

THE CASE OF WITCHCRAFT IN 91 B.C.
ITS HISTORICAL SETTING AND EFFECT ON
HAN DYNASTIC HISTORY*

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GLOUCESTER: I pray you all, tell me what they deserve
That do conspire my death with devilish plots
Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevail'd
Upon my body with their hellish charms?
HASTINGS: The tender love I bear Your Grace, my lord,
Makes me most forward in this princely presence
To doom th'offenders, whosoe'er they be:
I say, my lord, they have deserved death.
GLOUCESTER Then be your eyes the witness of their evil.
Look how I am bewitch'd; behold mine arm
Is like a blasted sapling, wither'd up:
And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch
Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.

Richard III, Act III, scene iv

Stirring events took place in Ch'ang-an, city of Eternal Tranquillity, during the years 92-90 B.C. Some of the highest in the land, including chief dignitaries of state and members of the imperial family, were executed or forced to suicide. Fears of witchcraft, possibly of an hysterical nature, resulted in the deaths of many who were suspected of such practices; and large numbers were killed in the open fighting that broke out in the city. In

* The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

- HFHD H. H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, volumes 1-3, Baltimore and London, 1938-55 (Unless stated otherwise, references are to volume 2).
- HHS *Hou Han-shu* and *Hsi Han-shu*; references are to Wang Hsien-ch'ien's edition, Ch'ang-sha 1915.
- HS *Han-shu*; references are to Wang Hsien-ch'ien's edition, Ch'ang-sha, 1900.
- SC *Shih-chi*; references are to *Shiki kaichū kōshō*, edited by Takigawa Kametarō, Tokyo 1932-34.
- Swann N. L. Swann, *Food and Money in Ancient China*, Princeton 1950.
- YTL *Yen-t'ieh lun*; references are to Wang Li-ch'i 王利器, *Yen-t'ieh lun chiao-chu* 校注, Shanghai 1958.

the name of justice men and women were sentenced to severe punishments, and senior officials tried in vain to persuade the emperor to relax and rule with a greater measure of clemency. It was a time of acute danger for the Han dynasty; the survival of the imperial house was threatened by the problem of the imperial succession; there was dissatisfaction expressed against the authority of the government and acts of rebellion had taken place; and the heavy expenditure of the previous years had depleted the Han treasuries. Some measure of stability followed the death of Wu ti in 87 and his succession by an infant son. At the same time there was an institutional change of no small significance. Three senior officials were appointed to act as members of a regency, and took all important decisions of state, to the exclusion of the responsibility vested hitherto in the Chancellor, the most senior official of duly established government.

These incidents formed more than a part of a sordid and unimportant political intrigue. They sprang from dynastic causes and possibly affected the choice of policies of state; they demonstrate the strength of the contemporary reaction to witchcraft and the political and social instability of the time; and while shedding some light on a series of dynastic plots and political intrigues that took place from time to time until 74, they explain the selection of the candidates who became emperors of Han China in 87 and, on two occasions, in 74. Above all, the incidents demonstrate that whatever lip-service was paid in edict or official pronouncement to the superior virtues of Confucian values, decisions of state were frequently dictated by ambition, jealousy or fear. In addition the incidents show how the formal provisions of Han institutions could be invoked as a means of carrying through decisions of a personal nature.

I. Dynastic Incidents 92-88

In November¹ to December 92, the emperor ordered cavalrymen to carry out a search of the Shang-lin 上林 Park, a large pleasure ground including ornamental waterways, shrines for the worship of various spirits and a hunting park.² The object of the search is not specified, and it may have included articles used in witchcraft as well as individuals such as traitors, criminals or practisers of sorcery. To prevent the escape of such persons the gates of Ch'ang-an were closed, and it was only after ten days that the search was brought to an end. The *Han-shu* continues immediately with the information that the witchcraft case arose, and it seems likely, if not certain, that the search was intended to disclose evidence of just such practices.

In February 91 two of the most senior officials of government were

¹ Dates are given in the usual way, i.e. as corresponding with the western calendar, and attention is drawn to any significance that a date may bear according to Han calendrical reckoning.

² HS 6:36b; HFHD, 113.

thrown into prison and died.³ These were Kung-sun Ho 公孫賀 and his son Kung-sun Ching-sheng 敬聲. Since 103 Ho had held the office of *ch'eng-hsiang* 丞相 or chancellor. This was the highest ranking office of state, and he held supreme responsibility, below the emperor, for the conduct of government. On his appointment to that office his son Ching-sheng had succeeded him as *t'ai-pu* 太僕, or superintendent of transport,⁴ and had thus become one of the nine ministers of state who ranked below the chancellor and carried direct responsibility for one of the specialist tasks of government. The high status and power enjoyed by these men was enhanced by their relationship to Wu ti's principal consort the empress Wei 衛; for Kung-sun Ho, the chancellor, was married to one of her sisters.

The fall of these two highly placed officials involved other members of the empress's family; and in addition it was linked with the question of witchcraft. Kung-sun Ching-sheng had been accused of embezzling a large sum of money from funds allocated to the northern army of Ch'ang-an. In the course of the case a man who had been imprisoned for acting with scant respect to the provisions of government sent in a written accusation. Kung-sun Ching-sheng was alleged to have had illicit sexual relations with the princess Yang-shih 陽石, who was a daughter of Wu ti and the empress Wei and thus his own cousin. In addition he was accused of having shamans offer prayers and express curses against the emperor, and of having manikins buried with similar intent near the road at Kan-ch'üan 甘泉, where Wu ti had a summer retreat.⁵

The case was proved and both men met their deaths. On a day corresponding with 14 April 91,⁶ Liu Ch'u-li 劉屈氂 was appointed chancellor in place of Kung-sun Ho. The intention had evidently been to follow an earlier precedent of Han government by dividing this high office between two men, so as to avoid reposing excessive authority in a single individual. For this reason Liu was nominated Chancellor of the Left, but there is in fact no record of the simultaneous appointment of a Chancellor of the Right. Liu Ch'u-li was a nephew of Wu ti; and, as will be shown later, he was related to another imperial consort, rival to the empress Wei.

The family of the empress Wei suffered a further blow in the intercalary

³ HS 6:36b, HFHD, 114; HS 63:1b; HS 66:1a *et seq.*

⁴ I am using, on an experimental basis, a new set of equivalent terms for rendering Han titles, and the corresponding terms adopted by Dubs will be given in the notes. He renders *t'ai-p'u* as Grand Coachman.

⁵ HS 66:1b *et seq.*

⁶ There is some doubt about the exact date. HS 19B:25b dates Kung-sun Ho's death in prison on the day *jen-shen* 壬甲 of the fourth month, which however did not include that day, and Liu's appointment as chancellor on the day *ting-ssu* 丁巳 in the fifth month (13 June). HS 6:36b (HFHD, 114) dates Ho's death in the first month, and HS 66:2a gives Liu's appointment in the spring. HS 15A:58b and SC 22:28 give *ting-ssu* in the third month (14 April) for Liu's appointment and the conferment on him of a nobility.

month, i.e. June to July 91.⁷ The princess Yang-shih, with whom, as has been seen, Kung-sun Ho's name had been linked, was impeached for practising witchcraft and put to death; the same fate overtook her sister the princess Chu-i 諸邑.⁸

During the summer Wu ti, now aged 66, duly travelled to Kan-ch'üan, where he fell ill, and one of the chief actors of the drama, Chiang Ch'ung 江充, makes his entry.⁹ Earlier in his career he had exposed a case of immorality and incest and brought about the death of a distant relative of the emperor.¹⁰ At court he had impressed Wu ti as being a man of character, and at his own request he had been sent on a mission to the Hsiung-nu. On return he had been put in charge of the suppression of banditry and the investigation of extravagant living in the metropolitan area. The rigorous and impartial way in which he had brought forward cases that involved men of high status or relatives of the imperial family had commended itself to the emperor; and Wu ti was convinced that Chiang Ch'ung was completely loyal, law-abiding and incorruptible. In 93 he had been appointed to the post of *shui-heng tu-wei* 水衡都尉 which carried financial responsibilities and which ranked just below the nine chief ministers of state. In addition, the office was responsible for the Shang-lin Park,¹¹ and it is therefore possible that Chiang Ch'ung had been concerned with the search conducted in 92. It seems clear that he was a man of some power who was able to protect his clients from the processes of the law.

In an earlier incident Chiang Ch'ung had aroused the enmity of the empress Wei's family. He had found a servant of the heir apparent, i.e. the son of the empress, infringing the rules that governed the use of the imperial highway, and he had duly brought the case to the notice of the emperor. Seeing Wu ti lying ill at Kan-ch'üan, Chiang Ch'ung realised that the heir apparent would probably exact reprisals for this incident once he had acceded as emperor. Chiang now submitted to Wu ti that his illness had been brought about by witchcraft; and, as he had probably expected, he was put in charge of an investigation. In the work of this tribunal he was assisted by Han Yüeh 韓說, who held the post of *kuang-lu-hsün* 光祿勳, or superintendent of the palace.¹² This ranked as one of the nine chief

⁷ HS 6:37a, HFHD, 114; HS 45:13a; HS 63:1b

⁸ HS 63:2a states that Wei K'ang 伉 suffered a similar fate, but Wang Hsien-ch'ien shows that this was not so. See HS 18:8a.

⁹ HS 45:11a.

¹⁰ This was the case of Liu P'eng-tsu 劉彭祖 king of Chao, in April-May 92. A half-brother of Wu ti, he had been nominated king of Kuang-ch'üan 廣川 in 155, being moved to Chao 趙 four years later. At his death in 92 he had thus successfully held a kingdom for 63 years. His son Tan 丹, who was heir apparent to the kingdom, had been accused by Chiang Ch'ung of incest and immorality and had been brought to trial and put to death; see HS 6:36b, HFHD, 113; HS 45:11a.

¹¹ HS 19A:20a.

¹² Dubs: Superintendent of the Imperial Household.

ministers, and the incumbent controlled certain guards units. Chiang Ch'ung was also helped by Chang Kan 章犢 and Su Wen 蘇文.

Events now moved towards a climax. Chiang Ch'ung had foreign shamans, probably from central Asia, dig the ground to look for manikins, and a variety of steps were taken to prove that witchcraft had been practised.¹³ As yet it seems that Chiang Ch'ung was not directing his efforts so as to have the heir apparent involved, but so as to engender an atmosphere of fear and distrust; and in this endeavour he was eminently successful. Members of the population were accusing each other of witchcraft; officials immediately had them brought up on charges of *ta-mi wu-tao* 大逆無道, or gross immorality;¹⁴ and before the incident was over, people had been put to death in large numbers, by the ten thousand according to the *Han-shu*. The victims included the famous generals Kung-sun Ao 公孫敖 (no relative of Kung-sun Ho) and Chao P'o-nu 趙破奴, as well as the family of Li Kuang-li, who will feature below.¹⁵

Chiang Ch'ung was now able to exploit the situation to the detriment of the Wei family. Wu ti, old and impressionable, suspected all around him of witchcraft and imprecation, and none dared protest that a man was innocent. Realising where Wu ti's thoughts lay, Chiang Ch'ung had it reported that there had been an emanation of witchcraft inside the palace, and he proceeded to investigate the situation there. He started by examining those of the palace women folk whose charms had all but lost their attraction for the emperor; by stages he reached the empress; and he then had men dig for evidence of witchcraft in the heir apparent's palace, and human images in wood were duly found.¹⁶

Wu ti was still away from Ch'ang-an. Fearing that he could not clear himself of suspicion, the heir apparent consulted Shih Te 石德 a member of his staff, who advised him to take immediate action. So he had the necessary documents drawn up and sent a commission to arrest Chiang Ch'ung and his associates. Han Yüeh, who doubted whether the commission possessed the requisite authority to arrest him, was killed but Chang Kan managed to escape to Kan-ch'üan, wounded. The heir apparent then informed his mother, the empress, of the situation, so that guards could be called out and weapons issued from the armouries of the palace. He gave out to officials that Chiang Ch'ung had staged a revolt, and on 1 September he had him executed, attending the scene in person and reviling him for his conduct in the past. He also had the shamans burnt to death in the Shang-lin Park.

¹³ HS 45:13b; HS 63:2a. For the actual steps taken see pp. 193f.

¹⁴ See Hulswé, *Remnants of Han Law*, Leiden 1955, pp. 156f where the term is rendered, more precisely, as great refractoriness (*ta-mi*) and impiety (*pu-tao*).

¹⁵ HS 55:18b; HS 55:20a; HS 94A: 25b. For the possibility that K'ung An-kuo 孔安國 or his family were involved, with a subsequent effect on scholastic history, see HS 36:33a and 88:14b.

¹⁶ HS 45:13b; HS 63:2a.

Open fighting now broke out in Ch'ang-an between the heir apparent and the emperor.¹⁷ At the death of Chiang Ch'ung, some of the heir apparent's forces had made their way into the chancellor's office. Liu Ch'u-li had managed to escape, alone, and bereft of the insignia of his office. His assistant rode post-haste to Kan-ch'üan to give the emperor the news, and Wu ti expostulated at the chancellor's feeble behaviour. Sending orders for the arrest of the rebels, the avoidance of bloodshed and the closure of the city gates so as to prevent the escape of the heir, Wu ti soon arrived back at Ch'ang-an. From the Chien-chang 建章 palace, which lay beyond the western wall of the city, he had troops called up from the neighbouring counties of the metropolitan area and put under the command of the senior officials of state. For his part the heir apparent, who lacked the authority to do so, had an amnesty proclaimed for criminals and convicts in Ch'ang-an. Arms were issued to them from the state armouries and they were put under the command of Shih Te and Chang Kuang 張光. The heir apparent also tried to call out a force of central Asian cavalry from local garrisons, but the attempt was foiled by Ma T'ung 馬通, who took charge of the force and brought it into the city to support the emperor. Ma T'ung also secured the loyalty of Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng 商丘成, one of the nine chief ministers who held the post of *ta-hung-lu* 大鴻臚 or superintendent of state visits.¹⁸

A further incident occurred at this time in which the historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien may have been concerned. The heir apparent tried to persuade Jen An 任安, inspector of the northern armies in Ch'ang-an, to send out troops in his support. Jen An firmly closed the gates of the barracks, refusing to comply with the request. Nonetheless he was later to be accused by Wu ti of waiting on events and duplicity, and he was executed at the emperor's orders.¹⁹ The heir apparent withdrew after this rebuff and rounded up support from the city.

Five days of fighting followed; according to the *Han-shu*²⁰ the dead were numbered by the ten thousand, and the gutters of Ch'ang-an's streets flowed with blood; and as the forces of the chancellor, who fought for Wu ti, grew in strength, those of the heir apparent were overcome. On 9 September, nine days after Chiang Ch'ung had been put to death by the heir apparent, Wu ti had officers sent to take custody of the empress Wei's insignia and she took her life. On the same day the heir apparent contrived to escape from Ch'ang-an and to lie up in hiding. But before long his presence was revealed, and on 30 September he followed his mother's

¹⁷ HS 6:37a, HFHD, 114; HS 63:3a; HS 66:3a.

¹⁸ Dubs: Grand Herald.

¹⁹ HS 66:4a; for the exchange of correspondence between Jen An and Ssu-ma Ch'ien and the difficulties of dating the letters, see Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques*, vol. I, xlii *et seq.*; and Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien Grand Historian of China*, New York 1958, pp. 194f.

²⁰ HS 6:37a, HFHD, 114; HS 63:4b; HS 97A:12b.

example. His three sons and one daughter also died; there survived one grandson, still a babe in arms, who was in due course to become the emperor Hsüan ti.²¹

There was a further casualty at this time of some importance. The chancellor's assistant, who had been responsible for closing the city gates, had been accused of negligence, thereby allowing the heir apparent to escape. The chancellor had decided to have him executed, but was persuaded to release him, pending official permission to do so. Pao Sheng-chih 暴勝之, who had stayed the chancellor's hand, held the office of *yü-shih ta-fu* 御史大夫 or Imperial counsellor,²² which was second in importance only to that of the chancellor; on Wu ti's fury that an officer who had indulged the rebels had not been punished, Pao Sheng-chih committed suicide.

Between February and the end of September 91, the Wei empress and her family had thus suffered virtual extinction. At court the atmosphere must surely have been charged with uncertainty and distrust; for, for the first time since 122, there was no duly nominated heir to succeed the emperor. The next development, which was to bring about the execution of a chancellor, started in April to May 90.²³

The chancellor was married to a daughter of Li Kuang-li 李廣利, brother of a former deeply beloved concubine of Wu ti. Li Kuang-li had served with some distinction, if not complete success, in the army, leading campaigns that had penetrated deeply into central Asia.²⁴ In the third month of 90 (April to May) he was sent off on a further expedition, in which Ma T'ung and Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng also held commands. According to custom, the chancellor, i.e. Li Kuang-li's son-in-law, accompanied the troops as far as the bridge over the Wei river, to wish the expedition all success. Li Kuang-li took the opportunity to suggest that his own nephew, i.e. Liu Po 博, son of the Lady Li and cousin of the chancellor's wife, should be nominated as heir apparent. The chancellor fell in with the suggestion. We are not informed of what steps, if any, were taken, or whether news of this arrangement leaked out; but the *Han-shu* points out that the witchcraft scandal was then at its height. It was now reported that the chancellor's wife had arranged for shamans to curse the emperor, and Li Kuang-li was involved in a charge of attempting to establish his nephew as emperor. The case came up for trial, and a charge of gross immorality (*ta-ni pu-tao*) was proved. On 18 July, Liu Ch'u-li was executed publicly, and his wife and children's heads were displayed in one of Ch'ang-an's streets. Li Kuang-li's family

²¹ HS 8:1a, HFHD, 199; HS 63:5b.

²² Dubs: Imperial Clerk Grandee, or Grandee Secretary.

²³ HS 66:4b.

²⁴ E.g., the campaigns against Ta-yüan of 104-101, and the expeditions against the Hsiung-nu of 99, 97.

were taken into custody, and Li Kuang-li himself, now on campaign surrendered to the Hsiung-nu.

This event marks a reaction in favour of the Wei family which can actually be traced further back.²⁵ As early as September 91, before the death of the heir apparent, a minor local dignitary named Ling-hu Mao²⁶ 令狐茂 submitted a statement to the emperor, suggesting that the motives for the heir apparent's murder of Chiang Ch'ung had been fear rather than disloyalty, and alluding, somewhat pointedly, to the previous occasion when Chiang Ch'ung's machinations had resulted in the accusation and death of an heir to a kingdom.²⁷ After the heir apparent's suicide, on 30 September 91, rewards were duly bestowed on those who had taken part in that incident; but we then read²⁸ "Some time later many cases of witchcraft were failing to gain credence. The emperor realised that his heir had been frightened and that he had not harboured treacherous intentions."

At this juncture T'ien Ch'ien-ch'iu 田千秋 submitted a memorial to the throne seeking to demonstrate the innocence of the heir apparent.²⁹ Wu ti was clearly impressed, and showed his change of heart by appointing T'ien to be superintendent of state visits (*ta-hung-lu*). This appointment was dated sometime in 90; it was quite exceptional, in so far as T'ien had not served in any other official capacity, and he now, suddenly, found himself one of the nine chief ministers of state. Furthermore on 27 July 89, T'ien was promoted to the post of chancellor, that had been vacant since the execution of Liu Ch'u-li on 18 July 90.³⁰ The family of Chiang Ch'ung were punished for his actions, together with Su Wen and those men who had taken part in encompassing the death of the heir. Wu ti's remorse was further shown by his erection of the Ssu-tzu 思子 palace, so named as the palace wherein he would think of his son and pray for the return of his spirit; and a terrace was built with the same intention. The final act in the re-instatement of the Wei family took place after the accession of Hsüan ti, their sole survivor, in 74 B.C. Members of the family who had succumbed during the troubles were reburied in positions of honour, with a full provision of plantations, an establishment of retainers and revenue, to ensure that the proper services were paid to their souls.

In the meantime events had affected other leading men of the day. It will be recalled that before the fighting actually broke out in Ch'ang-an, two officers, Ma T'ung and Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng had shown themselves loyal to Wu ti and against the heir apparent. On 12 September, when the fight was over, they were duly ennobled as a reward for their services. For

²⁵ HS 63:3a.

²⁶ For this name see the note in HS 63:3a.

²⁷ See note 10 above.

²⁸ HS 63:5a.

²⁹ HS 66:5a. T'ien's surname was originally Chü 車.

³⁰ HS 19B:26a.

Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng the citation read³¹ "In his capacity of superintendent of state visits (*ta-hung-lu*) he attacked the heir apparent of the Wei family and fought valiantly without harbouring thoughts of treason." Ma T'ung, whose nobility was considerably larger than that of Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng,³² received his award because "as a courtier in attendance at the palace he brought out troops to attack the rebel Ju Hou 如侯".³³

In October–November 91 Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng was appointed to the post of imperial counsellor, which had become vacant on the suicide of Pao Sheng-chih.³⁴ In the following April–May he and Ma T'ung held commands in the expedition that was sent into central Asia under the supreme command of Li Kuang-li; and in the course of the campaign they were both more successful than Li Kuang-li himself, who, it will be recalled, surrendered to the enemy.³⁵ Unlike Li Kuang-li, both Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng and Ma T'ung survived the reaction that set in in favour of the Wei family and which is marked by the execution of Liu Ch'u-li on 18 July 90. But by the time of Wu ti's death, early in 87, both had met a violent end.

There are two accounts of the death of Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng in the *Han-shu*. According to the entry which records the history of his nobility,³⁶ in 87 he was brought up on a charge that, as *chan-shih* 詹事, he had been in attendance at the ancestral shrine of Wen ti; and being drunk in the ceremonial hall had given voice to a highly unsuitable song; being charged with *pu-ching* 不敬 or irreverence³⁷ he committed suicide. This is somewhat puzzling. The *chan-shih*, sometimes rendered Supplier, was an officer attached to the household of the heir apparent, but, as we know, there was no nominated heir at this time; and there is no reference to Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng's appointment to the post. According to the second account, which is perhaps a little more convincing, he was charged as imperial counsellor with the crime of cursing the emperor, and he duly committed suicide.³⁸ It may be noted that he was replaced as imperial counsellor by the famous statesman Sang Hung-yang 桑弘羊, whose appointment was dated on 17 March 87—precisely ten days before Wu ti's death.³⁹

Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng's suicide is dated⁴⁰ in July–August 88, and at just this time Ma T'ung and his brother Ma Ho-luo 何羅 staged an unsuccessful attempt to murder the emperor, who was once more at Kan-ch'üan. Ma

³¹ HS 17:23b.

³² Shang-ch'iu Ch'eng's nobility allowed him to collect taxation from 2120 households, whereas that given to Ma T'ung allowed him to do so for 4870 households.

³³ HS 17:24a. For Ju Hou's part in supporting the heir apparent, see HS 66:4a.

³⁴ HS 19B:25b.

³⁵ HS 6:37b, HFHD, 116; HS 17:23a; HS 61:14a; HS 94A:25a; HS 96B:30a.

³⁶ HS 17:23b.

³⁷ See Hulsewé, *ibid.*, pp. 156f., where *pu-ching* is rendered as *nefas*.

³⁸ HS 19B:25b.

³⁹ HS 19B:26b.

⁴⁰ HS 6:38b, HFHD, 118.

Ho-luo had been on terms of friendship with Chiang Ch'ung; and the Ma brothers were now frightened that they would be penalised as a result of the turn of fortune against Chiang and in favour of the late heir apparent. In the event the plot was foiled and both brothers were executed, sometime in 88.⁴¹

The events of 92-90 and later show in high relief the contrast between the ideal of government by Confucian precept and moral principle and the practice of political and dynastic manoeuvre, based on motives of ambition and jealousy. The compiler of the *Han-shu*⁴² affirms by way of comment that the causes of the witchcraft case lay far deeper than the machinations of a single individual, Chiang Ch'ung. The compiler points out that the whole life of the heir apparent had been passed in an atmosphere coloured by warfare; and he takes note of the dangers of instability and violence that are attendant on an habitual resort to fighting. He also commends the action of T'ien Ch'ien-ch'iu, who was not a man of outstanding intelligence, in clarifying the witchcraft issue and vindicating the late heir apparent; by this action he had realised the value of eliminating evil and of damming the source of instability.

These events had considerable repercussions on the imperial succession, and it is not altogether impossible that the plot of the Ma brothers in 88 was part of a further attempt to restore the fortunes of the Li family at the expense of those who were associated with the now defunct Wei family. To understand these implications fully, it is necessary to review the whole situation at Wu ti's palaces together with the rivalries that existed between the families of different consorts.

II. Wu ti's principal consorts and their sons

The institutions of the Han imperial house provided for the nomination of one of the emperor's consorts as empress, i.e. *huang-hou* 皇后 and one of his sons as heir apparent, i.e. *t'ai-tzu* 太子. Apart from such cases the term *hou* was used only in titles given to the emperor's mother or grandmother. In the same way as an empress or heir apparent could be nominated, so could they also be removed from their exalted positions by the emperor's personal decree; and although there was no institutional necessity which demanded that one of the emperor's consorts should be nominated as empress, it was clearly in the interests of dynastic stability that there should be one, and that her son should be duly recognized as the successor to the throne. For the imperial palaces housed a large establishment of consorts or concubines. In general these were termed *fu-jen* 夫人, but particular ones could be, and often were, distinguished by a further title which conveyed a mark of status. Thus, by the end of the western Han period there were no

⁴¹ HS 6:38b, HFHD, 118. According to this passage the brothers were executed in 88 sixth month (i.e. July-August). HS 17:24a gives 87.

⁴² HS 63:22b.

less than 14 types of consort, and the *Han-shu* provides a set of equivalent symbols, i.e., titles in the civil service and titles in the hierarchic scale of orders of rank, whereby the position of the women could be assessed.⁴³ Except for the title *chao-i* 昭儀 which was introduced under Yüan ti (48-33), the other titles were all in use by Wu ti's time. Nominations of women as empresses or of sons as heirs apparent formed occasions of congratulation and rejoicing in Ch'ang-an, and were often marked by imperial bounties and a general conferment of *chüeh* 爵 or orders of aristocratic rank to certain members of the population.⁴⁴

In this situation rivalries and jealousies could be expected to flourish at a court where supreme authority for government and the conduct of justice was imposed by heaven in the emperor. Different balances of power could easily develop, according to the age of the emperor, the strength of character of his womenfolk or the political agility of their relatives. An infant emperor could be controlled by other parties, as happened during the eastern Han period on several notorious occasions; an emperor might wish to reward a favourite consort by conferring high-ranking civil or military office on her next of kin; alternatively, a statesman whose protégée had successfully won the emperor's heart might expect to enhance his family's position and wealth accordingly, and to ensure their safety under the dispensation of the next emperor.

These situations had arisen before Wu ti's time and were to be seen again in a somewhat notorious way at the close of the western Han period. For Wu ti's reign, account must be taken of six principal consorts and five sons.⁴⁵

(1) Wu ti's first empress, whose surname was Ch'en 陳,⁴⁶ had become his wife while he was still heir apparent, and she was duly nominated empress in 141. Having failed to bear Wu ti a son, and being highly jealous of the success of the Wei family's consort in this respect, she did her best to remedy her deficiency by various artifices. In 130 one of her daughters was charged with practising witchcraft on her behalf and of having curses uttered. The empress was dismissed from her position and a total of 300 persons who were involved in the case were executed.⁴⁷

(2) Wei Tzu-fu, 衛子夫, who was a professional singer, was presented to Wu ti several years after his accession, when he still had no son.⁴⁸ She

⁴³ HS 97A:2a. See Loewe, *The Orders of Aristocratic Rank of Han China*, *T'oung Pao* XLVIII, 1-3, p. 162.

⁴⁴ Loewe, *ibid.*, p. 116f.

⁴⁵ It is not possible to compile a complete list of the women who enjoyed the favours of Wu ti (e.g., see stray references such as that to Yin Chieh-yü 尹婕妤 in HS 97A:12a and SC 49:27).

⁴⁶ HS 97A:10b.

⁴⁷ HS 59:2a.

⁴⁸ HS 97A:11a.

bore him three daughters, and, in 128 when he was 29 years old, a son who was named Chü 據. After this event Wei Tzu-fu was proclaimed empress; her brother Wei Ch'ing 青 had been summoned for service, and from 129 onwards he commanded a series of expeditions against the Hsiung-nu, culminating in the victorious campaigns of 119. He had been granted a nobility in 127, and in 124 his three sons were similarly honoured, as a mark of their father's achievements.⁴⁹

Huo Ch'ü-ping 霍去病 was another relative of the empress Wei whose position was advanced thanks to the relationship. He was her nephew, and half-brother of Huo Kuang 光 who features prominently in Han history towards the end of Wu ti's reign and afterwards. Like Wei Ch'ing, Huo Ch'ü-ping was appointed to a high military command and fought successfully against the Hsiung-nu and in the north-west. He received his nobility in 123. In the following year, on a day corresponding with 31 May 122, the empress' son Chü was proclaimed heir apparent, and Chü's own first son was born in 113. The strength of the family may have been somewhat impaired by the deaths of Huo Ch'ü-ping in 116 and Wei Ch'ing ten years later,⁵⁰ although Huo Kuang was at this time steadily gathering influence at the capital.

Reference has been made above to a further relative of the Empress Wei who played a prominent part in Han history. Kung-sun Ho, whose family came from the north-west, was married to a sister of Wei Tzu-fu. As early as 135 he had been appointed *t'ai-p'u*, or superintendent of transport, and he held this position for 33 years until his promotion to be chancellor. He saw active service in the campaigns of 133, 129, 124, 123 and 119, and was ennobled in 124. In 112 he was deprived of that honour together with a large number of his peers, but he received a nobility for the second time on his appointment as chancellor in 103.⁵¹

It has been noted that after the virtual elimination of the Wei family in 91-90, their re-instatement came about only after the accession of Hsüan-ti in 74.⁵² Hsüan-ti was himself the grandson of the heir apparent Chü who had committed suicide in 91, and it was thanks only to good luck and human kindness that he survived the troubles and scandals of those years. He was a few months old when the witchcraft hunt broke out, but was nonetheless charged with complicity and thrown into prison. Thanks to the humanity of Ping Chi 郗吉, who was in charge of part of the official investigation, he was saved from death and brought up privately, out of harm's way.⁵³

(3) Li Fu-jen 李夫人 or the Lady Li⁵⁴ was brought to Wu ti's attention as an entertainer and younger sister of Li Yen-nien 延年. The latter was an expert musician and composer who had suffered the punishment of castration after some involvement with the laws. Serving as a eunuch in the palace he pleased the emperor with the musical compositions that he made for religious ceremonies. In due course his sister bore Wu ti a son, named Po 博; Li Yen-nien was given an official post and achieved a position of affection and personal influence over Wu ti. However, after being concerned with disturbances of the eunuchs he lost this advantage, and after the death of his sister both he and his younger brother were put to death. In the meantime Li Fu-jen's son had been created king of Ch'ang-i 昌邑 in 100. The precise date of her death is not given, but we are told that Wu ti was heart-broken. He had her portrait on display at Kan-ch'üan, and the *Han-shu* carries the famous story of a magician's attempt to have her ghost appear before him. The *Han-shu* also includes⁵⁵ the text of a *fu* which Wu ti is said to have composed to express the intensity of his grief.

Reference has been made above to an attempt made by Liu Ch'u-li and Li Kuang-li to have Liu Po, king of Ch'ang-i, nominated as heir apparent, some time between May and July 90. Liu Po himself died soon afterwards, either in 88 or 86,⁵⁶ and was succeeded by his son Ho; it will be shown later that Ho, a descendant of the Lady Li, was actually put on the throne as emperor for 27 days in 74.

In the meantime one member at least of Lady Li's family had received material advantage from the hold that her affections had gained on the emperor. Her brother Li Kuang-li was given a nobility in 101, after successful service in the field. In 104 he had been nominated to lead the most ambitious expedition yet launched under Wu ti, which was to attack Ta-yüan 大宛 (Ferghana); in the event he was successful, but not before he had had to retire to Tun-huang to collect reinforcements. In connection with this incident the author of the *Han-shu* permits himself a comment of a biased or at least a subjective nature.⁵⁷ Li's appointment to command the expedition is described as being due to Wu ti's wish to bestow noble rank on the family of his favourite concubine Li; and it is noticeable that similar remarks, with an implication that military skill was a matter of secondary importance, are not recorded in connexion with the appointments of Wei Ch'ing or Huo Ch'ü-ping. Wu ti's anger at Li Kuang-li's failure to reach his

⁵⁴ HS 14:21a; HS 93:4a; HS 97A:12b.

⁵⁵ HS 97A:14a.

⁵⁶ HS 6:38b, HFHD, 118, records his death for the first month of hou-yüan 後元, first year, i.e. January to February 88. However, HS 14:21a and HS 63:17b write that he died 11 years after his accession in 97, i.e. in 86, and they specify 86 as the year of Liu Ho's accession. From (4) below, it would seem that HS 97A:16b implies that Liu Po died in 88.

⁵⁷ HS 61:9b.

⁴⁹ HS 18:8a.

⁵⁰ HS 6:30a, HFHD, 96 and HS 19B:22a give this in 106, but according to the succession of the nobility in HS 18:8a, Wei Ch'ing died in 104.

⁵¹ HS 17:2b.

⁵² HS 97A:12b.

⁵³ HS 74:7a; HS 97A:19b.

objective immediately⁵⁸ may conceivably have been coloured by the feeling that his favourite had let him down. It will be recalled that Liu Ch'ü-li, who held the office of chancellor from April 91 to July 90, when the Wei family was in eclipse, was the son-in-law of Li Kuang-li.

After Wu ti's death the Lady Li was posthumously given the title of Hsiao Wu huang-hou, empress of the pious Wu. This title was given after the succession problem had been solved and a descendant of neither the Wei nor the Li family had actually become emperor. The move may perhaps be explained as part of Huo Kuang's highly circumspect policy, which was intended to preserve a façade of unity and to prevent the further outbreak of jealousies.

(4) The third and last consort of Wu ti to receive the title *huang-hou* was named Chao 趙,⁵⁹ and, as with Lady Li, the title was given posthumously. During her lifetime, and when she was Wu ti's favourite, she had borne the title *chieh-yü* 婕妤, which ranked at that time at the head of the titles of concubines. Nothing is told of her forebears, other than the fact that her father had been indicted for an offence and castrated by way of punishment, and that he had then served at court as a eunuch. A son who was born to Miss Chao in 94 was being considered for the succession when he was five or six years old, i.e. 89-88. At this time the heir apparent of the Wei family had recently met his death and the king of Ch'ang-i had also, in all probability, died; and it was evidently recognized that two other sons of Wu ti, who will be mentioned shortly, were not to be considered as candidates. The boy, who was called Fu-ling 弗陵, was actually made heir apparent after the death of his mother. He was then aged eight, and simultaneously with his nomination, Huo Kuang was promoted by the grant of the title *ta-ssu-ma ta-chiang-chün* 大司馬大將軍 or Supreme commander and General, and given a valedictory decree from Wu ti ordering him to assume the regency. Within two days Wu ti was dead, and Fu-ling, better known under his posthumous title of Chao ti, acceded. A nobility was posthumously conferred on the late father of the new emperor, and gifts were bestowed on other relatives of the Chao family. However, no member of the family is known to have risen to prominence in dynastic or political affairs.

(5) The origins of Wang Fu-jen 王夫人 or the Lady Wang, are untraced.⁶⁰ She bore Wu ti a son, Hung 閔, who was created king of Ch'i 齊 in 117, dying eight years later without a successor. There do not appear to have been any family connexions affecting dynastic or political developments.

(6) A second favourite of Wu ti whose surname was Li 李 is distinguished from Li Fu-jen, the Lady Li, by the title *i* 姬.⁶¹ She bore Wu ti

⁵⁸ HS 61:10a.

⁵⁹ HS 7:1a, HFHD, 151; HS 97A:16a.

⁶⁰ HS 14:20; HS 63:7.

⁶¹ HS 63:8b; HS 68:1b; HS 97A:16b.

two sons, called Tan 且 and Hsü 胥, who were created kings of Yen 燕 and Kuang-ling 廣陵 respectively in 117. According to a statement which appears twice in the *Han-shu*,⁶² they had been behaving in a somewhat abandoned way by the time when the succession problem arose in 91-90.

The *Han-shu* does not provide supporting evidence for this judgment of Tan's character, but tells a long tale of Tan's misplaced and abortive hopes for the succession; of his hints that he should be considered as a candidate; and, finally, of two plots in which he tried to attain this objective. On the death of Hung, king of Ch'i, in 110, Tan had taken steps to indicate to Wu ti that he should become his successor, but Wu ti had rejected the overture. The incident is a little puzzling, as by now Prince Chü had been nominated as heir for a dozen years. Nothing is recorded of Tan's actions or reactions during the scandals of 91-90, but in 87 he was evidently dissatisfied with the circumstances of Wu ti's death and Chao ti's accession. His enquiries proved fruitless, but he submitted a memorial to the throne, praising Wu ti's achievements and suggesting the establishment of shrines in his honour in the prefectures of the empire. In this way he was doubtless insinuating that he possessed superior feelings of duty towards the late emperor as compared with those of Chao ti; and it is noteworthy that on a later occasion he went so far as to allege that Chao ti was no son of Wu ti.⁶³ By this time Huo Kuang was in sole charge of the government. He rejected the memorial but offered Tan a gift of thirty million cash and a large nobility. Furious at the insult, Tan re-iterated that he possessed the true qualifications to be emperor, and now proceeded to scheme for Chao ti's replacement. This was the first of two plots in which Tan was involved, and on this occasion he succeeded in evading responsibility and fastening this on Liu Tse 劉澤.⁶⁴ He claimed that he had received special authority from Wu ti to take military precautions against any eventuality; and he immediately took such steps as summoning dissident elements, collecting revenue, manufacturing arms and armour from metals,⁶⁵ reviewing infantry, and cavalry and raising his own military banners. Such steps were tantamount to a declaration of rebellion, and fifteen officials who dared to remonstrate with Tan were put to death. However, news of the plot leaked out and Liu Tse was executed, in September 86.⁶⁶ In Tan's second plot, which was staged in 80, he was forced to suicide.⁶⁷ (see p. 186 below).

⁶² HS 68:1b and HS 97A:16b.

⁶³ HS 63:10a.

⁶⁴ HS 63:9a. Liu Tse was the great-grandson of one of Kao tsu's sons who had been created king of Ch'i 齊 in 201. This line died out in 126 and the kingdom of Ch'i was re-created for Wu ti's son Hung in 117; HS 14:6a and HS 14:20a.

⁶⁵ At this time the iron industry was under the control of a monopoly of state; hence independent manufacture of such goods was not authorized.

⁶⁶ HS 7:3a, HFHD, 155.

⁶⁷ HS 7:6b, HFHD, 164; HS 63:14a.

Hsü, the other son of the concubine Li, was not effectively involved in dynastic intrigues or political disturbances during the reign of Wu ti or Chao ti, but died eventually by his own hand in 54.⁶⁸ He is said to have been addicted to amusements and to have been capable of feats of strength. As his behaviour was unprincipled, he failed to qualify as a candidate to succeed Wu ti;⁶⁹ and although he was the sole surviving son of Wu ti at the time of Chao ti's death in 74, again he could not be considered.⁷⁰ We shall meet Hsü again in connexion with the utterance of curses against the emperor.

III. Summary of dynastic events 91-86

An attempt may now be made to summarize the foregoing somewhat tangled web of incident, treason and plot. Between February and September 91, all the leading personalities of the Wei family had been put to death, except for Huo Kuang. There had been a series of events which included the exploitation of public fear of witchcraft, and bloody fighting in Ch'ang-an between forces supporting the emperor and those collected by the heir apparent. During this process two members of the Li family rose to prominence, but the attempt in May 90 to have their own nominee declared heir apparent was foiled. By July 90 a reaction had set in and the most powerful member of the Li family group was executed. In 88 an unsuccessful attempt was made on Wu ti's life by officers who had stood by him in the fighting of 91 and who could not countenance the restoration of some honour, albeit posthumously, to the Wei family. In March 87, when Wu ti lay near to death, an infant who was of neither the Wei nor the Li family was declared heir apparent and succeeded two days later as Chao ti, with Huo Kuang acting as the head of a regency. In 86 Tan, king of Yen, entered into the first of two plots to take the place of Chao ti.

Partly as a result of these events, government was now conducted not by the recognized devolution of authority from the emperor and the chancellor, but directly by a triumvirate led by Huo Kuang. The critical years under consideration had at the same time seen the abandonment of some of the policies of expansion that had been adopted for up to four decades previously. It is therefore necessary to consider how far the growth of rivalries in the palace, the affiliations of leading officials, and the rise and fall of statesmen may be associated with such changes of policy, that affected both foreign and domestic matters. Subsequent events that are linked with these questions and which will be examined in due course include the debate on state policies that was arranged in 81; the second plot and the suicide of Tan, together with the execution of San Hung-yang in 80; and the accession of two emperors in 74, of whom one lasted for 27 days only, to

⁶⁸ HS 63:14b.

⁶⁹ HS 63:15a.

⁷⁰ HS 68:4b.

be replaced by a descendant of the empress Wei. Before proceeding to such questions, attention should be drawn to the state of government prevailing in China during the last decade of Wu ti's reign.

IV. Imperial expansion under Wu ti and the state of government

The period of fifty years preceding the incidents of 91 was one of the most formative in Han history. Until c.140 the keynote of imperial policy had been defence and consolidation; thereafter, initiative and expansion characterized many of the government's decisions. The change can be seen in the new arrangements evolved for administering the empire and enforcing the will of government; in deliberate measures to increase China's wealth and to organize the production and distribution of resources; and in the extension of Chinese influence more widely in the northern and southern perimeters of the empire. By 91 the cumulative effect of these changes had left its mark on Han institutions and society. Whatever measures had been taken to promote the study of Confucian texts or to practise teachings traditionally ascribed to Confucian thought,⁷¹ the ideology of Tung Chung-shu provided for the orthodox acceptance of strikingly different concepts; and in the sphere of practical government, decisions rested on realist principles that are associated with some of the legalist writers rather than on the traditional ethical precepts that were ascribed to the saintly kings of old.

Internally the grip of Han government had been noticeably tightened during this half century. The revolt of the kings of Huai-nan and Hengshan in 122 and its suppression marked in effect the final stage in a struggle between the central government and the *chu-hou-wang* 諸侯王 or kings. These were the blood relatives of the emperor whose forebears had received titles and administrative authority over large areas from Kao tsu. Thereafter, Han governments had successively curtailed their powers, and after the abortive revolt of 122 the kings could no more threaten the central government's authority. This was now extended ever more widely, as the territories that had been made over to the kings were incorporated as prefectures (*chün* 郡) directly under the control of the central government.

At the same time steps were being taken to reduce the size of some of the larger administrative units and thus to prevent the exercise of unduly powerful responsibilities by a single provincial official. Thus in 135 the highly important metropolitan area was divided into two units, and one of these was further sub-divided in 104.⁷² Further north, Shang chün 上都 was

⁷¹ See Dubs in HFHD pp. 20f.

⁷² According to the "original" notes in HS 28A1:19b, 24b, and 30b, the area under the *nei-shih* 內史 was put under the control of two officials, the *nei-shih* of the left and the right, in 135; but in HS19A:20b this change is dated in 155. The balance of the evidence, as seen in the appointments listed in HS 19B, is in favour of 135. For the subdivision of the area under the *yu nei-shih* and the adoption of new titles for the metropolitan officials in that year see HS 28A1 as cited.

split by the creation of Hsi-ho 西河 prefecture in 125; and at the perimeter, Lung-hsi 隴西 was reduced in size by the foundation of T'ien-shui 天水 and An-ting 安定 in 114, and Kuei-yang 桂陽 and Kuang-han 廣漢 were reduced by the foundation of Ling-ling 零陵 and Wu-tu 武都 in 111. A further measure designed to increase the scope of the central government's supervision of the provinces is seen in the establishment of the posts of *ts'u-shih* 刺史 or circuit inspector in 106.

Fuller administration needed the services of more officials, and the decree of 135 calling for the recommendation of individuals for service marks the government's realisation of this need.⁷³ A further measure of positive government which was based on the principles of Shang Yang and which illustrates the purposeful character of Wu ti's governments may be noted in the exploitation of the system of aristocratic ranks. These carried some material advantages and some legal privileges and were utilized to encourage service and to reward merit. Whereas at certain times of Han history these ranks were bestowed on a widespread basis as an act of imperial bounty, under Wu ti's dispensation such bestowals were very rare.⁷⁴ Instead the ranks were given in direct return for services rendered to the state, and thus formed an instrument of government that is described in the *Han-fei-tzu*. This deliberate use of rewards is seen again in the introduction (123) of a further series of orders which were given for military success or became available for the contribution of funds to a depleted treasury.⁷⁵

In addition, the government's use of the highest of these orders, i.e. the *ch'e-hou* 徹侯 or nobilities, demonstrates clearly a realistic means of exploiting the system in order to consolidate central government; and there is ample evidence of this practice in the decades before 91. The conferment of nobilities on the sons of the kings was an important instrument of reducing their power; and this was used no less than 178 times during Wu ti's reign, mostly before 116.⁷⁶ Alternatively, the gift of a nobility was used as a means of retaining the loyalties of surrendered enemy leaders, and it is noticeable that of the 75 nobilities given directly for services rendered to the state under Wu ti, no less than 41 were given to foreigners of that type. By contrast, Wu ti's government was also capable of withdrawing these honours as a means of punishment or, possibly, for political purposes; and the most obvious example of a wholesale reduction of rank is seen in the purge of the nobilities of 112.⁷⁷

⁷³ See Dubs, in HFHD, 20.

⁷⁴ See Loewe, *ibid.*, pp. 137f.

⁷⁵ See Loewe, *ibid.*, pp. 132f.

⁷⁶ Altogether 406 nobilities were given to the sons of kings during western Han. Of the 178 given in Wu ti's reign, at least 160 were dated in the short period 130-116. Apart from Wu ti's reign, the most frequent bestowals were made during the reigns of Hsüan ti (74-49; 63 instances); Yüan ti (49-33; 48 instances); and Ch'eng ti (33-7; 43 instances).

⁷⁷ See Dubs in HFHD, 126 f.

Further evidence of the increasing force of government during Wu ti's reign may be seen in connexion with economic matters. State monopolies for salt and iron were introduced c. 119; within the next five years attempts were made to regulate the transport of staple goods and to standardize prices; and from 112 the state eventually established a firm control over the minting of coins to the government's specification. As a direct measure to encourage greater agricultural production, the government was sponsoring the promotion of Chao Kuo's 趙過 new technique for sowing crops; and we know that this technique, which was capable of altering China's agriculture radically, was being practised in the state's colonies of the north-west by 90-80 B.C.⁷⁸ Even more revealing of the new attitude towards the positive conduct of government was the appointment c. 120 of two rich men, whose fortunes derived from salt and iron workings, to senior offices which collected state revenue. This was at the time when Sang Hung-yang, son of a rich merchant of Lo-yang, was first earning a reputation for shrewd business sense in government finances.⁷⁹

Above all, the positive policies adopted under Wu ti are shown very significantly in connexion with foreign relations. Up to 141, Han China had in general been forced to accept terms from its neighbours; c. 139 Chang Ch'ien 張騫 was first sent on a mission of exploration into central Asia. From now Han took the initiative, and the numerous campaigns fought against the Hsiung-nu culminated in the Han victories of 119. These were followed by the penetration of Chinese officials and soldiers in the south, south-east and south-west and into the Korean peninsula (112-108); and diplomatic ventures in the north-west were followed by military expeditions (from 104) which were intended to complete the expulsion of the Hsiung-nu or to provide a line of communication with central Asia. These steps resulted in the foundation of some 24 prefectures during Wu ti's reign; state-sponsored caravans plied the routes into Asia; static defence lines were extended as far as Tun-huang and manned by conscripts; and there were hopes of using river communications from the south-west to the sea coast. In these ventures it is to be observed that Han statesmen were capable of taking strategic considerations into mind and of trying to avoid dissipation of their resources. Unfortunately the tactical implementation of these plans did not always avoid such errors, with the result that from 99 onwards Han resources had been spent, and we hear of Han reverses on the field and of large-scale military losses.

Sustained efforts of this sort cost the Han treasury large sums. If we may believe sample figures that are given for certain campaigns, but which

⁷⁸ For these changes and topics see Swann, 57, 61, 377f.; for Chao Kuo's change, see Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, I, 70, and *Everyday Life in Early Imperial China*, fig. 75 and pp. 168f.

⁷⁹ HS 24B:12a and 14a; Swann, 271, 285.

may well be somewhat rhetorical, expenses amounted to 200,000 units of gold in the campaigns of 124-3, to 500,000 for those of 119, and 40,000 in 101.⁸⁰ Similar sums must have been needed for the expeditions led by Li Kuang-li, Kung-sun Ao and Li Ling 李陵 in 99, and by other officers in 97.

In commenting on the extension of Han influence in the western regions of central Asia at this time, the historian drew attention to the drain of money and the increased taxation involved. He continued:⁸¹ "The strength of the people was spent and resources were exhausted; and there followed some years of poor harvests. Robbers and thieves rose up everywhere and the roads were impassable. For the first time commissioners appointed directly by the emperor were sent out, clothed in embroidered silk and bearing axes, to exterminate the bandits in the prefectures and the kingdoms, and only then was the danger overcome. For these reasons, in his latter days [Wu ti] abandoned the lands of Lun-t'ai 輪臺 and proclaimed a decree expressing anguish and sorrow."

The text of the decree is duly carried in the *Han-shu*,⁸² and although it is not dated precisely, it was probably proclaimed sometime after 18 July 90.⁸³ In addition to rejecting the latest proposals for expansion in the north-west on the grounds of the popular hardship that would ensue, the text refers to the contemporary failure to keep the static defence lines in a state of efficiency, the poor discipline of the officers serving there and the bad morale of the troops. Pan Ku's statement of the growth of banditry and the measures taken to suppress it is supported elsewhere in the *Han-shu* in respect of two men who have been encountered already; both Chiang Ch'ung and Pao Sheng-chih had served as special commissioners appointed to the task.⁸⁴

From these considerations it seems that by the end of Wu ti's reign the force of the Chinese expansionist efforts had been spent, and that at a time when civilian morale was deteriorating Wu ti or his advisers had realised the need for retrenchment. Probably this appreciation may be dated between the despatch of the last of Wu ti's expeditions into central Asia, i.e. April or May 90, and the decree refusing Sang Hung-yang's proposal, i.e. late July 90; and the change of policy is certainly seen in the choice of the

⁸⁰ HS 24B:8a and 12b, Swann, 251 and 274; HS 61:14a and SC 123:42. These figures are difficult to interpret in a full economic context, in the absence of further information. The accepted value of gold was 10,000 copper cash to one unit (i.e. *chin* 斤 244 grams).

⁸¹ HS 96B:38b.

⁸² HS 96B:17a *et seq.*

⁸³ The preamble to Sang Hung-yang's memorial which preceded the decree refers to Li Kuang-li's surrender (HS 96B:15b), and the decree itself mentions his defeat (*ibid.*, 19a, b). Dubs (HFHD, 116, note 37.5) dates the defeat after Liu Ch'u-li's execution on 18 July 90.

⁸⁴ HS 45:12b; HS 66:7b; HS 71:1a. Pao Sheng-chih's work in this respect was started in 99 (HS 6:34a, HFHD, 106).

title *Fu-min* 富民 'enrichment of the people' for the nobility that was conferred on T'ien Ch'ien-ch'iu on 27 July 89.⁸⁵

There is not sufficient information in the *Han-shu* to assess how far changes of policy can be associated directly with the rise and fall of particular imperial favourites or by the turn of fortune that affected so many high-ranking officials during these critical years. But the *Tzu-chih-t'ung-chien* includes a suggestive paragraph in this connexion.⁸⁶ The passage draws a contrast between Wu ti's rigorous implementation of the laws and the clemency exhibited by the heir apparent. The difference was conspicuous at times when Wu ti was away from Ch'ang-an, and affairs of state were left to the direction of the empress and the heir apparent. As a result, the heir apparent is said to have acquired a popular following, while those statesmen who relied on the application of the laws were far from pleased. They did their best to calumniate the heir, while those officials who were of a more liberal frame of mind attached themselves to his cause; but in the event there were few to praise and many to criticize the heir apparent. The death of Wei Ch'ing in 106 denied to some interested parties their means of access to high places, and there followed considerable competition to cultivate the heir's friendship.

V. The Triumvirate and the Rise of Huo Kuang

The rise of Huo Kuang to a position of virtual dictatorship in Han China forms a remarkable episode in Chinese political history. His achievement followed a long preparatory period in which his behaviour had been beyond reproach; and in his long climb to eminence he made use of some institutional changes and doubtless relied on his relationship with the empress Wei, his aunt.

It has been observed⁸⁷ that during Wu ti's reign the position of the *ch'eng-hsiang* or chancellor had been gradually outmoded and that the emperor conducted government by means of his private secretariat, the *shang-shu* 尚書 or so-called masters of writing. However far this process had actually been taken, it seems clear that even by the end of Wu ti's reign the posts of chancellor and imperial counsellor still counted for much. Indeed, their significance may be measured, somewhat cynically, by the dangers attendant on tenure of the posts, and the series of holders may be recapitulated as follows:

Chancellor	Imperial counsellor
Kung-sun Ho	Pao Sheng-chih
103-February 91; executed	94-October 91; suicide

⁸⁵ HS 18:11a; HS 24A:17a, Swann, 184.

⁸⁶ Punctuated edition, Peking, 1956, p. 727. I have been unable to trace the source of the passage.

⁸⁷ Dubs, in HFHD, 10.

Liu Ch'ü-li	April 91 - July 90; executed	Shang-ch'ü Cheng	October 91 - 87; suicide
Unfilled	July 90 - July 89	Sang Hung-yang	March 87-80; executed
T'ien Ch'ien- ch'ü	July 89 - February 77; died naturally		

The post of chancellor was thus left vacant just at the time when the reaction in favour of the late heir apparent was setting in, and it is to be noted that for part of the twelve months in question Shang-ch'ü Cheng the imperial counsellor was away from Ch'ang-an on a campaign. We are not informed which authority was responsible for government during that crucial period; it may be guessed, but not proved, that effectively it was Huo Kuang.

Wu ti's final illness and death proved to be the occasion when Huo Kuang was able to establish himself in a position of dominance.⁸⁸ When he tactfully raised the question of the succession to the throne, Wu ti indicated the need for a regency and made three appointments. Huo Kuang was nominated *ta-szu-ma ta-chiang-chün*, supreme commander and general; Chin Mi-ti 金日磾 general of cavalry and superintendent of transport (*chü-chi Chiang-chün* 車騎將軍, *t'ai-p'u*); Shang-kuan Chieh 上官桀 general of the left (*tao* 左 *Chiang-chün*); and at the same time Sang Hung-yang became imperial counsellor.⁸⁹ As Sang's appointment took effect from 17 March 87, it is likely that the other nominations were dated on that day.

These officers were given a valedictory decree which ordered them to assist the young emperor, and according to the *Han-shu* all decisions were actually taken by Huo Kuang.⁹⁰ Huo, Chin and Shang-kuan were also awarded nobilities for the services they had rendered in suppressing the revolt of the Ma brothers in 88, and the citations for these awards date them at *jen-yên* 壬寅 in the first month, i.e. New Year's day in the second year of *Shih-yüan* 始元. This corresponded with 22 February 85.⁹¹

Fu-ling was nominated as Wu ti's heir apparent on 27 March 87 and Wu ti died two days later. At the time the validity of Wu ti's last decree was questioned by the son of Wang Mang 王莽, who was superintendent of the guards (*wei-wei* 衛尉)⁹² and thus one of the nine chief ministers. He claimed to have been present during Wu ti's last days and accused the triumvirate

⁸⁸ HS 68:2b. A translation of many of the parts of the *Han-shu* which concern Huo Kuang, together with maps, tables and some annotation, was published in 1930 by Arvid Jongsjell, under the title *Huo Kuang och Hans Tid* (Göteborg).

⁸⁹ HS 19B:26b.

⁹⁰ HS 7:2a, HFHD, 151.

⁹¹ HS 7:2a, HFHD, 156; HS 18:112a, 113b. There is some doubt regarding the time for Chin Mi-ti's ennoblement (HS 17:26a, notes, and HS 68:20a).

⁹² Dubs: Commandant of the Palace Guard.

of taking arbitrary steps to enoble themselves. The allegation was rejected and Wang Mang had his son poisoned.⁹³

In the meantime T'ien Ch'ien-ch'ü had been appointed as Chancellor. He is described in the *Han-shu*⁹⁴ as "a man of no particular abilities or talents and with no record of proven achievements; one single utterance drew attention to him and brought him senior statesman's office and a nobility." The single utterance was presumably the memorial that T'ien submitted in favour of the heir apparent.⁹⁵ Although the leader of the Hsiung-nu was apparently unable to comprehend why the Han empire had been entrusted to the care of such a man, there are obvious reasons why the appointment suited Huo Kuang very well. Huo made a point of deferring to T'ien's opinion and consulting him at the meetings held at court, and T'ien would reply by handing over responsibility to Huo. By this piece of play acting Huo's actions were duly validated, in so far as they had been agreed by the highest ranking dignitary in the service of the emperor.

Chin Mi-ti came from a leading family of the Hsiung-nu.⁹⁶ His father had been the Hsiung-nu king of Hsiu-t'u 休屠 and had been put to death by one of the other kings. Following the Han victories of 121, Chin Mi-ti, who was then aged 14, had been taken into service in the palace where he caught the eye of Wu ti. He served in various capacities, leading finally to that of *kuang-lu ta-fu* 光祿大夫 or counsellor of the palace.⁹⁷ His behaviour was impeccable, and he was greatly loved and rewarded by Wu ti, to the jealousy of the court, who resented that an alien should receive special favours. It is said that he suspected that Ma Ho-luo and Ma T'ung were plotting to murder the emperor, and that it was only by his personal intervention that Wu ti's life was saved. This incident, coupled with his refusal to accept privileges, endeared him even further to Wu ti and increased the latter's respect for his integrity. Chin Mi-ti died after assisting in the regency for one year only, on 29 September 86.

Very little is known about the antecedents of Shang-kuan Chieh, who is to be distinguished from a man of the same name who served in Li Kuang-li's campaign in central Asia of 104-101 and was appointed superintendent of the Lesser treasury (*shao-fu* 少府) in 102.⁹⁸ The statesman of this name came from the west; he served as one of the gentlemen of the court (*lang* 郎), and after an incident in which he won Wu ti's confidence he was appointed superintendent of transport, probably in 88.⁹⁹ His son

⁹³ HS 68:2a. The text of the *Han-shu* notes, but does not attempt to explain, the delay between the suppression of the revolt in 88 and the ennoblement of the three men.

⁹⁴ HS 66:5b.

⁹⁵ See p. 166 above.

⁹⁶ HS 68:18b.

⁹⁷ Dubs: Imperial Household Grandee.

⁹⁸ HS 19B:23a; HS 61:12a, 13a. Dubs reads *shao-fu* as Privy Treasurer.

⁹⁹ HS 7:2a, HFHD, 156; HS 19B:26b; HS 97A:17a.

Shang-kuan An 安 was married to one of Huo Kuang's daughters. After Chao ti's accession, if Huo Kuang was on leave from his duties, Shang-kuan Chieh acted as his substitute, taking all the necessary decisions. In 83 Shang-kuan An's daughter, then aged 6, was nominated as Chao ti's empress, despite Huo Kuang's opposition on the grounds of the parties' youth.¹⁰⁰ The quarrel between the two statesmen came to a head in 80, as will be shown below.

In the meantime the triumvirate had been strengthened by a further matrimonial tie, as another daughter of Huo Kuang had been married to Chin-mi-ti.¹⁰¹ Clearly the enthronement of Fu-ling in 87 had worked very well to the advantage of Huo Kuang. Descended from neither the Wei nor the Li family the infant could be accepted as a neutral party in the principal rivalries of the palace; and those who had previously supported the Wei or the Li family could offer their loyalty to the young emperor without loss of face and without apprehension. As yet Fu-ling was not encumbered by having relatives who were highly placed in the official hierarchy and might question Huo Kuang's position; and not for the last time in Han history did ambitious men see advantage in establishing an infant emperor whose will they could manipulate. The *Han-shu* remarks¹⁰² that Wu ti hesitated long before deciding to nominate Fu-ling as his heir, as he was well aware of the dangers that might beset the dynasty with an infant emperor and a young mother. The statement, which was presumably written by a member of the Pan family in the first century A.D., may have been coloured by wisdom acquired after similar occurrences. However, in the passage appended to *Shih-chi* chapter 49 by Ch'u Shao-sun 褚少孫 (fl.c.55 B.C.)¹⁰³ it is hinted that Wu ti encompassed the death of Fu-ling's mother, Miss Chao, before nominating him as the heir apparent. According to Ch'u Shao-sun, Wu ti explained this as being due to the need to eliminate the obvious danger, and cited the case of the Empress Lü 呂 as a warning.

VI. Dynastic Incidents 82-74

Chao ti's reign was punctuated by a number of incidents which involved the issues that had come to the fore previously. In 82, four years after the first plot of Tan, king of Yen, a man called Chang Yen-nien 張延年 drove up to the palace gates with his carriage horses, banners and clothing all dressed in yellow.¹⁰⁴ This was the colour reserved for the imperial family, and Chang claimed to be the heir apparent of the Wei family. Senior officials, including those who had known the heir, were ordered to

¹⁰⁰ HS 7:3b, HFHD, 157; HS 97A:18a.

¹⁰¹ HS 68:20a.

¹⁰² HS 97A:16b.

¹⁰³ SC 49:30f. For Ch'u Shao-sun's additions to the *Shih-chi*, see Burton Watson,

ibid., 226 note 9.

¹⁰⁴ HS 7:4a, HFHD, 158; HS 71:2a.

see if they could recognize him; large crowds gathered in Ch'ang-an to observe the spectacle, and as a precautionary measure the general of the right posted troops at the palace. Neither the chancellor nor his junior colleagues dared to express an opinion, until Ch'uan Pu-i 雋不疑, superintendent of one of the three metropolitan districts, ordered the arrest of the man, asserting roundly that he was a criminal impostor.

There are several interesting features in the *Han-shu*'s account of this incident, which occurred at a time when no heir had been nominated. Not only did it create a stir in Ch'ang-an; but apparently, even nine years after the former heir apparent's death, there were officials who were either ready to be persuaded of the claim or unwilling to come out in the open against the Wei family. Huo Kuang is not reported to have played any part and his evasion of the issue may be an example of that circumspect behaviour whereby he had reached his exalted position. He is said to have congratulated Ch'uan once the imposture had been exposed, and to have offered him one of his daughters in marriage.

The next notable incident was the famous debate held at court in 81. The disputants were given general terms of reference, "to discuss the sufferings of the common people";¹⁰⁵ more specifically, they started by fastening on the desirability of the monopolies of state; and in the course of their discussions they touched on the aims, duties and methods of government; general policies of state; the means of administration; the state of contemporary society; and the value of past precedent.

In the early years of Huo Kuang's regency there is discernible some measure of retrenchment, or even a disengagement from responsibilities. The Hsiung-nu incursion of 87 was not followed by the despatch of a large-scale punitive expedition;¹⁰⁶ in 82 the prefectures that had been established in Hainan Island were withdrawn, and the four that had been founded in Korea were re-organized as two. There are also signs of the attention paid to the welfare of the population. Prior to the command for a debate on popular suffering in 81, a commission of enquiry had been sent out to the provinces to collect data on this matter in 86;¹⁰⁷ and in the next year relief measures had been taken to help those who were in material want. These were all steps that could be associated with the traditional virtues of Confucian government. However, it should be borne in mind that the men responsible for administration under Chao ti, i.e. Huo Kuang and Sang Hung-yang, were the same officials who had sponsored realist measures of government under Wu ti; and it is clear from the account that we have of the debate of 81 that the government spokesmen, who included Sang Hung-yang, supported realist principles, while the critics of contemporary

¹⁰⁵ HS 7:5a, HFHD, 160.

¹⁰⁶ HS 7:1b, HFHD, 152.

¹⁰⁷ HS 7:3a, HFHD, 155.

government were those who had been nurtured in the scholastic tradition and harked back to the golden days of Yao and Shun.

The *Yen-t'ieh lun* 鹽鐵論, or *Discourses on Salt and Iron*, was probably compiled a decade or two after the debate took place. The disputants discuss the question of retrenchment as against that of expansion; of *laissez-faire* as against an attempt to control and exploit China's productive resources. Should the trading connections with central Asia be promoted or suspended? The critics of the government ask whether it is just and expedient to tax the population in order to expand Han territories; and the realist members of the government counter by asking whether Han can afford to relax the defensive measures needed to keep the Hsiung-nu at bay. The account of the debate is loaded on the side of the moralist critics of the day, who are always shown to be winning on points over their opponents; and the spokesmen for the government are on several occasions reduced to abject silence. But a significant contrast is to be noted in this respect between the force of argument as represented in the extant account of the debate and the measures actually taken afterwards. The practical issue involved was the continuance or abolition of the monopolies of state. Of these, the control of the iron and salt industries was the more important and controversial, and that of the production of alcoholic spirits, which had only been introduced in 98, was of lesser significance. However, despite the arguments that were reportedly put forward, the only monopoly to be abolished in 81 was that of spirits. This was the compromise suggested by the chancellor and the imperial counsellor, T'ien Ch'ien-ch'iu and Sang Hung-yang.¹⁰⁸

It may be noted that the *Yen-t'ieh lun* alludes occasionally to the political events of Wu ti's reign that have been described above. The name Chiang Ch'ung appears in two passages,¹⁰⁹ when the conservative critic of the government is protesting against the sharp practices, materialist attitude and rigorous administration practised by Wu ti's advisers; and Chiang Ch'ung was one of the named culprits. Elsewhere in the debate, the critic singles out Kung-sun Ho and Liu Ch'u-li as men who were responsible for the deterioration of moral standards in the government of Wu ti's reign.¹¹⁰

In the dramatic incident of 80 Huo Kuang emerged with unimpaired authority and with no rival to challenge his position.¹¹¹ Motives of varying natures lay behind the participation of the different individuals in the plot to remove Chao ti and Huo Kuang in that year. Shang-kuan Chieh and his son Shang-kuan An, who had been appointed general of cavalry (*chü-chi*

¹⁰⁸ HS 6:34b, HFHD, 107; HS 7:5a, HFHD, 161; YTL, 276, which adds that the agencies for iron situated within the passes were also abolished; HS 24B:20b, Swann, 320.

¹⁰⁹ YTL, 99, 194.

¹¹⁰ YTL, 233.

¹¹¹ HS 7:6b, HFHD, 164; HS 63:10b; HS 68:3a.

chiang-chün) in 83,¹¹² were probably inspired by political jealousy. In the time of Wu ti, Shang-kuan Chieh had actually held office that was senior to that of Huo Kuang, and he now resented the reversal of their relative situations. Likewise, Shang-kuan An's arrogant behaviour after the nomination of his daughter as empress (83) may have excited Huo Kuang's anger. The princess O-i 鄂邑, who was Chao ti's elder sister, had tried with the help of Shang-kuan Chieh and Shang-kuan An to have her lover Ting Wai-jen 丁外人 promoted, but Huo Kuang had sternly refused the suggestion. Tan king of Yen believed that he had a prior claim to the throne, as he had already demonstrated in 87-6. There is however no immediate or fully satisfactory explanation for Sang Hung-yang's involvement. He was not related to the imperial house or to any of the consorts, as were all the others who were concerned. There is nothing in the *Han-shu* to indicate that he was competing for dictator's powers, other than a suggestion that he wished office to be conferred on his relatives, on the strength of his own successful management of the state monopolies.¹¹³ Nor is there any record of his support being deliberately sought or bought by the others; and from what we know of Sang Hung-yang it would seem that he was a man of a sufficiently independent mind and strong character to avoid involvement in affairs of this nature without due reason. It is just possible that his implication was due to disgruntlement at the public enquiry of the previous year into policies which he, more than any other statesman, had sponsored and at the compromise which he had been forced to accept (see p. 184 above).

The conspirators waited for a day when Huo Kuang was away from court. They then had a document submitted to the throne in which he was accused of strengthening his own support by means of various appointments to office and of using his authority arbitrarily. Tan king of Yen took the opportunity to write to the emperor, citing past precedent and referring to the measures taken at the outset of the Han dynasty to prevent families other than the Liu house from interfering in matters of state.¹¹⁴ He wrote that trusted ministers were ruining the dynasty in an atmosphere that was conditioned by calumny and lawlessness. Chao ti was now 14 years old and angrily rejected the charges, promising legal processes for anyone who dared to renew the accusations. His authority was sufficient to stop Shang-kuan Chieh and Shang-kuan An from taking direct action, but the other conspirators continued in their course. Tan king of Yen started to recruit the help of the strong men of the provinces. Despite advice to the contrary and the warnings of a host of portents¹¹⁵ he was confident that he could carry the day by virtue of his right, as Wu ti's son, to rule as emperor. But his hopes

¹¹² HS 19B:27b.

¹¹³ HS 68:3a.

¹¹⁴ HS 63:10b.

¹¹⁵ HS 63:12b.

were shattered by the discovery of his plans, just at the time when a similar attempt was being foiled at Ch'ang-an. Here the princess O-i had prepared to have Huo Kuang murdered at a banquet; but prior information had reached the chancellor, and in the event Shang-kuan Chieh, Shang-kuan An and Sang Hung-yang were executed. The princess O-i and King Tan committed suicide.

Huo Kuang was able to retain his unique position for a further period of thirteen years, which saw Chao ti's attainment of majority in 77¹¹⁶ and the problems of imperial succession in 74. As an act of clemency, Hsüan ti created Tan's heir King of Kuang-yang 廣陽 in 73 and the line of succession continued without interruption until the time of Wang Mang.¹¹⁷

The dynastic events that followed the death of Chao ti are no less remarkable than those of the previous years and may serve to show that the old rivalries between the consorts of Wu ti were not yet dead.¹¹⁸ Briefly, Liu Ho 賀, a descendant of the Li family, succeeded Chao ti; but after a reign of a mere 27 days he was deposed and replaced by Liu Ping-i 平已, the only member of the Wei family to survive the scandals of 91-90. Liu Ping-i reigned as Hsüan ti for twenty-five years.

Chao ti died on 5 June 74 at the age of 20, and it was represented at court that Liu Hsü 胥 the only surviving son of Wu ti had a good claim to succeed as emperor. Hsü was a man of some seniority, having been created King of Kuang-ling as long ago as 117. According to the *Han-shu* his behaviour had been unprincipled, and the idea of his accession disquieted Huo Kuang. It may perhaps be surmised that Huo Kuang's unease arose from the thought of having an elderly man enthroned as emperor who would be able to withstand manipulation. Whatever his motives Huo Kuang succeeded in having the idea scotched, and he sent a commission of officials to summon Liu Ho, King of Ch'ang-i and grandson of the Lady Li. Ho was asked to make all speed to reach Ch'ang-an where he was to attend to the late emperor's obsequies.

Liu Ho set off from Ch'ang-i¹¹⁹ immediately, with indecent haste and without a thought to spare for the horses who died under the strain. However—and here again we can only follow the *Han-shu*, whose account may well be coloured by subsequent developments—Liu Ho spent the journey in reckless indulgence and with a show of ostentation; and he refused to make any of the protestations of grief that the occasion demanded until he reached the gates of the palace. Further reference to his behaviour will be made shortly.

¹¹⁶ HS 7:8a, HFHD, 169.

¹¹⁷ HS 14:20a.

¹¹⁸ HS 8:1a, HFHD, 199; HS 63:18a; HS 68:4b.

¹¹⁹ For the situation of Ch'ang-i, see Loewe, *Records of Han Administration*, I, 141, note 80.

We do not hear for certain of Liu Ho's presence in Ch'ang-an until 18 July, i.e. about 42 days after the receipt of the summons.

On that day he formally acceded to the throne, taking custody of the imperial seals and seal-ribbons; and the title of empress dowager was conferred on Chao ti's widow, grand-daughter of Huo Kuang, and of the tender age of 15. The long interval between Ho's departure at break-neck speed from Ch'ang-i and his accession may lend some support to the allegation that he spent the journey in a prolonged bout of material indulgence; alternatively, he may have reached the capital city earlier and have spent the interval in performing the ceremonies and vigils prior to accession. At the time Liu Ho was aged 18 or 19.¹²⁰ Chao ti's funeral was completed on 24 July.¹²¹

According to the *Han-shu*¹²² the immoral behaviour of the new emperor outraged and grieved Huo Kuang, who consulted T'ien Yen-nien 田延年. T'ien was *ta-ssu-nung* 大司農 or superintendent of agriculture¹²³ and a man with whom Huo enjoyed friendly relations. He advised that a conference should be called to discuss the situation; and when Huo Kuang duly reported his fears for the safety of the realm, all the attendant officials maintained an embarrassed silence. The situation was saved by T'ien Yen-nien in a powerful speech urging immediate action and threatening violence; and a report was presented to the empress dowager, giving grounds for the fear that Liu Ho was not fit to receive charge of the empire. By a dexterous manoeuvre, Liu Ho was brought into the presence of the empress dowager without any of his personal attendants, many of whom were arrested and sent down for judicial processes. The occasion—14 August, 27 days after his accession—was marked by formality and dignity; armed guards were drawn up and the senior officials of state took their places according to precedence.

Liu Ho was now obliged to listen to the text of a memorial which had been composed in the names of 36 senior members of the government, including civil officials and generals. The document began by stressing that the son of heaven's powers and authority rest on qualities and judgment, and deplored the evident lack of these assets in the person of Chao ti's successor. Liu Ho had had no proper feelings of grief and had failed to accept the conventional proprieties. Even before Chao ti's funeral he had misused the imperial seals; he had introduced his own retainers from Ch'ang-i, making merry with them in the imperial palace. There had been music and entertainments, both while Chao ti's coffin was still lying in state and after the interment; and the dowager empress's carriage had been used in the course of the imperial amusements. Liu Ho had had sexual relations

¹²⁰ See Dubs, in HFHD, 181; HS 63:20b.

¹²¹ HS 7:10a, HFHD, 174.

¹²² HS 68:5a.

¹²³ HS 19B:30a. Dubs renders *Ta-ssu-nung* as Grand Minister of Agriculture.

with women who had been members of Chao ti's entourage, and had threatened execution for anyone who dared to divulge such practices. In addition he had made free with the precious metals, swords, jades and silks of the palace stores so as to find presents for his fellow revellers; he had drunk to a state of stupefaction in the company of his attendants and slaves, and abused his position so as to send out messengers on personal missions—altogether on 1127 occasions in the 27 days since his accession. So far from taking heed of remonstrances, he had initiated judicial processes against the few men who had dared to voice their criticism. In this way the principles of imperial rule had been forfeited and the dynasty and empire lay endangered. The memorial ended with a request to report this state of affairs at the shrine of Kao tsu, founder of the dynasty.

With the predictable approval of this memorial by the empress dowager, granddaughter of Huo Kuang, the latter was free to have Liu Ho deposed and his seals returned to the keeping of the palace. Surprisingly Liu Ho was not exiled to the west as had been suggested, but allowed to return to Ch'ang-i; and his personal property was shared between his four daughters. However, his kingdom was brought to an end and the area was henceforth administered as the prefecture of Shan-yang 山陽 under the direct control of the central government. 200 of his associates who had encouraged him in his ways or shared in his indulgences were put to death at Huo Kuang's orders. There is an elaborate account in the *Han-shu*¹²⁴ to show that by 64, i.e. after Huo Kuang's death and a number of changes, Hsüan ti allowed himself to be persuaded that he had nothing to fear from Liu Ho, and a nobility was conferred on him in that year.¹²⁵

Huo Kuang now put forward his suggestion for filling the vacancy left by Chao ti's death, and he proposed that Liu Ping-i should be selected for the honour. Ping-i was aged 18; he was grandson of the Wei family's heir apparent who had committed suicide in 91; and once again a commission set out to acquaint a nominee for the throne of his destiny and to invite his presence at Ch'ang-an. Ping-i's accession was dated from 10 September 74.¹²⁶

Until his death in 68, Huo Kuang was in an unassailable position. As he doubtless expected, his offer to return the cares of government to the emperor was declined,¹²⁷ and he was treated with the greatest generosity in the bestowal of honours on those who had planned Hsüan ti's accession.¹²⁸ The nobility granted to him in 85 had entitled him to the emoluments collected from 2350 households,¹²⁹ and this was now increased by 17,200

¹²⁴ HS 63:18a.

¹²⁵ HS 15B:13a.

¹²⁶ HS 8:3b, HFHD, 205.

¹²⁷ HS 8:4a, HFHD, 207.

¹²⁸ HS 68:10b, 11a.

¹²⁹ HS 18:11a; SC 20:38 gives the figure of 3000 instead of 2350.

to a total of nearly 20,000. In addition he received handsome gifts of gold, cash, silks, slaves, horses and a residence. By comparison it may be noted that the next highest reward given at this time was a nobility of 10,000 households; and at the outset of the dynasty the two founding statesmen Ts'ao Ts'an 曹參 and Hsiao Ho 蕭何 had received nobilities of 10,600 and 8000 households respectively.¹³⁰ Commenting on the period of Chao ti's reign, the author of the *Han-shu*¹³¹ praised Huo Kuang's regency. He compared it with that of the Duke of Chou, and drew attention to Huo's policy of retrenchment, to his attempt to repair the ravages caused by the extravagance of the previous reign, and to his abolition of some of the monopolies of state.

The two acts of accession and the single act of deposal that took place in 74 illustrate how the form and proprieties of Han institutions were observed scrupulously while changes of a very serious nature were being contrived. The documents drawn up in preparation for the events take care to cite precedent; and in the case of the enthronement of the emperors, the documents stress that qualities are of greater importance than seniority. The nomination of Chao ti's widow as empress dowager¹³² created the necessary authority in whose name decrees could be issued and actions taken, even to the point of making and unmaking an emperor. The niceties of the imperial cult were preserved by having Liu Ho's misdeeds announced at Kao tsu's shrine, and Liu Ping-i's accession was marked by his formal visit of respect there.¹³³ The bill of indictment against Liu Ho included charges of infringing several points of duly prescribed behaviour; and one of the complaints of his activities prior to accession concerned his refusal to comply with the stipulations for mourning.¹³⁴ When the decision had been taken to invite Ping-i to accede as emperor, he was first created noble of Yang-wu 陽武,¹³⁵ and according to Yen Shih-ku 顏師古 (581-645) this step was taken so as to avoid creating a commoner son of heaven. Finally, formalism may be seen in the activities of officials. In the memorial indicting Liu Ho, it was the chancellor's name which appeared at the head of the list,¹³⁶ not that of Huo Kuang; although the decision to depose Liu Ho was taken by two men only (i.e. Huo Kuang and T'ien Yen-nien), the request to do so

¹³⁰ HS 16:4b and 11a.

¹³¹ HS 7:10b, HFHD, 175.

¹³² HS 8:3a, HFHD, 204. For the assumption of the power of decree by an empress or empress dowager, see Lien-sheng Yang, *Female Rulers in Imperial China* (Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 23 (1960-61) pp. 47-61; reprinted in Bishop, *Studies of Governmental Institutions in Chinese History*, Harvard 1968, and in Lien-sheng Yang, *Excursions in Sinology*, Harvard 1969).

¹³³ Similar visits to the ancestral shrines were paid by emperors on their accession by, e.g. Hui ti, Chao ti, Yuan ti, Ch'eng ti, Ai ti and P'ing ti.

¹³⁴ HS 63:18b.

¹³⁵ HS 68:10b.

¹³⁶ Sic HS 68:6b. This account is probably more authentic than the summary given in HS 8:3a, HFHD, 204, which simply mentions Huo Kuang's name.

needed the full backing of all senior officials; and obviously the incorporation of as many names as possible in the act would tend to preclude reprisals at a later stage, should further dynastic difficulties occur. Lastly, the two commissions appointed to summon Liu Ho and Liu Ping-i to the highest honour in the empire, each included the *tsung-cheng* 宗正 or superintendent offices of state which was regularly filled by a member of the Liu house. The incumbent was responsible for keeping the records of the family and maintaining the correct order of precedence among its members.

VII. Witchcraft and Cursing the Emperor

Commenting on the incident of 91, the *Han-shu*¹³⁷ states that the calamity of *wu-ku* 巫蠱 started with Chu An-shih 朱安世, i.e. the criminal who had accused Kung-sun Ching-sheng of these and similar practices (see p. 161 above); that it reached completion under Chiang Ch'ung; and that it then involved princesses, the empress and the heir apparent, who all met their deaths as a result. The statement is sufficient as far as it goes, but it has been shown above that the case was intricately connected with dynastic rivalries and institutional developments that persisted until 74 at least. It remains now to examine the nature of *wu-ku* and the associated practices that are mentioned, i.e. cursing the emperor and the burial of human images; and account should be taken of other events that are deliberately linked to these incidents in the histories, such as the search for persons involved or evidence. Above all it is necessary to glance briefly at the prevailing religious beliefs of the time, at least in so far as these affected the palace.

Tung Chung-shu's formulation of Han Confucianism had been evolved in the decades preceding the scandals of 91-90. As far as may be known the intellectual climate of Ch'ang-an at that time was coloured by the belief in Heaven's intervention in human affairs and its manifestation of warnings; and there was also a strong faith in the properties of *Yin-yang* and the five elements and their powers over human destiny. As the appointed arbiter of mankind and governor of temporalities, the emperor was accustomed to take part in a variety of ceremonies, which shed some light on the importance paid to various spiritual powers on behalf of the dynasty. Fairly regularly he worshipped at the shrines of the five *chih* 時 at Yung 雍.¹³⁸ In 110 he had worshipped to the Yellow Emperor, and in the same year he had performed the *feng* 封 ceremony to heaven at Mount T'ai. Other cults in which Wu ti participated included those devoted to the

¹³⁷ The *tsung-cheng* (Dubs: Superintendent of the Imperial House) also took part in the demotion of the empress Wei in 91 (HS 97A:118).

¹³⁸ HS 66:2a.

¹³⁹ Yung was a county situated in the area that was under the jurisdiction of the Yu-fu-feng 右扶風 (HS 28A:344).

sovereign of the earth, to the spirits of the hills and rivers, and to the souls of the legendary emperor Shun and the ancestral founder of the dynasty. Little expense had been spared in these ventures, which included the construction of the Spirits' Hall (*Ming-t'ang* 明堂) in 109. In addition Wu ti had made several journeys and spent considerable effort in searching for the immortal beings of P'eng-lai 蓬萊; and in several famous incidents he had shown his susceptibility to the influence of shamans or mediums such as Shao Weng 少翁 and Luan Ta 樂大. It is against this background that we can consider the belief and practice of *wu-ku* during the Han period.

The term *ku* 蠱 can be traced from the oracle bones until modern times, and has acquired a large number of meanings or connotations. The Yin bone character clearly represents insects or vermin within a pot or cauldron 罍.¹⁴⁰ In literature it is taken by commentators to carry a variety of particular meanings, including insects living in grain or into which grain is transformed;¹⁴¹ maggots breeding in a pot; objects that can be injurious to man; poisonous vermin contained within the human stomach; to bewilder or cast spells; emanations of evil; and the spirits of sentenced criminals whose heads had been exposed on stakes. In general the term is used to imply magical processes and has been translated as "Black Magic".¹⁴²

The history of the belief and practice of *ku* has been traced by Feng and Shryock, who summarize the contemporary (i.e., 1935) situation as follows:¹⁴³ "At present, *ku* is used primarily as a means of acquiring wealth; secondarily as a means of revenge. The method is to place poisonous snakes and insects together in a vessel until there is but one survivor, which is called the *ku*. The poison secured from this *ku* is administered to the victim, who becomes sick and dies. The ideas associated with *ku* vary, but the *ku* is generally regarded as a spirit, which secures the wealth of the victim for the sorcerer."

This conclusion is based on an examination of a series of passages extending from the *Tso chuan* to the nineteenth century. From the tenth century A.D. onwards there is clear evidence of the use of *ku* to kill people directly, or to bring pressure to bear upon them; e.g., a man may have received a "dose" of *ku* and be told that unless he returns by a certain time it will kill him; whereas, if he does comply, a safe antidote can be administered. There are accounts of various techniques of applying *ku* and different ways in which the victims are affected. When the poison has been introduced into a person it may manifest itself as a living insect or reptile

¹⁴⁰ See Karlgren *Grammata Serica Recensa*, 52b.

¹⁴¹ In this connexion see *Lun-heng* 49, Huang Hui 黃暉 edition pp. 714, 716.

¹⁴² Dubs, HFHD, 114 etc. uses the term "witchcraft and black magic" to render *wu-ku*. H. Y. Feng and J. K. Shryock use the term "Black Magic", in *The Black Magic in China known as Ku* (Journal of the American Oriental Society, volume 55, 1935, pp. 1-30). See also de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. v, 826 f.

¹⁴³ Feng and Shryock, 1.

that is highly active within his entrails. Sometimes there are fatal results; or else the insect is expelled from the victim's body and killed, possibly leaving traces as a physical deformity.¹⁴⁴

These practices are evidenced far more fully for recent centuries than they are for the Han period, and although they may very well be based on long-standing belief and custom, the meagre nature of the early references renders it difficult to determine how far the evidence may be applied retrospectively. There is a further difficulty in regard to practices of the Han period, as these are mostly described not as *ku* but as *wu-ku* 巫, i.e. *ku* in which shamans participate or are concerned. It is not clear whether the specific mention of the shamans necessarily introduces a new element in the concept; for the present purposes no distinction is made in translating the two terms, which have been rendered above as *witchcraft*.

The Han concepts of *ku* presumably lay at an intermediate stage between a descriptive statement in the *Tso chuan* (i.e., fourth century B.C.) and incidents recounted in the *Sou-shen chi* 搜神記 (fourth century A.D.) and the *Sou-shen hou chi* 搜神後記 (falsely attributed to T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛, 365-427, but certainly before the Sui period). The passage in the *Tso chuan* refers to the year 540 B.C., and has been rendered as follows by Couvreur:¹⁴⁵

"Le prince de Tsin demanda un médecin à Ts'in. Le prince de Ts'in ordonna au médecin Houo d'aller le voir. Le médecin (y alla et) dit au prince de Tsin: "Il n'y a rien à faire pour cette maladie. C'est le cas de dire que, quand le malade approche des appartements des femmes, il est comme halluciné. L'hallucination, la perte de la raison ne sont pas causées par les mauvais esprits ni par la nourriture, (mais par la passion). . . ."

"Tchao Meng demanda: 'Qu'appellez vous *kou* hallucination?' Le médecin répondit: 'On appelle *kou* ce qui produit l'excès, l'affection déréglée, l'erreur, le trouble. La lettre *kou* est composée des deux lettres *ming* récipient et *tch'oung* ver ou reptile. L'insecte ailé qui naît dans le grain longtemps emmagasiné s'appelle *kou*. Dans le I king de Tchou koug, la femme qui séduit l'homme, le vent qui renverse une colline sont appelés *kou*. Toutes ces choses se ressemblent.' "

Two points may be noted which concern the meaning attributed to the term in the period between this passage and the evidence for the fourth century A.D. In a comment to the *Chou-li*, Cheng Hsüan 鄭玄 (127-200) takes *ku* as meaning poisonous objects which harm human beings;¹⁴⁶ and the *Shuo-wen* 說文 defines *ku* as "insects within the stomach".

¹⁴⁴ See cases cited by Feng and Shryock.

¹⁴⁵ S. Couvreur, *Tch'ouen Ts'iou et Tso Tchouan, La chronique de la principauté de Lâu*, volume III, 35 f. For a different version of this passage, see J. R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion in the China of A.D. 320* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1966) p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Chou-li*, 10, SPTK 7a; see note to 庶氏.

The following passages illustrate the belief in the manufacture and efficacy of *ku* some two to three centuries after the time of Cheng Hsüan. The translations are those given in Feng and Shryock.¹⁴⁷

(a) In the province of Yung-yang, there was a family by the name of Liao. For several generations they manufactured *ku*, becoming rich from it. Later one of the family married, but they kept the secret from the bride. On one occasion, everyone went out except the bride, who was left in charge of the house. Suddenly she noticed a large cauldron in the house, and on opening it, perceived a big snake inside. She poured boiling water into the cauldron and killed the snake. When the rest of the family returned she told them what she had done, to their great alarm. Not long after, the entire family died of the plague.

(b) Tan Yu was a poor and devout monk. There was a family in the district of Yen who manufactured *ku*. Those who ate their food, died from haemorrhage. Tan Yu once visited this family, and the host prepared food for him. Tan Yu recited an incantation, and saw a pair of centipedes a foot long suddenly crawl away from the dish. He then ate the food, and returned home without being harmed.

(c) T'ang Tzu, of the Hsiang district, went to Chu Ch'i's mother P'en's house to drink wine. On returning home he became ill, and vomited more than ten *ku* worms. Seeing that he was about to die, he directed his wife Chang that after death she should cut open his abdomen in order to get rid of the disease. Later Chang cut open his body, and saw his "five viscera" completely destroyed.

The evidence for the Han period may now be considered. In 122 B.C. a consort of one of the Han kings was brought up on a charge of having killed her predecessor by means of *ku*,¹⁴⁸ but no details are furnished of the means allegedly employed. For the whole of the scandal of 91 there is no description of the practices said to have occurred, but something may be inferred, indirectly, from the account of the actions taken by Chiang Ch'ung after his appointment as commissioner to bring the cases of *wu-ku* up for trial.¹⁴⁹ The passage is by no means clear, and interpretations have varied from the time of Chang Yen 張晏 (3rd to 4th century) to that of Wang Hsien-ch'ien 王先謙 (1842-1918) or de Groot, who renders it as follows:¹⁵⁰

Now Kiang Ch'ung had the ground dug up by his Hunnish wu, to seek for human images; those men seized breeders of *ku* and nocturnal sacrificers; they saw the spectres; they defiled the ground (with

¹⁴⁷ Feng and Shryock, 7-8, cite these passages from (a) *Sou-shen chi* 12, *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng*, p. 86; (b) *Sou-shen hou chi* 2, *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng*, p. 28; (c) *Sung-shu* 宋書 81:10a (*Po-na* ed.).

¹⁴⁸ SC 118:45; HS 44:16b.

¹⁴⁹ HS 45:13b.

¹⁵⁰ *The Religious System of China*, (1892) vol. v, 830.

sacrificial spirits) so as to make suspicious places. They continuously arrested people, examining them, belaboured them with hot iron tongs, and roasted them to extort confessions. . . .

The passage would seem to mean that Chiang Ch'ung arrested men on charges of practising *ku* or uttering prayers by night. He had previously taken the precaution of having manikins buried where they lived, and he now had those sites smeared or defiled with other matter, in the pretence that they were traces of spirits. He then had foreign shamans¹⁵¹ examine the defilement left by such spirits, so that it would be generally realised that these were sites where *ku* had been buried; and he then proceeded to have the sites dug up. Whenever people were arrested, proof was sought and a trial instituted; and admissions of guilt were forced by the application of hot irons.

The exploitation of a belief in *wu-ku* for dynastic purposes in 91 is only too self-evident from our sources. There were also other instances in which *wu-ku* was used as a pretext for political action. In 130 it had been the instrument for deposing an empress.¹⁵² We next hear of a parallel case in the Eastern Han period; in A.D. 102 a charge of harbouring *wu-ku* was brought against the empress Yin, and imprecation was again involved.¹⁵³ The earlier case of Kung-sun Ao may also show how *wu-ku* could be exploited in the name of justice.¹⁵⁴ He had been condemned to death by execution because of the very great losses of the campaigns of 97 and 96, but by simulating death he had managed to escape and to retire to live incognito in the country. Some five or six years later, i.e. at the height of the scandal, his presence was revealed and he was re-arrested. He was then brought up on a charge that his wife had practised *wu-ku*, and by way of punishment the family were exterminated.

Some slight information is available regarding the attention paid to *wu-ku* in Han institutions. The office of *ssu-li hsiao-wei* 司隸校尉 was first established in Han institutions in 89;¹⁵⁵ its responsibilities included the arrest of those practising *wu-ku* as well as the investigation of cases of

¹⁵¹ *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien*, 728, reads 胡巫橫何. The latter two characters, which are taken as a proper name, are not traced in SC or HS.

¹⁵² See p. 169 above. In the records of extraordinary phenomena and their interpretation as acts of Heaven's warnings of dynastic misdeeds, HS 27A:13a, b deliberately links two explosions which were reported to have occurred in the state-controlled iron mines in 91 and 27 respectively. The first is associated with the dynastic events of 91-90, and the second with the somewhat comparable incident of 18-17, when Ch'eng-ti's empress Hsü 許 was deposed and her position filled by the imperial favourite Chao Fei-yen 趙飛燕. It is to be noted that HS 27A (*loc. cit.*) specifies that the empress Hsü was deposed after a charge of *wu-ku*. However, this detail is not included in HS 10:10a (HFHD, 398) or HS 97B:6b, and there is no record of the empress's punishment for such a crime. The inclusion of *wu-ku* in HS 27 could well have been made in order to accentuate the comparison between the two phenomena and their interpretation.

¹⁵³ HHS 10A:14a, 16a; HHS 16 (biog. 6): 6b.

¹⁵⁴ HS 55:18b.

¹⁵⁵ HS 19A:22a. Dubs renders the title as Colonel of retainers.

treason. From a comment to the *Chou-li* by Cheng Hsüan that has already been cited¹⁵⁶ we learn that according to the Han Statutes "Those who dare to poison people with *ku* or teach others to do it will be publicly executed"; and those who were punished for the crime in 130 finally had their heads impaled and exhibited publicly.¹⁵⁷ In this connexion, attention may be drawn to one explanation of the term *ku* that appears in the *Shuo-wen*, i.e., the spirits of convicted criminals whose heads had been exposed on stakes.

Some of the passages in the *Han-shu* definitely associate *wu-ku* with imprecation and the great searches that were carried out at imperial orders from time to time. In 130 a charge of both *wu-ku* and cursing was used as a means of deposing Wu ti's first empress.¹⁵⁷ There is nothing to show that the great search of 100¹⁵⁸ was necessarily concerned with these matters, and it may have been restricted to a search for criminals; but the institution of the great search of 99 follows immediately on a ban that was imposed on shamans who were in the habit of making sacrifices on the roads, and it seems likely that the search was not unconnected.¹⁵⁹ In 86 Han Hsing 韓興, son of that Han Yüeh who had been put to death by the heir apparent in 91, was brought up on a charge and executed. According to one statement¹⁶⁰ the charge was one of *wu-ku*; according to another passage¹⁶¹ it was one of imprecation; and the discrepancy in the accounts may reflect the historian's association of the two types of practice together.

Cursing the emperor, *chu-tsu shang* 祝詛上, was a heinous crime that was described in official Han terminology usually as *ta-mi wu-tao* and once as *ta-ni*. This was "great refractoriness and impiety" or simply "great refractoriness", and those accused of the crime were either punished by execution or forced to commit suicide.¹⁶² The principle source of information for cases of this crime is to be found in the tables of the *Han-shu*, which record occasions when a charge of *chu-tsu shang* brought about the end of a highly placed official's career or the line of a nobility. It is remarkable that of the total number of 21 cases recorded here for the two centuries of Western Han, at least 16 and probably 18 were dated between 90 and 85.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ See p. 192 above, Feng and Shryock p. 6, *Chou-li* as cited in note 146; see Hulsewé, *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁵⁷ HS 6:7a, HFHD, 41; HS 97A: 11a.

¹⁵⁸ HS 6:33a, HFHD, 103-4.

¹⁵⁹ HS 6:34a, HFHD, 105.

¹⁶⁰ See p. 162 above; HS 33:9b.

¹⁶¹ HS 16:68a.

¹⁶² See Hulsewé, *ibid.*, p. 156f., and p. 168 for the use of the term to mean "swearing by the name of the emperor when entering into agreements."

¹⁶³ There are three cases dated between 6 and 1 B.C. In two cases that are recorded in HS 17:16b and HS 17:18b, the text dates the crime at two years after the investiture, of the nobility, i.e. 後二年, corresponding with 111 and 108. However, it is very likely that this should be interpreted as *hou-yüan erh mien* 後元二年, i.e. 87 B.C., as has been suggested by Wang Hsien-ch'ien and Su Yü 蘇興 for two other cases (HS 17:8b

One of these cases involved the wife of Liu Ch'u-li the chancellor, as has been described above (see p. 165), and in this particular instance we are told that the curses were uttered by means of a shaman.¹⁶⁴ A further interesting case of cursing the emperor is recorded¹⁶⁵ for Hsü, one of Wu ti's sons (see p. 174 above), who had been created king of Kuang-ling in 117. Conscious of Chao ti's youth at the time of his accession, he had his own ambitions to succeed as emperor, and invoked the services of a local female shaman, of a type that was well-known in the south. She claimed that she had successfully brought about the appearance of Wu ti's spirit; those who had attended the scene were convinced by her claim, and Wu ti was alleged to have insisted on Hsü's succession to the imperial throne. Chao ti's death after the performance of certain ceremonies added verisimilitude to the witch's statement. Pleased at her success, Hsü employed her again to utter curses when Ho king of Ch'ang-i was summoned to be emperor; and his immediate deposal added yet more support to Hsü's belief in her powers. After Hsüan ti's accession, Hsü was involved in a charge of complicity in rebellion. He managed to evade trial and gave up the practice of having curses uttered, but he is said to have taken it up later when involved in other charges. Unfortunately little is recorded of the activities practised during these incidents. To bring about Chao ti's death, the witch uttered prayers at the Mountain of the Shamans, wu shan 巫山;¹⁶⁶ after the event cattle were killed and prayers of thanksgiving were offered.

Finally, attention may be drawn to further hints of the belief in the powers of invocation at the end of Wu ti's reign, and the susceptibility of the imperial mind to witchcraft. Following Li Kuang-li's defeat of 90, an edict was proclaimed pronouncing the need for retrenchment (see p. 178 above). The text includes the following passage:¹⁶⁷

"Enemy patrols taken by the noble of Chung-ho 重合 inform Us that when the Hsiung-nu hear of the approach of Han forces they have their sorcerers bury sheep or cattle by the roads that they are taking and by the water, in order to bring a curse upon Our armies; and when the *Shan-yü* sends a present of horses or fur-garments to the Son of Heaven, he regularly has his sorcerers lay a spell upon them. . . ."

Continued from previous page—

and HS 17:18a). In view of the discrepancy regarding the crime of Wei K'ang (see note 8 above) I have not included this case in the figures, despite the implication in HS 63:1b that he was brought up on a charge of cursing and executed. See notes to HS 18:8a. The figures given here do not include the cases of Kung-sun Ho, Kung-sun Ching-sheng and the two princesses (HS 63:1b).

¹⁶⁴ HS 66:4b. Li Shou 李壽 was an official who arranged to have the shaman killed, presumably to prevent leakage of the intentions harboured by Liu Ch'u-li and Li Kuang-li. Li Shou was executed for the crime; HS 17:24b; see Hulsewé, *ibid.*, 181.

¹⁶⁵ HS 63:15a.

¹⁶⁶ HS 63:15b; see notes in *Han-shu pu-chu*.

¹⁶⁷ HS 96B:19a.