

# THE RISE OF THE EUNUCHS DURING THE T'ANG DYNASTY

Part One (618-705)

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No student of the Chinese history of the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. can fail to be impressed by the dominant position of eunuchs at the Imperial Court. Should he then ask how this relatively small body, drawn mainly from the aboriginal inhabitants of Southern China and equipped with little or no education, acquired the domination of a highly cultured and sophisticated society, he will find in the official histories no ready and acceptable answer. The official historians were at all times preoccupied with moral issues, with "praising the good and condemning the wicked". To them the eunuchs, as members of the state department known in T'ang times as the Nei Shih Sheng (內侍省, Department of Administration of the Inner Palace), in other words as the guardians and servants of the Imperial Harem, were an undesirable necessity. At the same time, as possible court favourites and rivals to the administrative class, they presented a grave potential menace. They were the rats beneath the floor, whose activities would so undermine the building that their destruction must end with its collapse. "For if you attack the wood-worms by setting fire to the wood, though the worms will all perish, the wood itself must be consumed as well." According to the T'ang historians the eunuchs were kept in their proper place until the abdication of the Empress Wu (武后) in 705. In the reign of Chung Tsung (中宗) (705-710), they suddenly pullulated, and acquired in the reign of Hsüan Tsung (玄宗) (712-756) a political influence, which subsequent reigns served only to increase; but from this the only inference to be drawn is that the earlier Emperors were possessed of certain moral qualities which their successors lacked. The attempt to provide a more satisfactory answer to the original question has not proved quite easy. The Old T'ang history devotes one section to the biographies of fifteen eunuchs, the New two sections to the biographies of twenty-one; in each history the biographies are preceded by a general introduction, which though valuable is far too brief. The amount of additional material to be gleaned from such encyclopædias as the *Ts'ie Fu Yüan Kuei*, and the *T'ang Hui Yao* has proved disappointingly small,

while the critical studies to be found in such works as the *Nien Erh Shih Cha Chi* are repetitive and superficial. In fact, by all authors who touch upon the T'ang eunuchs, the period 618-705 has been almost completely ignored. In addition the difficulty has been increased by the bias of the official historians against a class from whom they were divided not merely by political rivalry, but also by differences of education, religion, and place of birth. Thus, especially in the earlier part of the dynasty, eunuchs are apt only to be mentioned in cases where they have been successfully prosecuted by some member of the official class for misdemeanours. In this article it has been my aim not merely to collect the scattered references made to eunuchs in the official histories and other works for the period 618-705, but by relating them to the changing social conditions to try and show how there came to be presented to eunuchs the opportunities of which they were soon to take advantage. In the space of a brief article the difficulty has been to know what to omit, and I am well aware that this study is in many ways over-simplified. At the same time, as so little has been yet written on the T'ang eunuchs, I have thought fit to preface my remarks with a general introduction on the provenance of eunuchs and their place in society. Of their rise to political power I hope to write in another article.

#### SOURCES OF SUPPLY

Traditionally the supply of eunuchs was maintained by punishment, and in particular punishment for treasonable offences. Any person convicted, for instance, of attempted revolt brought penalties not only upon himself, but upon his whole household, of which all male members over the age of fourteen were executed, and those below that age castrated and sent to serve as eunuchs in one of the Imperial Establishments wherein the female members were also enclosed as concubines or slaves. Castration as a punishment was first abolished in 547 A.D. in the kingdom of the Western Wei (西魏) and replaced by simple serfdom<sup>1</sup>. But the Western Wei covered only one portion of Northern China, and for the general abolition of this punishment, credit must be given to Wen (文), first emperor of the Sui (隋) dynasty, who is said to have issued the decree of abolition at the beginning of the period K'ai Huang (開皇), circa 581<sup>2</sup>. This decree by no means put an end to the employment of eunuchs; on the contrary with the increasing luxury of the Sui court, the demand for them became greater than ever. As castration was now considered an indignity to which no male of Chinese birth should be submitted, raiding expeditions were organised to capture young boys from aboriginal tribes, especially those of the south and south west. It is recorded, for instance, that in 602 the fourth son of the emperor Wen of Sui, "Hsiu prince of Shu (蜀十秀), captured on several occasions boys from the south western tribes of the Shan Lao (山獠) to

fill the positions of eunuchs"<sup>3</sup>. Under the T'ang, these slave raids continued, and it soon became the custom for provincial officials, again especially in the south, to send to the capital a quota of castrated boys as part of their annual tribute. Thus in the reign of the Empress Wu, "(Kao) Li-Shih (高力士), a native of P'an Chou (潘州), in Kuang-Tung, and originally of the family Feng (馮), was castrated as a child, and with another of his kind, Chin-Kang (金鋼), was presented to the court by the T'ao Chi Shih for Ling-Nan (嶺南討擊使) Li Ch'ien-Li (李千里) in the first year of the period Sheng Li (聖歷), 698, and entered the service of the Harem"<sup>4</sup>. The officials soon found an easier source of supply in the slave markets which flourished in the districts of Kuang-Tung and Fu-Chien, and from which they drew large profits by supplying eunuchs and slaves, not only to the court but to private households. An edict issued in 749 ordered all eunuchs in private households to be sent to the Nei Shih Sheng within a period of five days, and limited the number of slaves according to the rank of their master, and a series of edicts issued from 779 onwards attempted to put an end to the slave traffic, especially in the south<sup>5</sup>. But despite both these, and the efforts of the more enlightened provincial governors of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, such as Liu Tsung-Yüan (柳宗元), Han Yü (韓愈), and Chu Chung-Liang (朱忠亮), to redeem at their own expense slaves in their particular Chou (州)<sup>6</sup>, so lucrative a traffic was bound to spread, and the great majority of eunuchs had originally been sold voluntarily by their parents to the officials. By the reign of Hsüan Tsung (宣宗) 846-859, every Tao (道) or Administrative Area paid its annual tribute of castrated boys, known as Szu Pai (私白)<sup>7</sup>, the majority of whom still came from Ling (嶺) or Kuang-Tung and Min (閩) or Fu-Chien, the latter being known as the eunuch nursery. One of the more surprising discoveries made by the merchant Soleyman, while travelling in China at this same time, was that eunuchs were all of Chinese birth. A little later, however, he qualified this and wrote, "*Parmi eux, il y en a qui ont été amenés captifs des régions étrangères, et qui ont été faits. Plus tard, eunuques: il en est d'autres qui sont nés en Chine, et que les parents eux-mêmes ont mutilés pour les offrir au souverain, à fin de capter par là sa heinveillance.*"<sup>8</sup>

#### UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION

All boys on arrival at the court entered the service of the Nei Shih Sheng, and were put under the charge of senior eunuchs, by whom they were formally adopted, and whose family names they assumed. This was evidently recognised as a necessary exception to the law, which allowed foster parents to adopt only children of the same family name as their own. As the authority of the eunuchs increased, the more influential made every effort to reduce the difference between their way of life and that of

the officials proper. By the reign of the Empress Wu (684-705) eunuchs had begun to take to themselves wives, and in the reign of Hsüan Tsung (712-756) they had deserted their quarters in the palaces for large mansions and landed estates in the metropolitan area, and were adopting, in addition to young eunuchs, ordinary children of both sexes to whom they could bequeath titles and possessions<sup>9</sup>. The young eunuchs, whether of Chinese origin or not, all came from illiterate families, and the majority no doubt went through life unable either to read or write. For a small minority, however, some literary education was provided. The records speak of fifty Serving Eunuch Students of the Inner Palace (Hsiao Chi Shih Hsüeh Sheng, 小給使學生)<sup>10</sup>, for whom masters were chosen from among professional scholars holding honorary titles of the eighth grade or above. Of what this education consisted there is no mention; but as, certainly from 741 and probably from a much earlier date, eunuchs were required to instruct the ladies of the harem in a variety of subjects ranging from Confucian classics to the game of draughts, their own education must have been comprehensive, if not profound<sup>11</sup>. At all events the standard of literary proficiency attained even by the most distinguished eunuchs was never very high. The two short poems attributed to Kao Li-Shih are interesting only as the work of a eunuch<sup>12</sup>. Li Fu-Kuo (李輔國) is allowed only a rudimentary knowledge of writing and arithmetic, while Yü Chao-En (魚朝恩), who openly boasted of his literary accomplishments and held forth at length before the court officials, was careful to keep a staff of hack scholars to write his compositions for him. Finally, all eunuchs were brought up in the Buddhist faith, the religion at once of the people and of the ladies of the Inner Palace, and to Taoism they were also favourably inclined. If their charities to these two orders were great, it must be remembered that from the reign of Hsüan Tsung they exercised an almost complete official control over the activities of both, and that as Envoys of Faith and Works (Kung Te Shih, 功德使) the profits which they drew from commissions upon enforced repairs to monasteries and the purchase of live birds and animals for release were enormous<sup>13</sup>.

#### PROMOTION, DUTIES, AND NUMBERS

On emerging from their pupillage, eunuchs received first the status of Serving Eunuch of the Inner Palace (Nei Chi Shih, 內給使), a general designation for all who had as yet no official appointment or grade. Promotion was based upon a Selection Examination (Hsüan 選), but by whom or in what manner this was conducted is not recorded<sup>14</sup>. The edicts conferring appointments upon eunuchs, however, were drafted by officials of the Grand Imperial Secretariat (Chung Shu Sheng, 中書省) and were similar to those drafted for members of the official class proper. Eunuchs were at first confined to the Nei Shih Sheng and to a similar establishment

in the household of the Heir Apparent, the T'ai Tzu Nei Fang Chü (太子內方局), Harem Service of the Heir Apparent, where their duties were those of upper and lower household servants<sup>15</sup>. Certainly from the reign of Chung Tsung some eunuchs were trained as soldiers, and served in certain branches of the Imperial Guard<sup>16</sup>. At the beginning of the dynasty, however, severe restrictions were imposed upon the eunuchs. Their duties were to be purely menial, they were under no circumstances to take part in state administration, or to hold appointments of a grade higher than the fourth. In other words, they were never to be in a position to challenge the authority of the Chief Ministers. The number of established posts inside the Nei Shih Sheng was at the beginning of the dynasty less than a hundred and, though subsequently increased, remained at all times small. Kao Tsung (高宗) is said to have re-introduced in addition to the established posts the status of P'in Kuan (品官), and of Chi Shih (給使), and the total number of eunuchs is said to have been slightly increased by the Empress Wu. By the year 706 the total number had been raised by Chung Tsung to more than 3,000, of whom more than 1,000 had received extraordinary appointments to supernumerary offices of the seventh grade or above. During Hsüan Tsung's reign the number of Imperial Palaces increased greatly, and the harems contained some 40,000 ladies. More than 1,000 eunuchs now held offices of the third grade or higher, while those of lower grades numbered more than 3,000. Thereafter the numbers seem to have risen steadily if slowly, and in 820 the figures on the Nei Shih Sheng register show that 4,618 eunuchs held official grades, or as commoners were due to hold them, and of these 1,696 held offices of the third grade or higher<sup>17</sup>.

The accession of T'ai Tsung (太宗) in 627 coincided with a post-war period of inflation and popular distress. A whole piece of silk had to be given in exchange for a single peck of grain, and to buy food the people were reduced to selling the children into slavery. Yet by 630 grain had fallen to the very low price of 4 to 5 cash per peck, while silk commanded the price of 300 cash per piece. This astonishing recovery was certainly greatly helped by a succession of excellent harvests, but a large measure of the credit must go to the efficiency of the Governmental machinery, and to the Emperor who supervised and directed it. At the highest level, policy was discussed by the heads of three state departments, the Imperial Chancellery, (Men Hsia Sheng, 門下省), the Grand Imperial Secretariat (Chung Shu Sheng, 中書省) and the Department of Affairs of State (Shang Shu Sheng, 尚書省), among whom were included the so-called Chief Ministers (Tsai Hsiang, 宰相). The results of their deliberations were presented to the Emperor at private audiences, at which were also present certain lower officials of the Men Hsia Sheng and Chung Shu Sheng. These, under the general designation of Officials with privileged access to

the Emperor (Kung Feng Kuan, 供奉宮), were empowered according to their positions to criticise proceedings either orally or in writing, and to take minutes to be delivered to the History College (Shih Kuan, 史館) for inclusion in the current annals. The conclusions reached at these audiences would subsequently be issued in the form of edicts. The chief ministers were personally appointed by T'ai Tsung as much from the supporters of the former dynasty of Sui as from his own partisans; they were liable to dismissal at his hands, and in general were not permitted to remain in office for more than two or three years at a time. The complex interlocking of the duties of the three state departments and the duplication of even the highest offices ensured a constant exchange of criticism between the ministers, and effectually limited individual authority. In the event of a final struggle the Emperor could, and on rare occasions did, impose his will upon his ministers, while the reverse would have been impossible. In fact, T'ai Tsung, by the excellence of his appointments, by demanding from his ministers a large measure of criticism and by generally acting upon it, and by being careful never to transact business through the agency of court favourites or other unofficial channels, aroused in the bureaucracy an *esprit de corps*, which has excited the admiration of every historian. The result was shown in its efficiency and its almost complete freedom from those internal dissensions that in later reigns raised the authority of the individual at the expense of its power and prestige as a body.

This strong bond of confidence between T'ai Tsung and his Ministers did nothing to favour the eunuchs, who traditionally flourished upon palace intrigue and ministerial dissidence, and their initial attempts to extend their authority inevitably came to nothing. One recognised duty only gained for the eunuch a temporary release from the Inner Palace; this was employment as a Palace Envoy (Chung Shih, 中使) bearing messages and presents from the Empress or Emperor to high officials at the capital<sup>18</sup>. The extension of this service to include the provinces and even the regions beyond the empire brought the eunuchs for the first time into conflict with the officials, who at once devised a means of countering this encroachment upon their own privileges. In 640 a serving eunuch or Nei Chi Shih, employed upon such a mission as a Foreign Envoy (Wai Shih, 外使), applied to the sub-office of Surveillance of Frontiers (Ssu Men Pu, 司門部) for a pass to enable him to cross the frontier, the granting of which was either refused or delayed by the Assistant Secretary Wei Yüan-Fang (韋元方). The eunuch made representations to T'ai Tsung, who in a fit of temper ordered the instant dismissal of Yüan-Fang and his banishment to a minor provincial appointment. The elder statesman, Wei Cheng (魏徵), who at all times exercised the greatest influence upon the emperor, now made his remonstrations. "It has always been impossible," he said, "to treat eunuchs on terms of intimacy. They make up stories on

very little foundation, and are all too ready to provoke trouble. To employ them upon independent missions to distant places is highly inexpedient, and a practice that should not be allowed to be extended. The whole matter requires most careful consideration." T'ai Tsung accepted this correction and the sentence passed upon Yüan-Fang was quashed<sup>19</sup>.

At the same time the eunuchs of the T'ai Tzu Nei Fang Chu threatened to gain the ascendancy over their master. T'ai Tsung, successful in almost every enterprise, was not fortunate in his own children. His eldest son, the Heir Apparent Ch'eng Ch'ien (承乾), was a profligate, with at first enough discretion to dissemble his vices under an appearance of filial virtue and consequently to enjoy the indulgent esteem of his father. The favours that he accorded to the eunuchs of his own household at once excited vigorous protests from the Superintendent of the Household Yu Chih-Ning (于志寧)<sup>20</sup>. The first of Chih-Ning's remonstrations was ignored, the second led to an unsuccessful attempt upon his life. By the year 642 Ch'eng Ch'ien, who had received an unlimited grant from the treasury, abandoned all attempts to conceal his viciousness, and the report of his scandalous intimacy with a singing boy reached the Emperor, who ordered the boy's instant execution. Ch'eng Ch'ien's hatred of his father and his jealous fears of his younger brother T'ai, prince of Wei (魏王泰), were now played upon by his uncle, who persuaded him at once to attempt the assassination of T'ai and the dethronement of his father. In the following year another brother, Yu, prince of Ch'i (齊王祐), raised an unsuccessful revolt, and was secretly assassinated in the Nei Shih Sheng<sup>21</sup>. Among those implicated was one of Ch'eng Ch'ien's principal supporters, who, to save himself from death, revealed the whole conspiracy. Ch'eng Ch'ien was degraded, and of his supporters and the members of his household only Yu Chih-Ning was saved by his former protests from death or banishment. Even T'ai, prince of Wei, now became an object of suspicion, and the succession devolved upon the incapable Chih, prince of Chin (晉王治), who six years later ascended the throne as the Emperor Kao Tsung.

T'ai Tsung, well aware of the character of his heir, had entrusted him to the protection of some of his most able ministers, and the feeble incompetence of Kao Tsung was therefore offset at first by the long administrative experience of Chang-Sun Wu-Chi (長孫無忌) and Yu Chih-Ning. Immediately, however, trouble occurred again within the Imperial Household. The Kao Yang Princess (高陽公主) had been the favourite daughter of T'ai Tsung, who had given her in marriage to the second son of the celebrated minister Fang Hsüan-Ling (房玄齡). The princess, an unscrupulous libertine, had for some years planned to dispossess her husband's elder brother of his inherited titles and estates, and to this she now added a plot against her brother's throne, for the furtherance of which she employed as soothsayers, astrologers and palace spies certain Buddhist

and Taoist priests and a eunuch, one Ch'en Hsüan-Yün (陳玄運), one of the two Heads of the Service of Dependencies of the Inner Palace (I T'ing Ling 掖庭令)<sup>22</sup>. But the false accusations levelled against her brother-in-law caused this plot to be revealed, and in the year 652 she and her fellow conspirators were examined by Chang-Sun Wu-Chi and duly executed. Of the far more important intrigue of the Empress Wang (王后) against the lady Wu (武氏), whom she had herself introduced to the Emperor in the hope of ousting a rival to his affections, the details are too well known to need repetition. When in 655 the Emperor raised the question of replacing the Empress by the lady Wu, the higher ranks of the bureaucracy found themselves split into three factions, a Wang party led by Ch'u Sui-Liang (褚遂良) and Han Yüan (韓瑗), a Wu party led by Hsü Ching-Tsung (許敬宗) and Li I-Fu (李義府), while Chang-Sun Wu-Chi and Yu Chih-Ning headed a moderate party, and while secretly opposed to the lady Wu and hating her supporters, were not ready to carry criticism to a point that might jeopardise their own positions. By the end of the year the lady Wu was established as Empress, Li I-Fu was a chief minister, Hsü Ching-Tsung President of the Board of Officials (Li Pu Shang Shu, 吏部尚書), and the elimination of their ministerial rivals was but a matter of time. Within the space of four years all had been assassinated or forced to commit suicide in the places of their banishment, and the administration was entirely in the hands of the Empress and of her partisans. Li I-Fu and Hsü Ching-Tsung then effected an important change in the constitution<sup>23</sup>. Henceforward the Kung Feng Kuan were excluded from all private audiences with the Emperor, who was virtually forced to agree to whatever his ministers might demand of him, while the ministers in their turn were freed from the necessity of justifying these demands to their colleagues.

In 663 Li I-Fu, whose contempt for law and decency had become intolerable, was tried for the open sale of official positions, and banished to the provinces. Hsü Ching-Tsung also had reached old age, and the opposition party, which had survived even the suicide of Chang-Sun Wu-Chi, saw an opportunity to rid themselves of the Empress. To secure evidence against her the chief minister, Shang-Kuan I (上官儀)<sup>24</sup>, was forced to conspire with the Nei Shih Sheng. In 664 one of its heads, the eunuch Wang Fu-Sheng (王伏勝) revealed to the Emperor that a Taoist priest was being freely admitted to the Inner Palace to effect his death by the practice of black magic. The Emperor at once summoned to a secret audience Shang-Kuan I, who advised that the Empress be instantly dismissed. To this the Emperor consented, and Shang-Kuan I was ordered to draft the necessary edict. The Empress, informed by her partisans, went at once to her husband and found the edict still lying upon his desk. Before her reproachful anger all his resolution vanished. "It was never my wish," he muttered, "Shang-Kuan I told me to do it." A full enquiry was carried

out by Hsü Ching-Tsung; Shang-Kuan I and Wang Fu-Sheng were executed and their accomplices banished. From this time the Empress took no further chances. She attended all audiences, and from behind a curtain decided personally all affairs of state, while for the remaining twenty years of his reign the wretched Kao Tsung drifted from palace to palace, isolated, and so robbed of all semblance of authority that his eunuch envoys were slighted with impunity by provincial officials<sup>25</sup>.

With the usurpation of the Empress Wu and the unscrupulous rapacity of her ministerial advisers began the social disintegration which was to prove at once the making of the eunuchs and the ruin of the state. T'ai Tsung had restored prosperity by the apparently simple means of an equal distribution of land supervised by an honest and capable administrative service. To each adult male of the agricultural class, which formed the bulk of the population, was given a holding of fixed size, one fifth of which was a permanent tenure to be enjoyed by himself and his heirs, the remainder to be returned upon his death to the state. Each land-holder was registered upon a list subject to frequent revision, and paid annual taxes in kind on his produce: to avoid the rise of large estates, the indiscriminate sale of land was expressly forbidden. Of the tax grain and cloth, a part went to the capital, which was never self-supporting, but as the numbers of officials were still small, the amount required was not great enough to raise any problems of transport. The rest went to pay the local officials or into the state "price-controlled" granaries, whose stocks were released only in times of stress. After some fifty years, however, the number of officials at the capital had markedly increased, and with the rise in national expenditure greater demands both in the form of taxes and of forced labour were laid upon the people. These they would doubtless have been able to bear had the land allotments been fairly administered. As it was, the local officials, either through negligence or venality, connived at illegal sales, and gradually decreased the allotments, particularly of returnable land, while maintaining their tax demands. To the peasant farmers, thus faced with ruin, several possibilities were open. They might work as hired labourers on the large estates of others, they might change their profession and register as traders or artisans, they might, if they could find enough money, enrol as Buddhist or Taoist priests and by this payment escape further taxation, or they might leave the neighbourhood and "squat" on some piece of land outside the official register, which they could work solely for their own profit<sup>26</sup>. This last was the favourite means of tax evasion, and by the end of the seventh century the floating population of farmers, who remained in any one place only until the tax collectors caught up with them, had begun to assume serious proportions.

This social unrest was by no means confined to the lower classes of the people. The official class bereft of the controlling influence of T'ai

Tsung had degenerated, as we have seen, into a number of factions divided not by political issues but by self-interest and personal animosity, while the corrupt administration of Li I-Fu and Hsü Ching-Tsung had made bribery or brazenness a surer guarantee of promotion than literary talent or proven ability. Above the officials was a small aristocracy of birth centred in Shan Tung. These five great families, whose ennoblement dated from the entry of the Wei Tartars, despised the Imperial House and its servants as parvenus, and allowed marriage with them as a great privilege to be bought at a correspondingly high price. T'ai Tsung had attempted to lessen the pretensions of the Five Families by degrading them in rank and by otherwise ignoring their existence. He could not, however, persuade his chosen ministers to do the same, and all who could afford the price purchased exclusive marriages for their children. No amount of money could secure the same privilege for the sons of Li I-Fu, who in 659 obtained a decree forbidding intermarriage between the five families, and limiting their monetary demands for marriage outside their own circle. But it was never found possible to enforce either part of the decree. Below the officials, and equally desirous of entry into their ranks, was the merchant class. Traditionally depressed and expressly forbidden from entry into political life through the official examinations, they derived their wealth partly from the distribution of the essential commodities of salt and iron, and partly from usury. As this wealth increased, their repression became increasingly difficult. The other rising class was the Buddhist, and to a lesser extent the Taoist priesthood. Buddhism had been regarded even by T'ai Tsung with something more than tolerance. The number of priests was rising, and under the Empress Wu was to rise much further, and the larger monasteries were already wealthy foundations with control of large landed estates. Not only were the Buddhists the principal religious teachers and welfare workers among the people, but their relations with the ladies of the Inner Palace, their greatest benefactresses, and, therefore, with the eunuchs, were extremely close. They, too, now aspired to political influence of a less covert nature.

After the death of Kao Tsung and the summary dismissal of Chung Tsung within a few months of his accession, the Empress Wu assumed in name the authority which she had in fact wielded for the last twenty years. In her character the base superstition and cruel capriciousness, which have been so stressed by historians, were more than balanced by shrewdness and determination; though she was ready to grant unprecedented favours to the Buddhists, and though her jealous fears were to afford openings for those unscrupulous adventurers who are inevitably produced in times of social unrest, she was too well aware of the indispensibility of the official class as an instrument of government to allow their authority to be too openly flouted, or their sensibilities to be unduly outraged. This caution is amply illustrated by the career of the most notorious of her early favourites,

the market pedlar of medicaments, Feng Hsiao-Pao (馮小寶), who as the Buddhist priest Hsieh Huai-I (薛懷義) rose from abbot of the White Horse Monastery and contractor for vast public works to the supreme command of the military forces of the empire<sup>27</sup>. Though the latitude allowed to Huai-I was great, he was at no time allowed a place among the civil officials, and on the occasions when he attempted to challenge their authority, it was they whom the Empress upheld against him. But his elevation to a military office involved them in no loss of face, for between the civil officials and their military colleagues was fixed the gulf that divides education from illiteracy, and though the grade of a chief minister and a general might be equal, to the one the other was simply an object of contempt. The officials of the War Board exercised an adequate control over the professional soldiers, and if necessary this control could be strengthened by sending a member of the Censorate to "supervise" the activities of any particular commander in the field. The Empress admittedly made efforts to narrow this gulf. In 685 a professional soldier of the name of Wei Tai-Chia (韋待賈) found himself promoted to the office of President of the Board of Officials (Li Pu Shang Shu, 吏部尚書), and in the following year to that of Chief Minister. His inept conduct of both these offices exposed him to ridicule, and his efforts to resign were unavailing until in 687 he was sent in command of a further expedition against the Tibetans. The Censorate at once proposed that one of their number be sent to supervise his army, but this request led only to the loss of their traditional privilege, which from the year 705 fell into the hands of the eunuchs<sup>28</sup>. In general, however, soldiers were not appointed to civil offices, but high military titles were to serve future emperors as a convenient method of reward for eunuchs, slaves, and other persons whose lack of birth or education would have caused an affront to the dignity of the bureaucracy.

In the latter years of the reign of Kao Tsung, the increased favours shown to members of the Wu family had already begun to arouse the apprehensions of the Imperial relations, the T'ung Hsing (同姓)<sup>29</sup>, and their supporters. These were confirmed in 684 by the exile of the two grandsons of the general Li Chi (李勣) and a number of their partisans, who collected together in Yang Chou (揚州) and under the leadership of Li Ching-Yeh (李敬業) raised a revolt. Before the end of the year the revolt was crushed, and steps were taken to ensure against its repetition. At the beginning of 686 the Empress instituted a system of delation known as Kao Mi (告密), Laying Secret Information. Henceforward any person, no matter how humble his position, who was prepared to lay a charge of treason against any noble or official was rushed to the Imperial Residence (Hsing Tsai, 行在), entertained with the ceremony proper to officials of the fifth grade, and, if he could establish his charge, richly rewarded. Malcontents and social outcasts were quick to take advantage of this new opportunity, and the most

successful of the early informers, for the most part illiterate and vicious persons who had failed to succeed in or even to obtain any settled profession, were selected to form a secret police, entrusted with the special work of proscription. The leaders of this organisation, the professional thief Lai Tsun-Ch'en (來俊臣), the petty official Chou Hsing (周興), and the Turk So Yüan-Li (索元禮), were given honorific titles and official positions in the Censorate, with whose more regular and honourable members they engaged in continuous and bitter strife, and had a Court of Investigation (T'ui Shih Yüan, 推事院) built for their own use. To this central court, agents reported from all parts of the empire. The methods of Lai Tsun-Ch'en were simple and effective. Any personage, whose elimination was thought desirable, found himself the victim of simultaneous indictments from several different quarters. He was then arrested, and after being compelled, under torture, to sign a confession of treason, was executed, his property confiscated and his household enslaved.

The energies of Lai Tsun-Ch'en were at first directed against the members of the house of Li. As the result of the abortive revolt of 688, the abler were eliminated, and the ineffective Prince of Lu Ling (廬陵王) or Chung Tsung, and the titular Emperor Jui Tsung (睿宗) survived as political prisoners, attended only by servants, and cut off from all intercourse with the outside world. The Empress, however, continued to profess her belief in the honesty of the secret police, who either as the agents of influential members of the Wu family or as simple blackmailers carried on their infamous work for another ten years. Individual officials offered violent resistance, but by now the bureaucracy was too much divided by internal hatreds, and the disappearance of prominent members gave too many advantages to the rest, for them to wish to put up any effective opposition as a whole. There is no evidence that eunuchs assisted in their activities, and at least one eunuch was numbered among their victims. In 693 Fan Yün-Hsien (范雲仙), a deputy chief of the Nei Hsü Sheng (Nei Ch'ang Shih, 內常使), was indicted for treason, and publicly executed<sup>29</sup>. His offence was that he had ventured to pay a private visit to Jui Tsung. It was by such actions that Lai Tsun-Ch'en and his colleagues in fact founded the eunuchs' fortunes. The surviving members of the Li family, who throughout the reign of the Empress Wu were left to the intimacy of minor eunuchs and slaves, naturally favoured them after their restoration. Eunuchs, therefore, were to benefit largely by the honours indiscriminately lavished by Chung Tsung, and it was upon the assistance of the disgraced eunuch Kao Li-Shih and the Korean slave Wang Mao-Chung (王毛仲) that the prince Li Lung-Chi (李隆基) was to rely to effect his two *coups d'état*. Once the eunuchs had succeeded in gaining the Imperial favour, their permanent occupation of a central position quickly served to consolidate their influence.

Directly, the Empress, either because she had never forgotten how near the charges of Wang Fu-Sheng had come to bringing about her downfall, or because she preferred more virile favourites, did little to promote the interests of the eunuchs. Occasionally the Nei Shih Sheng was ordered to eliminate some palace lady who had incurred her displeasure; and in 695, after the uproar following the burning of the Ming Tang (明堂), eunuchs were ordered to arrest a number of the Empress' private nuns and priests who, while claiming prophetic insight, had not only failed to foretell the disaster, but had even dared to reproach her for its occurrence<sup>31</sup>. Apart from the possible gains resulting from the enlargement of the Nei Wen Hsüeh Kuan in 692, the creation of only one new office for eunuchs is recorded. The Department of Domestic Service for the Emperor (Tien Chung Sheng 殿中省) carried out for the Imperial Household many of the same duties as did the Nei Shih Sheng for the ladies of the Inner Palace, and it was therefore likely that, when the lady Wu assumed the position of Emperor, the two departments would have been more closely drawn together. In 699 six stables were established within the palace, the supervision of which was entrusted to an assistant officer of the Tien Chung Sheng; immediate responsibility for the first of these six, the Flying Dragon Stable (Fei Lung Chiu, 飛龍廄), devolved upon a eunuch bearing the title of Nei Fei Lung Shih (內飛龍使)<sup>32</sup>. Originally this stable provided a daily quota of eight horses for the Imperial use. Later, however, it mounted a special troop of horse known as the Fei Lung Chi (飛龍騎), which was commanded and possibly also manned by eunuchs. At the same time the eunuchs were able considerably to widen their sphere of operations. Hsieh Huai-I was at all times accompanied by a confidential eunuch staff<sup>33</sup>. Kao Li-Shih, on his expulsion from the Inner Palace, passed into the service of the Empress' nephew, Wu San-Ssu (武三思)<sup>34</sup>, and it is reasonable to infer that in the households of other members of the Wu family eunuchs were also employed. By the turn of the century they were, in addition, dispersed through the households of the Li family, where they enjoyed favour and trust soon to be converted into positions of authority.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *T'ung Chien, Hsi Wei, Ta T'ung* (大統) 13th year. Vol. 3, p. 1853. "Henceforth all liable to the punishment of castration (宮刑) shall not be so punished, but shall merely pass into the control of the state (沒官)."

<sup>2</sup> See *Shang Shu Chu Su*, section 29, *Lü Hsing* (呂刑), p. 195. In the commentary by K'ung Ying-Ta (孔穎達) occurs the passage: "In recent ages males of fourteen years or under who were convicted of treason, but not liable to the death penalty, were all castrated. In the Sui dynasty at the beginning of the period K'ai Huang, castration was for the first time abolished; but females were still enclosed in the harem. Thus castration as a punishment was next to death, and of the four punishments was the most severe."

<sup>3</sup> See *T'ung Chien, Sui, Jen Shou* (仁壽) 2nd year, Vol. 3, p. 2090.

<sup>4</sup> See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, biography of Kao Li-Shih, *Huan Kuan Chuan* (宦官傳), Section 184, No. 2, beginning.

<sup>5</sup> See *T'ang Hui Yao*, Vol. 3, Section 86, pp. 1570-1. A full account of the slave traffic in the T'ang dynasty is to be found in Niida, *Tōsō Hōritsu Bunsho no Kenkyū*, pp. 161-92, though no particular reference is made by the author to the specialised trade in castrated boys. Contemporary works of fiction mention the employment of eunuchs as doorkeepers in large mansions in the metropolitan area. See, for instance, the famous Li Wa Chuan (李娃傳) in the *Chin T'ang Hsiao Shuo*, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Between the years 806-13, Chu Chung-Liang redeemed more than 200 slaves at his own expense in Ching Chou (涇州, modern Kansu). (See his biography in *Chiu T'ang Shu*, Section 151.) Liu Tsung-Yüan in 815 set an example in Liu Chou (柳州, modern Kuanghsi) which led to the redemption of more than 1,000 slaves in this and neighbouring Chou (see *Han Ch'ang Li Chi* 32.2). Han Yü in 820 in Yüan Chou (袁州, modern Chuanghsi) redeemed more than 700 slaves (see *Han Ch'ang Li Chi* 40.9).

<sup>7</sup> See *Hsin T'ang Shu*, biography of 'T'u-'T'u Ch'eng-Ts'ui (吐突承璀), *Huan Kuan Chuan* (1), Section 207, No. 7, end.

The term Ssu Pai I believe to be abbreviated from Ssu Chih Pai Shen (私置白身), and to mean privately kept eunuchs. In the *T'ang Hui Yao* (Vol. 2, Section 65, p. 1133) under the heading Nei Shih Sheng occurs the following edict:

"In the eleventh month of the second year of the period Pao Li (寶曆), 826, it was decreed that households of court officials and territorial governors should not be allowed to keep ordinary eunuchs for their private use (私置白身)."<sup>8</sup> A poem by the T'ang writer, Ku K'uang (顧況) (receives degree of Chin Shih 進士 in 757), preserved in the 6th section of the Ching Hsiang Tsa Chi (青箱雜記), describes the fate of one of these boys. "The son was born in Min: an officer of Min having got him deprived him of his manhood. He had treasures and stores, he collected gold to fill his house. I had the labour and the toil, and was treated as the grass and trees. There is no reason in the way of Heaven, for I bear all the hardship. There is no reason in the way of the gods, for he has all the luck. The father parting with his son said, 'I regret that I ever begat you. When you were born, they urged me not to bring you up. But I did not follow their advice and as they foretold have incurred this evil.' The son parting with his father said, 'My heart breaks and bleeds when I think that the distance of earth from heaven will come between us, and that until I come to the Yellow Spring, I shall be unable to stand before you as my father.'" I believe that provincial officials acquired numbers of young boys whom they employed in their households as eunuch slaves, and often treated with great brutality, and that from their ranks the annual demands of the court and the requirements of officials in the capital were supplied.

The term Pai Shen in the meaning of eunuch without official grade is found in a memorial addressed from the Nei Shih Sheng to the throne in 820, where it is stated that the total number of eunuchs who should discharge duties as Kao P'in (高品), P'in Kuan (品官), or Pai Shen amounted to 4,618. (See *T'ang Hui Yao*, Section 65, p. 1133, and *Ts'e Fu Yuan Kuei*, Section 665, p. 8b.) The introduction to the *Huan Kuan Chuan* in the *Chiu T'ang Shu* (Section 184), records that in the period Shen Lung (神龍) 705-6, more than 1,000 eunuchs received extraordinary appointments to supernumerary offices of the seventh grade or above, but that eunuchs wearing red or purple robes (衣朱紫者) were still few, while in the period T'ien Pao (天寶)

742-55, eunuchs bearing the title P'in Kuan and those wearing robes of yellow or higher colours numbered over 3,000, and those wearing red or purple robes over 1,000. Kao P'in is included in a list of honorific titles conferred in the T'ang dynasty solely upon eunuchs given in the *Wen Hs'en T'ung K'ao* (Section 64, p. 24a), and seems to be the fourth highest in a list of twelve.

According to the *Ts'e Fu Yuan Kuei* (Section 665, p. 7a), the titles P'in Kuan and Chi Shih (給使, Serving Eunuch without official grade) were re-created in 670 by Kao Tsung (高宗) in addition to established appointments. Other mentions of P'in Kuan show that it cannot have been a high-ranking title. The eunuch Yü Chao-En (魚朝恩) started his career, circa. 755, as a P'in Kuan (see *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *Huan Kuan Chuan*, Section 184, No. 5, beginning), and in 825 a number of P'in Kuan were set to beat up an official who had wrongfully arrested a eunuch envoy (Chung Shih, 中使). (See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 4, p. 2934). Probably the thousand who received supernumerary offices from Chung Tsung (中宗) were also P'in Kuan. According to the *T'ang Hui Yao* (Section 31, pp. 591-2) purple robes were worn by officials of the third grade or above, red (緋) by those of the fourth and fifth grades, and yellow by commoners (庶人), which included minor clerical staff, slaves, etc. That Ssu-Ma Kuang (司馬光) interpreted 衣朱紫者 as officials of the fifth grade or higher is clear: for after recording the appointment of Kao Li-Shih to the office of General of the Guard for the Surveillance of Gates of the Right (Yu Chien Men Wei Chiang Chün, 右監門衛將軍), he adds "When originally T'ai Tsung laid down the regulations, he did not establish any offices of the third grade in the Nei Shih Sheng, whose members simply wore yellow robes, received an allowance of food, guarded the gates, and passed messages. The Empress Wu, though a woman, did not employ eunuchs in administrative duties, but in the time of Chung Tsung they were much favoured, and more than 1,000 received offices of the seventh or higher grades. Those wearing red robes (衣緋者), however, were still few. . . From this time (i.e., 713) the number of eunuchs gradually rose until it reached more than 3,000. The number appointed to be generals of the third grade by degrees became large, and more than 1,000 wore robes of purple or red (衣緋紫者)." (*T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, pp. 2507-8). Ssu-Ma Kuang was, in fact, in error in believing Kao Li-Shih to have been the first eunuch appointed to an office of the third grade, for the eunuch Hsieh Ssu-Chien (薛思簡) held the office of Grand General of the Guard for Surveillance of Gates of the Left (Tso Chien Men Wei Ta Chiang Chün, 左監門衛大將軍) in 707, and his replacement of the first 衣朱紫者 by 衣緋者 is therefore unjustified. Even so, if Ssu Ma Kuang is right in believing that 衣緋紫者 meant eunuchs of the fifth grade or above in contradistinction to 品官黃衣以上, eunuchs of the sixth to the ninth grades plus those with minor posts carrying no official grade, it seems reasonable to infer that between 高品 and 品官白身 the same distinction existed. The number of established posts in the Nei Shih Sheng was at all times small, and from the reign of Chung Tsung the majority of high-ranking eunuchs held honorific titles in conjunction with a supernumerary office. I therefore tentatively suggest that honorific titles given to eunuchs were divided into two categories, Kao P'in, first to fifth grade, and P'in Kuan, sixth to ninth grade, with the additional category of Pai Shen to denote all eunuchs bearing no official grade.

<sup>8</sup> See Renaud, *Relations des Voyages*, Tome 1, p. 74.

Recorded instances of the castration of adult members of foreign tribes are rare. I give two examples. A memorial presented in 686 to the Empress Wu mentions the castration, at the order of T'ai Tsung, of a certain Lo Hei Hei (羅黑黑). This man,



whose name shows him to be of non-Chinese origin, was a professional P'i-Pa player, and was sent to instruct the ladies of the Harem in the use of his instrument. (See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2415.) Secondly, An Lu-Shan (安祿山) is said to have castrated, with his own knife, his servant Li Chu-Erh (李猪兒), a member of the Ch'i Tan (契丹) tribe, by whom he was eventually murdered. (See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *An Lu-Shan Chuan*, Section 200.)

<sup>8</sup> Kao Li-Shih, after his expulsion from the Inner Palace for some minor offence by the Empress Wu, entered the household of her nephew, Wu San-Su (武三思) where he was adopted by the eunuch Kao Yen-Fu (高延福) and his wife. (See Kao Yen-Fu's epitaph written by Chang Yüeh (張說) in 725, *Chang Yen Kung Chi* 17.3.) Kao Li-Shih himself adopted a number of persons including a daughter, who in 781 falsely claimed to be the Empress Dowager and was exposed by her younger brother and by Li-Shih's adopted grandson, Fan Ching-Ch'ao (樊景超). (See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2725.) About the year 760, Yü Chao-En adopted a professional soldier of Hsien Pei (鮮卑) origin by name Shang K'o-Ku (尚可孤) thereafter changed to Yü Chih-Te (魚智德). (See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *Shang K'o-Ku Chuan*, Section 144.) Like Fan Ching-Ch'ao he was not a eunuch. This form of adoption does not appear to have been legalised until 791 when an edict permitted members of the Nei Shih Sheng of the fifth grade or above to adopt one male child, who should be under nine years of age at the time of adoption. (See *T'ang Hui Yao*, Section 65, p. 1133.) In the introduction to this section the editor writes: "After the beginning of the period Cheng Yüan (貞元), 785-804, the officers who acted as the Emperor's claws and teeth (i.e., the Imperial Guards) were all under the control of the eunuchs. From this time they began to adopt foster-children, to whom they bequeathed their titles, the first signs that foreshadowed their absolute authority."

<sup>9</sup> According to the *T'ang Liu Tien* (Section 12, under Kung Wei Chü 宮闈局), a department of the Nei Shih Sheng, the Office of Doors of the Inner Palace, Kung Wei Chü, was responsible for keeping the register of these students and for supplying them with food. (See also R. des Rotours, *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, 1, p. 250.)

<sup>11</sup> For full details of the College of Literary Studies of the Inner Palace (Nei Wen Hsüeh Kuan, 內文學館), see *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, 1, pp. 248-9. It seems probable that from the time of its enlargement (circa 692) by the Empress Wu, some of its eighteen professorships were held by eunuchs. After its abolition as a separate institution and attachment to the Nei Shih Sheng (741 or before), it was entirely staffed by eunuchs.

<sup>12</sup> These two poems, which are in reality brief impromptu verses, are to be found in the *Kao Li-Shih Chuan*, compiled by Kuo Shih (郭晁) supposedly on the basis of information supplied by Li-Shih himself. The work, however, consists of a series of anecdotes mainly legendary and worthless to the historian, and is, to my mind, rightly included among the works of fiction. Some of these anecdotes have been included by the editors of the *Hsin T'ang Shu* in Li-Shih's official biography. (See *Chin T'ang Hsiao Shuo*, p. 32.)

<sup>13</sup> According to his biographers, Kao Li Shih not only had a private chapel most sumptuously carved and decorated within the palace, but also founded in the capital a Buddhist and a Taoist monastery, each of unexampled magnificence. At the same time it is mentioned that eunuchs who received commissions in the provinces to promote faith and works (修功德) and to buy birds and animals, demanded not less than 1,000 strings of cash as their honorarium. Li Fu-Kuo carried his piety still further, and gained a great reputation for goodness by living as a Buddhist priest,

eating only vegetables, and being seen to tell his beads even while conducting state business. (See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *Huan Kuan Chuan*, 184.)

<sup>14</sup> See *T'ang Liu Tien*, Section 12, under Kung Wei Ling (宮闈令). "All eunuchs without an official grade were called Nei Chi Shih. If they held an official appointment or had passed through a period of suspension from office (經解免) and undergone a Selection Examination, they obtained appointments as Departmental Directors or Permanent Guards (得令長上)." This passage, the translation of which I am uncertain, contains the only mention that I can find of a Selection Examination for eunuchs. A number of edicts conferring appointments upon eunuchs are to be found in Section 418 of the *Wen Yüan Ying Hua*.

<sup>15</sup> For full details of the Nei Shih Sheng and T'ai Tzu Nei Fang Chü, see *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, 1, pp. 240-56.

<sup>16</sup> From 707 at least the Left and Right Guards for the Surveillance of Gates were commanded by eunuchs, Hsieh Ssu-Chien being followed as general by Kao Li-Shih and Yang Ssu-Hsü (楊思勳), and it was in these guards that the Chang Shang (長上) or Permanent Guards, referred to in Note 14, served. For full details, see *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, 2, pp. 537-42. I support M. R. des Rotours in thinking that the members of these guards were recruited from among the eunuchs.

<sup>17</sup> For this account of the numerical expansion of the eunuchs I have followed the text of the *Ts'e Fu Yüan Kuei* (Section 665, pp. 5-6) which contains details not to be found elsewhere. If the numbers of higher ranking eunuchs from the reign of Hsüan Tsung onwards seems disproportionately large, it should be remembered that the organisation developed, if not actually created by Kao Li-Shih, formed from at least the year 730 a channel through which all state business had to pass. The chief ministers could only approach the Emperor through a eunuch, and eunuch emissaries armed with authority to take precedence over the highest provincial or military officials ranged from Annam to Corea. These eunuchs still derived their authority from honorific titles, either civil or military, and until the establishment of the two offices of Nei Shih Chien (內侍監), Director of the Nei Shih Sheng, in 755, no eunuch held an established office of the third grade.

<sup>18</sup> Chung Shih in the T'ang dynasty are first mentioned in the year 632, when the minister, Wei Cheng (魏徵), after having acted as arbiter in a dispute over precedence within the Imperial Household, received from the Empress a message and a present of silk and money through a Chung Shih. (See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *Wei Cheng Chuan*, Section 71, and *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2286.) Later in the reign of T'ai Tsung, Chung Shih were frequently sent by the Emperor to take messages of condolence and presents of medicine to high officials in illness. (See, for example, *Chiu T'ang Shu*, as above, and *Fang Hsüan-Ling* (房玄齡) *Chuan*, Section 66.)

<sup>19</sup> This anecdote is to be found in the *T'ang Hui Yao*, Section 65, p. 1132, and in the *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2309. In the 17th section of the *Cheng Kuan Cheng Yao* (貞觀政要) the compiler Wu Ching (吳兢) has used a slightly different version as a peg on which to hang a long memorial on the general principles of government and irrelevant to the story itself presented by Wei Cheng in 637. In Wu Ching's version, the story ends: "From no one else but you could I have received such a warning," replied the Emperor. "From now on the employment of eunuchs as messengers shall be stopped". Nor is it recorded that T'ai Tsung made any further use of eunuchs as provincial envoys.

<sup>20</sup> See *Chiu T'ang Shu*, *Yu Chih-Ning Chuan*, Section 78, and *Heng Shan Wang Ch'eng Ch'ien* (恆山王承乾) *Chuan*, Section 76.

<sup>21</sup> See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Shu Jen Yu* (庶人祐) *Chuan*, Section 76.

<sup>22</sup> See *Hsin T'ang Shu, Ho P'u Kung Ch'u* (合浦公主) *Chuan*, Section 83, and *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2355.

<sup>23</sup> For the date of this constitutional change (circa. 658), see *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, Vol. 1, p. 159, note 1.

<sup>24</sup> Shang-Kuan I was primarily a *litterateur*, who enjoyed a considerable reputation both as a poet and as an historiographer. All his life had been spent among books and documents, and his lack of administrative experience probably marked him as a safe choice for the office of chief minister, to which he was appointed in 662. However, his arbitrary use of his newly-acquired authority soon aroused the hostility of his contemporaries. Both he and Wang Fu-Sheng had been in the service of the Prince Chung (忠), established as Heir Apparent in 652, and ousted by the Empress Wu in 656. Though it is said that Chung was not a party to the conspiracy, he did not escape the accusations of Hsü Ching-Tsung, and was executed at the same time. See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Shang-Kuan I Chuan*, Section 80, and *Yen Wang Chung* (燕王忠) *Chuan*, Section 86, and *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2379.

<sup>25</sup> In 675 an official, who among other duties had charge of the gardens of the Imperial Palace at Lo Yang (洛陽), found a eunuch misconducting himself in these gardens and had him severely beaten. He then addressed a memorial to the Emperor justifying his action, for which he received a reward of silk and a letter saying that should such an incident occur again, he was at liberty to take action without the need to send a memorial. See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 13, p. 2392.

In 682 the Emperor sent a eunuch envoy to the south to collect from the Yüan river (緣江) a rare species of bamboo, which he wished to plant in the palace gardens. This eunuch behaved with such insolence upon his journey that on reaching Ching Chou (荊州) he was arrested by the prefect, Su Liang-Ssu (蘇良嗣), who wrote to the Emperor a strong letter deploring both the messenger and his errand. The Emperor sent a reply in his own hand approving Liang-Ssu's action, and telling him to throw the plant back into the river. See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Su Liang-Ssu Chuan*, Section 75, and *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2404.

<sup>26</sup> Another occupation to which the dispossessed turned was the making of counterfeit coin. Since 660 the various attempts to call in debased currency had ended in failure, and only succeeded in raising commodity prices and bringing trade almost to a standstill. Increased penalties for counterfeiting led only to more ingenious methods of eluding the vigilance of the officials. Eventually, in the reign of the Empress Wu, these officials were sent round to take specimens of coins in local circulation: those which were worthless they seized, the rest, however rough or overweight, they left. As a result counterfeiting rapidly increased, and in particular, transients from the grain-producing areas of Chiang and Huai (江淮) rivers took themselves to remote places, where they could cast coin without fear of arrest. See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Shih Huo Chih* (食貨志) 1, Section 48, *Hsin T'ang Shu, Shih Huo Chih* 4, Section 44, *T'ung Tien, Shih Huo* 9.

<sup>27</sup> Hsieh Huai-I is said to have been forced to take Buddhist orders as a means of securing his free entry into the Inner Palace, just as his adoption into the family of Hsieh, into which the Empress had married her daughter the T'ai P'ing princess (太平公主), was the means of giving him precedence at the court. But though one official rudely proposed that as Huai-I had now all the privileges of a eunuch he had better be castrated, he was in fact associated with a number of genuine priests, and represented the interests of Buddhism at the Palace. The series of public buildings,

for which he was responsible, were also all of a religious kind. (See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Hsieh Huai-I Chuan*, Section 183.)

<sup>28</sup> See *T'ang Hui Yao*, Vol. 2, pp. 1086 and 1131, and *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2418. In fact, the author of the *T'ang Hui Yao* is not quite accurate in stating that no censor was sent on a mission of military supervision after 687. In the following year the Censor Su Hsiang (蘇珣) was ordered to investigate the various Imperial princes who had joined the revolt of Cheng, Prince of Yüeh (越王貞) and refused. The Empress then got rid of Hsiang by sending him to supervise the armies in Ho Hsi (河西), and placed the investigation in the hands of Chou Hsing (周興). See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2420.

<sup>29</sup> The *T'ung Hsing* were not necessarily members of the Imperial House by birth. The family name of Li Chi was Hsü (徐), but he was granted by the Emperor Kao Tsu (高祖) (619 or after), the privilege of bearing the same family name as his own. After Ching-Yeh raised his revolt, the Empress ordered his family name to be changed back to Hsü. See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Li Chi Chuan*, Section 67.

<sup>30</sup> See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2433. In the biographies of Lai Tsun-Ch'en, in both the *Chiu* and *Hsin T'ang Shu* (Section 186, and Section 209), a different version of this episode is given. In the *Chiu T'ang Shu* version alone, Fan Yün-Hsien is given the title Ta Chiang Chün Nei Shih (大將軍內侍), Grand General and Head of the Nei Shih Sheng. It seems to me most unlikely that any eunuch should have held a high military office at this date, and I am relieved to find that Ssu-Ma Kuang has rejected this version because of other discrepancies, and followed that which he found in the *T'se T'ien Huang Hou Shih Lu* (則天皇后實錄).

<sup>31</sup> See *T'ung Chien*, Vol. 3, p. 2436.

<sup>32</sup> See *Traité des Fonctionnaires*, Vol. 1, pp. 220 and 236.

<sup>33</sup> See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Hsieh Huai-I Chuan*, Section 183.

<sup>34</sup> See *Chiu T'ang Shu, Kao Li-Shih Chuan*, Section 184.

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