

## Chapter 4

### **Tang's Internal Evolution and its Foreign Policy**

Before discussing in detail the relations between China and its principal foreign rivals during Tang, we need to take an overview of the internal evolution of China during these centuries. We must understand the changes that took place in the internal power structure to understand the ways in which these changes influenced the formation of policy and the making of particular decisions dealing with external problems as they arose.

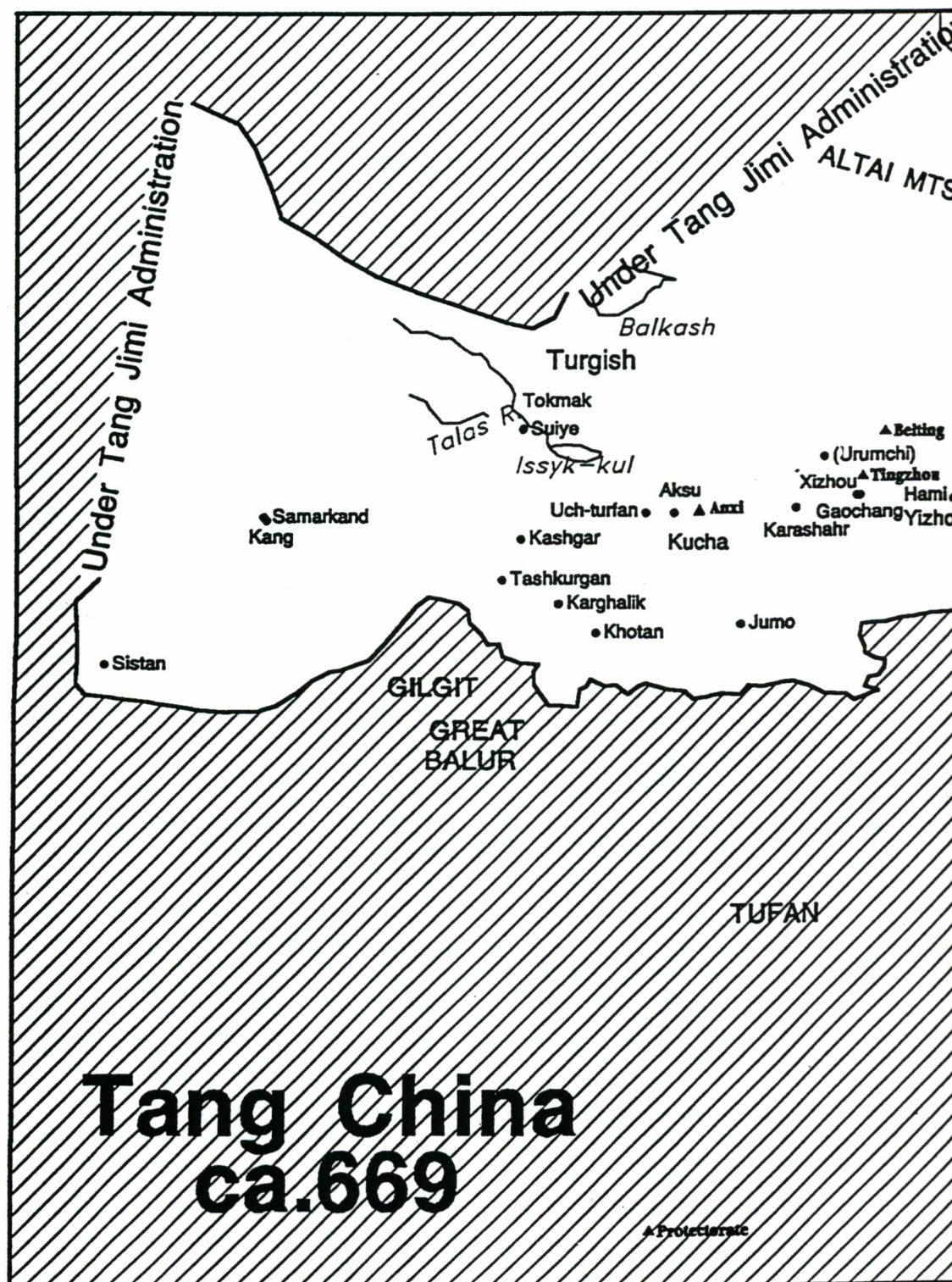
#### **Gaozu: Dynastic Consolidation**

Even more than Emperor Wen of Sui, Gaozu, the dynastic founder of Tang, displayed a cautious, pragmatic realism in his conduct of foreign affairs. Unlike Yang Jian, who was already at the center of power when he took the ambitious step of usurping the throne, Li Yuan was merely a provincial governor who, despite his aristocratic background, would probably have never conceived the ambition to supplant the Sui dynasty if it had not been for the anarchic breakdown that resulted from Emperor Yang's obsession with conquering Koguryō.

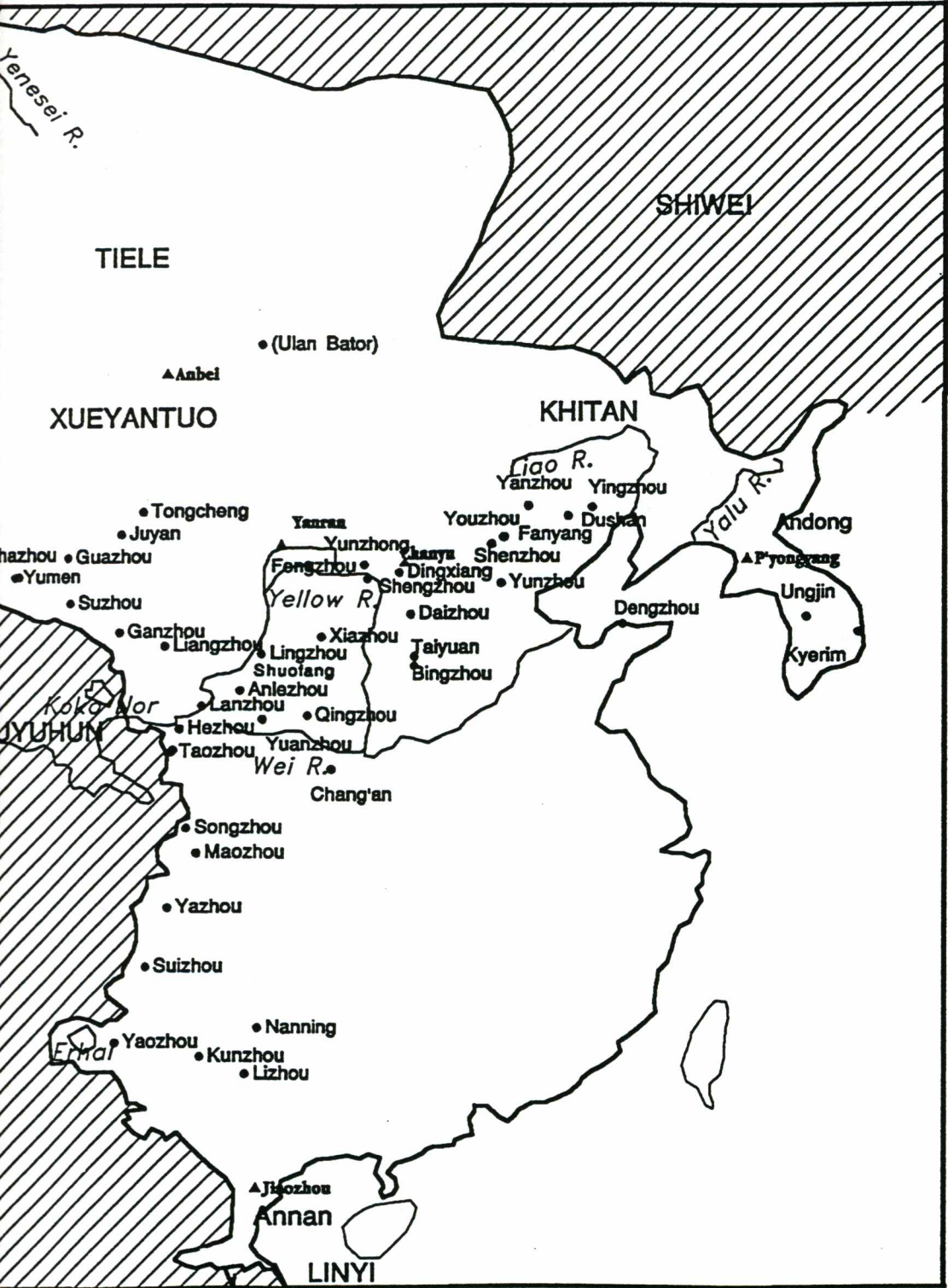
While the standard account pictures him as having to be reluctantly pushed into taking up arms by his brilliant son, Li Shimin, the role of the future Taizong may have been exaggerated by historians endeavoring to glorify the latter's achievements. Nevertheless, the standard account seems in general consistent with Gaozu's character as reflected in the decisions he took in dealing with foreign powers. As we shall see, while he was in command of affairs, Gaozu showed little compunction in adopting a submissive attitude towards the Turks and in giving up pretensions to suzerainty over Korea. During this period it was his ministers and not the emperor himself who wanted to insist on the traditional ideal of extending the authority of the Chinese Son of Heaven beyond the frontier.

#### **Building Frontier Defenses**

Following Sui practice, Gaozu kept twelve large standing armies in the capital region. These were staffed with soldiers recruited under the







*fubing* system. Keeping the two levels of local government, the prefecture and county of the Sui system, Gaozu also reestablished *zongguan fu* ("local regional commands" or "area commands") in frontier regions and interior areas of strategic importance. The label for these changed to *dudu fu* ("area commands") after 624. The area commanders (*zongguan* or *dudu*) were placed over the civilian administration of the area and were responsible for such military matters as taking care of "the walls, moats, soldiers, horses, armor and weapons, food supplies and defense arrangements etc. in the prefectures." Depending on the number of prefectures under them, these *dudu fu* were later classified as grand, first, second and third class, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Gaozu often appointed as area commanders former anti-Tang leaders or former Sui officials who had submitted to Tang, thus also incorporating the military forces under them directly into the Tang chain of command. For example, Zhang Changxun, a former Sui official in Wuyuan, attached himself to the Turks at the end of Sui, but he soon surrendered to Tang with the territory he controlled, and was appointed the Fengzhou *zongguan*.<sup>2</sup> Yang Gongren, a former Sui official, submitted in 619, and was appointed the Liangzhou *zongguan* as he had been the Prefect of Ganzhou in the northwest and was familiar with frontier affairs. Soon after, he was brought to Chang'an and became a Chief Minister from 619 to 626.<sup>3</sup> Gaozu used the same winning-over policy for non-Chinese leaders. In 618 Gaozu set up Yanzhou where the Mohe lived west of the Liao River, and in 621 the Mohe leader was appointed Yanzhou *zongguan*. He led his troops into battles against anti-Tang forces.<sup>4</sup>

Gaozu's appeasement policy towards the Turks could not entirely stop border incursions. It was left to the area commanders or local officials to handle such incursions, using the troops already under them. In any event, during that early period Tang was unable to organize major campaigns beyond the frontier. Kang Le has suggested that Tang held its major military forces in the capital region and that frontier area commands were only responsible for providing information and for temporarily checking invading forces. Battles with major invaders were fought mainly

<sup>1</sup> TD 32, pp. 185-6; ZZTJ 185, p. 5795; 190, p. 5977; Wechsler 1979, pp. 174-5.

<sup>2</sup> JTS 57, p. 2301.

<sup>3</sup> JTS 62, pp. 2381-2; ZZTJ 187, p. 5847; Wechsler 1979, p. 172. For former Sui officials made *zongguan*, see ZZTJ 187, pp. 5851-2.

<sup>4</sup> JTS 199B, p. 5359; ZZTJ 189, p. 5906.



by the troops sent out from the capital region.<sup>5</sup> Careful examination of the period of Gaozu, however, shows that although it is not clear how large the garrisons under their command were, the area commands often played important roles in driving back the Turks.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, however, generals of expeditionary armies (*xingjun*) were stationed on the frontier for defense.<sup>7</sup>

In 623, Dou Jing, Aide (*zhangshi*) of the Superior Area Command of Bingzhou, presented a proposal to strengthen the frontiers by opening up garrison fields in Taiyuan. Despite rejection by the court, Dou Jing persisted and sent up several memorials arguing for garrison fields, and was eventually summoned to the court to debate with the Chief Ministers. The debate ended in his favor.<sup>8</sup>

After Tang brought all China under its control in 625, Gaozu made plans to build ships for battles on the Yellow River, and to dig tunnels on the northern frontiers to block invasions by the Turks.<sup>9</sup> The practice of using the term *shu*, as used for communications between equals, to refer to letters to the Turks was given up in 625, when China was preparing to attack the Turks. Gaozu ordered substitution of the terms *zhao* or *chi*, "to order" or "an order" from the emperor to his subjects.<sup>10</sup> He also decided to restore the Twelve Armies of the capital region, which had been established in 619 and disbanded in 623. Their reestablishment ultimately aimed at defeat of the Turks.<sup>11</sup>

The militia system was further rationalized and improved under the second emperor, Taizong. The militiamen were organized into "assault-resisting garrisons" or "intrepid militias" (*zhechong fu*). Each militia consisted of 800, 1,000 or 1,200 men. These militias were heavily concentrated in the metropolitan area, and a small proportion of them were based in the frontier regions. For example, Liangzhou had seven units, and thus 7,000 militiamen; Shazhou had three, Guazhou one, and Ganzhou two (all of them in present Gansu).<sup>12</sup> In addition to these militiamen serving in the

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<sup>5</sup> Kang Le 1979, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> See the chronological summary of the battles during Gaozu's reign in Cen Zhongmian 1958, pp. 118-71.

<sup>7</sup> ZTJ 187, pp. 5860-1.

<sup>8</sup> JTS 61, p. 2369; ZTJ 190, p. 5974.

<sup>9</sup> CFYG 990, p. 11634.

<sup>10</sup> XTS 215A, p. 6032; ZTJ 191, p. 5996; CFYG 990, p. 11635.

<sup>11</sup> ZTJ 191, p. 5995; CFYG 990, p. 11635.

<sup>12</sup> Gu Jiguang 1955, p. 7659.

frontier garrisons, soldiers were recruited by other methods for the same purpose and there were also long-service garrison troops. For major military frontier campaigns, expeditionary armies would be organized consisting of militiamen, conscripts and non-Chinese troops.<sup>13</sup>

### **Taizong: Expansion**

The transfer of the throne from Gaozu to his second son, Li Shimin, known to history as Taizong, was dramatic. In the sixth month of 626, a band led by Li Shimin ambushed and killed the heir apparent, Li Jiancheng and his younger brother at the Xuanwu Gate of the Imperial Palace. Three days later he became the heir apparent and within two months he made Gaozu abdicate the throne.<sup>14</sup>

There can be no doubt that, unlike his father, Tang Taizong was a man of large vision as well as driving personal ambition, the latter quality demonstrated by his ruthless elimination of two of his brothers and seizure of power. After completing the consolidation of Tang dynastic power within the country, he undertook to expand its frontiers to those of the Han empire by conquering the Turks, establishing Chinese control over the Western Regions and extending Chinese rule over Liaodong and North Korea. Taizong was not uniformly successful in his undertakings, notably in his campaigns against Koguryō, and he himself did not live to see their success, which was achieved, however incompletely, under his successor, Gaozong.

These efforts all seem to be a continuation of Emperor Yang's expansive policies. Yet, instead of being criticized by traditional Chinese historians, Taizong has been held up for admiration as one of the greatest emperors in Chinese history. He has maintained this image among modern Chinese in general as well as among Chinese and Western scholars. He is given credit not only for wise and effective government but also for his conquests that made Tang China into a cosmopolitan world empire.

What made him different from Emperor Yang? The answer seems to be simple: he succeeded in making China internally united and externally powerful, while Emperor Yang was not only defeated abroad but also destroyed his own dynasty's internal stability and left China in chaos.

It has been argued that Taizong's rule constituted a model of good government, in which the emperor encouraged scholar-official participa-

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<sup>13</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 61-8; Wechsler 1979, pp. 207-8.

<sup>14</sup> Li Shutong 1965, pp. 153-91; Wechsler 1974, pp. 67-78.



tion in government. Taizong is credited with paying special attention to their advice, criticisms and remonstrance. His government has become famous for the emperor's deep personal rapport with a group of capable administrators.<sup>15</sup> The formalization of the system of the Three Departments, Department of State Affairs, Secretariat and Chancellery, as the governing body under Taizong, it is held, prevented both the emperor and his Chief Ministers from monopolizing power.<sup>16</sup>

This idealized image of Taizong has, however, been challenged as misleadingly turning him into a larger than life figure, and in any event as appropriate only to the first years of Taizong's reign.<sup>17</sup> As Wechsler concludes, from the late 630's on, Taizong was not as willing as before to heed opinions from such officials as Wei Zheng, especially on important issues.<sup>18</sup>

Taizong nevertheless was a capable military leader with a comprehensive vision. Early in his reign, Taizong's policy was generally cautious, and he was unwilling to stretch his forces too far and wide. When some officials in their memorials advocated that the ruler must be the sole authority and power, that he should not delegate any authority to underlings, and should engage in aggressive wars designed to cow the "barbarians" into submission, Taizong approved the opposite policy, relying instead upon the advice of Wei Zheng to "stop wars, promote the values of peace, spread virtue and extend kindness. If the Middle Kingdom was in peace, people from far away would submit willingly."<sup>19</sup>

In 630, when his ministers proposed an attack against Linyi because of the latter's insubordinate language in its memorial to Tang, Taizong refused, claiming that war was an ill-omened instrument to be used only as a last resort. He pointed out that the repeated and unsuccessful campaigns of Emperor Yang had only resulted in stirring up his own people against him and in bringing about his own death. It was a waste of effort, said Taizong, to launch an expedition just to punish objectionable language.<sup>20</sup> In 631, when Kang (Samarkand) asked to submit to China, Taizong did not give permission on the grounds that if the request were

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<sup>15</sup> Wechsler 1979, pp. 190-1.

<sup>16</sup> Sun Guodong 1957, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Wechsler 1979, p. 191.

<sup>18</sup> Wechsler 1974, pp. 149-51.

<sup>19</sup> *JTS* 71, p. 2558.

<sup>20</sup> *XTS* 222C, p. 6298; *ZZTJ* 193, pp. 6078-9.

accepted, Tang would have to come to the rescue whenever Kang was in danger.<sup>21</sup> Taizong made it clear that Tang did not have the ability to stretch its resources that far.

None of this means that Taizong did not have any political ambitions to build an empire, though not necessarily one slavishly imitating the Han model. Taizong was a product of his time, and presented a new image of a ruler which combined Chinese and non-Chinese attributes. He was motivated both by the Chinese belief in the legitimacy of the Son of Heaven to rule All-under-Heaven, and by a desire to be looked up to as a ruler of the non-Chinese as Heavenly Qaghan. He envisioned a grand empire on this dual basis, and step by step he carried out his design. He accepted Wen Yanbo's idea to use the *jimi* system as a way to gradually sinicize the nomads into the Chinese way (Chapter 5). Taizong also enlisted non-Chinese generals and nomadic military forces into the Tang armies. Without this policy, Tang success would not have been possible.

Always a capable ruler, Taizong kept firm hold on his authority to formulate foreign policy. After the conquest of the Eastern Turks he steadily carried forward his long range plan of empire building. On China's northwestern frontiers, Taizong established Yizhou in Hami in 630. Four years later in 634-635, Tang launched a military expedition to subdue the Tuyuhun and convert their state into an outer subject on the route to the Western Regions. Although Taizong made peace with Tibet, a new rival force, by forming a marriage alliance in 640, in 639 he ordered an attack on Gaochang, and upon its success in 640 he established Xizhou, Tingzhou and the post of Protector-general of Anxi, thus creating a foothold in the Western Regions. This set the stage for the later Tang victory over the Western Turks, whose territory was west of the Altai Mountains, with its influence extending into the Western Regions.

From 644 until the end of his reign five years later, Taizong launched military expeditions every year. In 644 the Protector-general of Anxi attacked Karashahr. In the northeast, Taizong ordered three major expeditions against Koguryŏ in 644-645 under his personal command, and in 647 and 648. All were aimed at establishing Chinese control over the Korean peninsula. In the year 646 Tang conquered the Xueyantuo and imposed the *jimi* system over all the Tiele people on their steppe land, which meant that Tang administration extended to north of the Gobi Desert. In 648 after a Tang military success over Kucha, the nearby oasis states gave

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<sup>21</sup> ZZTJ 193, p. 6091.



their allegiance to the Tang court. The Western Turks under Helu also submitted to Tang. Taizong was then able to move the seat of the Protectorate of Anxi further west to Kucha and to establish the Four Garrisons in the Western Regions.

Although his reign ended with his failure to conquer Koguryō Taizong was on the whole successful in achieving the objectives of his foreign policy. This was due to the strength of the militia system, his success in getting the cooperation of nomadic allies, and his own superior leadership. Growing up as a military man and well experienced in political affairs before he became emperor, he was a master of strategy, cautious and skillful, and showed a much better understanding of the external situation and sounder assessment of events than his predecessors. Seeing the internal political weakness within the Turkish rulership, he knew when to take advantage of it. He first made an alliance with the Xueyantuo and then broke that alliance when the time was ripe. His persistence in launching campaigns to penetrate the Western Regions made possible the eventual conquest of the Western Turks during Gaozong's reign.

### **The Making of Foreign Policy under Taizong**

Chief Ministers under Taizong were mostly pragmatic men, and some had practical experience in both military and civilian administration. Taizong intentionally excluded imperial relatives from top positions with the one exception of his brother-in-law, Zhangsun Wuji.<sup>22</sup> These men were not isolated from reality, sitting in the court with knowledge only of beautiful prose and calligraphy. They actively participated in state affairs, and their opinions were not necessarily dependent on their official positions, civil or military.

Zhangsun Wuji, for example, was an able military strategist, but often followed a cautious line. Before the final conquest of the Eastern Turks, he favored keeping the peace agreement, whereas Xiao Yu, with both military and civilian official background, advocated military action. Wen Yanbo, with experience as a civilian official, was expansionist when he rejected Gaozu's idea that China should not make Koguryō a tributary. In the debate on how to settle the Turks after 630, he proposed a plan of gradual sinicization of the nomads aimed at expanding Chinese influence through peaceful means.

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<sup>22</sup> For these chief ministers, see Wechsler 1979, pp. 193-200; see also Guisso 1978, pp. 167-98, for a list of chief ministers from 618 to 705.

Fang Xuanling, a member of the first generation of civil service examination graduates, was opposed to the wars against Koguryō but he had very practical views on the comparative feasibility of war or peace in dealing with the nomads. In his historian's comment in the *Zhoushu* he says that since the situation changed frequently and the balance of power did not remain the same, in choosing between subjugating "barbarians" or appeasing them, and in choosing between going to war or forming a marriage alliance, the best strategy was to adapt plans to the actual situation.<sup>23</sup> Zhang Liang, with both military and civilian experience, strongly opposed Taizong's campaign against Koguryō when he was Minister of Justice with the status of Chief Minister in 643. But when his opinions were rejected he became one of the commanders in the campaign.<sup>24</sup> Among officials outside the Chief Minister rank, there were also military officials, such as Jiang Xingben and Yuchi Jingde, who opposed the war against Koguryō.<sup>25</sup>

It is true that military officials were often inclined toward military solutions. Military action was their profession, and promotion for them depended on their military success. As we shall see (Chapter 5), in a court discussion on whether to attack the Turks, Chief Minister Du Ruhui, speaking as the Minister of War, insisted on a bellicose attitude. Chief Ministers Li Shiji and Li Jing were of primarily military background. Both Li Shiji and Li Jing were supporters of the war against Koguryō (Chapter 6). They exerted a strong influence on Taizong.<sup>26</sup>

Among Taizong's Chief Ministers, the most Confucian-minded was Wei Zheng.<sup>27</sup> As a firmly Confucian scholar-official he consistently opposed the policy of extending Chinese rule over non-Chinese. In the debate on how to resettle the Turks, he and many others drew a clear line between the "civilized" Chinese and the "savage barbarians," and insisted that the Chinese were the roots of All-under-Heaven while the "barbarians" were merely like branches and leaves. He opposed Taizong's decision to make Gaochang a Chinese prefecture and upheld the Confucian principle of opposing war.

It is interesting to note that Wei Zheng also opposed Taizong's ef-

<sup>23</sup> *ZS* 50, p. 921. Biographies of the four are in *JTS* 61, 63, 65, 66; *XTS* 91, 96, 101, 105.

<sup>24</sup> *JTS* 69, pp. 2514-5.

<sup>25</sup> *JTS* 59, p. 2334; 68, p. 2500.

<sup>26</sup> Biographies are in *JTS* 67, 69; *XTS* 93, 94.

<sup>27</sup> Wechsler has a detailed study on Wei Zheng, see his 1974.



forts to entice foreign countries to come to pay tribute to the Tang court, for he held that political prestige gained from the tributary practice would not benefit China economically and would in fact exhaust China's resources. He believed, on the other hand, that trade between the non-Chinese and frontier Chinese people should be encouraged, since it benefitted the common people.<sup>28</sup>

Chu Suiliang was another Confucian-minded scholar-official who took over the role of Wei Zheng after Wei's death and became a Chief Minister in 644. He was opposed to the establishment of a prefecture in Gaochang and to war against Koguryō. But Taizong did not follow his opinions on all these matters.

Under both Gaozu and Taizong, frontier officials played an important role in the formulation of foreign policy. In 622 Li Daen, the Daizhou *zongguan*, suggested an attack on Mayi, an important frontier town then under Turkish control. Gaozu followed his advice.<sup>29</sup> In 623 Dou Jing, a member of the famous northwestern aristocratic Dou family, as Aide of the Superior Area Command of Bingzhou, presented a memorial suggesting opening up garrison fields in Taiyuan to support frontier defense purposes. He persisted with several memorials and was eventually summoned to the court to debate with the Chief Ministers. The debate ended in his favor. In Taizong's time, when he was the Area Commander of Xiazhou, he sent spies into the Turks lands to divide them and enticed them to submit to Tang. In the debate on how to settle the Eastern Turks after 630 he participated in the court discussion.<sup>30</sup>

In the 643 discussion on whether to carry out the marriage promise made to the Xueyantuo, Taizong followed the opinion of Qibi Heli to refuse the marriage. Qibi was then a general in the capital, but as a former chief of the Qibi tribe and having just returned from the capture of the Xueyantuo, he had actual knowledge of the internal situation among the Xueyantuo.

In 644, when the Protector-general of Anxi, Guo Xiaoke, proposed an attack on Karashahr, Taizong agreed.<sup>31</sup> In the late 640's Taizong adopted an aggressive policy towards the non-Chinese in the region of Nanning. This was suggested by the Area Commander of Suizhou, Liu

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<sup>28</sup> *JTS* 71, p. 2548.

<sup>29</sup> *ZZTJ* 190, pp. 5950-1.

<sup>30</sup> *JTS* 61, p. 2369.

<sup>31</sup> *JTS* 198, p. 5302; *XTS* 221A, p. 6229; *ZZTJ* 197, p. 6211.

Boying, who in his memorial proposed that Tang send out an expeditionary force to chastise the Man peoples so that Tang could establish communications along the route through the Erhai Lake region in Yunnan to India.<sup>32</sup>

The emperors often consulted the frontier officials for detailed information and recommendations on strategy. In 623 Gaozu asked the former Bingzhou *zongguan* Liu Shirang, of military official background, about frontier defense, and acted upon his advice.<sup>33</sup> Before his campaign against Koguryō Taizong summoned Zhang Jian, the Area Commander of Yingzhou, and Cheng Mingzhen, the Prefect of Mingzhou, to the court, to tap their first hand knowledge of the geographical conditions of Liaodong and their opinions on military strategy.<sup>34</sup> Early in Taizong's reign Cui Dunli often acted as Chinese envoy to the Turks and then was appointed the Area Commander of Lingzhou. After he became the Minister of War, he went as commissioner to the Uighurs several times. Because he knew the situation among the nomads very well, his proposals were often adopted.<sup>35</sup>

The important role of the frontier officials can be also seen in the fact that their administration often affected relations with nearby non-Chinese. They would often make their own decisions without previous permission from the top. Whether successful or not, these decisions often had lasting consequences for the relations of China with its foreign neighbors. These frontier officials continued to play important roles during subsequent reigns.

### **Gaozong and Empress Wu: from Expansion to Defense**

After his death in 649, Taizong was succeeded by his son Gaozong. From 660, however, Gaozong's empress, Wu Zetian, became the actual ruler because of the emperor's poor health. She took part in court audiences, albeit from behind a screen. On his death in 684, Gaozong was succeeded by the elder of his two surviving sons by Wu Zetian, later known as Zhongzong. A brief power struggle then ensued between Wu Zetian and the new emperor's consort, Empress Wei, also a strong and ambitious woman who dominated her husband. When Zhongzong began

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<sup>32</sup> Backus 1981, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> *JTS* 69, p. 2523; *ZZTJ* 190, p. 5968.

<sup>34</sup> *JTS* 83, p. 2776; p. 2784; *ZZTJ* 197, p. 6213.

<sup>35</sup> *JTS* 81, pp. 2747-8.



to give high offices to his wife's relatives, Wu Zetian accused him of planning to hand over the empire to them and, using her authority as Empress Dowager, deposed him and placed her younger son, the later Ruizong, on the throne. Ruizong was not allowed to function as emperor, but was kept sequestered while the Empress Dowager, now dispensing with the pretence of a screen, presided openly over the court. In 690 she proclaimed herself emperor of the Zhou dynasty (690-705), the only female ruler in name as well as fact in Chinese history.

During the early part of his reign Gaozong faithfully continued his father's expansionist policy, carried on by the momentum of China's previous military successes. This policy was in accord with Gaozong's own personal interests and ambitions. As the third choice for succession to the throne, and being in no way as strong as his father, Gaozong felt keenly the need to live up to his father's reputation and to prove himself a worthy ruler.<sup>36</sup> He succeeded in extending the boundaries of the Chinese empire to the farthest limits that it ever attained in the course of history, with his conquests of the Western Turks in 659, Paekche in 660 and Koguryō in 668.

Gaozong and Empress Wu made serious efforts to live up to the ideal of a universal empire. The *jimi fuzhou* system was extended to the Western Regions and the Korean peninsula. Military actions were resorted to whenever rebellions by subject peoples took place. The trans-frontier administrative system was improved through various adjustments and through the establishment of six major Protectorates surrounding China.

However, this expansion placed a heavy burden on China's resources which were overextended and unable to sustain control over so wide a territory. Empress Wu, while supporting the expansionist policy after 660, when she took actual control of the central power, gradually changed to a policy with more emphasis on defense than expansion.

From 670 the newly enlarged Chinese empire was forced into retreat when it was severely defeated by Tibet in the battle at Koko Nor. While the court persisted in competing with Tibet for control over the Western Regions, from this time on China under Empress Wu turned away from aggression and concentrated more on defense, accepting the reality that China was in no position to maintain its administration in its overextended territory.

The Protectorate of Andong on the Korean peninsula was with-

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<sup>36</sup> Guisso 1978, pp. 109-10.

drawn back into Liaodong in 676. In 679 the Eastern Turks broke away from Chinese control and in 682 revived their empire. Empress Wu recognized the qaghan's rule and accommodated the Turkish demands for material goods and a marriage contract so as to appease and prevent them from attacking, so that Tang could concentrate on dealing with the Khitan invasion of Hebei in 696-697.

And yet Empress Wu was by no means a weak ruler. She demonstrated a firm attitude in competing with Tibet over the Western Regions, and did not hesitate to resort to military force in frontier defense. At the same time, though it hardly reflects on Empress Wu personally, the fact that she was a usurper and a woman undoubtedly weakened her position in dealing with external affairs. The Turkish qaghan made it an excuse for using arrogant, insulting language and the Khitan used a demand for the restoration of Tang as propaganda in their invasion (Chapter 8). In the end she was forced to give up her plans to establish her own dynasty and finally, as an old woman, to abdicate in favor of her deposed son.

One major development in the shift of China's foreign policy from aggression to defense was the establishment of permanent armies on the frontiers. Previously under Taizong, militiamen would only serve in the frontier garrisons for a period of time. There were also long-service garrison troops composed of Chinese and of nomads who had submitted. For major military frontier campaigns, expeditionary armies would be organized consisting of militiamen, conscripts from other areas, and non-Chinese troops.<sup>37</sup>

With the more frequent warfare in Gaozong's and Empress Wu's time such an arrangement was not sufficient. From the later part of the reign of Gaozong onwards, the court started to build up larger and permanent defensive units on the frontiers with such labels as "armies" (*jun*) and "fortresses" (*cheng*). These units were intended to be permanently ready to do the jobs formerly performed by expeditionary armies.<sup>38</sup> In 677 the first permanent armies were established in China's northwest under the names of Heyuan, Jishi and Momen. Their primary responsibility was to defend against the Tibetans.<sup>39</sup> The Protectorate of Anxi in the Western Regions in 640 had 1,000 troops and the size of the permanent garrison reached

<sup>37</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 61-8; Wechsler 1979, pp. 207-8; Lai 1986, pp. 50-1.

<sup>38</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 67-8.

<sup>39</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, p. 68; p. 147, note 30. For more details, see Lai 1986, chapters 4 and 5.



30,000 by 692.<sup>40</sup> The Protectorate of Andong set up in P'yŏngyang after the conquest of Koguryŏ in 668 was manned by 20,000 troops.<sup>41</sup>

The armies in the northwest functioned effectively to defend China against the Turks, other nomads and the Tibetans up to the time of the An Lushan rebellion in 755. During his seven year-tenure as the Commissioner of the Heyuan Army (ca. 677-684), Heichi Changzhi set up garrisons, watchtowers, opened garrison fields and led attacks against the Tibetans in Qinghai. The Tibetans, according to Chinese sources, "were afraid of Changzhi and did not dare to raid again."<sup>42</sup>

Between 701 and 706, when Guo Yuanzhen was Area Commander of Liangzhou, he set up the Fortress of Herong in the south and the Baiting Army in the north to defend against the Tibetans and Turks, and ordered the Prefect of Liangzhou to open up garrison fields. Thus, an area that was previously troubled by the Turks and Tibetans enjoyed peace and order. Guo's good government won the support of both Chinese and non-Chinese.<sup>43</sup> Before the end of Empress Wu's reign in 705 more armies were set up on the northeastern and northern frontiers to form the basic defense line.<sup>44</sup>

### Chief Ministers with Experience in Frontier Affairs under Gaozong and Empress Wu

Neither Gaozong nor Empress Wu had the kind of experience Gaozu and Taizong had had in military affairs or the same degree of actual contact with the social reality of China. Internal disputes within the leadership during their reigns also sometimes damaged Tang frontier policy, as we shall see in the cases of Liu Rengui and Li Jingxuan in 678 concerning the campaign against Tibet, and Pei Yan and Pei Xingjian in dealing with the Turkish rebellion in 681. Despite these limitations, Gaozong and Empress Wu had some capable Chief Ministers and well-established political institutions inherited from earlier reigns.

Empress Wu relied on a group of Northern Gate scholars (*Beimen xueshi*), her personal secretaries, for decision-making while at the same time her own intelligence and skillful mastery of court politics were also

<sup>40</sup> XTS 221A, p. 6222; p. 6232.

<sup>41</sup> ZZTJ 201, p. 6357.

<sup>42</sup> JTS 109, p. 3295; Sato 1958, p. 334; for military farms, see pp. 367-8.

<sup>43</sup> JTS 97, p. 3044; ZZTJ 207, pp. 6557-8.

<sup>44</sup> For the locations, names and dates of these armies, see Pulleyblank 1955, Map II.

assets. Most scholars recognize that her leadership brought innovations and improvements into the bureaucracy. There has been controversy among modern scholars whether and to what extent Empress Wu deliberately adopted policies seeking support from groups formerly excluded from the ruling aristocracy. It does seem clear, however, that the reign of Gaozong and Empress Wu saw a broadening of the ruling class's social background, and Empress Wu showed an obvious talent for choosing capable officials.

During this period, the court increased the number of non-Chinese generals appointed,<sup>45</sup> but the constant interactions with foreign countries also brought forth a group of experienced and talented Chinese frontier officials and generals. Some of them were promoted to be chief ministers and in that position they continued to perform their duties on the frontiers. Some holding such dual appointments did not participate in decision-making at court while others contributed to decision-making at the central level.<sup>46</sup> The following are some examples.

Cui Dunli was experienced in frontier affairs when he was appointed Minister of War under Taizong. His proposals were often adopted by the court. In 653, under Gaozong he was made Chief Minister.<sup>47</sup> He had a family background in frontier affairs. His grandfather Cui Zhongfang had been a Regional Military Commander (*zongguan*) during the Sui period.<sup>48</sup>

Ren Yaxiang, as the Protector-general of Yanran, participated in military expeditions against the Western Turks in 657, and was promoted to be Minister of War. He became a Chief Minister in 659. In 661 he was one of the commanders of the expeditions against Koguryō and died while on active service in the army the following year.<sup>49</sup>

Liu Rengui, of poor and lowly background, rose to be Chief Minister in 665 primarily due to his performance in dealing with Korea. He continued to be in charge of campaigns against Silla and in defense against Tibet.<sup>50</sup>

Cui Zhiwen, with an aristocratic family background, started as a

<sup>45</sup> Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 236-7.

<sup>46</sup> For a list and brief summary of the careers of the chief ministers during 681-705, see Guisso 1978, Appendix B.

<sup>47</sup> *JTS* 81, pp. 2747-8; *XTS* 106, p. 4044.

<sup>48</sup> *SUIS* 60, pp. 1449.

<sup>49</sup> *JTS* 194B, p. 5187; *ZZTJ* 200, p. 6324; p. 6327; Twitchett 1979, p. 254.

<sup>50</sup> *JTS* 84, pp. 2789-96; *XTS* 108, pp. 4081-5.



frontier officer. While holding a minor position in Lingzhou he presented fifteen memorials to the court around 664, proposing to move the Tiele tribes back north of the Yellow River because they could not live peacefully with the agricultural Chinese. Eventually the court agreed with him, and according to the Chinese sources, the nomads were also grateful to him because they were moved to good pasture land. When Cui was the Prefect of Lanzhou his good government attracted the Dangxiang people to submit. He was made Chief Minister in 679.<sup>51</sup>

Wei Daijia, from an official family, distinguished himself for his bravery on the battle field. He was then appointed as a frontier official. He was made Chief Minister under Empress Wu in 685, and continued to lead military campaigns against the Turks. Aware of his lack of literary ability, he requested demotion and expressed the wish to continue his military career, to which Empress Wu agreed. After he suffered a defeat in the war with the Tibetans in 689 he was exiled and died soon after.<sup>52</sup>

Lou Shide, of obscure family background, got his examination *jìnshì* degree before the age of 20. He later volunteered for service in the army sent against the Tibetans and acted as envoy to Tibet. He distinguished himself through military achievements and good government as a frontier official. In 693 he was made Chief Minister and continued to use his expertise as commissioner for frontier garrison fields and as a general. As a result of defeat in battle against Tibet in 695 he was demoted but was soon reestablished as Chief Minister.<sup>53</sup>

Wang Xiaojie, of an obscure family background, was promoted to Chief Minister in 694 after his success in recapturing the Four Garrisons. An excellent general, he continued to command in battles, and died fighting against the Khitan in 697.<sup>54</sup>

Tang Xiujing, of official family background, was known for his literary and military abilities. He obtained his examination *míngjīng* degree before the age of 20 and became a military officer, participating in several battles against the Turks. He opposed the court's plan to give up Fengzhou, and it was on his advice that China recovered the Four Garrisons. He once served as Vice Protector-General of Anxi and had a good mastery of the frontier situation, being familiar with all the strategic points

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<sup>51</sup> JTS 185A, p. 4791; XTS 106, p. 4040.

<sup>52</sup> JTS 77, pp. 2671; XTS 98, p. 3904.

<sup>53</sup> JTS 93, pp. 2975-6; XTS 108, pp. 4092-3.

<sup>54</sup> JTS 93, pp. 2977-8; XTS 111, p. 4148.

along northwestern frontier. Even before he became Chief Minister in 703 he was often asked to participate in court discussions with the Chief Ministers concerning the Western Regions because of his expertise on the subject. Empress Wu once remarked to her Chief Ministers: "Xiujing has profound knowledge of frontier affairs; ten of you are not his equal." During later reigns he continued to be a Chief Minister.<sup>55</sup>

### **Xuanzong: from Defense to Aggression**

In 705, already in her eighties, Empress Wu was forced to abdicate the throne in favor of her son, Emperor Zhongzong. The Li royal family restored the name of the Tang dynasty. Political authority was, however, in the hands of Zhongzong's consort, Empress Wei, and her daughter. The throne passed to Ruizong, Empress Wu's other son, after a bloody coup in 710, and two years later Ruizong abdicated in favor of his third son Li Longji, the major leader in the coup. The new emperor, known posthumously as Xuanzong, and informally to posterity as Minghuang, the Brilliant Emperor, ruled from 712 to 756, a long and eventful period which was the high point of the Tang dynasty in terms of internal peace and prosperity. It is also remembered as a golden age for its achievements in arts and literature, but despite the political sophistication of its institutional arrangements, the reign ended in the catastrophe known as the An Lushan rebellion, which changed China drastically and permanently.

During the early years of Xuanzong's reign, Chief Ministers Yao Chong and Song Jing urged caution in foreign policy. But Xuanzong displayed his ambition for military success as early as 714 in supporting the recapture of Yingzhou in the northeast from the Khitan by force, and in proposing to assume personal command in a campaign against Tibet. In 716 a Hu (Sogdian) suggested to the court that the countries "south of the sea" (Southeast Asia) were rich in marvelous treasures and profitable for trade and asked that he should be sent to go and obtain them. He also proposed to go to Shiziguo (modern Sri Lanka) to acquire medicines and women doctors who could be brought into the imperial palace. Xuanzong was tempted. He ordered a censor to accompany the Sogdian on such an expedition but changed his mind when the censor memorialized against the plan, arguing that to compete with merchants for profits was not the kingly way.<sup>56</sup> Such caution was increasingly atypical. Minghuang's nor-

<sup>55</sup> *JTS* 93, pp. 2978-80; *XTS* 111, pp. 4149-51.

<sup>56</sup> *ZZTJ* 211, p. 6718.



mal tendency was to support aggressive actions by his generals.

Throughout his reign Xuanzong followed the policy of reinforcing frontier defenses as his main strategy for dealing with foreign issues. Several important changes were made in the frontier system. Despite temporary adjustments, there was a steady rise in the number of armies and in their complement of troops. By 722 the total number of frontier soldiers was said to be 600,000. Chief Minister Zhang Yue proposed a cut of 200,000 on the grounds that there was no severe foreign threat at the time. When the emperor expressed his doubt about this, Zhang, well experienced in military and frontier affairs, insisted that he had been on battle fields for a long time and understood the situation of the Chinese armies well. Excessively large numbers of troops were, he pointed out, often kept by generals for their own private use. Xuanzong was finally persuaded to follow his suggestion.<sup>57</sup> For 742 alone, however, altogether forty-seven frontier armies are listed by name.<sup>58</sup>

A second major change was the recruitment of permanent, professional soldiers both as palace guards and as frontier troops.<sup>59</sup> The *fubing* system, already in decay, continued to exist in name but ceased to function in practice. On the frontier, while some troops were still recruited from the ranks of militiamen for an average period of service of three years, the government also recruited permanent soldiers who would live with their families on the frontiers to meet the needs of frequent military expeditions.<sup>60</sup> By 742 the total number of troops under the ten Military Commissioners had again grown to around 500,000.<sup>61</sup> These permanent armies worked garrison fields to support part of their needs. In the Western Regions merchants were taxed to partly supply the garrisons.<sup>62</sup> The bulk of the expenses of frontier armies, however, was borne by the central government. Around 713 the annual frontier expenditure was approximately 2,000,000 strings of cash. By 741 it had already reached 10,000,000. By 755 it had again increased to 14 or 15 million, and constituted a heavy financial burden.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *JTS* 97, p. 3053; *XTS* 125, p. 4408; *ZZTJ* 212, p. 6753.

<sup>58</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, p. 68.

<sup>59</sup> *JTS* 97, p. 3053; *XTS* 125, p. 4408; *ZZTJ* 212, p. 6753.

<sup>60</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 69-70.

<sup>61</sup> This is according to *ZZTJ* 215, pp. 6847-9. *JTS* 38 (pp. 1385-9) has different figures. It says the frontier troops numbered roughly 490,000 in total.

<sup>62</sup> Ise 1968, pp. 446-50.

<sup>63</sup> *TD* 148, p. 773; Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 71-2.

Third, with the decline of the Turks, many non-Chinese came to submit to Tang. They were incorporated into the Chinese armies to serve in frontier garrisons and participate in military expeditions.<sup>64</sup> At the same time the court, having learned from earlier experience, was on guard against nomads who had submitted, fearing possible rebellions. For example, on the northern frontiers, the Tianbing Army, first set up in 699, was reestablished in 717 in Taiyuan in order to meet the perceived need to guard against the Tiele Turks, who had recently surrendered and were scattered north of Taiyuan. Soon after, the Tiele Turks were organized into Chinese-style military formations, and the Tianbing Army was charged with direct supervision of these non-Chinese armies.<sup>65</sup>

The large number of non-Chinese in the Tang armies can be seen in an edict issued in 714 announcing Xuanzong's taking over personal command of a campaign against the Tibetans. It states that there were 200,000 non-Chinese soldiers in this army.<sup>66</sup>

After their submission, the Khitan were organized into the Jingxi Army in 716 and their chief was appointed Military Commissioner (*jinglue dashi*). At about the same time the Xi were organized into the Baosai Army and their chief was appointed Military Commissioner.<sup>67</sup>

This increasing reliance on non-Chinese troops and generals, on the one hand, shows the growing influence of the non-Chinese component of Tang society, and on the other, the weakening of the Chinese component of the military.<sup>68</sup>

The fourth and the most important change was the organization of frontier armies into various "regional commands" (*fanzhen* or *fangzhen*) under military commissioners (*jiedu shi*) on the northern, western and southwestern frontiers. This was intended to increase the effectiveness and coordination of these armies in military manoeuvres. The Military Commissionership eventually became a very powerful post. Its holder was to supervise one of the large frontier armies and coordinate its subordinate units during wartime.

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<sup>64</sup> Zhang Qun 1990, pp. 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> *JTS* 99, p. 3090; *XTS* 127, p. 4442; *ZZTJ* 211, p. 6728; *CFYG* 992, pp. 11651-2; Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 238-9.

<sup>66</sup> *CFYG* 118, p. 1407.

<sup>67</sup> *XTS* 219, p. 6170; p. 6174; *ZZTJ* 221, p. 6720. It is not clear when the Baosai Army of the Xi was established, but in an edict of 718 (*CFYG* 986, pp. 11583-4) the army is mentioned.

<sup>68</sup> Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 245-6.



Between 710 and 733 nine regional commands were organized. In the far south a Lingnan *jinglue shi* was set up. The post was lower in rank than a *jiedu shi* but the responsibilities were similar.<sup>69</sup> In 756, during the An Lushan rebellion, Lingnan was promoted to be a regional command under a *jiedu shi*.<sup>70</sup>

A military commissioner assumed more military power and was in control of larger standing armies and wider areas than an area commander or protector-general. Among the six major protectorates, the Protectors-General of Beiting and Anxi were changed to Military Commissioners of Beiting and Anxi. The Protectors-General of Chanyu and Anbei were brought under the Military Commissioner of Shuofang. Andong was under Pinglu, and Annan under Lingnan.<sup>71</sup> In the Western Regions, the Military Commissioners of Anxi and Beiting by 714 had altogether 44,000 troops.<sup>72</sup> In 742 the Military Commissioner of Fanyang, on the frontier facing the Khitan and Xi, had the largest command with a force of 91,400.<sup>73</sup> The power of the Military Commissioner grew to the point that he was given authority to handle financial and supply problems and also had responsibility for civil affairs.

It should be noted here that from Taizong's time on, China had been divided into ten administrative regions called "circuits" (*dao*), each comprising a cluster of prefectures. Initially, there was no permanent office in a circuit. Each was supervised by a commissioner sent out from the capital at irregular intervals to inspect the operation of local governments and ensure the good performance of local officials. The number of circuits increased to fifteen by 733, and permanent officials were appointed in the following year with the title of "investigation commissioner" (*caifang shi*), soon renamed "surveillance commissioner" (*guancha shi*).<sup>74</sup> The Military Commissioner of Shuofang was concurrently given the post of Surveil-

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<sup>69</sup> Twitchett (1979, pp. 365-7) lists nine frontier commands, not including Lingnan. Ise (1968, pp. 446-7) gives ten, including Lingnan. This is because Lingnan by 733 is lumped in with the other nine military commands, but its commanding officer is referred to as a *jinglue shi* rather than a *jiedu shi*. See *JTS* 38, pp. 1385-9.

<sup>70</sup> *ZZTJ* 218, p. 6984.

<sup>71</sup> *JTS* 38, pp. 1385-9; *ZZTJ* 215, pp. 6848-51.

<sup>72</sup> Ise 1968, pp. 266-8.

<sup>73</sup> For the names of the regional commands and number of troops, horses and clothing, see Ise 1968, pp. 446-7. Note that Ise relies on *JTS* 38 (pp. 1385-9), whose figures are different from those in *ZZTJ* 215, pp. 6847-9.

<sup>74</sup> Twitchett 1979, p. 205; pp. 402-4; Hucker 1985, pp. 487-8.

lance Commissioner for Guannei circuit in 734 and again in 746, thus having responsibility for civil affairs in the area; the Military Commissioner of Jiannan was simultaneously the Surveillance Commissioner of two circuits.<sup>75</sup>

The changes in the frontier system concentrated huge power in the hands of Military Commissioners, which so improved the efficiency of the frontier forces that passive defense gave way to aggressive defense and then to expansionist expeditions such as the aggressions of Zhang Xuanbiao against Tibet (Chapter 7), Du Xian, Liu Huan and Gao Xianzhi against the Western Regions, and An Lushan against the Khitan in the northeast (Chapter 8).

The famous Tang Chief Minister Du You of the eighth century placed the blame for Tang aggression on the frontier generals, remarking that it was frontier generals, Geshu Han, active on the Tibetan frontiers, Gao Xianzhi, An Lushan in the northeast, and Yang Guozhong in the southwest, who competed in striving to engage China in expansive campaigns in order to obtain favors from the court.<sup>76</sup> But it is clear that Xuanzong himself cherished dynastic ambitions inherited from his ancestors. He displayed a quite uncompromising attitude, hoping to restore the boundaries set up under the early reigns, although in the northeast, Xuanzong pragmatically accepted the fact that it was impossible for China to exert any greater degree of control on the Korean peninsula.

These changes also directly affected the power structure of the ruling group at the central level. During Xuanzong's reign, among the thirty-six Chief Ministers at least twelve of them had also held the position of Military Commissioner at one time in their careers. Du Xian was Protector-General of Anxi before he became Chief Minister.<sup>77</sup> In 735 Chief Minister Zhang Jiuling, famous for his belief that the court should be in the hands of scholar-officials rather than military men, strongly opposed Xuanzong's intention to promote Zhang Shougui to be Chief Minister based on the merit he displayed as Military Commissioner.

Xuanzong agreed, but the next year, when Zhang Juling also opposed the promotion of Niu Xianke, another capable Military Commis-

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<sup>75</sup> Twitchett 1979, pp. 367-9.

<sup>76</sup> *TD* 185, p. 985.

<sup>77</sup> The calculation is based on Pulleyblank 1955, Appendix V, and on the biographies of these chief ministers.



sioner, to Chief Minister, Xuanzong did not accept his advice.<sup>78</sup> Between 736 and 752 Chief Minister Li Linfu exercised the role of *de facto* dictator, since Xuanzong was no longer interested in government. Well aware of the power of the Military Commissioners and the importance of controlling the military, Li himself assumed the title of Military Commissioner of Longyou and Hexi in 738, and controlled the military of both places through his deputies until 740. The reason for this short tenure is not clear; it may have been the result of a power struggle in the court.<sup>79</sup>

In 746 and 747 as part of his great purge of his political rivals Li Linfu removed from their official posts two Military Commissioners, Huangfu Weiming and Wang Zhongsi, who had a close relationship with the crown prince, the future Suzong, accusing them of plotting to enthrone the crown prince, whose appointment he had opposed.<sup>80</sup> Then, in order to prevent Military Commissioners from gaining more power and exerting political influence through military success, Li Linfu persuaded the emperor to appoint non-Chinese generals who distinguished themselves in battles as Military Commissioners. He argued that these non-Chinese of humble origin as a consequence had no political connections at court to challenge the emperor's power and were better fighters. Xuanzong let him have his way. Eventually, except for Jiannan, all the Military Commissioners were non-Chinese, including the half Turkish and half Sogdian An Lushan, his cousin An Sishun, the half Turkish Geshe Han, the Korean general Gao Xianzhi, and Abusi, who was of Turkish origin.<sup>81</sup>

It has been suggested that Li Linfu specially favored An Lushan's advancement so as to use An's support against his political rivals. After the death of Li Linfu in 752, Yang Guozhong assumed the role of dictator at the court. Yang rose to power because his cousin Yang Yuhuan (Consort Yang) was the most favored concubine of Xuanzong. As a political rival of Li Linfu, Yang Guozhong could not command much respect from An Lushan. In order to put An under control, Yang intentionally supported Geshe Han as An's rival.<sup>82</sup> An Lushan, by then the Military Commissioner of three regional commands, and enjoying great favor from the throne, became involved deeply in court politics, which eventually led

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<sup>78</sup> Twitchett 1979, pp. 407-8. For a specific study of Zhang Jiuling, see Herbert 1978.

<sup>79</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 94-5.

<sup>80</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, pp. 89-92.

<sup>81</sup> Pulleyblank 1955, p. 95.

<sup>82</sup> Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 247-52.

to his rebellion in 755.

### **Suzong and Daizong: The An Lushan Rebellion and Its Aftermath**

Late in 755, An Lushan led an army of 150,000 men, including Tongra, Xi and Khitan, from his base in Fanyang on the pretext of having received a secret edict to remove the Chief Minister, Yang Guozhong. He soon captured Luoyang, whereupon he abandoned his pretence of serving the Tang dynasty and declared himself Emperor of Great Yan. The following summer, after a temporary stalemate at Tongguan, the defile where the Yellow River cuts through into the Central Plain, the rebels penetrated into Guanzhong. When Chang'an was about to fall to the rebels, Xuanzong abandoned the capital to take refuge in Sichuan. On the way occurred the famous incident at Mawei post station where his troops mutinied, killed Yang Guozhong and forced the emperor to put to death his favorite concubine, Yang Yuhuan.

The Crown Prince, the future Suzong, remained behind in Guanzhong to organize resistance to the rebels. He was persuaded by Du Hongjian, Deputy Commander (*liuhou*) of Shuofang, and other officials to make his headquarters at Lingwu, the seat of the Military Commissioner of Shuofang, and to assume the throne there and seek an alliance with the Uighurs.<sup>83</sup> He followed this advice, and proclaimed himself emperor. When the news reached Sichuan, Xuanzong abdicated in his favor.

An Lushan's army occupied Chang'an. In 757 An Lushan was killed by his son, An Qingxu, who was himself later killed in early 759 by another rebel leader, Shi Siming. Shi Siming, also of non-Chinese origin, had been left in charge of An Lushan's base in Hebei, surrendered to Tang in late 757, but rebelled again the following year. He, in turn, fell out with his son, Shi Chaoyi, and died in 761 at the hands of one of the latter's officers. The rebellion continued under Shi Chaoyi and was only finally suppressed with the assistance of foreign troops, especially the Uighurs, in 763 under Suzong's successor, Daizong.

The An Lushan rebellion drastically changed China. China not only lost its control over the Western Regions but also suffered losses to Tibet within its own territory. By 763 Tibet had annexed the Hexi and Longyou areas in modern Ningxia and Gansu. From these areas they constantly raided the Tang borders and posed a direct threat to the Tang capital. Defense of the frontier with Tibet took on a new urgency. Tibetan oc-

<sup>83</sup> JTS 108, pp. 3282-3; XTS 126, pp. 4422-3; ZZTJ 218, pp. 6980-2.



cupation of the Gansu corridor also cut off communications between China and the Western Regions. China's control over the Western Regions was in effect ended. The other two major foreign powers were the Uighur empire in the north and the Nanzhao kingdom in the southwest.

China's foreign policy thereafter centered around maintaining a balance of power amongst these four powers. Preoccupied with internal struggles with the provincial governors and severely limited by the lack of economic resources, Tang's rulers became much more pragmatic in dealing with these powerful neighbors, making alliance with one or another of them, and adopting measures that put China in an equal or even inferior position to one or more of them.

A formerly centralized China was changed into a decentralized state with the power of the court severely undermined. In settling the An Lushan rebellion, the court compromised with the rebel forces in the Hebei region and appointed former rebel leaders as Military Commissioners under four regional commands covering areas in present Hebei, part of Shandong and Henan. These were at the time called Youzhou or Lulong, Chengde, Weibo, and Xiangwei (incorporated by Weibo in 775). Known as the three commands of Hebei, the Military Commissioners there only nominally recognized the authority of the Tang central government.

Though accepting titles from Tang as symbols of legitimacy, the generals governed their territories in practice as independent fiefdoms, appointing their own officers and civil officials, collecting taxes and passing on their power to their descendants. They formed alliances among themselves, intermarried, and even preserved a lingering allegiance to the memory of An Lushan and his successors. Until 819 the Pinglu Army, which had been stationed on the frontier in southern Manchuria under An Lushan at the outset of the rebellion but had remained loyal to Tang and crossed into the Shandong peninsula, played the same semi-independent role within its territory and remained outside the effective control of the Tang court.

In the rest of the country, regional commands also became permanent during the post-rebellion period, forming a new tier of provinces between the central government and the prefectures, controlled by either military or civil commissioners appointed by the central government but often acting with a good deal of autonomy. In Henan and Shaannan (comprising the valley of the Han river, controlling a vital supply line bringing tax grain to the capital), Military Commissioners, mostly generals with their troops withdrawn from frontier commands in the far west, had

been set up during the rebellion to contain the rebels and prevent them from penetrating into the still undisturbed grain producing areas farther south. After the rebellion was over these troops remained in place and were sometimes as difficult for the Tang government to control as the former rebels.

Dealing with the provinces continued to be a distraction when defending against foreign threats all through the post-An Lushan period. Throughout this time the court relied mostly on the provinces of the Yangtze and Huai valleys for its tax revenues. The military forces directly under its control were the armies of the northwest and those of the provinces loyal to the court. Doubts about the loyalty of all provincial generals led to emphasis on the Palace Armies which came increasingly under the control of eunuchs. The court also tried, as the occasion arose, to make alliances with the autonomous Military Commissioners and play off one against another.<sup>84</sup>

At the center, the Tang emperors of the post-An Lushan period were more out of touch than were their strong predecessors with the country as a whole. They turned to those closest to them in their inner court for support and advice in decision-making. Breakdown in the recruiting of the regular bureaucracy led to reliance on the Hanlin scholars (see below on Lu Zhi). It was, however, the eunuchs whose role was especially enhanced as a result of the rebellion and who eventually, as in Later Han and Ming times, came to be the dominant force in the Tang government.

The rise of the eunuchs began when Suzong assumed the throne during the rebellion and was enhanced by the continuing mistrust between Suzong's successors and the military.<sup>85</sup> As Crown Prince, Suzong had had to live a sequestered life because of fears that he might become the focus of a plot by power seekers at court to replace his father prematurely. Moreover, when he assumed the throne at Lingwu, there were few experienced civil officials at hand on whom he could rely to set up his administration. It was natural that he should turn to his eunuch, Li Fuguo, who had been his constant companion in earlier times.

Reliance on eunuchs increased after the establishment of two new Palace Armies in 757. Suzong was trying to reverse the situation under

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<sup>84</sup> For more on the provinces during the latter half of Tang, see Wang Shouan 1969; Pulleyblank 1976, pp. 49-60; Twitchett 1976 has an extensive bibliographical note on the subject; Peterson 1979, pp. 484-560.

<sup>85</sup> Pulleyblank 1976, pp. 54-5; Zhang Qun 1986, pp. 302-6.



Xuanzong, when the capital's defenses had become weak. These Palace Armies were first placed under the command of the Prince of Jianning, but when he fell victim to palace intrigues, Suzong entrusted Li Fuguo with the command.<sup>86</sup> Li Fuguo became so powerful that he controlled personal access to the emperor, participated in much government business, and was appointed Minister of War in 761. At the time of Suzong's death, he intervened with the palace guard to foil a plot by the empress and to secure the succession of Daizong as the next emperor.<sup>87</sup>

Earlier, in 758, another eunuch, Yu Chaoen, had been appointed "inspector of the armies" (*guan junrong shi*) to coordinate the joint forces of nine Military Commissioners in the ill-fated campaign to besiege An Lushan's son, An Qingxu at Anyang. The appointment of eunuch supervisors (*jianjun*) to accompany generals in the field and report to the throne on their conduct, a function that early in the dynasty had been performed by censors, had begun in the time of Xuanzong and had become a regular practice by this time. Reporting directly to the emperor, the function of the eunuch supervisors was to watch over the Military Commissioners and deter ambitious generals from becoming too powerful, but at the same time this planted seeds of mistrust.<sup>88</sup>

Yu's position, which placed him over nine generals, was unprecedented. Besides being symptomatic of the emperor's mistrust of military men, it reflected the increasing independence of the generals who had been installed as Military Commissioners in command of their own territories. It is not surprising that Yu was not on good terms with the two most important commanders responsible for the campaign, Guo Ziyi and Li Guangbi, and that disunity in the command structure led to a complete debacle.<sup>89</sup> Instead of discrediting the practice of involving eunuchs in military command, however, the behavior of the generals, who retreated in disorder, each to his own home base, served to emphasize the unreliability of the professional military command.

Another illustration of the lack of trust and understanding between the military governors and the court is the case of Pugu Huairen. Of Uighur background, he played an important role in the suppression of the An

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<sup>86</sup> Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 311-2.

<sup>87</sup> *JTS* 184, pp. 4759-61; *XTS* 208, pp. 5879-82; *ZZTJ* 221, pp. 7073-4; 222, p. 7115; pp. 7123-5; Dalby 1979, pp. 572-3.

<sup>88</sup> Liu Yat-ming 1970, p. 97.

<sup>89</sup> *JTS* 184, pp. 4763-5; *XTS* 207, pp. 5863-6; *ZZTJ* 220, p. 7061.

Lushan rebellion, but due to personal rivalries and for other reasons, he kept his troops inactive during the Tibetan invasion of Chang'an in 763, and a year later rose in rebellion, joining forces with the Uighurs and Tibetans (Chapter 9).

Although at his succession in 762 Daizong got rid off Li Fuguo, he entrusted another eunuch, Cheng Yuanzhen, with equally great power. Cheng's bad relations with generals Guo Ziyi and Li Guangbi severely weakened Tang's ability to resist the Tibetan invasion in 763 (Chapter 10). Although under considerable pressure, Daizong eventually dismissed Cheng Yuanzhen from all his posts in 763,<sup>90</sup> he entrusted yet another eunuch, Yu Chaoen, with command of the Palace Armies and the Shence Army, a fateful move that in the long run became the foundation of eunuch power.

Incorporation of the Shence Army into the Palace Armies was a major step taken by Daizong's court to strengthen its control over the military. The Shence Army had been established in Longyou on the northwestern frontier during Xuanzong's reign, and moved into the interior during the An Lushan rebellion. At the time of the Tibetan invasion of Chang'an in 763, it was stationed at Shaanzhou, where the emperor sought refuge. In the absence of a regular general, the army was then under Yu Chaoen as the eunuch inspector. He came to the rescue of the emperor and gave him protection until he was able to return to the capital. The Shence Army was then incorporated into the Palace Armies with Yu in command. In 765, Yu Chaoen placed units of the Shence Army west of the capital to guard against another Tibetan invasion.

The court now had stronger Palace Armies at its disposal, but the military power in the hands of the eunuchs was also greatly increased. In a power struggle, Yu Chaoen was murdered in 770 at the instigation of the Chief Minister Yuan Zai, in cooperation with the emperor. Command of the Shence Army was at first given to another eunuch but, when he too was purged, it passed temporarily to non-eunuch officers.<sup>91</sup>

Daizong was never a strong or capable ruler. He was very much interested in Buddhism, perhaps disillusioned by the turbulent politics and chaos in China. Whenever Tibetans raided, he would order monks to recite the *Sutra of the Benevolent King* in the hope of warding them off. His in-

<sup>90</sup> JTS 11, p. 274; ZZTJ 223, pp. 7155-6.

<sup>91</sup> XTS 50, p. 1332; Des Rotours 1947-48, pp. 850-2; Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 328-34; Dalby 1979, pp. 573-4. For more on the Shence Army, see also Lai 1986, chapter 6.



terest in Buddhism was shared by some of his Chief Ministers, including Yuan Zai, who exercised a dominant role in the court between 762 and 777. Daizong's government was preoccupied with the urgent financial problems of the post-rebellion period and, in external affairs, was limited by the growing strength of the frontier peoples. The best it could do was to try to maintain the Uighur alliance and to defend the frontiers with whatever means were available.<sup>92</sup>

### **Dezong: Increasing Influence of the Inner Court and Military System**

When he came to the throne in the middle of 779, Dezong was determined to reverse the trends of the previous reign. He carried out a series of reform measures to restore the power of the central government. He instituted the "double-tax" system designed by his Chief Minister Yang Yan, a financial specialist, and adopted a firm policy towards the semi-autonomous provinces. To control the unruliness of foreigners at the capital, he ordered that all envoys who had remained in Chang'an and were being housed and fed at Chinese expense should be sent back, and that all the Uighurs and various Hu (referring mostly to Sogdians) who were at the capital should wear their own costumes and not dress as Chinese.<sup>93</sup>

Dezong's personal resentment at the humiliations he had suffered at the hands of the Uighurs as Crown Prince, was one of the main factors in a major change in his foreign policy: to abandon the Uighur alliance and make peace with Tibet, a policy that was also designed to enable him to divert northwestern frontier troops into the interior to deal with the rebellious provincial governors (Chapter 10). Dezong's firm policy towards the northeastern provinces had touched off a series of internal wars that lasted from 781 to 786 and troops were badly needed there. However, the removal of these troops to the interior placed a heavy burden on the finances of the court, since these armies, now removed from their home bases, had to be supplied by the central government.

Moreover, as Lu Zhi, then a young Hanlin academician (Hanlin *xueshi*), pointed out, with the frontier troops in the east and the Shence Army being away from the capital to suppress the rebels, Chang'an was vulnerable. He suggested the recall of the Palace Armies back to the capital to defend against a possible Tibetan invasion, but Dezong did not heed

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<sup>92</sup> ZZTJ 224, pp. 7196-7; Dalby 1979, pp. 578-9.

<sup>93</sup> ZZTJ 225, p. 7264; p. 7265.

his advice.<sup>94</sup> The dangers in the situation were not long in materializing.

In late 783 when the soldiers of the frontier province of Jingyuan arrived at Chang'an on their way south and found that they were not treated as well as they expected, they rioted and made Zhu Ci their leader. Zhu Ci was a former Military Commissioner of Jingyuan and brother of Zhu Tao, the rebellious Military Commissioner of Youzhou. When the court discovered that Zhu Tao had sent a letter to Ci asking him to join the rebellion, it detained Zhu Ci in Chang'an. Vulnerable in the capital, Dezong fled northwest to Fengtian. Zhu Ci occupied Chang'an, proclaimed himself emperor, and pressed on to Fengtian.<sup>95</sup>

Dezong asked the Tibetans for assistance. They came but returned home again before recovering Chang'an (Chapter 10). He also summoned the detachments of the Shence Army still stationed at the capital but none came. It emerged that the commissioner of the Shence Army, Bai Zhizhen, had been corruptly enrolling merchants and shopkeepers who enjoyed the privileges of guardsmen but did not undergo military training and continued with their former occupations. When called to arms in the emergency, they ran away. On his way to Fengtian Dezong was accompanied by only a small group of officials and two eunuchs who managed to organize an escort.<sup>96</sup>

During his exile, with only a small group of officials around him, Dezong relied on the Hanlin scholar, Lu Zhi, as a personal adviser and secretary. With his insights into the situation and sound analyses of political and economic matters, Lu Zhi assisted Dezong in settling the crisis. He played such an important role in court business that he was referred to as an "inner Chief Minister" and overshadowed the titular Chief Ministers of the outer court. After the emperor's return to the capital, Lu Zhi was promoted to a high official post and was appointed Chief Minister in 792, after which his influence over the emperor declined.<sup>97</sup>

Before the rebellion of the Jingyuan troops was over, Li Huaiguang, one of the generals recalled from the campaign against the rebels in the northeast to rescue the emperor, rebelled (Chapter 10). All this shook the emperor's confidence in the Military Commissioners. After the crisis, Dezong made major changes in the military system. In 786, he

<sup>94</sup> Twitchett 1962, pp. 94-5.

<sup>95</sup> *ZZTJ* 228, pp. 7351-8. For Zhu Ci's revolt, see Peterson 1979, pp. 505-7.

<sup>96</sup> Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 127-31; Dalby 1979, pp. 586-7.

<sup>97</sup> For more on Lu Zhi see Twitchett 1962; Chiu-Duke 1992.



again put eunuchs in control of the Shence Army. From then on, eunuch control of the Shence Army became permanent.<sup>98</sup> Under eunuch control, the Shence Army played a major role in frontier defense as well as in guarding the emperor and his court. Detachments were regularly despatched, along with contingents recruited from provincial military commissioners, as Troops for Autumn Defense to reinforce the permanent garrisons on the frontier at the time of harvest when there was greatest danger of Tibetan raids. Shence detachments were also stationed permanently at strategic walled towns inside the frontier occupied by provincial armies. Eight Shence garrisons near the capital formed a third inner line of defense outside the city itself, where the main body of the Palace Armies was stationed.<sup>99</sup>

The hardships and dangers of his exile during Zhu Ci's rebellion had a traumatic effect on Dezong, and his main concern during the remainder of his reign was enrichment of his treasury by regular or irregular means so as never to be in want again. In dealing with provincial governors, he returned to the *laissez-faire* policies of his predecessor, relying on eunuch supervisors to exert what control they could over the military commissioners whose appointments were within the scope of the court's effective authority.

### **Abortive Reform under Shunzong**

Towards the end of Dezong's reign, a reform-minded group of young men, including the famous writers Liu Zongyuan and Liu Yuxi, gathered around his Crown Prince, the future Shunzong, determined to deal with the twin problems of provincial militarism and eunuch influence at court so as to reverse the trend towards dynastic decline. Unfortunately, before he came to the throne in 805 Shunzong suffered a stroke that rendered him mute and incapable of effective participation in government. Though the reformers briefly attained power, the eunuchs were able to resist their attempt to take control of the Palace Armies and to engineer Shunzong's abdication in favor of his son, known to history as Xianzong.

The significance of this brief episode was controversial at the time and will probably always remain so, given the limitations of the sources, which are heavily weighted on the side of the winners and vilify the reformers as a low-minded clique interested only in their own power. What

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<sup>98</sup> Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 127-31; Peterson 1979, p. 512; Dalby 1979, pp. 583-7.

<sup>99</sup> Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 376-82.

seems clear is that the power of the eunuchs was entrenched and their determination to hold on to it was enhanced. Their position was not seriously challenged again until the Sweet Dew incident in 833.

This also had a demoralizing effect on the civil bureaucracy, which was divided at the time between the supporters of the reform group and the majority which was left out of the conspiracy. The majority felt threatened by the reformers' subversion of regular procedures and preferred to accommodate themselves to the eunuchs and cooperate with them to maintain the status quo rather than support radical change. This split may have sown the seeds of the factionalism that infected court politics for the next several decades, and which had repercussions on foreign policy from time to time.<sup>100</sup>

### Temporary Recovery under Xianzong

Xianzong came to the throne towards the end of 805. Young and forceful, he was determined to restore central authority over the independent military commissioners. Between 806 and 819 he engaged in a series of confrontations with the autonomous provinces, and succeeded for the moment in making even Hebei accept court appointees. A *modus vivendi* was established with the provinces that, on the whole, maintained internal peace in the country until the army mutinies and peasant revolts of the last three decades of the ninth century.

Xianzong concentrated his attention and economic resources on dealing with internal problems. In foreign policy, the court carried out negotiations for peace with Tibet (Chapter 10). The Uighur problem was not so urgent as in Daizong's time and Xianzong was able to decline a new marriage contract with them until 820 when he was finally persuaded by his ministers to an agreement: from a long-term point of view it seemed important and advantageous to continue the alliance relationship (Chapter 9).

Xianzong's reign was looked upon as a period of recovery and resurgence, but it was also marked by entrenchment of the power of the eunuchs. It was during his reign that the position of Palace Secretary (*shumi shi*) was formally established. Since it was held by eunuchs they now formed a consultative body parallel to the Chief Ministers.

Eventually, the emperor was either murdered by eunuchs or died of

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<sup>100</sup> On Shunzong's reign see, among others, Pulleyblank 1960; Dalby 1979.



a drug overdose.<sup>101</sup>

### **Decline and Disintegration**

From the next emperor, Muzong, to the end of Tang in 907 the Tang dynasty went from decline to disintegration. In 821 the central government appointees were driven out in Hebei, which returned to semi-autonomous status and remained so to the end of the dynasty.<sup>102</sup> The eunuchs became so powerful that they intervened in almost all the successions until the end of Tang, and continued to exert their influence in military and political affairs. Under these circumstances the abilities and personalities of individual emperors were of less importance for foreign policy than in earlier times.

Wuzong's reign (840-846) coincided with the collapse of the Uighurs and the opportunity it provided to abolish the Manichean temples throughout the country which the Uighurs had sponsored. This was probably a stimulus to the persecution of Buddhism carried out later by that Daoist inclined emperor but this did not have any direct bearing on dealings with foreign countries.

Factional struggles within the bureaucracy became serious from the 820's on, with rival groups seeking support from the eunuchs. The infamous Niu-Li factional struggles had a direct bearing on the formation of foreign policy at the time of the Weizhou Incident of 831 (Chapter 10) and when the Uighur power was in disintegration during the early 840's (Chapter 9).

The Shence Army, as the main military force under direct control of the central government, deteriorated during the later years of Xianzong's reign. It enjoyed special privileges and higher pay, but was badly disciplined and lost its fighting spirit. Already in 812 Chief Minister Li Jiang had pointed out that the purpose of the Shence Army was to guard against Tibet, but because it was under the control of eunuchs who refused to cooperate with the military commissioners, it was ineffective. He proposed to turn the command of the units of the Shence Army over to the military commissioners where they were stationed. His proposal was blocked by the eunuchs, but over time the provincial armies gradually absorbed the Shence detachments into their own and became the major force

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<sup>101</sup> Dalby 1979, pp. 634-5.

<sup>102</sup> Dalby 1979, pp. 611-2.

for defense of the northeastern frontier.<sup>103</sup>

From the 820's peace was maintained on the frontiers to a large extent more due to decline of both of the major foreign powers, than because of the conclusion of marriages with the Uighurs and a peace treaty with Tibet. During the 840's, when the Uighur empire disintegrated, the court under Wuzong and his capable Chief Minister Li Deyu made efforts to exacerbate the collapse, but Tang China at this time did not have the strength to recover its influence on either the steppe lands or in the Western Regions. When the Tibetan kingdom also collapsed during the 840's, the Nanzhao kingdom in the southwest increased its expansion at Tang's expense. Tang was for most of this time on the defensive.

From the mid-ninth century on, army revolts and peasant rebellions broke out, reaching their height in the rebellion of Wang Xianzhi and Huang Chao in 874-884. Although the government under Xizong (r. 873-888) was in the hands of loyal and capable men, Tang's foundations were mortally shaken. During the popular rebellions the court had to rely on provincial military commissioners, who now became regional warlords. One of them overthrew the Tang dynasty in 907. China entered another period of disunion known as the period of Five Dynasties and the Ten Kingdoms.

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When the Tang dynasty began, it faced challenges both from within and without. Gaozu had to follow a cautious foreign policy, buying time for the consolidation of the dynastic power. This was changed to an expansive policy under Taizong, when China was at peace within and the economy had recovered. He set about restoring the glories of the Han empire and went beyond that to envision a world empire with both Chinese and nomadic peoples as equal subjects. The expansion reached its climax under Gaozong. Sickly physically, he fell under the influence of his empress, Wu Zetian, who became his assistant, and eventually usurped the throne after his death. Handicapped by her position as a woman and a usurper, and faced with the growing power of foreign rivals, she retreated from expansion to defense. Her grandson, Xuanzong, a capable and ambitious ruler with the advantage of having inherited a prosperous and peaceful country, again engaged China in expansion westward, but his capacity to carry out an ambitious foreign policy was more limited than Taizong's

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<sup>103</sup> For Details on the decline of the Shence Army, see Liu Yat-ming 1970, pp. 403-13.



owing to his lack of experience outside the palace. In the end he handed over power to Li Linfu in order to enjoy the good life as *de facto* retired emperor.

During much of this time the Tang decision-making group had capable ministers, often combining military as well as civilian experience. The militia system was an important factor in Tang's early successes. Its deterioration under the stress of constant wars, especially the long-drawn-out Korean campaigns and those caused by the emergence of Tibetan power in the northwest, led to an emphasis on building strong defenses and increased reliance on frontier armies, eventually including many foreign troops and foreign generals, the most ambitious of whom, An Lushan, rose in rebellion against the court in 755.

The post-An Lushan period contrasts sharply with the first half of Tang in foreign policy. The weakened Tang empire had to follow reactive, pragmatic and compromising, non-aggressive, policies towards the powerful Tibetan kingdom and the Uighur empire. The emperors' personalities and attitudes were still important at times, especially in the reigns of Suzong, Daizong, Dezong, and Xianzong, but militarism in the provinces and growing eunuch power at the center complicated the decision-making process and left the central government weak and incapable of responding aggressively to new opportunities, such as those provided by the collapse of the Uighurs and Tibetans in the 840's.