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Asia Pacific: **PERSPECTIVES** *an electronic journal*

Volume I · Number 1

May · 2001

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Asia Pacific: Perspectives is a peer-reviewed journal published twice a year in May and November. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities. In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

Our task is to inform public opinion through a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach to issues of interrelatedness in the Pacific Rim region* will be especially welcome. Graduate students, as well as established scholars, are encouraged to submit their work.

* 'Pacific Rim region' as used here includes North America, Pacific Central and South America, Oceania, Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, East Asia, South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka), and the Russian Far East.

To Change China: A Tale of Three Reformers

by Greg Anderson, M.A.

Abstract

The cyclical rising and falling of historical Chinese dynasties has often been punctuated by the emergence of reformers who attempted to bring about improvements and to set the nation on what they believed to be the correct course. This paper examines the lives, motivations, reform programs, and results achieved by three such reformers—Wang Mang of the Han, Wang Anshi of the Song, and Zhang Juzheng of the Ming—in an effort to understand the conditions that drove them to reform, and to draw lessons for modern day reformers in the People's Republic of China.

Wang Mang is judged to be a nearly complete failure as his reforms were based almost solely on nostalgia for a return to the idealized Zhou era, rather than on solutions to specific problems. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were more successful in addressing specific problems, though neither made an effort to gain support for their reforms from the bureaucracy. Wang Anshi was the most successful of the three as his reforms were not only far-reaching and integrated, but they also included an important self-sustaining component that, were it not for the downfall of the Northern Song, could have led to more permanent changes.

Introduction

Throughout its more than four thousand years of history, China has been subject to unending cycles of rise and fall, innovation and stagnation, prosperity and decline. The pattern goes something like this: A new dynasty is founded by a charismatic leader who is able to give the citizens a feeling of optimism and hope. This is followed by a phase, lasting as long as one hundred years, in which the dynasty reaches its zenith politically, economically and culturally. In the next phase, the dynasty reaches a plateau of stagnation and complacency, which is followed by a final phase of decline, destruction and the eventual fall of the dynasty.¹

At some point during that final phase, history records the emergence of reformers who, often at great personal risk, attempt to change or improve what they believe to be wrong, to put an end to perceived abuse or disorder, and to redirect the course of the dynasty. However, because every Chinese dynasty, from the mythical Xia to the Qing, eventually met its demise, we know that none of these reformers was ultimately successful.

Why have these reformers so often failed in their attempts to restore China's glory? Is there a common thread running through Chinese history to explain the difficulties faced by those who have wanted to make changes to government, society or economy? What lessons can we draw from historical reform attempts that will help us to understand China's post-cultural revolution reform efforts?

In an effort to formulate answers to these questions, this paper will examine the lives of three historical reformers whose influences are separated by thousands of years, Wang Mang of the Han Dynasty, Wang Anshi of the Northern Song, and Zhang Juzheng of the Ming.

Certainly the most well-known among our three reformers was Wang Mang (45 B.C. - A.D. 23) who served as Imperial Regent under several emperors during the latter part of the Former Han Dynasty. His reforms were mostly economic in nature but were heavily influenced by Wang's reverence for the teachings of Confucius; however, Wang Mang's reforms have often been overshadowed by the fact that he dethroned the last emperor of the Former Han and established his own (short-lived) dynasty with himself as emperor.

Over one thousand years and several dynasties later, Wang Anshi (A.D. 1021-1086) rose to prominence as Grand Councilor under the emperor Shenzong (r. 1068-1085) toward the end of the Northern Song dynasty.² Wang is best known for his package of reforms known as the New Policies (*xin fa*), which contained an integrated set of reforms touching upon China's bureaucracy, military, economy and education.³

Toward the end of the Ming dynasty, and five hundred years after Wang Anshi, Zhang Juzheng (A.D. 1525-1582) served as Chief Grand Secretary under the emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620). Having served as imperial tutor during Wanli's childhood, Zhang exercised strong influence over the emperor and, as such, was regarded as a *de facto* Prime Minister.⁴ The reforms of Zhang Juzheng, though not as extensive as those of either Wang Mang or Wang Anshi, were focused on tax administration and stringent fiscal management.

All three of these reformers had in common the fact that they came into positions of power during times in which their respective dynasties were considered to be in decline, and all three felt they had the cure to what ailed China. Wang Mang's medicine was certainly the most drastic in that part of his prescription included the ending of the dynasty he had served and the establishment of a new dynasty known as the Xin (A.D. 9-23). Though some of his reforms began before he ascended the throne, most of his reforms came during his reign as emperor. Wang Mang's Xin dynasty lasted only fourteen years and ended with his murder in A.D. 23.

Wang Anshi's tenure as Grand Councilor lasted, with only brief interruption, from A.D. 1070 to 1076, and was preceded by various other bureaucratic posts including Vice Grand Councilor. His final year as Grand Councilor preceded the fall of the Northern Song by fifty-one years.

Zhang Juzheng served as Chief Grand Secretary from A.D. 1572 to 1582. Unlike Wang Mang and Wang Anshi, Zhang had no previous career experience as a state official. He had served as tutor to the emperor Wanli, both before and after Wanli's accession to the throne at the age of ten. Zhang's final year as Chief Grand Secretary preceded the fall of the Ming by only sixty-two years.

History has been at times, both cruel and kind to the memories of these three reformers – though mostly cruel. The proximity of their administrations to the last days of their respective dynasties, (and in Wang Mang's case, his usurpation of the throne) combined with the vehemence of their contemporary opposition, contributed to unfavorable accounts of them in the official Han, Song and Ming Histories. Later scholarship, however, has reexamined the reforms of all three, providing us with more objective accounts of their reforms and the effects of their reforms on state and society.

We will begin by observing the times in which our three reformers lived and the circumstances which motivated them to attempt reforms.

The Motivation for Reform

Conditions of the Former Han

The Han Dynasty was founded by Liu Bang (206-195 B.C.) who arose from peasant origins to lead a rebellion against the oppressive, legalist Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.). Liu adhered to the Confucian teaching that only a just and moral government had a right to govern the people and, therefore, to maintain the "Mandate of Heaven" (*tian ming*). He relaxed many of the rules and punishments that had controlled the daily existence of the people under the Qin, and encouraged learning as a way to bring talented people into the service of the state. The leadership of Liu Bang helped to foster growth and prosperity during the early years of the Han.

The Han was begun under the official ideology of Confucianism which stressed the value of learning and self-discipline. Through learning, anyone could make himself a better person, fit to serve the needs of the state and to serve as an example of moral and just living for the common people. Liu Bang supported these notions by establishing examinations in the Confucian Classics designed to select worthy men to serve the state. These examinations, which would persist in one form or another until the early twentieth century, gave anyone with the means to study an opportunity to become a civil servant, and thus guarantee his family a comfortable living and a respected position in society. As a result, gentry status generally was not inheritable; it had to be earned through passing the exam.⁵

The Confucianism of the Han, however, was not pure Confucianism in that it incorporated Legalist elements which had been opposed by Confucius. John K. Fairbank refers to this Legalist-Confucian amalgam as "Imperial Confucianism" which retained some of the Legalist elements of Qin rule, particularly the use of rewards and punishments by rulers to maintain order among the people.⁶

Despite its good beginnings, later Han emperors, notably Han Wudi (r. 141-87 B.C.), became corrupted by their absolute power, and instituted greater government control over many aspects of life. Though Han Wudi sought to extend the Confucianist orthodoxy established under Liu Bang, he also established other practices which were decidedly un-Confucian. Han Wudi set up government monopolies over the production of staple goods such as salt and iron which would continue under many subsequent dynasties in the future. The money earned from controlling the markets for salt and iron went primarily to finance the Han army which expanded China's borders through conquest of neighboring kingdoms.

These monopolies were the subject of a now-famous debate which took place among reformist Confucian scholars and modernists during the year 81 B.C.—the Debate on Salt and Iron. The Confucian reformists opposed the monopolies on the grounds that they imposed burdens on the people to finance unnecessary wars. Modernists, however, argued that the wars were necessary to protect the common people from

conquest by China's barbarian neighbors.⁷

In addition to the monopolies, the state also became involved in commerce through controlling the grain trade. The government's "ever-normal granary" was established to equalize grain prices by buying up excess supplies when grain was plentiful and selling stored grain when the supply was low. Though there is some evidence that the policy was effective in equalizing prices, one result was that private merchants were deprived of this particular source of income.

Another source of government income during this time was the land tax which was levied on all land held by private citizens according to the amount of land one owned. Over time, however, land became more and more concentrated in the hands of an ever-decreasing number of wealthy landowners. Most often this would happen when, during times of drought, flood or pestilence, small farmers would borrow money from the wealthy to tide themselves over until the return of favorable growing conditions. These loans were often made at usurious rates of interest and required pledging of the land, and sometimes even the farmer and his family, as collateral. During extended periods of poor agricultural conditions, much land passed into the hands of the wealthy, and many farmers and their families became slaves of their creditors.

This concentration of landholding, one might think, would make the jobs of the tax collectors much easier in that they would have fewer landowners from whom to collect tax. On the contrary, it became far more difficult. The political and economic power gained by the wealthy landowners made it possible for them to exert influence over local government and to thereby have their tax bills reduced, or even to have their land removed from tax rolls altogether.

Another form of government 'income' at this time was *corvée* labor in which adult males were required to work for approximately one month each year in service to the government, usually on construction projects or in military service. As was the case with the land tax, the wealthy were often able to exert their influence to avoid their annual duty to the state.

This ability of the wealthy to avoid taxes and labor increasingly led to even greater pressure on the powerless to make up for lost revenue. This pressure often took place in the form of great oppression and punishment by local governments who were themselves under pressure from the central government to keep the revenues flowing. Increased pressure on the poor quite often led to resentment, banditry and sometimes rebellion.

The central government's appetite for tax revenues grew significantly over the latter portion of the Former Han Dynasty, especially after the military exploits of Han Wudi. Administration of new territories conquered by the Han, as well as continued military activity to keep the Xiong Nu, so-called barbarians along the northern border, at bay, placed a great strain on government finance.

The former Han peaked under Wudi, then under a succession of weak emperors began a century-long period of decline.⁸ Notable during this period, from approximately the end of Han Wudi's reign in 87 B.C. to the end of the former Han in A.D. 9, was the increasing influence of the extended

families of empresses at court. Whenever a Han emperor died, power then rested in the hands of his widow, the empress dowager, who had the duty of selecting the next emperor from among the Liu clan. In many cases, the new emperor selected by the empress dowager would be a minor who was supervised by a regent appointed from among the relatives of the empress. Though holding no official political power, this regent, as caretaker of the young emperor, and as a close relative of the empress dowager, often exerted much influence at court.⁹ The power and privilege that came with the position of regent also led to much conflict and intrigue among relatives of various empresses and empresses dowager who competed for favor and influence.

As we shall see, the latter years of the Former Han exhibited all the characteristics of a dynasty in decline: much extravagance at court, fighting among factions for influence, weak emperors, a decrease in fiscal discipline, and the increasing power of the wealthy.¹⁰

Before declaring himself emperor in A.D. 9, Wang Mang had been appointed Regent, first in 8 B.C. and again in 1 B.C., by his aunt, the Empress Dowager Wang.¹¹ Prior to his regency, three of Wang Mang's uncles and one of his cousins had occupied the position consecutively for twenty-eight years.¹² It is ironic, then, that the poor and weakened condition of the dynasty, which drove Wang Mang to implement reforms in the first place, was also the condition which placed him into a position to implement reforms.

Much unlike his relatives who apparently availed themselves of the privileges of their offices, Wang Mang is noted for living simply and frugally. Even Ban Gu's official Han history (*Han Shu*), which was deeply critical of Wang's usurpation of the throne, praises him for the model Confucian behavior he exhibited in his youth. He was devoted to his studies of the Confucian Classics, cared for ill family members and even helped to raise an orphaned nephew.¹³

An ardent Confucianist, Wang Mang, shared Confucius' idealization of the ancient times of the sage-kings, Yao and Shun, and the ruling clan of the Zhou dynasty, Kings Wen and Wu, and the Duke of Zhou. Their eras were supposedly times when all was right with the world, and leaders exemplified the Confucian virtues of benevolence, virtue, filial piety, order, observance of ritual, and a commitment to learning.

Driven by these influences, and a belief that the Han were no longer able to set the proper example for the people or to provide for their needs, Wang Mang wanted to re-establish the ideal Confucian society. Though very little recorded history of his time exists today, the *Han Shu* portrays Wang Mang as caring for the conditions of the common people. Of the Qin Dynasty rulers' treatment of the people Wang wrote in an edict:

The Qin was without principle and increased the levies and taxes for its own use, exhausting the strength of the people with its inordinate desires... profaning the will of Heaven, destroying human relationships, and perverting the principle that man is the noblest creation of Heaven and earth...¹⁴

Wang Mang also criticized the Han for the oppressive burden of taxes on the poor and for allowing property to be gathered in the hands of the rich:

(The rich)...grew arrogant and perpetrated evil deeds, while the poor, without even the dregs of grain to satisfy themselves with, were reduced to despair and turned to a life of crime. Both sank in wickedness, and punishments had to be used...¹⁵

His ideology aside, there is also evidence to suggest that Wang Mang was driven by ambition as well. Among his relatives whom he nursed to health during illness was one of his uncles, a regent who served the emperor. Even in his blind Confucianism, Wang certainly realized that by sacrificing his own interests to care for his well-connected uncle, he would be helping to ensure his future reward. Additionally, prior to his first appointment to regent, Wang Mang had a cousin who was older, had advanced to a higher post than he, and who was, therefore, better-placed to become the next regent. Through intrigues of his own, Wang Mang accused the well-placed cousin of minor wrong-doing—a crime which unfortunately ended in the cousin's execution—and placed himself next in line to be appointed regent.¹⁶

Throughout his career, Wang Mang demonstrated great political skill through exercising personal influence and masterfully spreading propaganda that legitimized his every move. He earned the support of the Confucian bureaucracy by basing his reforms on interpretations of the Confucian texts, and he gained influence by generously rewarding titles and property to those whom he thought might challenge him politically. He also took great pains to legitimize his claim to the throne, first through providing "evidence" that he was a descendant of China's mythical Yellow Emperor, and secondly through documenting numerous "portents" all of which supposedly pointed to his being selected by Heaven to ascend the throne in place of the Han.

Conditions of the Eleventh Century Song

Moving forward in history nearly one thousand years, the founding emperor of the Song Dynasty (A. D. 960-1279), Song Taizu (r. 960-978), actually made it possible for Song Dynasty reformers to challenge the status quo. Unlike the founding emperors of previous dynasties, Song Taizu placed great emphasis on institutional continuity with the prior regime, as opposed to making his own mark through a radical departure from the past.¹⁷ Because the system was not the invention of Song Taizu, himself, various aspects of the system were open to challenge. The political and economic systems of the Tang (A. D. 618-907) had been preserved in the Song but were allowed to be changed or replaced as was deemed necessary to meet the current needs of the nation. By the mid-eleventh century, some thought the needs of the country did call for a change, but few reformers had arisen to suggest radical improvements to the existing system.

Economically, Song China operated under a system similar to that of the Han in which the central government collected revenue from land taxes and monopolies on certain commodities such as salt, iron and tea. But the prevailing political thought of the time did not include the concept of a fiscally accountable government.¹⁸ Additionally, the government enforced a system known as the "Commissioned Services Act," in which common people were conscripted on

a regular basis to provide services to the government. This policy of *corvée* labor, similar to that of the Han, dated back to very ancient times in Chinese history. As under previous dynasties, over the years wealthy landowners were able, through bribes or government connections, to have their taxes reduced, to have their land removed from the tax rolls, and to avoid *corvée* labor.

The agrarian-based economy of the times also depended upon regular and productive harvests, part of which were required to be shipped to the capital for storage and use by the administration. These stores of grain, and other commodities such as silk or cotton, could be accepted in lieu of cash, declining in amount the further away one lived from the capital to take into account the greater cost of shipping commodities over long distances.¹⁹

The Song Dynasty continued in the tradition of civil service examinations which had their origins in the Han. The required curriculum covered dynastic histories, poetry, and the Confucian classics²⁰, and heavily emphasized memorization of Confucian texts and poetry composition. Although the wealthy had an advantage in their means to pay for an education, it was not impossible for members of the lower classes to pass examinations and gain entrance into the bureaucracy.²¹ In keeping with convention, the aspirants to education and civil service postings were all men.²²

Militarily, the Northern Song found itself constantly challenged by the Xixia and the Liao along its northern border. Though the Song abandoned much of the imperial ambitions of the Tang which had preceded it, the Song continued to allocate tremendous resources to national defense. Prior to the reign of Wang Anshi's emperor, Shenzong, the standing army numbered 1,162,000 men²³ "for whom soldiering was a full time profession. The cost of supporting this army was a crushing burden on dynastic finances,"²⁴ and the Song began to experience large budget deficits.

In 1058 Wang Anshi traveled to the capital, Kaifeng, from his home province of Jiangxi to present what would be his most famous memorial to the Emperor Renzong (r. 1023-1064). Wang's "Ten Thousand Word Memorial" outlines his general political philosophy while giving a brief preview of the elements of his New Policies which were still to come nearly ten years in the future. Wang Anshi criticizes the ineffective method of instruction in schools: This method (of instruction) calls for the recitation and memorizing of an enormous amount of literature...but even if success in this matter is gained, it does not qualify the best student for the ruler's position...they would have only the vaguest notion of what to do when they were appointed to actual office.²⁵

Wang Anshi gives clues as to his future socialist economic policy:

...I have made some enquiry into the methods of finance adopted by the ancient rulers...this consisted of using the resources of the people to produce wealth for the State, and to devote the wealth thus accumulated to meeting the requirements of the national expenditure.²⁶

...and his thoughts on the current method of appointing officials:

On the basis of possessing literary ability a man may be appointed to a Financial post, then...transferred to a legal position, or again to...the Board of Rites. One cannot expect anything else than that he finds it difficult...seeing that he is required to...fill any position whatsoever.²⁷

When taken as a whole, the "Ten Thousand Word Memorial" contains, not random opinions on various problems facing state and society, but rather an integrated, self-contained system designed to return the Song to its potential greatness.²⁸ Basing his reasoning on the Confucian classics, he asserted that government should return to the ways of the ancient kings, but only in a general sense:

"I am not arguing that we should revive the ancient system of government in every detail...So complete a revival is practically impossible. I suggest that we should just follow the main ideas and general principles of these ancient rulers."²⁹

Conditions of the Sixteenth Century Ming

Nearly three hundred years after the time of Wang Anshi, and after a brief period of rule over China by the Mongols, Hong Wu (r. 1368-1398), founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty, returned China to Chinese rule by defeating the overstretched Mongols. A very capable emperor and dedicated worker, Hong Wu established the dynasty on a solid foundation by restoring peace and order to the country and building up a strong army to defend China's borders.

Especially characteristic of his rule was a greater concentration of powers in the hands of the emperor. This concentration of powers, though effective in the hands of a capable emperor such as Hong Wu, would eventually contribute to the downfall of the Ming, as later, less capable and less scrupulous emperors wielded these concentrated powers. By the reign of the Jia Jing emperor (r. 1522-1566), emperors had begun to neglect their governmental duties, often not even taking the time to hold court.³⁰

During the course of the Ming, court eunuchs grew tremendously in number and in power. The emperors brought about this condition as their increasing requests for eunuchs to serve in the palace induced many parents to castrate their own children in the hopes that their sons could obtain positions in the palace. Many of the thousands of eunuchs who lived and worked in the palace sought out opportunities for influence and corruption, and were a contributing factor in the eventual downfall of the dynasty.

Perhaps the most well-known eunuch was the Admiral Zheng He, who commanded a navy of as many as 60 vessels that explored as far as the coast of Africa. These explorations, which took place between 1405 and 1433, were eventually ended, most likely because of their expense, but also because of the increasing threats the Chinese felt around their own borders. Moreover, memories of the Mongol conquest had reinforced a conservatism and xenophobia that gave China an inward focus which would persist well into the twentieth century.

Similarly to the Han and the Song, the Ming derived most of its revenue from land taxes and the salt and tea monopolies. The Ming also inherited the old system of *corvée* labor; however, by the later fifteenth century, much of the work had been commuted to silver payments for many

people. Despite its good beginnings, the Ming began to experience systemic economic problems toward the middle of the dynasty. As in the Han and Song, the land taxes became easy to evade through the collusion of wealthy landowners and corrupt officials who were very lowly compensated in their official positions.³¹ Additionally, because much *corvée* labor had been commuted to silver payments based on local, ad-hoc decisions, there did not exist a uniform system or standard by which government ministers could forecast revenue receipts.³²

Combined with revenue collection problems, the Ming dynasty was faced with an ever-increasing expense burden. In addition to government salaries and imperial household expenses, the administration carried the extra burden of providing living expenses for emperors' relatives who numbered nearly thirty thousand by the middle of the sixteenth century.³³ By then the imperial treasury was nearly empty and money had to be borrowed from the provinces or from government departments.³⁴

The army, which in the early part of the Ming had become nearly self-supporting through its own farming ventures, also became a heavy burden as it came to rely increasingly on state financial support by the middle of the dynasty. Despite continued threats by the Mongols from the north, Manchus from the northeast and Japanese pirates from the east, the strength of the Ming army was allowed to decline. When the Mongols attacked Beijing in 1550, army commanders were only able to gather fifty to sixty thousand soldiers from the local regiment, which during the time of Hong Wu, had numbered more than one hundred thousand men.³⁵

Much of the Ming educational system was similar to that of the Han and Song. Those who aspired to join the civil service were still required to pass rigorous exams involving memorization of the Four Books and the Five Classics. One notable difference, the infamous "eight-legged essay" (*ba gu wen*), which required a set form for writing examination papers, was instituted during the late thirteenth century. Though Wang Anshi had attempted educational reforms during the eleventh century which were intended to produce a more highly skilled bureaucracy, the traditional Confucian view of education prevailed during the Ming: one's morality, rather than one's level of skill, was of greater importance for a civil service position. Those who would exercise creativity by departing from the approved form or content need not apply. Arriving on the scene at a time when the Ming dynasty was clearly in decline, Zhang Juzheng believed that the continuance of the dynasty was of utmost importance. In an indication of his commitment to the dynasty, he wrote, "If it is to the benefit of the state, I would do it regardless of life or death."³⁶ In 1568, prior to his appointment as Chief Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng submitted his "Memorial on Six Affairs" to the emperor suggesting that the current problems faced by the dynasty were primarily due to a weakening of imperial authority and a disrespect for dynastic laws and institutions. Despite his background as a Confucian scholar, this memorial subsequently earned him the reputation of a Legalist. However, he often combined both Confucian and Legalist arguments to justify his means. Here he advises the emperor to

combine Legalist punishment with his Confucian duty to provide a moral example for the people:

"If [the emperor] desires all to return to rectitude, he must have laws and regulations, prohibitions and ordinances in order to govern them...However, if [he] does not devote attention to cultivating virtue as the basis of conducting government, then he is himself unrectified...Therefore, the sovereign in conducting government should desire only in his personal conduct actually to carry it out in order to lead them by his personal example."³⁷

In a preview of his fiscal policies, Zhang wrote:

"To clear away tax arrears is the means by which to [ensure] a sufficiency for the state. [To guarantee that] officials, and people both have a sufficiency and that both above and below are benefited, is the means by which to plan for the strengthening of the foundation of the state, to maintain peace and expel aggression...When wealth is insufficient, contention arises...propriety and morality begin when money is sufficient...not to spare labor and expense to establish profit for a hundred generations approaches righteousness. To accumulate [wealth] and be able to disperse it approaches wisdom."³⁸

Zhang was a proponent of autocracy and firm, but benevolent government, justifying his belief with the Han Feizi analogy of a loving parent causing temporary pain to an infant while lancing its boil or shaving its head (in order to cure an illness).³⁹

Motivation in Comparison

Though separated by many centuries, Wang Mang, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, all three, achieved political power under remarkably similar conditions. They served governments which derived their revenues from land taxes and monopolies, and required of their subjects *corvée* labor. All three dynastic governments faced the challenges of high concentration of wealth, tax evasion among the wealthy and military threats from across the country's northern borders. All three governments were staffed by bureaucrats who had earned their positions by following the prescribed formats and memorizing the required Confucian texts.

Although all three of our reformers began their careers by influencing their respective emperors, Wang Mang was the only one to go so far as to declare himself emperor and ascend the dragon throne. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, however, operated within the political environments under which they were called to serve, but their respective political environments differed in that the founder of the Song had established a system whereby a Grand Councilor (or Prime Minister) could challenge the status quo. The Ming founder, however, had established a system of absolute, concentrated imperial power, incapable of challenge by the bureaucracy. Until the time of Zhang Juzheng, no other Chief Grand Secretary had dared to suggest a radical change in policy to the emperor.

Though palace eunuchs served in all three dynasties, those of the Han were generally bystanders, and those of the Song were somewhat obstructionist, but in neither time did they carry significant political power.⁴⁰ By the time of the Ming, however, palace eunuchs were considerably greater in number, carried far greater political power, and were far more capable of corruption.

In terms of personal backgrounds, all three of our reformers were Confucian scholars from their youth. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were both holders of the *jin shi* degree and were both prolific writers of poetry and prose.⁴¹ Whereas Wang Mang professed to be a devout Confucian throughout his entire life, both Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, tended to be more eclectic in their beliefs, drawing from any source which would help them to achieve their goals – including Buddhism, to which both turned during their latter years.

Wang Mang, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng are all three remembered as reformers, but Wang Mang is best remembered for usurping the throne of the emperor and overthrowing the dynasty which he had sworn to serve. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, however, were true activists who were serious enough about reform to risk the opposition which would arise to thwart their plans. Neither, however, had the political stature to even consider taking the reigns of power for themselves. Rather, they steadfastly supported their respective emperors and counted on their mutual support in order to implement their reform programs.

For inspiration, our reformers turned to different sources. In keeping with the teachings of Mencius, both Wang Mang and Wang Anshi believed that the ideal model for government was exhibited by the ancient sages as described in the *Zhou Li* and *Book of Rites*.⁴² Zhang however, took the position of Xunzi that later rulers, especially his dynastic founder, Ming Taizu, were the ideal model for government.⁴³

All three of our reformers believed that their respective dynasties had ventured off course and sought means by which they could set things back in order. Wang Mang sought to re-establish the Utopian vision of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1027-221 B.C.), with himself as the Confucian sage-king who had ascended the throne based on merit rather than inheritance.⁴⁴ Because of their more pragmatic emphases on the rule of law, both Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were labeled by their contemporaries, as well as many later historians, as Legalists in the school of Han Feizi, but this description more aptly applies to Zhang.⁴⁵ Zhang wrote specifically of the need for imperial use of the “rewards and punishments,” but the prescriptions of Wang Anshi went deeper than simple rules and regulations.⁴⁶ In his “Ten Thousand Word Memorial,” Wang Anshi wrote, not on reward and punishment, but he

“continually [stressed] the fundamental importance of *capable officials*, how to train them, how to cultivate them by paying them well...”⁴⁷ (Emphasis added.)

Nevertheless, Wang Anshi did believe that government should play a strong role in molding society. Though he did not object to the Confucian idea of moral self-cultivation, he believed that self-cultivation took “a long time to attain the desired objective,”⁴⁸ and that government could hurry things along by reforming the institutions of government and hiring more capable officials.

The Reforms

What were the specific measures attempted by our three reformers to address their concerns? We begin again with the earliest of our reformers, Wang Mang.

The Confucian Reforms of Wang Mang

Though most of his reforms came during his reign as emperor, Wang Mang also enacted minor reforms as Regent. In demonstration of his support for learning and Confucian education, he directed the improvement of provincial schools in A.D. 3 and enlarged the Imperial Academy in A.D. 4. He also sponsored conferences at the capital covering such topics as classic texts, astronomy, philology and divination.⁴⁹

Also in A.D. 4, Wang Mang carried out one of his most Confucian of reforms, the rectification of names, or *zheng ming*. The essence of rectification of names is that things should be called what they are in reality, and things should be in reality what they are called.⁵⁰ Wang Mang took this quite literally as he changed the titles and ranks of ministers, and the names and boundaries of the commandaries to names that had been previously used during the much-idealized Zhou era.⁵¹ This required much time and energy, and led to an enormous amount of administrative work – all very necessary, though, as Wang believed that a return to a golden era patterned after that of the Zhou was necessary in order to set the nation back on the right path.

Also related to his efforts to revive the Zhou period was a monetary reform ordered by Wang Mang in A.D. 7. Having read in an ancient text that the Zhou kingdom used more than one denomination of cash, Wang also ordered that the regular copper cash (a round coin with a square hole in the middle) be supplemented with several other denominations. He ordered the minting of larger denominations of round coins, as well as other coins in the shapes of a small knife and a spade which had their origins during the Shang dynasty (c. 1766-1027 B.C.) and the Zhou. These new coins, which were only allowed to be minted by the state, contributed to a substantial increase in government revenues, but because the metal values of the coins had no bearing on their face values, this also led to massive counterfeiting.

At the same time, Wang Mang announced the nationalization of the empire’s goldstock, making it illegal for anyone but kings to own gold. Privately held gold was exchanged for the newly-minted coins introduced by Wang Mang. The apparent reason for this move, in addition to providing more revenue for the government, was to decrease the power of the Liu clan, the family of the deposed Han dynasty.⁵² Later, after he became emperor, Wang would also introduce additional denominations of coins in gold and silver as well as tortoise shells and cowrie shells – the latter two also based on coinage used in the Shang and Zhou Dynasties.

Wang Mang implemented his major economic reforms after he became emperor in A.D. 9. First on his agenda as emperor was land reform. The increasing concentration of land in the hands of the wealthy and their increasing ability to evade taxes was not only depriving the government of revenue, but also exacerbating the condition of the poor. Wang Mang began by abolishing private estates and restricting the amount of land a family could own to 100 *mu* or less.⁵³ Any excess land had to be given to poorer relatives or neighbors, or it was returned to the government for redistribution. The sale of land was prohibited, as was the buying and selling of slaves.

In keeping with his idolization of Zhou times, Wang Mang also decided to reinstitute the 'well-field system' which had been mentioned by Mencius and the author(s) of the *Zhou Li* as having been the standard for land management from China's mythical beginnings until the beginning of the Qin Dynasty in 221 B.C. The well-field system, or *jing tian* required that parcels of land of approximately 100 acres be broken into nine equal plots to be farmed by eight families who all built their houses on the ninth plot.

In an edict of A.D. 10, Wang introduced additional economic measures, again, by presenting his reforms as a revival of Zhou-era institutions. Part of this package included, not only an extension of the existing government monopolies on salt and iron, but the addition of new monopolies on liquor and on the products of "mountains and marshes." Despite the fact that Confucians had been vehemently opposed to the monopolies since their introduction by Wudi over a century earlier, Wang Mang managed to present an interpretation of the classics that legitimized the monopolies. He asserted that the word *guan*, meaning 'controls', as used in the classic texts was actually an archaic term for monopolies.⁵⁴

The edict of A.D. 10 also introduced the so-called "Five Equalizing Measures," which were designed to create price stability through nation-wide price surveys and government buying and selling of commodities in an effort to equalize supply and demand. Also contained in these measures were new programs providing low- or no-interest loans for peasants to purchase seeds and tools, and to pay expenses associated with funerals and sacrificial rituals.⁵⁵ A final provision of the edict of A.D. 10 levied a 10% tax on income for individuals who made their living outside the field of agriculture.

In A.D. 16 one of Wang Mang's final reform measures provided a systematic approach for reducing the stipends of government officials during years of bad harvests. Though the government officials could not have been happy to have their stipends reduced, this was clearly an attempt to manage the national budget by reducing government expense in years that income was also expected to fall.

In summary, the reforms introduced by Wang Mang seem to have been designed to accomplish three things (in order of increasing importance): 1) alleviate the suffering of the peasants, 2) provide additional sources of revenue for the government, and 3) return the nation to the idealized Zhou-era Confucian Utopia.

The New Policies of Wang Anshi

Wang Anshi's New Policies were enacted over a period of four years from 1069 to 1073 and can be broadly grouped into three categories: Economic, Education and Civil Service, and Military.⁵⁶ Wang Anshi's first broad measure, which acted as an umbrella for his subsequent reforms, established an *Administrative Regulations Commission* in 1069. Also known as the *Finance Planning Commission*, this government agency was responsible for a complete restructuring of the bureaucracy which resulted in the organizations for financial, administrative and military planning reporting to the Council of State (which was managed by Wang Anshi) rather than directly to the emperor. This centralization of authority under Wang

Anshi would make it possible for him to later introduce coordinated policies which affected the integration of all areas of state planning.

With administrative and fiscal power thus concentrated in his hands, Wang Anshi implemented his reforms. His economic measures reestablished the country's tax base through a land survey and an equitable tax system designed to lower the tax burden on peasants. Part of the tax revenues went to fund the Hired Service System which provided salaried employees for local sub-bureaucratic posts in place of conscripted labor. Wang Anshi also sought to nationalize credit for farmers by establishing a system that extended loans to farmers at a twenty percent rate of interest. Prior to this time, credit had been available only from wealthy landowners who charged significantly higher rates of interest.⁵⁷ An additional aim of economic reforms was to provide price stability through government buying and selling of commodity items.

Wang Anshi's educational reforms were designed to produce more useful, tangible results than those of the current system. The goal was to graduate bureaucrats who not only fit the proper Confucian profile, but who had the hard skills with which to manage various areas within the government. The new examinations for civil service required, not only the traditional essays on the Classics, but also the composition of actual policy proposals.⁵⁸ Wang Anshi also introduced specialized degrees in fields such as law, science and medicine. Additional bureaucratic reforms included hiring central government clerks on a salary basis in place of the existing system of conscription, and a system of strict supervision with incentive measures to reward quality work.

In support of the military, Wang Anshi introduced the *bao jia* system in which households with two or more sons were required to supply one male for military training and service in the local militia. Rural households were organized to take responsibility for community policing and eventually tax collection. Wang Anshi also introduced a horse-breeding system in which civilian households were charged with raising horses to be used by the army in times of war.

Wang Anshi's policies were interdependent in that properly managing state finances required an educational system capable of training people with the necessary skills.⁵⁹ But before state finances could be put in order, the financial burden of a large military apparatus had to be reduced without compromising state security. Wang Anshi's massive reform program, by far the most comprehensive among our three reformers, was clearly not intended to make everyone happy as it left no stone unturned in an attempt to set the dynasty's education, military, and finances on a firmer footing.

The New Austerity of Zhang Juzheng

In contrast to the New Policies of Wang Anshi, Zhang Juzheng's reforms were less a cohesive package than a series of attempts to reimpose fiscal accountability on a profligate system. As Chief Grand Secretary, Zhang did not have the power to reform the bureaucracy or initiate fiscal policy, he therefore made use of his power over personnel management and his control of imperial documents to implement his plans.

He began by auditing the imperial accounts and directing an end to those government operations he deemed unnecessary. Remaining government operations were reduced or made subject to strict supervision. In particular, the eunuchs in charge of palace procurement came under close scrutiny, as did the hostel service provided by the imperial postal system.

On the revenue side of the equation, not only were taxes *not* reduced, but the collection of taxes was more rigorously pursued. Zhang implemented a program to combat the rampant tax evasion which had left dynastic finances in chaos, instituting severe punishment for tax evaders. All excess funds collected were put into the imperial treasuries in the form of silver ingots which bore the inscription: "Never to be spent."⁶⁰ A horse-breeding system, similar to that implemented by Wang Anshi in the Song, had also been established by the founding emperor of the Ming; however, in another revenue-generating scheme, Zhang directed that all army stud horses be sold and that the funds raised also be deposited into the imperial treasury.

These measures provided the needed funds to strengthen the Ming army which achieved notable victories during the time of Zhang Juzheng. The Mongols were forced to submit to the emperor, and Japanese pirates, which had been a constant threat for decades, met their final defeat as well. Under greater prospects for peace, the army then also became subject to cutbacks. Frontier posts were required by Zhang to cut up to twenty percent of their annual expenditures.⁶¹

Due to his proximity to the emperor, Zhang Juzheng also held great influence over the emperor and constantly preached the virtues of frugal living. As such, the expenses of the imperial household during the Zhang Juzheng decade were modest in comparison to those of other emperors. Zhang suggested to the emperor that lantern decorations and fireworks be discontinued, and he complained that the palace women wore too many jewels. This harshly imposed frugality would lead to strong resentment by the emperor after Zhang's death.

His austerity program in place, Zhang Juzheng began the one serious attempt at major reform in his administration. He ordered a land survey of the entire country and adopted the 6000 square foot *mu* as the nationwide standard for land area measurement. This land survey was to have been a prelude to tax reform that would end, once-and-for-all, the rampant tax evasion of wealthy landholders. Unfortunately, Zhang Juzheng died before the survey was completed, and the reform was abandoned by his successor.

Reforms in Comparison

Throughout China's agrarian history, land has often been the source of much controversy: Who owns the land? Who will make use of it? What will be done with the fruit of the land? How much will be taken in taxes?... The fact that all three of our reformers attempted to change policies with regard to land ownership or taxes added to the controversy of their reform programs.

Wang Mang's land reform was the most controversial as its main aim was to equalize land ownership by taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Wang Anshi and Zhang

Juzheng had sought merely to equalize land *taxes*. Wang Mang's land reform seems to have been designed to punish the rich; whereas, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng's reforms were designed only to punish tax evaders. All three, however, had in common the aim of increasing government revenue through equally-applied land tax.

While all three reform programs contained fiscal and economic measures, they differed in their implementation. Wang Anshi's program was more comprehensive in that it also attempted to reform the institutions and the bureaucracy surrounding the country's economy. Not only did Wang Anshi attempt to reform the bureaucracy, but he attempted reforms of the educational system which fed the bureaucracy. The reforms of Wang Mang and Zhang Juzheng, though similar in many ways to those of Wang Anshi, lacked the integration and coordination of Wang Anshi's New Policies.

Though all three reformers attempted to impose better fiscal management, their approaches to economic reform differed vastly. Wang Anshi appears to have had a much firmer grasp on economics than did Wang Mang or Zhang Juzheng, as Wang Anshi's program focused on fiscal stimulus and improvement in national productivity. Wang Mang, and especially Zhang Juzheng, seem to have focused more on building up a cash surplus through increasing taxes and cutting government expenditure.

Before taking office Wang Anshi had already observed that simple cost-cutting was not enough. One of Wang's contemporaries, Sima Guang (1019-1086), who would later become known as a famous historian, had been asked by the emperor to manage the country's fiscal crisis. Sima's solution, to simply curb government expenditure, was abandoned after a year of no apparent results. The emperor then turned to Wang Anshi for answers to the budget problem. Wang Anshi's reply was that "there was no Way (*dao*) in the governance of resources...[officials had] lost the Way of *creating wealth*."⁶² According to Paul Smith by "Way of creating wealth," Wang Anshi referred to the

"institutions, techniques, and authority through which the state was meant to govern the ... collection and disbursement of goods and money in the economy as a whole."⁶³

Unlike Wang Mang and Zhang Juzheng, Wang Anshi did not view excessive spending by the government to be a major problem for the national budget. Excessive spending was, however, the major cornerstone of Zhang's reforms, and it was at least a minor concern of Wang Mang's. Ironically, the two Wangs both had the reputations of simple and frugal lifestyles.⁶⁴ But, as we shall soon see, Zhang Juzheng, the chief proponent of frugality during the Wanli reign, apparently enjoyed a lifestyle what was anything but frugal.

Aside from the specifics of their reforms, probably the greatest single difference lay in the ultimate *purpose* of their reforms. The reforms of Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were implemented because those two men sought to improve the times in which they lived; their ultimate aims were to solve specific problems in the political economy of the nation. The ultimate goal of Wang Mang, on the other hand, was to identify those aspects of society which no longer conformed to the Zhou tradition and to "re-conform" them.

Wang Anshi would have specifically disagreed with Wang Mang's attempt at a wholesale return to the Zhou era: "...responsible officials...should advocate some positive method of improvement, ...they are either stupid or misled when they advocate a reversion to the ancient ways."⁶⁵

Likewise, Zhang Juzheng would have also disagreed with Wang Mang's unquestioning adoption of old methods:

Law is neither ancient nor modern. It is merely what is suitable to the times and acceptable to the people. If it is suitable to the times...it should not be abolished. If it does violence to the times...it should not be followed.⁶⁶

The methods by which they chose to implement their reforms differed as well. Wang Mang, of course, took over the imperial throne in the process of implementing his vision; however, prior to establishing his own dynasty, he made great efforts to win influence among the Confucian scholars who made up the bureaucracy. He also granted titles, fiefs and marquisates to other influential people—including members of the Liu clan who had founded the Han dynasty—in order to win their support. As we have seen, however, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng sought to preserve their dynasties by faithfully serving their respective emperors. Their major difference from Wang Mang in this regard being that, as Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng had such a strong rapport with their emperors, neither really saw much need in trying to gain influence among the bureaucracy or the gentry. Wang Mang was a politician. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were loners with support in high places.

The Results of Reform

Having compared the reform programs of our three reformers, our next task is to compare their respective achievements. Did they fail or succeed? How did their contemporaries and the population at large react?

The Effects of Wang Mang's Confucian Reform

Despite the fact that Wang Mang began his reign with the support of the Confucian bureaucracy, he soon found himself fighting a losing battle. His land reforms, though based on Confucian arguments, went too far in damaging the interests of the rich and powerful. The Confucian bureaucracy, though agreeing with Wang Mang in principle, had to support the wishes of the rich and powerful for very practical reasons: the bureaucrats were in their positions because the rich and powerful allowed them to be there.

How ironic then, that the Confucianists, those who despised profit and valued morality and order above all things, had an almost symbiotic relationship with the wealthy. The wealthy were wealthy because Confucian officials turned a blind eye to their tax evasion and exploitation of the poor. The Confucian officials were allowed to remain in power as long as they supported the interests of the wealthy. Wang Mang's reforms upset the balance of things and made a lot of people angry.

The land reform was such a blow to the landowning gentry that many illegal sales of land still took place, resulting in swift and severe punishment for those who were caught. By A.D. 12, the reform had generated such ill will that Wang

Mang was forced to completely rescind the land reforms. In a memorial to the throne (which must have been "pre-blessed" by the emperor since it dared to criticize his reform) a court official once again justified the attempt to reinstate the well-field system of ancient times, but admitted that, because it had fallen into disuse over more recent centuries, it would take "at least a hundred years" before the people could become accustomed to the idea again.⁶⁷

Wang Mang's attempts to reintroduce the new denominations of coins based on ancient coin designs also ended in failure, but not before many people counterfeited the coins and suffered severe punishment for doing so. At this time, the notion of a currency backed by the "full faith and credit" of the governing authority was still a novel idea. Wang Mang thought, wrongly, that by simply assigning a value to a coin, irrespective of the value of metal contained in the coin, people would accept it. Not only were counterfeit coins produced, but the populace simply refused to use some denominations of Wang Mang's coinage.

One effect of Wang Mang's new coinage was certain to have been an increase in profit to the government. Though records of government receipt and expenditure have been lost, the order in A.D. 7 requiring the wealthy to turn in their gold in exchange for the newly-minted coins surely led to a great windfall for the government.⁶⁸

As we have seen, Wang Mang's attempts to remove land from the hands of the wealthy, and to force the people to use coinage, for which there existed no economic infrastructure to support its value, led many to attempt to skirt the law. Not only were the punishments set in place to deter people from breaking these imperial edicts *not* a deterrent, but they were of extreme severity.

Wang Mang's use of such severe punishment must have been confusing to those members of the bureaucracy who supported him because of his Confucian background. Because he used Confucian texts to justify practically everything he did, it is ironic that he felt obliged to resort to such extreme measures of punishment. Confucius taught that, if a ruler provided the perfect moral example for the people, the people would naturally do what was right, implying that only the ruler who provided a poor example need resort to the use of edicts and punishments.⁶⁹

The government monopolies, which were revived and extended under Wang Mang, also ran counter to Confucian rhetoric of the times. And aside from the Confucian arguments against them, they did not work as intended during Han Wudi's time a century before, nor did they work under Wang Mang. de Bary writes that the monopolies

"had the same effect of forcing up the prices of necessary commodities, lowering the quality, depriving many people of their livelihood, and imposing an additional tax burden upon the population."⁷⁰

Wang was also forced to eventually rescind the monopolies as well, but it did not happen until A.D. 22, far too late to placate a very angry population.

The monopolies, along with the new denominations of coinage introduced by Wang Mang, did contribute, as intended, to an increase in government revenues. These

increased revenues allowed for a strengthening of the northern army during Wang's reign;⁷¹ however, much of the increase in revenue went into the hands of corrupt officials.⁷²

Unfortunately for Wang Mang, his reign as emperor of the Xin dynasty coincided with a number of natural disasters that, as we now know, had nothing to do with Wang Mang's reign. However, as Wang Mang had already made use of many naturally-occurring phenomena as portents pointing toward the transfer of the "Mandate of Heaven" from the Han to himself, these natural disasters which occurred during his reign were all the more believed to be the fault of Wang Mang himself.

A victim of bad luck, Wang Mang was blamed for a shifting in the course of the Yellow River in A.D. 11 from its northern course, entering the sea near present-day Tianjin, to a southern course, entering the sea south of the Shandong peninsula. The shifting of the river led to massive famine and displacement of thousands, possibly millions, of refugees.⁷³ These groups of refugees initially resorted to banditry out of necessity in order to avoid starvation, but ultimately grew in number and organization to become a rival power base to government forces. Though Wang Mang's forces managed to keep these peasant groups in check during his reign, they ultimately outnumbered government forces and banded together with members of the Liu clan to bring down the Xin dynasty and restore the Han.

The times of Wang Mang were never peaceful. He began by confusing the public by changing the names of places, and by introducing multiple denominations of coinage. He alienated the bureaucracy by attacking their wealthy benefactors, then by reducing their salaries during bad times. He made the entire populace angry by extending the government monopolies. Then he suffered the bad fortune of having the Yellow River change course under his watch. Wang Mang listened well enough to the people that he rescinded a number of his policies, but the anger his reforms engendered among the populace had become so widespread, few supporters remained by the time of his fall.

The Effects of Wang Anshi's New Policies

The time of Wang Anshi's administration, on the other hand, was one of relative peace and prosperity. Even those among Wang Anshi's detractors had to admit that he had increased government revenues and strengthened the army. His Public Services Act freed many farmers from public works obligations, allowing them to return to agriculture; however, there is some evidence that the level of taxes required to substitute for service obligations may have been responsible for increased levels of banditry.⁷⁴

Several measures resulted in giving the government a monopoly in banking and commerce, while at the same time reducing the interest burden on poor farmers and depriving the wealthy of opportunities to exact usurious interest rates on the poor. The tax burden was also distributed more equitably as wealthy landowners had fewer opportunities for evading the land tax.

The economic results, in summary, were a redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, nationalization of banking

and commerce, and increased revenue for the government – a textbook definition of socialism.

Militarily, Wang Anshi strengthened the country's defenses while decreasing defense expenditures. During Wang's time, the standing army was reduced from 1,162,000 men to 568,688 men. However, the standing army was complemented by a trained militia that grew to 7,182,028 under Wang's policies.⁷⁵ Even one of Wang Anshi's opponents, Zhang Chun, a subsequent Grand Councilor, readily admitted that the militia "after training were superior to the regulars."⁷⁶

Though there is little evidence as to the efficacy of Wang Anshi's educational reforms, we do know that the emperor, Shenzong, made no attempt to roll back the educational reforms after Wang left office. However, during later administrations Chinese education reverted to its traditions of memorization over practical application.

Williamson points out that the Song Annals, despite their bias against Wang Anshi and his reforms, leave no record of peasant uprising during Wang's time. That being the case, the common people could be presumed to have been content with Wang Anshi's New Policies.⁷⁷ After all, the common people, who had received military training as part of their duties in the militia, were certainly capable of organizing to overthrow the considerably smaller regular army.

Many historians also raise the issue that the sources from which we draw the histories of China were written by the educated elite. The fact that much of the extant historical writing from the latter eleventh and early twelfth centuries is critical of Wang Anshi's New Policies only attests to the dissatisfaction of the rich and powerful – the very target for most of Wang Anshi's reforms. The poor and illiterate obviously had no means through which to record their thoughts at the time.

The Effects of Zhang Juzheng's Austerity

Zhang Juzheng's imposition of fiscal restraint put Ming China back on its way to prosperity, effectively reversing the decline of the previous 100 years,⁷⁸ and giving the Ming dynasty a "new lease on life."⁷⁹ By curbing tax evasion among the wealthy and by checking imperial expenditure, Zhang Juzheng brought government reserves to unprecedented levels. When Zhang took office, there had essentially been no reserves, but by the time he left, the granaries in Beijing had sufficient grain for nine years. The imperial vaults held six million taels of silver; the court of imperial stud held another four million, and the vaults in Nanjing held an additional 2.5 million.⁸⁰

With money flowing into government coffers, Zhang was also able to bring about a time of peace and stability. With a strengthened military, the Ming were able to force the Mongols to once again submit to the Chinese emperor. Also, Japanese pirates, which had been a threat to the Chinese coast for years, were finally subdued.⁸¹

Aside from a strengthened military, it would appear that Zhang Juzheng had no other plans for spending or investing the increased inflows of cash. Essentially, the millions of taels of silver were allowed to lie idle in government vaults,

without any plans for infrastructure or public works spending. This hoarding of cash led to a decrease in the money supply, which eventually had a deflationary effect on agricultural prices.⁸²

Interestingly, during Zhang Juzheng's time, reform was never officially declared. Zhang simply used his power over the personnel office and control of government documents to implement his changes. Ray Huang writes in the *Cambridge History* that

"Zhang's administration matched the kind of imperial splendor usually known only after the establishment of a new dynasty."⁸³

The Results of Reform in Comparison

To one degree or another, our three reformers each managed to strengthen the army in his time, thereby preventing external forces from disturbing the peace along China's borders. This is not unimportant as territorial integrity was and is a national obsession for China.

Domestically, however, the results were different. The chaos caused by Wang Mang's confusing introduction of new coinage, confiscation of gold, and redistribution of land, along with the shifting of the Yellow River from its course, all combined to build up discontentment throughout the country, and across all segments of society. Moreover, the harsh punishments Wang Mang applied to those found in violation of his new decrees were universally applied, thus ensuring universal anger. In criticism of Wang Mang, Ban Gu wrote in the *Han shu*: "The people could not turn a hand without violating some prohibition."⁸⁴

The domestic situation for Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were different from that of Wang Mang. Aside from the fact that there were no major natural disasters during their times, their reforms were far less painful. Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng tried to reimpose fairness in a tax system which had been gradually undermined by the influence of the wealthy on local bureaucrats, whereas Wang Mang's land reform actually took land away from the wealthy. Though neither action won the support of the wealthy, Wang Mang's outright confiscation of their land, gold and slaves contributed to extreme discontent among the gentry.

Without a doubt, all three improved the financial conditions of their respective dynasties by some combination of increasing revenues and decreasing expenses. Though records of Han-era finances have been lost, evidence would indicate that Wang Anshi was probably more successful in enriching the Song state than Zhang Juzheng was with the Ming.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, under the watch of each reformer, corrupt officials helped themselves to much of the increased revenues flowing into government coffers.

Though not without its shortcomings, Wang Anshi's program was clearly ahead of its time in comparison to those of the other two reformers, as it focused not merely on increasing revenue and decreasing expense, but also on improving productivity and *managing* wealth. Only Wang Anshi's New Policies contained provisions for building some of the needed institutions and for supplying a better-educated bureaucracy to staff those institutions. It is baffling, however,

that, over the next 900 years, no subsequent Chinese government attempted such large scale economic reforms.

The reforms of all three met with opposition from those who had a vested interest in the status quo, but their methods for dealing with opposition differed. As was pointed out earlier, Wang Mang, ever the masterful politician, sought to influence those he thought might oppose him. Wang Anshi, however, almost seems to have ignored his opposition, believing that what he was doing was right for the country:

"governing is for managing resources, and managing resources is what is meant by moral duty."⁸⁶

Wang Anshi naively assumed that other government officials would share his sense of moral duty in the management of public finance.

Zhang Juzheng, though holding very little power of his own, used the tools at hand to overcome his opposition. He was most often able to influence the emperor by having his associates memorialize the throne, then as Chief Grand Secretary, he would draft the official rescripts. He also used his power over the office of personnel management to have certain officials promoted, demoted or sent to far-off posts depending on whether they supported or opposed his programs.

The bureaucrats who opposed all three of our reformers were threatened by reforms of the current system. State officials enjoyed their positions of authority and were supported by the wealthy who had the most to lose from equalizing tax reform. Also, many, though not all, of those officials benefited handsomely through bribes or embezzlement, and could not have been happy about losing their extra sources of income, or in Wang Mang's case, about having their salaries reduced when times were bad.

Among those officials who were not corrupt, there remained competent and loyal officials whose help could have been useful in implementing reforms. Wang Mang did manage to maintain a small measure of bureaucratic support among those officials who believed his liberal interpretations of the Confucian classics. But for Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, simply having the support of their respective emperors, likely prevented them from seeking the support of those loyal officials, and very likely ensured the opposition of those officials to their reform programs. There is no record that either Wang Anshi or Zhang Juzheng made an effort to 'sell' his programs to the bureaucracy.

Though each of our reformers managed to implement his reforms initially, the reforms of each one were eventually rescinded as a result of public pressure. Because they were based on the sole aim of a return to the Zhou-era, the reforms of Wang Mang were never intended as practical solutions to real problems. Their failure was inevitable, despite Wang Mang's ultimate power as emperor. The reforms of Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, on the other hand, were intended to solve specific problems and were in force long enough to achieve positive results, but in the end, their reforms were also rescinded due to growing pressure from those who had suffered under their reforms – namely, the rich and powerful.

The Legacies of Three Reformers

How does history view these three reformers? Did their personal sacrifices leave any lasting legacy for China?

The Restoration of the Han After Wang Mang

The banditry that broke out in eastern China as a result of the changing course of the Yellow River was badly misread by Wang Mang. Rather than alleviate the suffering of the peasants by making available food from the state granaries, he sent armies to suppress what he thought was a rebellion. The bandits eventually became organized as the Red Eyebrows, the rebel group who would storm the capital and murder Wang Mang in October of A.D. 23. Following another two years of internal struggle, a ninth generation descendant of Liu Bang, Liu Xiu, restored the Han dynasty in A.D. 25. Today this restoration is commonly known as the Later Han.

Liu Xiu began the Later Han dynasty with particular efforts to restore public finances which had declined under the chaotic final years of Wang Mang. He made an effort to re-apply tax assessments fairly across the board, allowing no exemptions for the wealthy. Provincial governors who showed favoritism to the rich spent time in prison.

Unfortunately, along with the restoration of the Han, there eventually came the restoration of the status quo which had led to discontentment and decline at the end of the Former Han. Since Wang Mang's attempts at land reform had been rescinded, there was once again no check on the ability of the rich and powerful to begin taking over the landholdings of the poor and powerless. And as the rich grew richer, the bureaucracy became increasingly willing to look the other way as the rich evaded taxes. The ensuing declines in central government revenues eventually contributed to the fall of the later Han in A.D. 220.

With all the attention emperors paid to recording events for posterity, one wonders whether subsequent emperors ever went back to read those recorded histories. This cycle of rise and decline would continue to plague China for the many subsequent centuries.

Despite the failure of Wang Mang's land reforms, he still managed to have influence on later regimes. If nothing else, the disruptive effect of Wang's attempted land reforms managed to level the playing field temporarily. According to recorded history, only twenty or so of the influential clans during the former Han managed to regain influence during the later Han, and of those twenty, "less than half were eminent."⁸⁷ The Xin interregnum allowed for greater social mobility during the early years of the later Han.

Probably the most significant influence of Wang Mang on subsequent dynasties was his use of religious, metaphysical and intellectual evidence supporting his divine right to rule the nation. Before Wang Mang, no emperor had devoted such time and effort to documenting his own legitimizing ancestry (real or fabricated), and to documenting naturally-occurring phenomena as portents indicating a shifting of the Mandate of Heaven. From the Later Han until the twentieth century, no other aspirant to the dragon throne would attempt to take power without first meticulously documenting his divine

right to rule.⁸⁸ Even as recently as 1976, it was widely believed in China that the Tangshan earthquake was a portent foreshadowing the end of the reign of 'emperor' Mao Zedong.

As has been mentioned, it is difficult to find a balanced account of the times of Wang Mang and his influence on the nation. Because court historians always worked at the behest of the eminent ruling clan, anyone who would challenge the authority of that clan was essentially portrayed as evil incarnate. Ban Biao, who began the *Han Shu* or *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, and his son Ban Gu, who continued the history after his father's death, sought to ensure that Wang Mang would be remembered in history as an illegitimate usurper of the throne. To this day, some dynastic charts still list the Han dynasty as beginning in 206 B.C. and ending in A.D. 220 – without even a footnote to document Wang Mang's Xin dynasty which separated the Former and Later Han dynasties by fourteen years.

Despite the attempts of the Former Han historians to discredit everything Wang Mang did, twentieth century scholarship has provided reassessments of Wang Mang. Though many scholars still regard Wang Mang negatively, Hu Shi, a Chinese ambassador to the United States during the Republican era, praised Wang Mang as a socialist visionary, writing that "Wang Mang and his assistants were nineteen centuries ahead of their time."⁸⁹

Other modern scholars such as Homer H. Dubs, noted for his translation of the *Han Shu* into English, have tended to adhere to Ban Gu's harsh criticism of Wang Mang. Still other scholars such as Clyde B. Sargent and Hans Bielenstein have combined Ban Gu's history with other evidence and logical reasoning to form more balanced opinions. Danish scholar, Rudi Thomsen, who has produced the only significant English language biography of Wang Mang, presents the view that Wang was driven by his own ambition, which was masked by his blind, yet honest belief in Confucianism.

Regardless of scholarly opinion of Wang Mang the person, Wang Mang the reformer managed to shake up society and to leave behind a legacy of mysticism which still influences Chinese thought to this day.

The Northern Song After Wang Anshi

Unlike Wang Mang, Wang Anshi had time to see his reform efforts come to fruition. He was also fortunate enough to live out his life in relative peace, and die a natural death. The last of Wang Anshi's New Policies was implemented in 1073, and in 1074 he briefly left his post as Grand Councilor to accept the position of governor of Nanjing. This move was voluntary on the part of Wang Anshi, and was due to his embarrassment over the poor implementation of the State Trade System which, according to memorials written by the opposition, had led to discontent in the capital city. However, Wang Anshi was soon to return, albeit reluctantly, at the urging of the Emperor in 1075.

Wang Anshi's final tenure as Grand Councilor was to last only until 1076, when on grounds of his poor health and grief over the death of his only son, Wang begged the Emperor to allow him to resign. He spent the remaining years of his life in literary pursuits until his death in 1086.

James T.C. Liu suggests three phases of Wang Anshi's New Policies: the Reform phase (1069-1085), the Anti-reform phase (1085-1093) and the Post-reform phase (1093-1125), the latter two phases occurring after Wang Anshi left office.⁹⁰ A brief account of these latter phases will shed light on the reasons for negative accounts of the New Policies in the Song Annals and other writings from the Wang Anshi era.

The Anti-reform phase began with the death of Emperor Shenzong in 1085, less than a year before the death of Wang Anshi. The emperor was succeeded by his ten-year-old son, Zhezong (r. 1086-1101), who, due to his young age, was dominated by his grandmother, the Empress Dowager Xuan Ren. As Regent, she was the *de facto* ruler of China until her death in 1093.

The Empress Dowager had been bitterly opposed to the New Policies and immediately set about to rescind them. She recalled to the capital Sima Guang, the famous statesman and historian who years earlier had left the capital in disgust over the New Policies, to serve in a provincial post. Sima accepted the post of Grand Councilor, and, one-by-one, began to dismantle Wang Anshi's entire program, until not a single policy remained in place.⁹¹ This Anti-reform period was also characterized by the purging of the few remaining supporters of Wang Anshi still in service at the time. The anti-reformers, however, simply tried to restore the pre-Wang Anshi status quo. Aside from efforts to reduce government expenditures, they offered no means by which to raise enough funds to meet even the *reduced* needs of the state. In the end, the Empress Dowager's purge of the reformers led to a period of crippling factionalism which would contribute to the eventual downfall of the Northern Song.⁹²

The Emperor Zhezong, however, adored his father and sympathized with the reformers. When his grandmother, the Empress Dowager, died in 1093, he began the "post-reform" period by returning many of the Wang Anshi-era reformers to power and reinstating many of Wang Anshi's New Policies. Zhezong was then followed on the throne by his younger brother Huizong (r. 1101-1126).

The post-reform period is characterized by a return to power of the remaining reformers and a resurrection of the New Policies. Unfortunately for the memory of Wang Anshi, the official Song Annals record that the reforms failed yet again, and even led to the fall of the Northern Song Dynasty to the invading Jin army in 1127. *Fortunately* for the memory of Wang Anshi, several other extant sources attribute the failure of the post-reform period to an emperor with a weakness for luxuries (Huizong)⁹³, and corruption among palace eunuchs and officials who purported to be followers of Wang Anshi.⁹⁴ Though some of Wang Anshi's New Policies were reinstated, other so-called "New Policies," which bore no resemblance to those of Wang Anshi, were enacted. The ineffectiveness of these ersatz New Policies further contributed to contempt for Wang Anshi among the establishment.

The fifty-one years between the time Wang Anshi left office and the fall of the Northern Song dynasty were, to be sure, a turbulent period of time. But though Wang had already left the stage, he had made a lasting impact on society. Enough of his supporters remained to continue to fight for the ideals Wang Anshi stood for, and to continue to challenge those whose sole aim was to re-establish the status quo.

The Ming After Zhang Juzheng

Though Wang Anshi lived just long enough to see all of his policies overturned by Sima Guang, Zhang was more fortunate in that regard. He remained in office until the age of fifty-seven, dying of an illness in 1582. Only nine days prior to his death, the eighteen year-old emperor Wanli had granted him the title of Grand Preceptor, China's highest civilian honor and one which had not previously been granted for over two hundred years.⁹⁵

Though Zhang had succeeded in stemming the tide of decay, and probably in delaying the downfall of the Ming, problems did begin to arise prior to the end of his administration. The authoritarianism and centralism required of Zhang's system of tax enforcement exposed the government to greater opportunities for corruption. By the time of Zhang's death, palace eunuchs exercised undue influence over the bureaucracy, and there was much corruption in both the government and the army.

Also, because of Zhang's "single-handed" rule, he left no trained successor to continue his reforms.⁹⁶ The land survey, which had been intended to provide for a more equitable distribution of the land tax, was discontinued upon Zhang's death. The succeeding Grand Councilor, Zhang Juzheng's protege, Zhang Siwei (1526-85), assessed that public and court opinion had turned against Zhang Juzheng and began a movement to purge his predecessor's policies. The effect of Zhang Siwei's pronouncements was to shame those who had supported Zhang Juzheng while increasing the power of those who had opposed him.

The increased power of Zhang Juzheng's opponents then allowed them the authority to conduct investigations, not only into the effects of Zhang's policies, but also into his personal life. At this time it was brought to light that Zhang, who had lectured the emperor on the importance of frugality, who had drastically cut imperial expenditure and built huge reserves of cash – all in the name of preserving the dynasty – had himself been living a life of lavish splendor. Not only was his home very extravagantly decorated, but he was reported to have traveled in his own two-room sedan chair, ferried about on the shoulders of thirty-two attendants – hardly the picture of frugality.⁹⁷ One wonders, however, why the outrage became public only after the death of Zhang Juzheng. If he had truly traveled in such an ostentatious conveyance, why had it not already been noticed and reported to the emperor? Two possibilities seem reasonable: either Zhang had such power over the personnel office that no one would dare to criticize him to the emperor, or the story of Zhang's sedan chair was simply concocted by his detractors to further erode the legitimacy of his attempts at reform.

Regardless, outrage on the part of the bureaucracy at revelations such as these led to a rollback of all remaining policies even remotely associated with Zhang Juzheng. The one person most outraged, however, was the Wanli emperor. He felt betrayed to learn of Zhang's alleged luxurious lifestyle, and was humiliated to the point of taking posthumous revenge on Zhang and his family, exiling his sons to the frontier and confiscating his family's possessions.

The reaction of the emperor was so extreme that it prob-

ably hastened the downfall of the Ming. Wanli, who would continue to rule for another thirty-seven years, became a greedy “hoarder of worldly goods.”⁹⁸ The pleasure-seeking emperor became less and less interested in the affairs of state, leaving a vacuum that was quickly filled by corrupt eunuchs who exacted a heavy burden on poor tax payers.⁹⁹ The drastic increase in imperial spending and bureaucratic decay, combined with an increase in military expenditure needed to expel the *samurai* Hideyoshi from Korea, bankrupted the Ming dynasty in the early seventeenth century. Only a few decades later, the Ming fell to the invading Manchus who established the Qing dynasty in 1644.

Any years that had been added to the length of the Ming dynasty by Zhang Juzheng’s strict financial management, were more than likely lost through the profligacy of the very emperor who had given Zhang the opportunity to implement his reforms.

Conclusion

Did They Truly Fail?

Reforms have never been easy, anywhere or at anytime. Those who would attempt reform are driven to do so by conditions that they believe call for a change. Those conditions, however, usually exist for a reason, namely that those holding the greatest power at the time want things to remain the way they are; therefore, those who would reform are generally fighting an uphill battle.

Wang Mang’s reforms worked so disastrously that he was forced to rescind most of them himself, years before he was murdered. The fact that he was emperor really did not seem to matter as even the emperor was subject to the approval of the most powerful elements of society – in Wang Mang’s case, the wealthy. Also adding to the pressure on Wang Mang was the fact that many people, especially the Liu clan, always looked upon him as a usurper rather than a legitimate heir to the throne. Without question, Wang Mang failed to successfully implement his reforms.

Though not emperors themselves, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng at least had the support of emperors who had rightfully inherited their positions. Still, the post reform phases of Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng consisted of both rollback of their reforms and personal character attacks. By the end of their administrations bureaucratic pressures that had built up during years of anger and resentment exploded in fury against the memories of these two reformers. The aftermath of this explosion is a history leaving the impression that Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng were miserable failures as well.

But were they truly failures? The fact that Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng both accomplished what they had set out to do leads one to conclude that they were not. Granted, their measures could have been implemented with more economic forethought; both reform programs were hampered by the lack of an underlying legal infrastructure. Additionally the outcomes of Wang Anshi’s and Zhang Juzheng’s policies, especially those dealing with the collection of taxes, were adversely affected by the corrupt implementation of unscrupulous officials. Nevertheless, the fact remains that neither Wang Anshi nor Zhang Juzheng *failed* to implement his reforms.

The Lessons of Reform

The reason that Wang Mang failed to make any lasting impact in terms of the social and economic well-being of the people should be quite obvious. He reformed for all the wrong reasons. Yes, reform was needed; the fact that the Han dynasty was in decline was clear to many people during Wang Mang’s time. However, rather than addressing specific problems, Wang Mang sought to return to an idealized, mythical, Utopian past. Additionally, Wang Mang does not appear to have assessed the potential impact of his reforms on society. The damage that his reforms did to the personal fortunes of the wealthy ensured their complete lack of support.

Lesson #1: Reverence for an ideology is not a reason to reform. Reform must address specific problems with targeted solutions that do not unnecessarily antagonize a particular segment of society.

Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng, however, did reform for the right reasons. They saw their dynasties in decline, identified the problems, and laid out specific solutions. Their biggest shortcomings, though, were that they tried to do it all on their own, without popular or bureaucratic support.

One commonality shared by Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng was their desire to change, to challenge the status quo—all in the name of restoring the glory of their respective dynasties. But their reforms struck at the very reason for the declines in their dynasties: an *unwillingness* to change. The reason behind this unwillingness to change was the vested interests that the most powerful elements of society held in the status quo. State officials and the landed elite had banded together to preserve the very systems which had given them their status. As we have seen, neither Wang Anshi nor Zhang Juzheng made an effort to nurture support among the bureaucracy for their programs. Once they were both out of office, all of their hard work was reversed.

Perhaps if Wang and Zhang had made greater efforts to “win friends and influence people,” their policies would have lived beyond their terms of office. Then again, maybe they knew they would be unsuccessful in garnering support so they decided not to waste energy on such a fruitless pursuit.

Wang Anshi had laid out his arguments in his memorials and other writings, but he expected his written arguments to stand on their own. After all, if what he was doing was for the good of the country, why would the benefits not be obvious to all? Naïvely believing that his ideas would sell themselves, Wang lacked the political savvy required to move a bureaucracy.¹⁰⁰ Zhang Juzheng, on the other hand, did not seem to care whether others accepted his reforms. He used what power he had to silence his critics. If either Wang Anshi or Zhang Juzheng had possessed the persuasiveness of a Sun Yatsen, or the charisma of a Mao Zedong, perhaps they could have converted some of the more moderate among their detractors, or at least tempered some of the opposition.

Lesson #2: Having the support of a strong benefactor is important, but brute force only works for a limited time. Eventually, the support of the bureaucracy is equally as important. Politics is a game best left to politicians. Those unwilling to play the game – even those with the most noble of intentions – will not succeed without the ability to exercise influence.

Yet another difference remains to distinguish the results of Wang Anshi's reforms from those of Zhang Juzheng. Though Wang Anshi's reforms were immediately rolled back once his emperor died, they were later revived by well-intentioned followers during the post-reform phase. The reforms of Zhang Juzheng, however, represented the last gasp of a failing dynasty, and were never attempted again during the Ming.

Why did Wang Anshi's reforms get a second chance? Wang's reforms, unlike those of Zhang Juzheng, were very comprehensive in that they were designed not only to reform the economy, but also to reform the bureaucracy and the educational system. It is very likely that Wang Anshi's educational reforms produced a second generation of reformers who had the skills necessary to carry on his work. It was simply unfortunate that the final emperor of the Northern Song frittered away his time with pleasures and essentially gave away half the nation to the invading Liao from the north.

Lesson #3: Reforms that only solve the apparent problem may not be good enough. There needs to be a supporting infrastructure to ensure the continuance of the reform efforts.

Were Wang Mang, Wang Anshi and Zhang Juzheng the only reformers who emerged during this 1,500-year stretch of Chinese history? There can be no doubt that other potential reformers also spoke up, but were immediately squelched by imperial authority. Sima Qian, the famous historian who dared to question a decision made by the emperor Han Wudi in 98 B.C., spoke up and paid the price for his audacity. Given the choice of death or castration, he chose the latter and became a lesson to all Chinese for the next two thousand years: It is dangerous to challenge authority.

Though not conclusive, these three historical portraits do provide insight into the difficulty of reform in modern China. One recent reformer who faced difficulties was former Premier, Zhao Ziyang. A protégé of Deng Xiaoping, Zhao took cues from Deng's economic reforms in the 1980s, but pushed too hard in the political arena. As has recently been revealed, Zhao was among the three Politburo Standing Committee members who did not vote in favor of martial law in order to contain the Tiananmen Square demonstrators in 1989.¹⁰¹ He was purged from office after his apparent support of the 1989 demonstrators.

Even more recently, Qiao Shi, former head of the National Peoples' Congress, was also prematurely removed from office. The reform-minded Qiao had a reputation for attacking corruption, and was an advocate for faster democratic reforms. In a speech to the 15th Party Congress in March of 1997, Qiao called for the creation of a system of law which all government officials and party members must obey, and for the government to become more transparent and accountable.¹⁰² In that same meeting of the Party Congress, it was announced that Qiao would be stepping down in order to comply with Jiang's insistence that all party cadres retire at the age of seventy – even though Jiang, himself, was already seventy-one at the time and remains in office along with fellow septuagenarians Li Peng and Zhu Rongji.¹⁰³

These and other reformers of post-Mao China still face the difficulties of challenging a bureaucracy that refuses to

embrace change. There still exist the vested interests in the form of Communist Party officials who fear their eventual fall from power and the loss of their official privileges. These officials live in fear of the potential results of democratic reform in China. They have witnessed the effects of democratic reforms on the lives of other former dictators such as Chun and Roh of South Korea, Ceausescu of Romania, and Suharto of Indonesia.¹⁰⁴

Still, there is reason to hope for a China that will be more tolerant of reform in the future. Though China is still a dictatorship, it is certainly less autocratic than during imperial times. In stark contrast to the imperial era, the Communist Party relies heavily on the use of its propaganda machine in a never-ending battle to win the hearts and minds of the people. Despite the apparent lack of democratic values evident in such efforts, this indicates that the Party feels a need to continuously reinforce its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The opinions of 1.2 billion Chinese do matter to their government, and a government concerned with the opinions of its people is a government with the potential to reform.

APPENDIX A

Wang Mang's Five Equalizing Measures¹⁰⁵ according to the Han Shu

1. *The Determination of the Index Number of Prices*

"Each directorate shall use the second month of each season for the determination of the equitable price of the commodities under its management. It shall note down the highest, lowest, and the mean price of each commodity in each district. The mean price shall be the equitable price of that particular locality, and shall not be applied to the places where the other directorates are situated."

2. *The Buying of Unsold Goods from the Market*

"The Office of Equalization shall buy up all such goods as wheat, rice and other foodstuffs, cloth, silk and silk-fabrics – goods which are needed by the people for everyday use but which the merchants have not been able to sell at a particular time. The cost price shall be paid to the dealers in order to insure them against loss."

3. *The Stabilization of Prices*

"As soon as the price of any of these useful commodities rises one cash beyond the 'equitable price' for that particular season, the Equalization Office shall sell out its accumulated stock at the equitable price so that the people may be protected against those who make extravagant profit by cornering supplies and manipulating the market."

4. *Loans without Interest*

"Persons who need ready money for funeral, burial, or sacrificial purposes may be given loans by the Commissioner of Credit from the proceeds of trade. Such loans should be without interest, but must be repaid within the specified period of time. Loans for sacrificial purposes shall be repaid within ten days; those for funerals and burials within three months."

5. *Loans to be used as Working Capital*

"Poor people who need capital to start productive work may also secure loans from the Commissioner of Credit who shall charge them a moderate rate of interest."

APPENDIX B**Wang Anshi's New Policies****Economic Measures**

Finance Planning Commission: established to draw up plans for key policies and recommend the reorganization of state finance.

Investigating Commissioners: employed to investigate conditions in agriculture, irrigation and obligatory local service and to recommend action.

Tribute Transport and Distribution System: established to replace the transportation of tributary items sent to the government from the provinces with government buying and selling according to market conditions.

Green Shoots Policy: Using government granary reserves as capital, extended loans to farmers during planting, to be repaid with 20 percent interest at harvest. Until this time farmers had borrowed from wealthy land owners who generally charged a higher rate.¹⁰⁶

Regulations on Agriculture and Water Conservancy: Set up rules to manage local irrigation projects and river conservancy.

Hired Service System: Established a system, funded by a graduated cash tax, to hire permanent employees to staff local sub-bureaucratic posts. This replaced the previous local obligatory service policies.

State Trade Policy: In an effort to stabilize market prices, government offices were created in major commercial centers to buy from and sell to small merchants, thereby allowing small merchants to avoid dealing with wealthy merchant guilds acting as wholesalers.

Land Survey and Equitable Tax Policies: Established to survey holdings of land and land quality in order to create the graduated tax system necessary to fund other policies. Aimed at eliminating tax evasion and unfair burdens.

Guild Exemption Tax: Merchant guilds were assessed a tax and relieved of the burden of contributing supplies to the palace.

Currency: Removed the ban on private shipment and handling of copper. Increased minting of copper cash to meet the demands of expanded state financing and replacement of obligatory labor and contributions of commodities with cash tax payments.

Education and Civil Service

New Examination System and Schools Policies: Poetry was dropped as an examination item. Candidates were required to write one essay and three policy proposals, and to discuss the meaning of items from the Classics. Appointed education officials to all prefectures and reorganized the National University under a three-grade system. Those who passed through all three grades were to be appointed directly to office. Instituted a new degree in law and established training in specialized fields such as military science, law and medicine.

Government Clerks: Clerks without official rank hired on salary basis. Established a system of strict supervision with measures for reward and punishment for clerks.

Bureau for Commentaries on the Classics: Prepared official commentaries on the Classics for study in preparation for civil service examination.

Military

Tithing Policy (Bao jia): Organized rural households into units of ten. Each household with two or more adult males was required to supply one male to receive military training and to serve in the local militia. Each unit was responsible for community policing, and eventually was also charged with the duties of tax collection.

Horse-breeding System: Families in the northwest border regions were each assigned a horse to care for. Horses could be used as farm animals, but the responsible family was required to replace the horse at its own expense if the horse died. During times of war, the horses were to be provided to the cavalry.

Directorate of Weapons: Charged with improving the quality of weapons and other minor defense-strengthening measures.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Rhoads Murphey, *East Asia: A New History* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 121.
- ² The Song era title of Grand Councilor (*zai xiang*) is also commonly translated as Prime Minister.
- ³ *Xin Fa* can be most literally translated as New Laws; however, all major works consulted for this paper, with the exception of de Bary's *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, use the term "New Policies." Authors who produced works mentioning the *Xin Fa* since 1960 were possibly influenced by an argument from James T. C. Liu, *Reform in Sung China: Wang An-shih (1021-1086) and his New Policies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959) p. 1, 119.
- ⁴ The founding emperor of the Ming had abolished the office of Prime Minister as historical Prime Ministers were judged to have been too influential upon the emperor. As Chief Grand Secretary (*shou fu*), Zhang held informal powers similar to that of previous Prime Ministers. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985). Charles O. Hucker, ed., *Chinese Government in Ming Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 46, 466.
- ⁵ Murphey, p. 68.
- ⁶ John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992) p. 62.
- ⁷ John Meskill, *An Introduction to Chinese Civilization*, ed. John Meskill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 46.
- ⁸ The emperor Han Xuan Di (r. 74 – 49 B.C.), however, did briefly interrupt the decline by relaxing the harshness of punishments toward the common people, and reducing court expenditure. See: Rudi Thomsen, *Ambition and Confucianism: A Biography of Wang Mang* (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1988), p. 38.
- ⁹ Fairbank, p. 59.
- ¹⁰ J.A.G. Roberts, *A History of China, vol. 1.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 57-58.
- ¹¹ The Empress Dowager Wang, Wang Zhengjun, had been the empress of emperor Yuan (r. 48 - 33 B.C.) and mother of emperor Cheng (r. 33 - 7 B.C.).
- ¹² Ray Huang, *China: A Macro History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1988; repr., Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1997) p. 52.
- ¹³ John E. Wills, Jr., *Mountain of Fame* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 78.
- ¹⁴ Wang Mang, *Edict on Land Reform*, from the *Han Shu*, 99B:9a-10a; William Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960) vol. 1, p. 224-5.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Thomsen, p. 43, 209.
- ¹⁷ Winston Lo, *An Introduction to the Civil Service of Sung China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 11.
- ¹⁸ Milton W. Meyer, *China: A Concise History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), p. 219.
- ¹⁹ H. R. Williamson, *Wang Anshih: A Chinese Statesman and Educationalist of the Sung Dynasty* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1935-37), vol. 1, p. 131.
- ²⁰ During this time the required Confucian classics consisted of the *Analec*s of Confucius, the works of Mencius, the classics of History (*Shu jing*), Poetry (*Shi jing*), and Changes (*Yi jing*), the three classics of Rites (*Li ji*, *Yi li*, *Zhou li*) and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu*). John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China*, (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1985; repr., Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 4.
- ²¹ A small amount of statistical evidence indicates that possibly as many as thirty percent of candidates "may have come from households that had not produced officials in the immediately preceding generations." John Meskill, *An Introduction to Chinese Civilization*, ed. John Meskill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 120.

- ²² E.A. Kracke, Jr., *Civil Service in Early Sung China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), chap. 4 passim.
- ²³ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 178.
- ²⁴ Lo, p. 77.
- ²⁵ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 61.
- ²⁶ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 68.
- ²⁷ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 73-74.
- ²⁸ Peter K. Bol, "Government, Society and State: On the Political Visions of Ssu-ma Kuang and Wang An-shih," *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China*, eds. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) p. 162.
- ²⁹ Williamson, vol. 2, p. 50.
- ³⁰ Albert Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), p. 162.
- ³¹ Ray Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 89.
- ³² Hucker, *Chinese Government in Ming Times*, p. 88.
- ³³ Chan, p. 142.
- ³⁴ Chan, p. 263.
- ³⁵ Chan, p. 188.
- ³⁶ Robert Crawford, "Chang Chü-Cheng's Confucian Legalism," *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 368.
- ³⁷ Crawford, p. 395.
- ³⁸ Crawford, pp. 396-7.
- ³⁹ Han Fei Tzu, *Basic Writings*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) p. 128.
- ⁴⁰ Liu, p. 93.
- ⁴¹ Along with Su Shi (Su Dong Po), Wang is also considered to have been "one of six great prose masters of the Song Dynasty." Kracke, p. 19.
- ⁴² Bol, "Government Society and State," p. 163.
- ⁴³ Willard Peterson, "Confucian Learning in late Ming Thought," *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 8, The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 740.
- ⁴⁴ Chen Qiyun, "Confucian, Legalist, and Taoist Thought in Later Han," *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 1, The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C. - A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 773.
- ⁴⁵ Han Feizi (c. 280-233 B.C.) was the Legalist inspiration for China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi (r. 259-210 B.C.).
- ⁴⁶ Crawford, p. 384.
- ⁴⁷ Liu, p. 45.
- ⁴⁸ Liu, p. 42.
- ⁴⁹ Hans Bielenstein, "Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty, and Later Han," *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 1, The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C. - A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 228.
- ⁵⁰ See *The Analects of Confucius*, XIII:3. Translation by D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 118.
- ⁵¹ Thomsen, p. 72 and 144.
- ⁵² Thomsen, p. 88-90.
- ⁵³ Wills, p. 85.
- ⁵⁴ Thomsen, p. 130.
- ⁵⁵ A more detailed description of the Five Equalizing Measures is contained in Appendix B.
- ⁵⁶ For a more detailed treatment of the individual measures, see Williamson, vol. 1, chapters 11-22. Also, a list of Wang's measures with brief descriptions is contained in Appendix C.
- ⁵⁷ de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, p. 420.
- ⁵⁸ Meskill, p. 132.
- ⁵⁹ Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992) p. 248.
- ⁶⁰ Ray Huang, "The Ming Fiscal Administration," *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 8, The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 162.
- ⁶¹ Ray Huang, "The Lung-ch'ing and Wan-li Reigns, 1567-1620," *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 7, The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644, Part I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 524-5.
- ⁶² Paul J. Smith, "State Power and Economic Activism during the New Policies 1068-1085: The Tea and Horse Trade and the 'Green Sprouts' Loan Policy," *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China*, eds. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) p. 83-84.
- ⁶³ Smith, p. 83.
- ⁶⁴ Wills, p. 78. Liu, p. 61.
- ⁶⁵ Williamson, vol. 2, p. 376.
- ⁶⁶ Crawford, p. 378.
- ⁶⁷ Thomsen, p. 127.
- ⁶⁸ Thomsen, p. 123.
- ⁶⁹ See *The Analects of Confucius*, II:3. Translation by D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 63.
- ⁷⁰ de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, p. 226.
- ⁷¹ Wang dispatched an army of over 300,000 men to the northern border with the Xiong Nu who ventured no major attacks during Wang's reign. Bielenstein, *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, p. 237.
- ⁷² Witold Rodzinski, *A History of China, vol. 1*. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979) p. 67.
- ⁷³ Bielenstein, p. 241-3.
- ⁷⁴ Liu, p. 111.
- ⁷⁵ Williamson, vol. 2, p. 187.
- ⁷⁶ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 208.
- ⁷⁷ Williamson, vol. 2, p. 202.
- ⁷⁸ Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, p. 14.
- ⁷⁹ Crawford, p. 367.
- ⁸⁰ Huang, *Cambridge History*, vol. 7, p. 522.
- ⁸¹ Chan, p. 269.
- ⁸² Huang, *Cambridge History*, vol. 8, p. 163.
- ⁸³ Huang, *Cambridge History*, vol. 7, p. 526.
- ⁸⁴ de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, p. 226.
- ⁸⁵ Smith, p. 79. "According to estimates by Albert Fierwerker and others, it appears that the Song state was able to take in almost twice as much of its economy's total output as either the Ming or the Qing state."
- ⁸⁶ Smith, p. 83.
- ⁸⁷ Bielenstein, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, p. 275.
- ⁸⁸ Michael Lowe, "The Religious and Intellectual Background," *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, p. 740.
- ⁸⁹ Williamson, vol. 2, p. 239. In his biography of Wang Anshi, Williamson includes several chapters on forerunners of Wang Anshi, one of whom was Wang Mang.
- ⁹⁰ Liu, p. 9.
- ⁹¹ Williamson, vol. 1, p. 383.
- ⁹² Richard L. Davis, *Wind Against the Mountain: The Crisis of Politics and Culture in Thirteenth Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 40.
- ⁹³ Liu, p. 97.
- ⁹⁴ Liu, pp. 9-17 passim; Williamson, vol. 1, chap. 3 passim.
- ⁹⁵ Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, p. 30.
- ⁹⁶ Chan, p. 270.
- ⁹⁷ Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance*, p. 25.

- ⁹⁸ Huang, *Cambridge History*, vol. 7, p. 515.
- ⁹⁹ The eunuchs and other officials used torture to enforce payment of taxes. Wanli era records describe blood-stained courtyards in which people were tortured for inability to pay taxes. Chan, p. 226-7.
- ¹⁰⁰ Liu, pp. 115-116.
- ¹⁰¹ "Who Wanted Troops in the Square, Who Didn't and What They Said About It," *New York Times*, January 6, 2001.
- ¹⁰² "Qiao Shi's Radical Ideas," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 1997, p. 10.
- ¹⁰³ "Ready for the Fourth Generation," *The Economist*, October 28, 2000, and Frank Ching, "Change is Coming to China," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 28, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁴ Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo were arrested, put on trial and imprisoned. Ceausescu, former dictator of Romania, was, along with his wife, put on trial and immediately executed in 1989. Suharto, who was forced out of office in 1998, is currently under investigation for alleged corruption and embezzlement during his thirty-two years as president of Indonesia.
- ¹⁰⁵ From Williamson, vol. 2, p. 237-8.
- ¹⁰⁶ de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, p. 420.

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