

Preface to Second Edition

The oneness of China is the norm. Periods of division are aberrations. This is how Chinese thinkers, leaders, and ultimately the majority of Chinese people have regarded Chinese politics and history for more than 2,000 years. With the revolution of 1949, Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communist Party achieved a reunification that they thought was essential to China. But they succeeded to a republic that inherited the borders of the Manchu Ch'ing dynasty, and a political entity that was founded on the ideal of a modern nation that took its place among the nations of the world. How is this achievement to be measured against the concept of *t'ien-hsia* (All under Heaven) that had served China well for so long? It does not matter what the new China is now called: The ability to restore the civilizational ideal of an undivided norm is still the key to legitimacy. The difference is that the emphasis is now placed on the sovereign nation having fixed borders and not on the oneness of civilization. This new idea is supposedly determined by international law based on which the borders are recognized by other nations. It is, therefore, not a concept that national elites are free to modify. Thus issues like uniting Taiwan with the mainland today and preserving the current territorial boundaries of the People's Republic of China have become new kinds of dominant symbols.

The Chinese continue to be reminded how staunchly the ultimate indivisibility of China, now newly defined, was upheld as an act of faith among the elites and how firmly the story of China has been tied to this ideal. The major reason why the transmission of such faith had been successful in the past was that the ideal had always been framed in realistic terms and thus had always been seen as achievable. The oneness was never perfect. As long as certain minimal conditions were met and the polity that proclaimed that oneness was widely acknowledged, that was normally enough. Chinese ruling elites adopted this pragmatic approach so that they could ensure that the ideal always approximated China's reality. These elites did not even have to be people regarded traditionally as Chinese (called Han Chinese today). Invaders from the north and west, ranging from

the Hsiung-nu and Hsien-pei to Turkic T'u-chüeh and Uighur and the Tibetan T'u-po during the first thousand years after unification, all tried to capture the Chinese centre. For the second thousand years, the Khitan, the Jurchen, the Mongol and the descendants of the Jurchen, the Manchu, were more successful and indeed parts if not all of China came under their rule for some 700 of the 1,000 years. All of these invading forces played key roles in dividing and uniting lands that were identified with the *t'ien-hsia* to be ruled by the Son of Heaven (*t'ien-tzu*). As the official historical records show, the victors who could stay in control for a while and were seen as having been in the direct line of succession of legitimate dynasties were counted as Sons of Heaven. It did not matter how long or how brief a time they were in control. During the Five Dynasties studied in this work, the Later Han dynasty (947-951) had two emperors who together ruled for only three years and 307 days. Nor did it matter even if they had caused China to be divided in the first place. As long as they were dedicated to, or had contributed in any way at all to the eventual reunification, their claims to be *t'ien-tzu* were accepted as legitimate.

My first interest in Chinese history was in the modern period. I was intrigued by the warlords who divided China for decades after the fall of the Manchu Ch'ing Empire in 1911. It was striking how Chinese elites, whether militarists, bureaucrats or intellectuals, all agreed that they should dedicate themselves to reunifying China. For some 40 years, they strenuously organized themselves for that task and many were prepared to sacrifice their lives to put the pieces back together again.¹ In everything they wrote and said, they reminded the Chinese people of the disastrous times when China was divided, notably during the divisions following the fall of the Han in the third century and the T'ang at the end of the ninth century. The latter was the last time that the *t'ien-hsia* had been fragmented in a similar way. I was thus drawn to ask how that particular reunification was subsequently achieved. This study, originally entitled *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* and completed in 1957, was undertaken in an attempt to understand what happened during times of division that helped the centripetal forces to return to the norm. It begins with the final stage of decline of the T'ang dynasty (618-907) and ends 50 years later in 947 when it became clear that the foundations for a last push towards unification were in place. I did

not go on to pursue the final acts of unification that were completed after 960 by the first Sung emperors, T'ai-tsu and T'ai-tsung. Those events that are celebrated in Sung records and many later histories have been re-examined and described by Edmund H. Worthy in the thesis he completed in 1976.²

All Chinese histories agree that the T'ang emperors were not powerful for long. By the end of the reign of the fifth emperor, Hsüan-tsung (712-756), a series of invasions and mutinies had led to the fall of the capital, Ch'ang-an. Although the capital was recaptured, the dynasty never fully recovered. For the next century, central authority remained weak and many military governors in the provinces enjoyed great autonomy in North China. The descent to anarchy and more rebellions was inevitable. Finally, the dynasty fell in 907 and was followed by the period of the Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms (907-960). This was the most serious fragmentation of the *t'ien-hsia* that the Chinese had ever experienced. Ever since then, the history of the ninth and tenth centuries has been seen in the context of an aberration that fortunately did not last for too long before it reverted to the norm of reunification. In the dramatization of this onerous task, all histories thereafter have been deeply influenced by the writings of Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072) and Ssu-ma Kuang (1019-1086). The most important were the New History of the T'ang dynasty and the New History of the Five Dynasties by Ou-yang Hsiu and the *Tzu-chih Tung-chien* (Mirror for Government) by Ssu-ma Kuang.³ They upheld the orthodox view that Chinese history was primarily political history and its essence was to be found in the oneness of China. For rulers and their scholar-officials alike, their sacred duty was to keep the idea of China's oneness alive at all costs.

Since the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty and the *t'ien-hsia* system in 1911, some Chinese intellectuals influenced by Western methodologies have been drawn to social and economic history and sought to depart from this political orthodoxy. Others have found modern Japanese scholarship on this question helpful. One group adopted Marxist analysis wholesale and reframed Chinese history altogether so that much of the 2,000 years of unity and division was depicted as a 'feudal' period during which peasant rebellions provided the best explanation for all significant changes. My study of the Five Dynasties was done when the peasant rebellions versus feudal order framework was

becoming the new orthodoxy. I was not persuaded that model could fit my period of study and chose not to adopt it. Instead, I concentrated on re-examining the methods and instruments of reunification, both civilian and military, at a time when China was the most divided. It was clear that few of the protagonists themselves had much time to reflect on what it would take to end the fragmentation; the desperate fighting to survive took up most of their energies. But the *t'ien-hsia* ideal that provided the framework of governance was a constant reminder that there was a larger responsibility that awaited a new Son of Heaven. Ending the fissiparous tendencies that had become so dominant during the ninth century had become not merely an ideal but also a necessity if the fighting was ever to end. It was for this purpose that the bureaucratic and military systems of the tenth century were re-structured, especially in North China. Its relative success in the border provinces where the danger of nomad invasions was greatest eventually enabled the northern dynasties to reunify much of the former T'ang lands in the west and the south. The mechanisms of the first 60 years of the exercise of centralizing power provide the subject of this book.

In preparing this second edition, I have considered whether or not to revise the book to take recent research into account.⁴ Some new work has been done that focuses on the economic consequences of incessant wars and some notable social changes, and there have also been studies that show the underlying continuity of elite groups of the T'ang period that survived the anarchic conditions and re-surfaced as *t'ien-hsia* builders during the Sung. Other studies have highlighted the literary and artistic achievements of the years of division, and also the technical and commercial creativity. But, when compared with other great moments of Chinese history, the Five Dynasties period has not attracted much attention. There is among most Chinese historians a natural impatience with the messiness of division. This is in sharp contrast to the tendency among European historians to celebrate difference. While much history writing is focused on the numerous nations-in-the-making in Europe of the past five centuries, Chinese historians are more inclined to believe that the history of China can be better understood in the context of *t'ien-hsia* unity. For most of them, as for all Chinese military and political leaders, the only right way to deal with the aberration of division is to end it as quickly as possible and get on with more important business.

I have followed with interest the books and articles that have been published on the Five Dynasties period since this book appeared over 40 years ago.⁵ There have been no new sources concerning the period's political history. Although there have been several efforts to re-examine the structural and institutional changes that occurred during the period, none of the writings contradicts the main arguments in this book. I have therefore decided to retain the main thrust of the original study and revised only parts of it to make it more readable. For the same reason, I have also cut down the technical material and some of the footnotes that seemed to be necessary at the time.

Chinese concerns with unification are changing but it is not yet clear whether the changes will make China's position in the modern world safer or more insecure. A unified *t'ien-hsia* that stood for a civilized realm as the Chinese defined it is one thing, a united nation-state formed in the shadow of modern Great Powers is quite another. As *t'ien-hsia*, there was no threat to the surrounding peoples who were not prepared to partake in it. This China was worth defending at all costs because it saw itself as standing for a humane and advanced way of life. The Chinese did not admire the tribal and nomadic alternatives that they saw on the periphery of their world and what ethnography there was about these peoples had little in it that could be described as romantic or sympathetic. The Chinese traded with their neighbours and, from time to time, even exhorted them to accept China's values. But they were content to believe that the only way the core parts of China could be safe was to be united under one central administration and that their history had confirmed that view all along, hence all those who sought to divide such a China should be shunned. In that context, the large numbers of unknown or little known officers and officials named in this study who have contributed their bit to the forces of unification have each earned a small place in history. In so far as the histories of China written today continue to lament the divisions of the Five Dynasties, this study on the preparations for reunification illuminates the actions of people who had to live through the worst divided decades of Chinese history.

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Endnotes

- 1 Wang Gungwu, 'Comment on C. Martin Wilbur, Warlordism in Modern China', in *China in Crisis*, Vol. 1, Book 1, ed. Ho Ping-ti Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968-, pp. 264-270. By the 1960s, I had revived my earlier interest in the period of warlord divisions after reading the six-volume work by Tao Juyin, *Beiyang junfa tongzhi shiqi shihua*, Beijing: Sanlian Publishers, 1957-. In addition, I was influenced by Jerome Chen's analysis of the origins of warlord politics (*Yuan Shih-k'ai, 1859-1916: Brutus Assumes the Purple*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), with his story of how an obsession with unification and centralized power actually led to decades of deep division. Such an obsession is echoed in the struggles for supremacy during the 10th century studied here. Soon afterwards, I also had a chance to read Lucien W. Pye's early study (published only in 1971), *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China*, New York: Praeger, 1971, and a series of studies about the decades between 1916 and 1937 that were published in China. The latter have included details of the several Japanese incursions into China's territories, and these may be compared with the Khitan invasions of North China of the 10th century. That confirmed my belief that the Five Dynasties period is highly relevant for the study of Chinese history during the first half of the 20th century.
- 2 Edmund Henry Worthy, Jr, 'The Founding of Sung China 950-1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions', Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976. Ann Arbor, MI : Xerox University Microfilms, 1979.

A more recent study that covers both the early and later periods of reunification is Fang Cheng-hua, 'Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (S.D. 875-1063)', Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2001. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Microform 3006719, 2001.
- 3 Ou-yang Hsiu wrote the history of the T'ang dynasty, the *Hsin T'ang Shu*, with Sung Ch'i and others, as an official history but his personal interest in the following period prior to the founding of the Sung dynasty led him to re-write the history of the Five Dynasties. He thought the official compilation, the *Chiu Wu-tai Shih* based on the records of a number of fragmented states in both northern and southern China, was poorly done. This work, later called the *Hsin Wu-tai Shih*, has now been largely translated, with an introduction, by Richard L. Davis, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. For the chronology of this confusing period, there has been nothing better

than Ssu-ma Guang's *Tzu-chih T'ung-chien*, and the best edition is still the one published by the Guji publishers of Shanghai in 1956.

- 4 Since the completion of my work in 1957, there have been numerous studies on the Mainland and in Taiwan about the late T'ang and early Sung dynasties and the messy decades in between. Original monograph studies of the Five Dynasties period itself, however, have not been many. One work, unavailable to me at the time, which I wished I had read before I wrote mine, was Han Guopan's biography of Ch'ai Jung (Chai Rong), 921-959. Ch'ai Jung was the brilliant second ruler of the Later Chou dynasty (951-960) who reigned from 954 to 959, and the book was entitled *Chai Rong*, Shanghai: Renmin publishing, 1956. Had I read it then, I might have been encouraged to take the unification story to 959 instead of stopping with the Later Han in 951. Kurihara Masuo later wrote an even fuller study of Ch'ai Jung which he published in 1979, *Ransei no Kotei (Emperor in Turbulent Times)*, Tokyo: Togensha, 1979. After reading both works, I am persuaded that Ch'ai Jung's military successes of the late 950s had been made possible because the foundations of a new kind of central power that could overcome recalcitrant states and provinces had already been laid during the preceding two decades.
- 5 Perhaps the most representative are the general histories of the period by Tao Maobing, *Wudai shilue*, Beijing: Renmin publishing, 1985; and Zheng Xuemeng, *Wudai Shiguo shi yanjiu*, Shanghai: Renmin publishing, 1991. Both had built on Han Guopan's earlier *SuiTang Wudai shigang* first published in 1961, Beijing: Xinhua shudian. They all reflect the premise that peasant rebellions were responsible for bringing down the T'ang dynasty.

The most recent book on the organization of central power during the T'ang and Five Dynasties period focuses on the institutional changes that this book covers. This is Dai Xianqun, *Tang Wudai zhengzhi zhongshu yanjiu*, Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2001. His chapter on the *shumiyuan* (in this book, the Military Secretariat) reflects the considerable recent interest in the subject, but it does not go much beyond the work of Su Jilang's 1977 essay, "Wu-tai de Shu-mi Yuan", reproduced in his *T'ang Sung Fa-chih Shih Yen-chiu*, Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1995; or Chao Yu-lo, *T'ang Sung Pien-ke-ch'i chih Chun-cheng Chih-tu: Kuan-liao Chi-kou yu Teng-chi chih Pien-cheng*, Taipei: Wen-shih-che, 1994.