. 154–55.

<sup>12</sup> Notable opponents of Tun's plot include Ch'ü T'i and Chou I; see Yü Chia-hsi 余嘉錫, ed., *Shih-shuo hsün-yü chien-shu* 世說新語箋疏 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1993; hereafter *SSHY*) xiii/6, p. 599; v/31, p. 312, and the annotation by Liu Hsiao-piao 劉孝標, quoting [*Chou*] *I pieh-chuan* 埤顯別傳. See Richard Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo Hsün-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota P., 1976), pp. 165–66, 303. The point of the anecdote is to criticize this laissez-faire approach to rebellion, and it may be exaggerating it for a wry, humorous effect.

<sup>9</sup> Leban, "Managing Heaven's Mandate"; Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*.

<sup>10</sup> Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, pp. 225–27, demonstrates (expanding on an unpublished paper of Leban) how the Ssu-ma copied the Ts'ao accession rituals point-by-point.

for several decades after his death.<sup>13</sup>

That direct challenges to the throne could potentially be forgiven had the corrosive effect of creating a general presumption of ministerial freedom of action; after all, if even an attempt to usurp the throne could be considered acceptable, how could there be a serious objection to lesser transgressions? Consider the example of T'ao K'an 陶侃, Wang Tun's successor in Ching province, who maintained a sterling and unblemished reputation, and is much admired for his restraint and frugality in the surviving literature. The following passage is therefore made all the more noteworthy:

Mei I 梅頤 had once done a favor for T'ao K'an. Later, when he was serving as grand warden of Yü-chang commandery, he became involved in an incident, and chancellor Wang Tao dispatched someone to arrest him. K'an said, "The Son of Heaven is still rich in springs and autumns (that is, still young, referring to emperor Ch'eng 成, enthroned at the age of six in 326), and all critical decisions are made by the courtiers. Since Wang Tao got to imprison him, why may T'ao K'an not release him?" Whereupon he dispatched someone to Chiang-k'ou 江口 to take Mei forcibly out of custody. Later when Mei I saw T'ao K'an he did obeisance, but K'an stopped him. Mei said, "If I don't do so now, tomorrow how could my knees ever bend again?"<sup>14</sup>

If a model of probity like T'ao K'an could be portrayed as ascribing to the belief in ministerial freedom of action in a time of imperial weakness, it must have been a widespread assumption indeed. Such routine acceptance of personalized decision-making naturally led to the development of powerful personal cliques and bitter factional struggles within the theoretically singular, hierarchical bureaucratic system.<sup>15</sup>

The danger of insubordination was greatly compounded by the fact that the first Eastern Chin emperors proved unable to mount any serious campaign to retake the north or to eliminate the upstart state of Ch'eng-Han 成漢 (in the modern Szechwan area). Thus calls for a northern invasion were also assertions that the Ssu-ma dynasty, having lost the north, was in danger of forfeiting the mandate. Dissenters could avail themselves of this political weapon as long as the court remained militarily inactive. In fact, according to near-contempo-

rary anecdotes, every single commander of Ching province early in the Eastern Chin, from Wang Tun straight through to Huan Wen, asserted it. T'ao K'an's final memorial mentioned his ambition to retake the north and Szechwan, and thereby "fulfill the plan of Ssu-ma I 懿" (posthumously honored as the founder of the Chin dynasty); and, further, he requested that the court appoint a like-minded man as his successor. Yü Liang 庾亮, who followed K'an in the post, was widely rumored to be contemplating a move against the capital just prior to his death in 340. Yü Liang's younger brother and successor, Yü I 翼, is said to have coupled his nonstop calls for northern invasion with musings about becoming another Han Kao (that is, Liu Pang) or Wei Wu (Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操), two vigorous dynastic founders.<sup>16</sup> Huan Wen, who followed Yü I into the office, was the most brazenly successful of these men, certainly, but his twin ambitions to retake the north and found his own dynasty were not in themselves considered unusual or necessarily reprehensible in his day. Before exploring Hsi Tso-ch'ih's approach to the question of dynastic legitimacy, therefore, we must first take a closer look at the volatile career of the man who, more than any other, shaped his political world.

#### THE CAREER OF HUAN WEN

Huan Wen, the brash eldest of five brothers, came from a reputable but not very highly-ranked family from Ch'iao 譙 (in modern Anhui). His career, which began in the eastern seaboard province of Hsü 徐, only took off with his appointment to the sprawling western command based in Ching province in 345. It was an opportune time for this ambitious leader; the great scions of the Lang-yeh Wang and Ying-ch'uan Yü 潁川庾 clans had all died within the previous few years, and the new emperor was a mere child of three. A new generation of men was rising to power, one in which the division between provincial military commanders and the court aristocracy was to become all the more clear. Huan Wen was the epitome of the former; once sent to Ching province, he did not return to the court for almost twenty years, and then only reluctantly.

Studying the available sources for the career of Huan Wen — *Chin shu* 晉書, *Shih-shuo hsün-yü*, and various fragments from contemporary histories — it is clear that his initial ambition was not to seize the throne directly. Rather,

<sup>13</sup> Sun Ch'o 孫綽, "Memorandum on Yü Liang," as quoted by Liu Hsiao-piao in *SSHY*viii/79, p. 466 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 231); see also Fang Hsüan-ling 房玄齡 et al., comps., *Chin shu* 晉書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974; hereafter, *CS*) 98, p. 2576.

<sup>14</sup> *SSHY*v/39, pp. 319–20 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 170).

<sup>15</sup> A point well made by Dennis Grafflin, "Reinventing China," pp. 159–68.

<sup>16</sup> T'ao K'an's memorial is recorded in Wang Yin 王隱, *Chin shu*, as quoted by Liu Hsiao-piao in *SSHY*ii/47, pp. 107–8 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 53); Yü Liang's ambitions are noted in *SSHY*vi/13, p. 356 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 184) and xxvi/4, pp. 826–27 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 429); Yü I's musings are in *SSHY*x/18, p. 568 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 286).

like his predecessors, Huan Wen's ambition was to reconquer all of the territory once held by the Western Chin and refound the empire; in doing so, he could anticipate displacing the weakened Eastern Chin rulers with a virile new dynasty of his own. During his first decade in Ching province he presumed that his military successes would carry him forward; only later, after encountering serious military and political setbacks, did Wen alter this approach. Ultimately, his disastrous defeat at Fang-t'ou 枋頭 in 369 led him to turn his energies entirely away from military pursuits towards the outright manipulation of the throne. Moreover, his excesses in the last four years lost him much support, and ultimately earned him the "stinking" reputation that has been perpetuated ever since.<sup>17</sup>

*Military Solutions, 345-354*

The year before he died, Yü I, inspector of Ching province and commander-in-chief of military affairs in the western half of Chin territory, finally achieved his goal of forcing Huan Hsüan 桓寬, an appointee of his, out of a long-held position in the Hsiang-yang 襄陽 subcommand. With that, the northern frontier of Ching province was placed under the firm control of the provincial administration, paving the way for Yü I to launch a northern invasion.<sup>18</sup> But in 344 and 345 the deaths of, first, the emperor, then of Yü I's brother Ping 冰, and then Yü I himself spoiled these ambitions, and the fruits of his efforts fell to Huan Wen, newly appointed to the western command. Huan Wen and Yü I had shared views about the need for aggressive military action, and some at court were uneasy about giving such an obviously ambitious man so important a command.<sup>19</sup> With six provinces under his authority, Huan had direct civilian control over the area comprising the modern provinces of Hupei and Hunan, and a military writ that extended, at least nominally, over most of Kweichow, Yünnan, Szechwan, southern Shensi, and Honan.

Unfortunately, Huan's key supporter at court, Ho Ch'ung 何充, died within half a year of his appointment. Ssu-ma Yü 司馬昱, the youngest son of Eastern Chin founder Ssu-ma Jui and, at the tender age of twenty-seven, already a great-uncle to the newly-enthroned child emperor Mu 穆, intended to make sure that Huan Wen's ambitions were balanced by a gentleman accept-

<sup>17</sup> His ultimately "stinking" reputation is noted in *SSHY* xxxiii/13, p. 904 (Mather, *New Account*, pp. 476-77). My reconstruction of the career of Huan Wen is taken largely from *Chin shu*, especially Huan Wen's biography (*ch.* 98) and the basic annals in *ch.* 8-9. Other sources are footnoted specifically, below.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion by T'ien Yü-ch'ing 田余慶, *Tung Chin men-fa cheng-chih* 東晉門閥政治 (Peking: Peking U.P., 1989), pp. 129-38.

<sup>19</sup> Note, for example, *SSHY* vii/19, pp. 400-1 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 206), and annotations.

able to the Yü clan's supporters, who had lost the western command to Huan Wen. He plucked from a ten-year retirement Yin Hao 殷浩, a man with a sterling reputation for cultivation, and gave him Ho Ch'ung's old position as inspector and commander-in-chief of Yang 揚 province, the capital area. Huan's position at court, now greatly weakened, threatened to undermine his hold on the western command; he needed a quick and decisive achievement to secure authority. Thus, within a mere fourteen months of his initial appointment, he was leading his armies up the Yangtze River on an invasion of the independent Ch'eng-Han state.

Such rapid success, the most decisive of his career, secured Huan Wen adulation from the throne; he was promoted to *cheng-hsi* 征西 ("invades the west") general in 348 and given the right to use rituals equivalent to the highest court officials. Sun Sheng 孫盛, formerly a subordinate of T'ao K'an, Yü Liang, and Yü I, and who was on Huan Wen's staff during the campaign, suggests that Huan was already interested in the possibility of eventually replacing the Ssu-ma clan on the throne.<sup>20</sup> His efforts towards this end, however, were entirely directed at further military achievements, building towards the reunification of the old territory of the Western Chin. He wasted no time in refortifying his new provincial capital at Chiang-ling 江陵 and recruiting bright young men from Ching province to serve on his provincial administration. Huan's frustration with the court faction increased over the next several years, however, as they failed to take advantage of the opportunities for a northern campaign that were opened up by the collapse of the Hsiung-nu state of Later Chao 趙 (328-349). He finally advanced downriver to Wu-ch'ang 武昌 with his forces in winter of 351, claiming to be preparing for a northern invasion, but also to threaten the court into action. They apparently took the hint: Huan Wen got a largely ceremonial promotion to defender-in-chief, and was allowed to conduct a minor campaign the following summer, followed by the commencement of Yin Hao's northern campaign in late autumn. He did little at this time to cultivate the support at court that he would have needed for a successful coup; and his strategy remained very much oriented towards a military solution, in which the reconquest of the north would eventually serve as the natural justification for the replacement of the Chin dynasty with a new one of his own.

Huan Wen had little confidence that Yin Hao's campaign would succeed, nor did he desire it to. In this he was not disappointed; Yin's painfully slow

<sup>20</sup> Sun Sheng 孫盛, *Chin yang-ch'iu* 晉陽秋, as quoted in Ou-yang Hsün 歐陽詢, ed., *I-wen lei-chü* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi, 1965), p. 85.

advance was ultimately halted and reversed by the rebellion of a twice-turncoat general, Yao Hsiang 姚襄, who drove the imperial forces back south of the Huai River in the winter of 353-54. Huan Wen insisted that Hao be relieved of command and demoted to a commoner for his incompetence. The court assented, and Huan received the green light for his long-anticipated invasion. By that time, however, the best opportunity had been lost, since the Hsien-pei Mu-jung 慕容 clan had already reconsolidated much of the Central Plain and were styling themselves the (Former) Yen 燕 dynasty (352-370). Huan decided to repeat his success in Shu by invading the Wei 渭 River valley, also a mountainous, well-defined redoubt, which had been only recently brought under the sway of the Fu 苻 clan. Though his invasion, launched in the spring of 354, met with early triumph, he was defeated badly that summer and began to run out of supplies; he finally retreated back to Hsiang-yang late in autumn. The court rewarded Huan Wen handsomely for his achievements, but one suspects they were a bit relieved that he had not had greater success. Huan Wen himself must have been far from satisfied.

#### *Lo-yang Propaganda, 355-362*

On the heels of his first real military setback, Huan shifted tactics. Instead of placing all his confidence in an essentially military approach, he began to apply propaganda to the problem more systematically by repeatedly petitioning the court to move the capital back to Lo-yang 洛陽. To do so, of course, would require a substantial military effort in Honan, since Lo-yang was not under the control of Chin forces at the time, and it was precisely the endorsement of such an effort that Huan was seeking. The court demurred, and instead challenged him to prove himself by catching and eliminating the traitorous Yao Hsiang, who was then running roughshod over Honan. Yao Hsiang began a siege of Lo-yang in the summer of 356. As it dragged into the fall Huan seized the opportunity to strike, and in a critical battle he defeated Yao's forces at the I 伊 River and drove him into the mountains of Shansi. Lo-yang was his – surely his sweetest victory.

Huan Wen now renewed his efforts to entice the court to relocate; with Lo-yang firmly in the geostrategic orbit of his power base in Ching province, relocation would make the imperial administration into a mere pawn. The court again demurred, since the axis through the Huai valley, which connected Lo-yang to the southern capital at Chien-k'ang 建康, remained under heavy pressure from Mu-jung forces. To convince the court that Lo-yang was secure, Huan Wen needed to be able to protect that axis. At this point, however, a series of untimely deaths slowed down his progress for several years. His nom-

inee to protect Lo-yang and the Huai valley axis, Hsieh Shang 謝尚, was already the commander of the upper Huai valley (Yü 豫 province, in modern Anhui), and would have been fully acceptable to the court. Unfortunately he fell ill and died the following spring, forcing Huan to leave Lo-yang garrisoned by a subordinate general. Hsieh Shang was replaced by his cousin Hsieh I 奕, who was Huan's military aide, but he too died in the spring of 358 at the start of another northern campaign. Huan accepted yet another representative of the Hsieh clan, I's younger brother Wan 萬, and again moved to push back the Mu-jung in 359. Hsieh Wan turned out to be a disastrous general, however, and in a confused retreat gave up all the territory in the Huai valley north of the river. Huan Wen demanded and got Hsieh Wan's demotion, but following that the upper Huai valley command was left unfilled for over two years.

Meanwhile, the lower Huai valley command (Hsü province, modern Kiangsu north of the Yangtze) was finally given to Fan Wang 范汪 in 361. Fan Wang had once served on Huan Wen's staff, but he had rejected the latter's offer of a promotion and gone to serve at court instead. He was a surprise appointment, and had little military expertise. In the summer of that year Huan Wen personally advanced north as far as Nan-yang 南陽 and encamped there for over a year, sending his brother Huan Huo 豁 to campaign east into Hsü-ch'ang 許昌. He requested Fan Wang's participation, and then, when Fan did not perform to his liking, demanded his demotion. The court assented, but it was widely felt that Huan was being vindictive and the court too pliant.<sup>21</sup> The court then sent up a pair of Huai valley generals who proved more to Huan's liking, and this team successfully beat off Mu-jung pressure for most of 362. In particular, Huan Wen managed to support Lo-yang against a concerted Mu-jung attack, and once again petitioned the court to move the capital. In an elegant response, penned by Sun Ch'o 孫綽, the court again refused, indicating that the north was still too unsettled and the strategic protection of the Yangtze River too important to risk relocation. Sun Ch'o wrote at one point, "We have planted our roots beyond the Yangtze for many decades.... Why give up a peaceful and happy state?"<sup>22</sup> Thwarted by such complacency and conservatism, Huan Wen again left a garrison at Lo-yang and returned to Chiang-ling; his Huai valley generals also retreated back to more defensible positions south of the Huai River.

#### *Wooing Chin – Fighting Yen, 363-370*

The setback to Huan Wen's ambitions in 363 opened the way for a closer

<sup>21</sup> CS 75 ("Biography of Fan Wang"), pp. 1982-84.

<sup>22</sup> CS 56, p. 1546.

cooperation between him and Ssu-ma Yü than had previously been evident. The latter had perhaps become more confident that Huan would not be able to threaten the throne with a decisive military success anytime soon, and, since Huan still lacked his own powerful court faction, he was also unlikely to thwart Ssu-ma by political maneuvering. Yet Huan Wen was the only man to have the demonstrated capability to lead a serious defense against the Mu-jung clan, who had become the principal military threat. As a result, the court made him commander-in-chief of all court and provincial military affairs – the highest military appointment. Huan Wen promptly moved his operations into the Huai valley and began the reinforcement of Ho-fei 合肥 as a base of operations. He did not, however, go formally to court to accept his new positions. He was repeatedly summoned in the summer and early autumn of 364, but did not relent until later in autumn, when he moved down to Ku-shu 姑熟, just upriver from Chien-k'ang; it was his first visit to court in almost twenty years. That winter he and Ssu-ma Yü negotiated a new arrangement of provincial and military commands, which were put in place the next year. Huan was allowed to give over his western command to his brother Huo, and to expand his brother Ch'ung's 冲 command in Chiang 江 province to include parts of the upper Huai valley command.

Now for the first time Huan Wen attempted to use patronage to win over a decisive faction of the Chien-k'ang elite. He selected young representatives of its most revered families to be on his staff at court, including T'ai-yüan Wang T'an-chih 太原王坦之 (son of Wang Shu 述, inspector of Yang province); Lang-yeh Wang Hsün 王珣 (grandson of Wang Tao); Hsieh Hsüan 謝玄 (son of Hsieh I and nephew of Hsieh An 安); and Ch'ih Ch'ao 郗超 (grandson of Ch'ih Chien 鑿).<sup>23</sup> Along with Yü Hsi 庾希, nephew of Yü Liang and already one of his top generals, Huan had representatives from every leading family of the Chien-k'ang elite working for him. He even went so far as to try to contract a marriage between Wang T'an-chih's daughter and his own son, but Wang Shu, incensed at the possibility of so intimate a bond with a mere "military man," vetoed the match. After Shu's death in 368, however, the bond was in fact made (with different offspring), signaling the Huan clan's begrudged and tenuous arrival in the rarefied social world of the Eastern Chin super-elite.<sup>24</sup>

By contrast with his success at court, Huan Wen's military ambitions were repeatedly frustrated after 365. Lo-yang finally fell to the Mu-jung after being under heavy pressure for half a year. In the summer came the death of Chou Wu 周武, who had been Huan's strongman in Shu for almost twenty years. By that winter Ssu-ma Hsün 勳, who had been commander in Liang 梁 province (the Han-chung valley; present-day southern Shensi) even longer, had raised troops in rebellion and gone to attack Chou Wu's son Ch'u 楚, who had taken over his father's command. The rebellion was not cleared up until the summer of 366, and it was rapidly followed by more trouble in the west, when, that autumn, forces from the expanding state of Former Ch'in 秦 (351–385) pushed into the Nan-yang area, and during winter a rebellion erupted in the same area and was not crushed until the following summer. The following year, however, brought the death of Mu-jung K'o 恪, the top general for the Yen state, and Huan Wen quickly began to organize what proved to be his last northern campaign, finally launched early in the summer of 369.

Huan Wen's final campaign was by far his most ambitious, his first truly large-scale effort, and over terrain in which he had relatively little prior military experience. He was forced to dig lengths of canal in what is now western Shantung to get his navy onto the Yellow River, and was thereafter beset by the same problem that felled him in the Wei valley campaign – inadequate lines of supply. He demanded that Yüan Chen 袁真, his upper Huai valley commander, build another canal up to the Yellow River to resupply his forces, but it was a dry summer and Chen was unable to complete it. Stranded at Fang-t'ou, on the Yellow River, Huan was forced to burn his flotilla of ships and retreat; tens of thousands of his men died as they were picked off by pursuing forces of the Mu-jung clan and their temporary allies from Ch'in. After gathering remaining forces in the lower Huai valley, he blamed Yüan Chen for the failure of the campaign and demanded his demotion. In the winter Chen, who had been in the upper Huai command for eight years and built up a loyal band of supporters, rebelled and took the strategic garrison at Shou-ch'un 壽春 with him. Crushing the rebellion took all of the next year and sapped a good deal of Huan Wen's military strength because it required fighting off reinforcements from both Yen and Ch'in; Shou-ch'un was not secured until the spring of 371. Now sixty years old, with his military career in ruins, Huan Wen used his remaining energy and ambition in manipulating the court.

<sup>23</sup> See CS 98, p. 2575–76, and the independent biographies of these men in CS. The whole is neatly summarized in Ssu-ma Kuang 司馬光, *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1956; hereafter, *TCIC*), p. 3192.

<sup>24</sup> *SSHY* v/58, pp. 332–33 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 175); see also Richard Mather, "Intermar-

riage as a Gauge of Family Status in the Southern Dynasties," in Dien, ed., *State and Society*, pp. 218–20.



*Endgame at Court, 371-73*

The record of Huan Wen's final years is so shrouded in prejudice that it is quite impossible at this distance to be sure of many of his actions, much less his intentions. We can feel certain of a few basic facts: that in the winter of 371 he supported, and perhaps engineered, the deposition of the emperor and his replacement by Ssu-ma Yü; that he engaged in several further purges of court favorites early in the subsequent year; that he essentially did not intervene in the transfer of the throne to Ssu-ma Yü's son in the autumn of 372; and that he died in autumn of the following year, age sixty-two.<sup>25</sup> The common assumption is that he was a ruthless opportunist who sought only the overthrow of Ssu-ma power and the establishment of a new dynasty. As Michael Rogers points out, however, this portrait was developed to serve the pro-Ssu-ma interests of the Hsieh clan, who dominated the court in the two decades following Huan Wen's death. The resultant pro-Hsieh, anti-Huan bias of the official record was perpetuated in the collected anecdotes of *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* and codified into the official dynastic history *Chin shu*, which was compiled under the T'ang dynasty.<sup>26</sup>

Culling through the eighty-plus anecdotes about Huan Wen in *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* with this caution in mind, one is struck by the survival of many positive references, especially about his early career in Ching province. He is portrayed as a liberal and compassionate ruler, charismatic and inspiring, and forgiving of a man like Yin Hao who, though basically good, was not suited to the military command thrust on him by the court.<sup>27</sup> Only the anecdotes that deal with Huan in the years 369 through 373 clearly delineate an evil intent (and contrast it with that of Ssu-ma Yü, Hsieh An, and Wang T'an-chih, who are largely seen as exemplary). These anecdotes are naturally the most striking, memorable, and plentiful ones, and it is from them that the poor reputation stems.<sup>28</sup> I would suggest, however, that the wealth of positive anecdotes

<sup>25</sup> This bare-bones chronology underlies the highly anecdotal treatment of the end of Wen's career in *CS* 98, pp. 2577-78.

<sup>26</sup> See Rogers, *Chronicle of Fu Chien*, pp. 60-61. The bias was preserved in the T'ang period for a host of reasons that Rogers analyzes in excellent detail.

<sup>27</sup> See *SSHY* iii/19, p. 183; xxviii/2, p. 864, and xxviii/4, p. 866 (liberal and compassionate); xiii/8, pp. 661-62 (charismatic); viii/117, p. 482-83 (on Yin Hao); see trans. in Mather, *New Account*, pp. 89, 450, 451, 304, and 239, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> Most notably vi/29, p. 369 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 190), where he plans to assassinate Hsieh An and Wang T'an-chih; and xxxiii/13, p. 904 (Mather, *New Account*, pp. 476-77), where, despairing of founding his own dynasty, he nonetheless plots to "leave behind a stench for ten thousand years."

from his early years reflects a depth of genuine support and admiration for Huan Wen and his goals, support that is further reflected by his successful recruitment of members of the capital elite to his staff. The only truly contemporary account of Huan Wen in the final period that discusses his dethronement of the duke of Hai-hsi 海西 (emperor Fei 廢) does not suggest any impropriety.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, the principal beneficiary of the events during Huan Wen's "endgame" at court turned out to be Ssu-ma Yü and his descendants, who took over the imperial line. The latter had campaigned to succeed to the throne as early as 342, and had dominated the court for over twenty years prior to his accession. For much of this time, he and Huan Wen had divided power between themselves – Ssu-ma Yü at court, Huan in the provinces. Their relatively close collusion after 363 suggests that they were as much co-conspirators as rivals, at least until Ssu-ma Yü obtained his objective. Though he is disingenuously characterized as Huan Wen's puppet, Ssu-ma's success in winning support in the final face-off, his achievement in seating his own bloodline on the throne, and his descendants' manipulation of the historical record to obscure his coup behind the drama of the anti-Huan legend, suggest that Ssu-ma Yü was the one controlling the strings.

Regardless of the truth behind the historical record, there is a broader issue at hand – how Huan Wen's contemporaries would have regarded an attempt to usurp the throne. As I have argued, usurping the throne, although certain to ruffle feathers, was widely held to be within the bounds of propriety for an able minister in a time of weak rule.<sup>30</sup> In Huan Wen's day, the Ssu-ma clan had not only lost control of the north, but the duke of Hai-hsi was their third successive sovereign who had failed to produce an heir; no clearer portents of the inadequacy of the Ssu-ma clan were needed. Whether Huan Wen was the correct successor, however, hinged largely on the capital elite's assessment of Huan Wen's worth, his character, ultimately his charisma. This perspective is beautifully illustrated by an anecdote in *Shih-shuo hsün-yü* that relates how Ssu-ma Yü, now emperor Chien-wen 簡文, ordered Huan Wen not to proceed with the execution of two imperial relatives. After a lengthy exchange, the emperor finally replied, "If the House of Chin is to remain vital and enduring, then your Excellency should obey this [order]. But if the great Mandate

<sup>29</sup> Sun Sheng, *Chin yang-ch'iu*, as quoted by Liu Hsiao-piao in *SSHY* xxv/38, p. 808 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 416).

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Grafflin concurs, noting that while the political aggressiveness of men like Huan Wen roused intense opposition, it was not perceived as rebellious or even socially unacceptable at the time; "Reinventing China," p. 167.

has passed from us, then we request to make way for a more worthy man (that is, yourself)." Shaken by the forthrightness of Yü's statement, Huan Wen desisted and merely exiled the two men.<sup>31</sup> Although the account is probably exaggerated, its presumption is that both the emperor and his minister were fully aware of the precedent of ministerial usurpation, and were engaged in a fabulous game of chicken, each daring the other to demonstrate defiance or deference. It is only the personal virtue of the two men – Ssu-ma Yü's perceptiveness and cool-headedness versus Huan Wen's ultimately abashed bluster – that keeps them both in their respective positions.

In short, the problem for the Ssu-ma clan's control of the throne was not so much Huan Wen in particular, but the entire state of affairs in which ministerial rebellion was potentially acceptable, in which the right to rule was based on the public perception of a man's personal fitness as much as any institutional controls. A neglected aspect of this tension was the potential power it gave to the minister's subordinates who, anticipating tremendous advancement in their own careers if their patron acceded to the throne, might pressure their patron to go ahead, even reporting flattering portents that could, however, ultimately undermine the trust of his sovereign.<sup>32</sup> Carl Leban has referred to this process as a "two-way symbolic communication" between the minister and the "quasi-electorate" of his supporters, but he perhaps understates how much the process may be driven by the subordinates, not the minister, and the enormous potential it had for getting dangerously out of hand.<sup>33</sup>

The risks of such high-stakes factional infighting were many. Obviously, the storm of claims and accusations could drive the minister inexorably forward into violent rebellion, leading to the destruction of one side or the other. The potentially catastrophic effects were obvious, not only for the principal figures, but also for their subordinates and the extended families of all concerned. Even a less drastic denouement, one that covered over the conflict and maintained the lives and official positions of the principal figures and their supporters intact, could leave the minister's reputation vulnerable to later defamation. It would appear that, given the weakness of evidence regarding Huan Wen's efforts to usurp, the struggle at court in his final years was of this lesser variety; his vilification as a great rebel was then created later by adherents of the Hsieh and Ssu-ma faction for their own political purposes.

<sup>31</sup> *SSHY* xxviii/7, p. 869 (Mather, *New Account*, pp. 452–53).

<sup>32</sup> This problem is the seed of those anecdotes that blame Ch'ih Chao for flattering Huan Wen and engineering his takeover; see *SSHY* ii/59, pp. 118–19, and vi/27, p. 368 (Mather, *New Account*, pp. 59 and 189, respectively); also *CS* 98 ("Biography of Huan Wen"), p. 2577.

<sup>33</sup> Leban, "Managing Heaven's Mandate," p. 338.

The court faction had always been opposed to Huan Wen for essentially political, rather than theoretical, reasons: his ambition to retake the north was a direct threat to Ssu-ma rule. At the same time some contemporaries, including many of Huan Wen's subordinates, were more than ready to back his seizure of the throne by the time-tested mechanism of ritual abdication and succession. In between these political positions vis-à-vis Huan Wen was a third position: those who had backed him when his intention was toward territorial unification, but became disillusioned when he turned to direct manipulation of the throne. Indeed, Huan Wen's ultimate failure to progress towards usurpation can perhaps be attributed to the loss of support from this latter sector of the political elite, suggesting that the standard of unification retained a substantial number of adherents even several generations after the migration south. The course of Hsi Tso-ch'ih's career and the content of his political writing provides us with an unusually clear case study of the political perspective of a man from this third camp.

#### HSI TSO-CH'IH AND THE QUESTION OF DYNASTIC LEGITIMACY

Huan Wen's career is an interesting study in its own right, but it also provides an essential context for interpreting Hsi Tso-ch'ih's political thought, some of the most interesting of the Eastern Chin period. Hsi, a native of Hsiang-yang (in present northern Hupei) whose clan was, by his own description, "a powerful family of the lands of Ching,"<sup>34</sup> had first been recommended by Yüan Ch'iao 袁喬 (Huan Wen's subcommander in the Hsiang-yang area) and made a clerk on Huan's civilian staff in about 348, soon after the invasion of Shu. He rapidly rose through the ranks to become Huan's lieutenant-inspector (*pieh-chia* 別駕), responsible for running the Ching provincial administration when Huan was on campaign, and his *Chin shu* biography indicates that Huan Wen deeply valued him.<sup>35</sup> As Huan Wen began to shift his attention to courting the gentry elite of Chien-k'ang, however, he failed to promote Hsi to his high-powered capital staff, instead leaving him behind as a provincial military

<sup>34</sup> Hsi Tso-ch'ih, "Biography of Shan Chien 山簡," in *Hsiang-yang ch'i-chiu chi* 襄陽耆舊記. The earliest extant version is that in Jen Chao-lin 任兆麟, *Hsin-chai shih-chung* 心齋十種 (1853 edn.) 3, pp. 3b–4a; see also Huang Hui-hsien 黃惠賢, *Chiao-pu* 校補 *Hsiang-yang ch'i-chiu chi* (Chung-chou: Chung-chou ku-chi, 1987), pp. 80–81. Hsi's biography of Shan Chien is also closely followed in *CS* 43, pp. 1228–30. For an English translation and discussion of Hsi's local history, see Andrew Chittick, "Pride of Place: The Advent of Local History in Early Medieval China" (Ph.D. diss., U. Michigan, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> See *CS* 82, pp. 2152–53; trans. Chittick, "Pride of Place," p. 225.

clerk. Despite his later promotion to a powerless but prestigious commandery governorship, Hsi was thereafter somewhat disillusioned with his patron, and had further reason to be as he learned of Wen's increasingly ruthless behavior after 369.<sup>36</sup>

Around this time Hsi Tso-ch'ih set his prodigious literary talents to work on a general history of the empire from the foundation of the Eastern Han through to the fall of the unified rule of the Chin (that is, from 25–317). As commentators in the Southern Dynasties and early-T'ang dynasty observed, he wrote the work as a way to address the fundamental problem of Huan Wen and men of his ilk. Yet those commentators merely validated the anti-Huan, pro-Ssu-ma bias of the prevailing interpretation of Eastern Chin history by limiting their interpretation of Hsi's work to the Huan Wen issue.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Hsi Tso-ch'ih had gone a lot further than mere criticism of his patron; he deeply believed that the prevailing theory of dynastic succession by ritual abdication created a political environment that had lured Huan Wen and others into in-subordination and disgrace and exposed the throne to repeated challenges. Such temptations would continue unless and until the prevailing theory was exchanged for a more ambitious formulation of the regime's legitimacy via the standard of unification.

Hsi Tso-ch'ih's memorable gambit for making this point was to assert that the Three Kingdoms state of Wei should not be considered a legitimate dynasty, despite its acceptance of ritual abdication from the Han, because it failed to unify the entire sphere of Han civilization. He therefore used the calendar of the Shu-Han state, instead of Wei's, for the period 221–264, and named his work *Han-Chin ch'un-ch'iu* 漢晉春秋 (*Annals of Han and Chin*) in order to emphasize the delegitimation of Wei. A substantial debt to the classic *Ch'un-ch'iu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*) is also evident, both in Hsi's use of the chronicle structure and the "praise-and-blame" fashion in which historical precedents are discussed as a veiled commentary on contemporary politics. For example, an entry records Ssu-ma Shih's 司馬師 bold and gracious acceptance of blame for the military failures of several different subordinate generals. To this Hsi appended a lengthy discussion on the merits of such an approach, concluding:

<sup>36</sup> As told in *SSHY* 1v/80, p. 258 (Mather, *New Account*, pp. 134–35), and repeated in *CS* 82, p. 2153. Hsi originally opposed Huan Wen because, having been sent to the capital and met Ssu-ma Yü, he was so impressed with the culture of him and his clique that Huan Wen seemed a boor by comparison; Huan, for his part, resented Hsi's admiration of the literati. This is so patently self-serving a tale that it deserves little credence. More evidence can be cited to support my interpretation here; refer to Chittick, "Pride of Place," pp. 222–23 ("Appendix Two: Translation and Analysis of the Biography of Xi Zuochi").

<sup>37</sup> This position is evidenced in *CS* 82, p. 2154.

If sovereigns are cognizant of this principle and rule their states by it, then there will not be bad government from their courts and their persons will not suffer disaster; their deeds may be defective, but there will be renown for them; though the army may be crushed, the victory is theirs. In such cases even a hundred defeats are immaterial; how much more so with only two defeats!<sup>38</sup>

The obvious target of this discourse is Huan Wen, who, by refusing to take personal responsibility for the Fang-t'ou debacle of 369, provoked Yüan Chen's rebellion and thereby lost time, resources, and a good deal of precious support. Huan had already exhibited similar behavior in his demotion of Hsieh Wan in 359 and Fan Wang in 361. In short, once the background events are fully understood, Hsi Tso-ch'ih's text can and should be read as a running commentary on the political events of his day, providing an important insight into some of the deeper wellsprings of his political thought.

Hsi Tso-ch'ih provided a more direct explication, however, in his final memorial to the throne. Although written perhaps two decades after *Han-Chin ch'un-ch'iu*, it encapsulates in a single essay the fundamental arguments by which he rejected the long-standing theory of succession by ritual abdication.<sup>39</sup> It is a typical example of his intricate parallel-prose style, full of shameless adulation for his protagonists and scathing denunciation for his villains, and punctuated with numerous historical references to drive home his points. The purpose of the essay, as laid out in the introduction, is to explain why the Chin should not offer the ritual of the "Three Reverences" to the Wei, as one was expected to do for the preceding dynasty; in other words, why the Wei should not be considered a legitimate dynasty, but a mere usurper, no better than Wang Mang.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Originally quoted by P'ei Sung-chih 裴松之 in *San kuo chih* 三國志 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959; hereafter *SKC*) 4 (Wei 4), p. 125; also in *JCTC*, year 253, item 4; trans. Achilles Fang, *The Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms (220–265): Chapters 69–78 from the Tzu Chih T'ung Chien of Ssu-ma Kuang (1029–1086)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1952) 1, pp. 126–27, nn. 143, 144. The surviving fragments of *Han-Chin ch'un-ch'iu* are collected by T'ang Ch'iu 湯球 and Huang Shih 黃頤, *Chung chia pien-nien-t'i Chin shih* 眾家編年體晉史 (Tientsin: T'ien-chin ku-chi, 1989), pp. 3–88.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Hsi Tso-ch'ih's biography in *CS* 82, p. 2154–58. The memorial is not dated, but it is supposed to have been sent up immediately prior to Hsi's death, probably in conjunction with the court's nomination of him to oversee the drafting of the imperial history. Though it has been presumed that Hsi died soon after Hsiang-yang returned to Eastern Chin control in 384 (i.e. Mather, *New Account*, p. 524), Hsi's biography of Chu Hsiü says that Hsiü died in T'ai-yüan 18 (393 AD); thus Hsi must have died sometime thereafter. See Chittick, "Pride of Place," pp. 220–30.

<sup>40</sup> Modeled on the Chou treatment of the Shang, the "Three Reverences" involved the enfeoffment and provision of certain ritual privileges to the lineal descendants of three emperors from the preceding dynasty, as a mark of respect and succession.

In the opening rhetorical question-and-answer, Hsi Tso-ch'ih suggests what the primary objections to his thesis would be: first, that Wei had conquered "all of central Hsia 中夏" (that is, north China), the traditional heartland of Chinese culture; second, that they had received the ritual abdication of the Han; third, that Chin's manner of usurping the throne was no better than Wei's, and so should be regarded equally. The heart of his argument lies in a dismissal of the first objection, that the Wei had achieved unification of the sphere of Chinese civilization by ruling over northern China alone. Hsi's response is to assert unequivocally that Wei's failure also to pacify and gain the assent of the population of the Yangtze valley was a decisive proof of their inadequacy.

Hsi is known to have been deeply concerned with defining the Yangtze valley as a part of "all under Heaven," meaning the Chinese cultural sphere, as opposed to possessing a (presumably lesser, if not utterly barbarian) cultural sphere of its own. He is recorded as having participated in a famous debate with Fu T'ao 伏滔, a native of southern Shantung, about the respective claims of the north and south to the inheritance of classical culture. After responding to Fu T'ao's list of historically illustrious northerners with a southern litany of his own, Hsi asserts that the south was the burial place of "all the sages" (by which he meant mythological heroes such as Shen Nung, Fu Hsi, Shao Hao, and Shun) and the favored topic of poets, including such works as *Shao nan* 邵南 and *Ch'u tz'u* 楚辭, and thus in no way inferior in cultural attainment to the north.<sup>41</sup> By anchoring the great legends and figures of the past on southern soil, he clearly defines the Chinese cultural sphere as including the south.

In his memorial on dynastic legitimacy, Hsi Tso-ch'ih also implicitly assumes that the sphere of traditional Chinese culture includes the Yangtze region. By defining the "target area" for reunification as including the south, he can then use Wei's failure to gain supremacy over the south as the basis for rejecting their legitimacy. He first lays out at length the history of the fall of the Han and the rise of the Chin, noting that, although each state in the Three Kingdoms era had "partial peace, in reality there was chaos." He concludes that "those who did away with the calamities of the three states and tranquilized the strife of the end of Han ... were all of the house of Ssu-ma." He goes on to make his criteria for legitimacy explicit in the following key passage:

Now if we grant that Wei had the virtue of succeeding a sovereign, then its leadership must have been inadequate; if it had the achievement of tranquilizing chaos, then the Sun 孫 (state of Wu 吳) and the Liu 劉 (state

of Shu 蜀) also established ordered regimes. If its leadership was inadequate, then it cannot be said that it ordered the era, and if the era was not ordered under Wei, then Wei cannot be considered the master of all under Heaven. If kingly leadership was inadequate under the Ts'ao, then the Ts'ao cannot begin to be considered kings for even one day."<sup>42</sup>

The argument Hsi makes here is straightforward: Wei's control of north China was not a sufficient claim to legitimacy, since the rival states of Wu and Shu also achieved the partial pacification of the Chinese cultural sphere (as Hsi defines it), and therefore had equal claim to legitimacy. If the Ts'ao dynasty had offered truly virtuous leadership, then they would have gained the assent of *all* under Heaven, including the south, and brought true peace. Since they failed to do so, they cannot be accepted as a legitimate dynasty.

Hsi Tso-ch'ih immediately qualifies this criterion with a second one, that mere military conquest is not sufficient if one does not also bring peace to the empire. On this basis he rejects the precedents of Kung Kung 共工 (a mythic monster who, after being defeated in an attempt to control the empire, burst the pole that held up the sky in the northwest, causing the axial tilt) and the Ch'in dynasty, under both of which the empire was briefly united. As he argues, under their rule the people "still did not see order under the emperor; the destruction was more ruinous than during the Warring States. Still less can we consider as a dynasty a man who briefly rules a few provinces, merely impressing those within their borders." In other words, he considered the Ts'ao clan to be nothing but regional warlords; not a wholly shameful thing to be, as he ultimately acknowledges, but hardly the equal of the Han or the Chin.

This is in effect a two-point test for legitimacy: military subjugation of the Chinese cultural sphere, including the Yangtze valley, and righteous leadership that results in the universal acquiescence of the subject populace. Hsi seems to presume that such leadership would not be unduly coercive and would be respectful of traditional culture and ritual. By such reckoning, Wei clearly could not be regarded a legitimate dynasty on the first point, since they failed to subdue "all under Heaven," including those in the Yangtze valley. Wei was not legitimate on the second point either, since they had violated the bounds of propriety by usurping the throne from the legitimate Han rulers. Moreover, Hsi interprets their failure to unify the Han cultural sphere as implicit evidence of an "unrighteousness" as seen at least in the eyes of various of their contemporaries.

<sup>41</sup> *SSHY*ii/72, pp. 132-33 (Mather, *New Account*, p. 65).

<sup>42</sup> *CS*82, pp. 2155-56.

Having made the case for his own standard of legitimacy, Hsi Tso-ch'ih curtly dismisses ritual abdication, as being an insufficient, even irrelevant, standard of legitimacy. In the first place, he argues, the manner of ritual transfer was "not like Yao and Shun," who had "personally commissioned their sincere ministers." Furthermore, he adds later on, a true dynastic founder does not rely merely on being given the throne by a predecessor, citing with scorn the precedent of king K'uai of Yen 燕王噲 (r. 320–318 BC), whose abdication in this manner led to the destruction of his state. Receiving ritual abdication was no proof of righteousness. The only honorable way for a lineage to take the throne was to unify the empire personally.

The most contentious of the three kinds of objection that Hsi sought to answer concerned the potential illegitimacy of the Chin. The Chin dynasty certainly qualified as legitimate by the criterion of military unification, but their origins in treachery against the Ts'ao clan might seem, by parallel with Ts'ao Ts'ao's treachery against the Han, to be grounds for disqualification on the criterion of righteous leadership. Having already established Wei as illegitimate, Hsi is well prepared for this part of the argument. He boldly asserts that the illegitimacy of Wei obviated the need for a minister to be subordinate to his lord, for, "if justice is incomplete, then one is just borrowing a passage on the way to a higher strategy; if leadership is unrighteous, then the tie between lord and minister is not the same." As long as the representatives of the Ssu-ma clan ultimately intended "to rely on justice and dispatch Wei," they could serve under them temporarily without staining their reputation. Thus, while Ts'ao Ts'ao was a villain for usurping the throne from the weakened yet still legitimate Han dynasty, Ssu-ma Yen did not transgress by displacing the illegitimate state of Wei. Having thereby rescued the reputation of the Ssu-ma from the potential shame of its traitorous origins, Hsi Tso-ch'ih returns to the question at hand, rhetorically asking why, "for empty reverence of unrighteous Wei, should we degrade our leadership to all?"<sup>43</sup>

What is notable about this lengthy essay is that Hsi Tso-ch'ih has nothing to say about the legitimation of Wei's rival, Shu-Han. In fact, given that Shu-Han did not meet at least the first of his two criteria for legitimacy, military subjugation of the Chinese cultural sphere, the essay might suggest that it was not a legitimate state either. In a separate essay responding to the assumption of the imperial title by Liu Pei 劉備, however, Hsi makes an exception for the case of Shu-Han:

Now a lord who lays a foundation must first carry out a great pacification

(unification) and only then establish himself (as emperor), while a sovereign who continues a lineage should establish himself quickly so as to hold the hearts of the people.<sup>44</sup>

Here he argues that Liu Pei's blood relation to the Han imperial line was reason enough to claim the imperial title even before unification was complete; he goes on to make an explicit comparison to emperor Kuang-wu, founder of the Eastern Han and the most recent example of such a restoration. In other surviving passages from his works he lauds Liu Pei and his entourage for being faithful to the mandate of the preceding legitimate empire and seeking to re-found it, whereas Ts'ao Ts'ao and his heirs did not.<sup>45</sup> The parallel to Ssu-ma Jui, founder of the Eastern Chin under similar circumstances, would have been as obvious to Hsi's contemporaries as it is to us today.

Nonetheless, unification of the empire remained the most important criterion, leading Hsi to take a rather qualified view of the history of the Shu-Han state as a whole, given its inability to achieve the dynastic revival that was central to its tenuous claims of legitimacy. A principal target of his criticism is Liu Shan, Liu Pei's ineffectual successor, under whose rule the once vigorous Shu-Han state deteriorated to the point that it was easily conquered by Ssu-ma Yen in 264.<sup>46</sup> It is this aspect of Shu-Han that Hsi is most interested in paralleling to the Ssu-ma clan's rather moribund rule in his own day. The parallel is clear in a comment on Liu Shan's accession to the Shu-Han throne in 223 that is recorded in the "Treatise on the Five Phases" in *Sung shu* 宋書. The text notes that after Liu Pei died, his son Shan did not wait until the month was out before changing the reign title to the first year of Chien-hsing 建興 (it had been the third year of Chang-wu 章武); this was regarded as improper. Hsi then is recorded as having written:

According to the *Rites*: When the lord of a state takes the throne, he must await the end of the year and thereafter change to a new title, for the sentiments of his ministers are such that they cannot bear to have two

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by P'ei Sung-chih in *SKC* 41 (Shu 11), pp. 1016–17.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in Li Fang 李昉, comp., *Tai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1960) 447, p. 2058 (quoting Hsi Tso-ch'ih), Chou Yu's and Lu Su's achievements are degraded because they were in service to Wu, an illegitimate dynasty; Chu-ko Liang's, on the other hand, are noble because they were in service to Liu Pei, a descendant of Han, and for the purpose of restoring the Han's greatness. Hsi sometimes pressed his defense of Liu Pei a bit far; in *SKC* 37 (Shu 7), p. 956, he makes a rather tortuous effort to defend Liu Pei's worthiness following his unrighteous, even "perverse" leadership in the illegitimate seizure of Shu.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., see his withering characterization of Shan after his dethronement and removal to the Chin capital, in *SKC* 33 (Shu 3), p. 902.

<sup>43</sup> *CS* 82, pp. 2156–57.

lords in a single year. This could be called the utmost failure to know ritual; by this the gentleman knows that Shu would be unable to come east (that is, unify the empire).<sup>47</sup>

The significance of this passage is apparent when we realize that, upon the deposition of the lord of Hai-hsi and the enthronement of Ssu-ma Yü in midwinter of 371, the reign title was changed, without waiting, from the sixth year of T'ai-ho 太和 to the first of Hsien-an 咸安. It is quite apparent from Hsi Tso-ch'ih's condemnation of Liu Shan's similar action in 223 that he regarded this as a serious transgression of propriety, one that signaled the weakness of the Eastern Chin throne.

In other words, Hsi Tso-ch'ih sees the historical parallel of the contemporary Ssu-ma rulers not in the righteousness and vigor of Liu Pei, but in his son Liu Shan, the worthless successor who forfeited the achievements of his virtuous predecessor by transgressions of ritual and general impotence. Thus he offers not a word of criticism for the Ssu-ma clan's eventual conquest of Shu-Han and displacement of Liu Shan, whose claim to the Han mandate had clearly run out. This criticism was a challenge to such contemporaries as Sun Ch'o, who argued that the Chin court should stay sheltered behind the Yangtze and forego retaking the north.<sup>48</sup> By comparison, Hsi argues that this lack of ambition would effectively delegitimize the regime, and leave it vulnerable to challengers from within and without.

If we consider how Hsi Tso-ch'ih's own career decisions were affected by this philosophy, we can immediately see how he may have found Huan Wen's early ambitions and behavior to have been in line with his ideals for unification, even if (as seems likely) Hsi had not thought them through carefully. Hsi Tso-ch'ih developed his ideas more fully only after Huan Wen gave up attempting to conquer the north and began manipulating the throne, allowing his behavior to lapse into high-handedness in the process. Hsi was undisputably concerned with criticizing Huan Wen, and delineating the pride and excess that contributed to his decline. He went beyond that rather common theme, however, to argue that the problem stemmed from the larger context created by the prevailing theory of dynastic legitimacy, which held out the prospect that ministerial insubordination could eventually be justified as a prelude to dynastic succession, and thereby tempted ministers to excess. Hsi's

solution to the prevailing theory was to insist on the primacy of unification prior to succession, thereby disallowing any attempt by men such as Huan Wen to seize the throne before the real work of unification was essentially complete.

Hsi Tso-ch'ih's political perspective had several important implications for his selection of political commitments. First, the best man to serve under would be one who had his sights set on unifying the empire in a righteous manner. Huan Wen had been acceptable as long as his goal was to conquer the north, and his behavior met the demands of propriety. Hsi may also have considered Fu Chien 苻堅, the vigorous founder of Former Ch'in (r. 357–384) as a possible candidate for a time, since Hsi had chosen not to flee from the Ch'in invasion of Hsiang-yang in 379 and accompanied two men he highly respected (the local governor Chu Hsü 朱序 and the monk Tao-an 道安) to Fu Chien's court to be offered an official post.<sup>49</sup> Second, if and when a man failed to meet these criteria, he should not be served. Thus when Huan Wen looked as if he intended to usurp the Chin throne without first unifying the empire, and his actions transgressed the bounds of propriety, Hsi quit his service, probably sometime in 372 or 373. So too Fu Chien presumably failed to meet his standards, and Hsi left his court and returned home. Third, and most significantly, the Ssu-ma were only owed a weak allegiance, for they seemed to have little inclination or ability to retake the north; their only claim to legitimacy was fidelity to the mandate of Western Chin, which Hsi Tso-ch'ih rejected as an insufficient basis for rule. Ultimately, in the absence of an acceptable patron, and with the increasing cynicism of old age, he spent the last decades of his life in retirement, indulging his interests in Buddhism and local history.<sup>50</sup>

What is curious about Hsi Tso-ch'ih's perspective on legitimacy, by comparison with the orthodox formulation that prevailed in his day, are the many criteria that he leaves out. He explicitly rejects succession through ritual abdi-

<sup>49</sup> CS 82, p. 2154. Hsi Tso-ch'ih wrote a positive biography of Chu Hsü in *Hsiang-yang ch'i-chiu chi*; see Chittick, "Pride of Place," p. 220. He also wrote two laudatory letters regarding Tao-an, both recorded in Yen Ko-chün 嚴可均, comp., *Ch'üan Liu-ch'ao wen* 全六朝文 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959) 134, pp. 1b–3a. However, he apparently did not take the post Fu Chien offered him.

<sup>50</sup> The significance of his appointment to oversee the national history is unclear: it cannot be reliably dated (sometime between 384 and Hsi's death after 393), and Hsi never took the post. His reputation as a critic of Huan Wen would have served him well in landing the offer, but his deeper historical philosophy was critical of imperial complacency. Hsi Tso-ch'ih's memorial could be construed as an attempt to persuade the throne to accede to his construction of dynastic legitimacy and demonstrate serious effort towards retaking the north, as a condition for him to accept the job.

<sup>47</sup> *Sung shu* 宋書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974) 31, p. 899.

<sup>48</sup> See Sun Ch'o's response to Huan Wen's ambition to return the capital to Lo-yang, reprinted in CS 56, pp. 1545–47.

cation.<sup>51</sup> He does not mention the Five Phases or other techniques of portent or prediction at all.<sup>52</sup> He sees blood relation to the preceding dynasty as being of only tenuous significance; the fragmentary successor dynasties of Shu-Han and Eastern Chin could only achieve substantive legitimacy by unifying the entire sphere of Han civilization, as their predecessors had. If they could not – and in Hsi's opinion the prospects for Eastern Chin were no better than they had been for Shu-Han – then they deserved to be deposed. He replaces all of the elements of the rather scholastic orthodox approach to legitimacy with the relatively straightforward, idealistic criteria of military and political unification and moral leadership. He cannot be said to have broken especially new ground with this idea; it was a part of the legacy handed down from the Han. However, Hsi Tso-ch'ih was the first person to apply this formulation to the complex situation following the fall of the Han, and come up with a solution to its troublesome implications for the Eastern Chin throne's claim to legitimacy. His efforts could have cleared the way for the Eastern Chin to formulate its legitimacy on a more robust basis, but only at the high price of requiring a continued and wholehearted military effort to reconquer the north.

#### HSI TSO-CH'IH'S LEGACY

Hsi Tso-ch'ih's formulation of the problem of dynastic legitimacy did not gain much currency in his own time, since the court faction did not wish to expend its fragile resources on northern campaigns. The challenge of Huan Wen had clearly brought the issue to the fore, however, and in the following years the Ssu-ma clan and their allies in the Hsieh clan worked to strengthen the traditional justification for Chin rule in a way that they hoped would deter further challengers. Their argument rested on the claim that the Chin were the preservers of "culture," what Michael Rogers has termed the "mystique of legitimacy." This strategy had several origins: in the northern immigrant's sense of cultural superiority over the native southerners (a sense shared by some

<sup>51</sup> In this I differ with Hok-lam Chan's assessment that Hsi Tso-ch'ih, like his contemporaries, was explicitly concerned with *cheng-t'ung*, with "cyclical pulsation," "rightful succession," and "genealogical linkage" in determining legitimacy; see Chan, *Legitimation*, pp. 33–42. See also Peter Bol's criticism of Chan along these lines, in his review in *HJAS* 47.1 (1987), p. 289, n. 5.

<sup>52</sup> The T'ang-era editors of *Chin shu* assert that Hsi Tso-ch'ih based the legitimacy of Chin on the positive portents surrounding its conquest of Shu-Han; see *CS* 82, p. 2154; trans. Chittick, "Pride of Place," p. 225. However, Hsi makes no mention of this in his final memorial. The likely source for the idea is in his biography of Hsiang Ch'ung, part of his local history of Hsiang-yang, but the words are clearly ascribed to Ch'ung, and the idea is in any case partially or wholly derived from Ch'iao Chou, an advisor to Liu Shan; see discussion in Chittick, "Pride of Place," p. 188. There is no other pre-T'ang evidence that Hsi himself subscribed to this interpretation.

southerners); in their defense of all things cultural over things military and their corresponding disdain for men such as Huan Wen who emphasized military solutions; and in their reluctance to attempt a reseizure of the north, not only because it would promote the ambitions of military men over the culture-lords of the capitol bureaucracy, but also because it would uproot them from their comfortable estates and sinecures in the south. The "mystique" formulation had a lasting impact on Eastern Chin historiography, coloring it with a pro-court, pro-literati, anti-Huan, and anti-military bias.<sup>53</sup>

An emphasis on culture, however, could not disguise the fact that the court faction's strength largely flowed from provincial military commands, just as did Huan Wen's. The rise of the Hsieh clan was as much attributable to the success of Hsieh Shang and Hsieh Hsüan in the provinces as to Hsieh An's at court. The latter's main role was as a facilitator and focal point, channeling the clan's military achievements into more lasting court sinecures and status markers.<sup>54</sup> Doubtless the Huan clan would have benefited equally from having one of their members so well-placed at court, but they nonetheless managed to reach the pinnacle of power without it. This fact, which the "cultural mystique" ideology attempted to disguise, proved inescapable. In fact, Liu Yü 劉裕, another military strongman, came to dominate the throne after 404, and later usurped the Ssu-ma clan's birthright, regardless of the presumed mystique of their cultural inheritance. The subsequent Southern Dynasties proved no more able to retake the north than the Eastern Chin had been, however, and they lacked even the weak justification of fidelity to the mandate of Western Chin to fall back on. Unable to develop any theory of dynastic legitimacy more robust than that of the Ts'ao rulers, they remained ideologically defenseless against the repetition of their ritual of ministerial usurpation.

As previously mentioned, historiographical commentators late in the Southern Dynasties period and in the T'ang remained dismissive of the wider implications of Hsi Tso-ch'ih's political thought, which was at odds with the tradition of "cosmic continuity" represented by ritual abdication that was upheld by every ruling house through to the T'ang. Liu Chih-chi 劉知幾, the most prominent of these, begrudgingly noted that Hsi's work was "occasional-

<sup>53</sup> See Rogers, *Chronicle of Fu Chien*, especially p. 52. The "cultural mystique" formulation was superficially similar to Hsi's positive assessment of fidelity to the mandate of the previous legitimate dynasty; "culture" in the orthodox interpretation really referred to the traditions, more explicitly the elite family lines, inherited from the Western Chin. But the mystique idea tried to make sufficient what Hsi Tso-ch'ih had only credited as worthy, and evaded his insistence on sincere efforts towards reunification.

<sup>54</sup> The underlying military basis for the rise of Hsieh An and his clan is described in T'ien, *Tung Chin men-fa*, pp. 197–226.

ly worth a look," but still rejected his preference for Shu-Han over Wei as heterodox.<sup>55</sup> Hsi's position languished as an undercurrent to official historiography until it finally found the limelight in the Sung dynasty, when Ou-yang Hsiu delineated the same two criteria for dynastic legitimacy that Hsi Tso-ch'ih had defined.<sup>56</sup> The position received an equally strong endorsement from Ssu-ma Kuang, the compiler of the influential history *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑. The similarity between Ssu-ma's and Hsi's position has been obscured, however, since Ssu-ma Kuang chose to date the critical years 221–264 by the Wei calendar, not by Shu-Han's as Hsi had. Ssu-ma Kuang argued that, whereas he could accept the legitimacy of the Eastern Chin, since they "took up the tasks of their ancestors and could hope for restoration," he rejected Liu Pei's claim to lineal descent from the Han ruling house, and so lumped Shu-Han together with Wei and Wu as a "feudal state." In other words, his position differed from Hsi's on what was essentially a minor technical issue (the quality of Liu Pei's claim of royal ancestry), not on theoretical principles. Ssu-ma Kuang, with seven hundred years' distance from the problems of Eastern Chin, naturally had little reason to share Tso-ch'ih's preoccupation with the delegitimization of Wei. His dating of the Three Kingdoms period thus rested on convenience; since the Wei dating was traditional, he followed it, while explicitly denying that this was meant to confer legitimacy upon Wei over its rivals.<sup>57</sup>

By comparison, Chu Hsi's insistence on using the Shu-Han calendar in his redaction of Ssu-ma Kuang's work titled *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien kang-mu* 綱目 was far more politically and emotionally charged. As previously noted, Chu Hsi was concerned with defending his own Southern Sung dynasty's claim to the proper "lineage" of traditional culture against the invasion of non-Chinese peoples from the north. For him, the legitimacy of Shu-Han, as well as Eastern Chin, was a precise parallel to the Southern Sung's predicament, that of a dynasty whose "descendants grew weak and had to wander from their original seats of government."<sup>58</sup> His work demonstrates a tangible anxiety over how to characterize a dynasty that, despite being owed legitimacy by dint of sharing

the blood and the cultural spirit of its legitimate predecessor, nonetheless failed to win universal support. Chu Hsi's rather shallow and doctrinaire solution was to insist that fidelity to the mandate of a unified predecessor dynasty and preservation of its cultural traditions were sufficient to confer legitimacy, a position strongly reminiscent of the Eastern Chin's "cultural mystique" ideology. On these grounds, he redated Ssu-ma Kuang's chronicle to use the Shu-Han calendar, instead of Wei's, and explicitly claimed the legitimacy of Shu-Han.

The superficial resemblance of Chu Hsi's dating system to Hsi Tso-ch'ih's led subsequent Chinese commentators, such as those who compiled the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* imperial library, to presume that they shared ideology as well; modern Western historians have usually followed their lead, and identified Hsi as a defender of the Chin and its culture against the northern barbarian threat.<sup>59</sup> As this essay has demonstrated, such an approach misinterprets both the motivation and the rationale behind Hsi Tso-ch'ih's thought. He showed no particular concern about "barbarian" conquest from the north; he was if anything more concerned with overcoming the barbarian reputation of his own south. Furthermore, he was not an unequivocal supporter of the imperial house of his own day, having challenged its weak formulation of legitimacy, its vulnerability to ministerial insubordination, and its perpetual unwillingness to retake the north. Thus, while the use of the Shu-Han calendar was of paramount importance for Chu Hsi as a declaration of Shu-Han's legitimacy (and, by implication, Southern Sung's), it was a peripheral issue for Hsi Tso-ch'ih, a device by which to emphasize the delegitimization of Wei and the ritual abdication theory it stood for.

This contrast is made even clearer if we consider Chu Hsi's later years, when he qualified his original position and characterized Shu-Han's legitimacy as merely "residual," since they had not succeeded in unifying the dynasty. This position is much closer to Hsi Tso-ch'ih's. Chu Hsi's doctrinal evolution paralleled his political shift from unequivocally defending the Southern Sung ruling house to demanding it undertake a renewed effort to conquer the north and reunify the empire. This is just as we would expect from our understanding of the implications that this same theoretical stance had for Hsi Tso-ch'ih.<sup>60</sup>

Hsi's historical thought was a perceptive solution to the underlying political problems of his day. The effort to justify the legitimacy of "partial states"

<sup>55</sup> Liu Chih-chi, *Shih-tung* 史通 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1961) 4, p. 24; 7, p. 13b.

<sup>56</sup> Ou-yang Hsiu, "Cheng-t'ung lun 正統論," in *Ou-yang Wen-ch'ung kung wen-chi* 歐陽文忠公文集 (SPTK edn.) 16, pp. 1a–11b. See also the discussion by Hok-lam Chan in *Legitimation*, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Ssu-ma Kuang's decisive statement on legitimacy is in *TCTC* 69, pp. 2187–88; trans. Fang, *Chronicles* 1, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> I have taken this characterization from Ssu-ma Kuang's description of the Eastern Chin and its type of weak regional successor state, in *ibid.* My discussion of Chu Hsi's historiography relies on Hoyt Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1982), pp. 168–72.

<sup>59</sup> See nn. 3–5 and 51, above.

<sup>60</sup> See Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, pp. 171–72.



(Wei and Eastern Chin) over their rivals by the rubric of ritual abdication forfeited the claim to a higher basis of allegiance, that of unification, and exposed the throne to continual manipulation by powerful ministers, such as Wang Tun and Huan Wen, who hoped to claim the mandate for themselves by the devious engineering of prognostications and court rituals. By legitimating Wei and yet justifying their own seizure of the Wei throne, the Chin had established this behavior as a standard historical precedent, against which they were thereby made ideologically defenseless. In a single stroke Hsi criticized overly ambitious ministers such as Huan Wen, heightened the righteousness of the founders of the Chin, and challenged the contemporary throne to aspire to a grander and ultimately more defensible interpretation of their mandate. The subsequent misinterpretation of his views has not only obscured the vigor and subtlety of Hsi Tso-ch'ih's contribution, but also the key political and ideological fault lines of the debate about imperial authority in the early-medieval period.

*LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

<i>CS</i>	<i>Chin shu</i> 晉書
<i>SKC</i>	<i>San Kuo chih</i> 三國志
<i>SSHY</i>	Yü Chia-hsi, ed., <i>Shih-shuo hsin-yü chien-shu</i> 世說新語 箋疏
<i>TCTC</i>	<i>Tzu-chih t'ung-chien</i> 資治通鑑