

ers, was already too much for the narrow-minded nobility. One could, thus, argue that the fights between reformers and anti-reformers were actually battles between short-sightedness and long-termism or between individual class members' greed and the ruling class's general interest. Or one could argue that the ruling classes of Greece and Rome were enchained by the prisoners' dilemma (where a single player, by allowing space for their particular interest, works towards the ruination of his class). States, even as small as Athens, or as large as Rome, with a large sector of goods procurement by violence would do better not to eliminate those who did most of the physical robbing. Accordingly, one might surmise that it was a fault of the Greece nobility not to pay heed to Solon and the likes and Rome should have listened more to its Cassius, Potelius, Licinius, the Gracchi, Drusus, Rufus, Saturninus, or even to Cinna. One may also doubt this consideration and ask: Could Rome at all have become Rome, including the stretched and over-stretched empire, with an army of only farmer-soldiers and a rather egalitarian society? Did not a similar attempt fail in Sparta? Did not Alexander the Great triumph with a project that more closely resembled Rome? These questions are outside of the scope of this book. From antiquity we return to modernity and to the modern master drama.

Section 3. China: A glance at 2000 years of East-Eurasian ancient master drama

Constituents of the ancient master drama in China

No other country has a history as long and coherent and with a size and mass like China. It is as if Rome had remained a unified world empire from the Punic wars to today, yet at several times its historic extension and population. Still, in the West, Chinese history has remained a field of interest for a small group of specialists, mostly sinologists, only, and is normally not exploited for general theoretical endeavors. The author had the intention to break that pattern. After he had worked out major lines of the ancient master drama in Western Eurasia, he wanted to spend some time in China to examine its ancient master drama more length. This original intention fell victim to the travel restrictions in the Corona pandemic and to the increasing awareness of the author that an account written by someone not capable of reading Chinese would have to remain of limited value. Therefore, the original intent shrunk to a short glance at the Chinese ancient master drama. Here are the insights:

First, readers of books on Chinese history are stricken with the observation that the ancient master drama is significantly more present and explicit there than in historic writing on Western Eurasia. Rural property relations, the de-facto or de-jure land-owning by a small peasantry, or its loss of the land to "engrossing" latifundia

owners, are almost everywhere outspokenly treated not only as causes of abundant or meagre state finances, of social unrest, banditry, rebellions, civil wars, dynasty changes, revolutions and external wars but also as central historic themes. There is not much difference in this regard between the dynasties. The awareness obviously already existed in antiquity itself. Debates, which connected agricultural policies and taxation with the domestic strength and the international and military status of the empire, or domestic, international and military weakness, are omnipresent, certainly since the Ch'in in the late 3rd century BC. This awareness was never lost and, thus, state policies rather consciously oscillated between the protection and support of the small independent peasantry via redistribution of land, state loan programs, the provision of tools, oxen, seed and of agricultural knowledge to small farmers and tax releases in their favor,¹³¹ and the promotion of private property of agricultural land as the alternative. Both were hailed to allow the Chinese people to better subsist, generate growth, and to finance internal and external strength of the state,

Second, while it is often argued that Chinese history knows a period resembling to the European Middle Ages or to feudalism, ruptures nearly as sharp as the one between the dynamic capitalist times of European Greek and Roman Antiquity and the stagnant European Middle Ages and back from them to modern capitalism with the rise of Venice and in the Renaissance cannot be found in China. On the one hand, Confucian and Taoist thought, as well as an idealized memory of the agrarian situation in the Ch'ou dynasty (1046–256 BC), which will be explained below, and, somewhat later, Buddhist thought, were ever-present and often moderated capitalist M–C–M'–dynamics. On the other hand, what could have been the Chinese Middle Ages – the period from the Late Han to the Sui – did not improve the situation of the small peasantry so thoroughly as the European Middle Ages did. The agricultural question, state financing and social rebellions etc., more equally than in Europe, pervade almost all historic periods.¹³²

Third, in China there appear to have been even more personalities, arising out of the emperor's administrative elite or noble families, of the type of a Solon, Peisistratus, the Gracchi brothers and their likes, that promoted top-down reforms in favor of the peasantry. Still, these reforms, which were, as we shall not tire to stress,

131 It is noteworthy that taxes were generally often rather low. During the Ming dynasty land was, e.g., often taxed at only about 3 % percent of its yield and the tax was, quite favorably, payable in kind. (*Huang*, The Ming fiscal administration, page 107.)

132 E.g., while most Chinese Marxist historians appear to believe that the transition from slavery to feudalism in China history occurred in the final two and a half centuries of the Ch'ou dynasty, most Soviet Marxists only placed it at the end of the 3rd century AD. Some Non-Marxist historians even consider the first four or five centuries of the Ch'ou as feudalist (*Bodde*, The state and empire of Ch'in, p. 22).

always *also* reforms in favor of the central states, its tax-income and its war-machinery¹³³ and, furthermore, like in Europe, against the gentry, mostly shared the destiny of their European brothers and failed and their proponents were ultimately similarly frequently killed as in Europe. Chinese history also has significantly more large peasant rebellions, which were rather successful for some time than Europe, e.g., with the German Peasants Wars of the 16th century. In fact, they quite often evolved into real “rebel-regimes”, which controlled great parts of China over longer periods, sometimes decades, and were connected to fierce, lasting and very bloody civil wars. Some of the rebellions also triggered the demise of a ruling dynasty. E.g., the social rebellions during the later (Eastern) Han strengthened independent military commanders which ultimately overthrew the Han. Or, a main leader of the “Red Turban”-rebellion, which greatly contributed to the fall of the Yüan dynasty, became himself the founder of the consecutive Ming dynasty and the first Ming emperor in 1368.¹³⁴

Fourth, the Chinese, more clearly than the European variant of the ancient master drama, exposes the factors, which determine the course of the master drama: (i) the existence of private sellable ownership of agrarian land or not; (ii) there being natural catastrophes (river floodings, rivers changing their bed, locust, several periods of particular cold, bad harvests, draughts etc.), civil wars and wars destroying the precariat base of the small peasantry or not; (iii) states providing land, tools, seed, knowledge or other aid to small peasants or not, in particular after catastrophes, or not; (iv) states overtaxing peasants and demanding excessive labor and military services from them (required for war, the building or maintenance of the Chinese Wall, canals, roads, other buildings-projects or the luxury of the court) or not and waving or cutting taxes, granting loans or making transfer payments or not; finally, (v), there being a strong, independent gentry or merchant class, which aggressively exploited the small peasantry and appropriates its land or not. The effect of certain policies could change depending on the time after it was unleashed. E.g., it appears, that the introduction or re-introduction of private sellable property of agricultural land always initially often stimulated and raised production, while it later, almost unavoidably, later led to the opposite, the decay of the small peasantry and its displacement by the gentry, followed by a weakening of the central state's tax-base and the central state itself.

133 *Sadao*, The economic and social history of former Han, page 556 et seq. As *Wright* comments: “No Chinese empire could prosper without adequate arrangements for the distribution of agricultural land, and the collecting to taxes based on agricultural production” (*Wright*, The Sui dynasty (581–617), page 93.)

134 The founder of the Han dynasty, which displaced the Ch'in dynasty, Liu Pang or Kao-ti, was also of peasant origin, *Sadao*, The economic and social history of former Han, page 552.

Fifth, quite interestingly and not greatly different from Europe, more lasting peasant rebellions that attempted some sort of state-building, almost always promoted not only general equality of possession, equality of status and of the sexes but were also connected to eclectic utopian and religious ideologies and often bizarre practices, e.g., ritual sexual orgies etc. As the peasants-rebellions in China were longer-lasting, this is more visible than in Europe.

The ancient master drama throughout the main Chinese dynasties

In the following, we shall look at some major episodes of the Chinese ancient master drama. Over large part of Chinese history, the agrarian situation as it was alleged to have been in the Ch'ou dynasty (1000 to 771 BC), indeed, served as idealistic benchmark for agrarian policies. Already Confucius (551–479 B.C?) had praised the Ch'ou's agrarian policies, his disciples followed suit and hardly ever were requests for agricultural reforms made, including in bloody uprisals, which did not refer to it. The so-called "*tsing tien*"-system ("well field"-system), which was said to have even already existed around 2500 BC, and to have survived from there until into the Ch'ou dynasty 1500 years later, was in the center of these romanticized memories. One unit of a "well field" consisted of eight families, four roads and a well which was dug in the center. The whole concept was derived from practical, value-in-use-oriented or technical considerations. The politically and socially important implication was in the background: The value-in-use-orientation could prevail because private property and the law of private property were no factors, neither in the sense that interests flowing out of private ownership would influence the organization of the daily life in the countryside, nor in the sense that peasant families were at risk to lose their land. Historic research appears to confirm that the image largely corresponds to actual practices in the Ch'ou dynasty.¹³⁵

However, the break was to come. While the accumulation "of landholdings by local clans or families was probably well under way in the Warring States",¹³⁶ it was under the Ch'in rule, who would later unify China, when the "legalist", Han Fei-oriented and "modernist" reformer *Shang Yang* established general private ownership of agricultural land in the fourth century BC.¹³⁷ This initially increased productivity and raised the production;¹³⁸ it contributed to render the Ch'in fit to end the "War-

135 "The *tsing tien* system is the most important element in Chinese economic history", writes *Chen Huan-Chang*. See on this system *Chen Huan-Chang* (2015) page 497 et seqs., page 497, 501, 506. On the "checkerboard"-fashion design of the *tsing tien* system, see also *Bodde*, The state and empire of Ch'in, page 27 et seq.

136 *Sadao*, The economic and social history of former Han, page 548.

137 *Bodde*, The state and empire of Ch'in, page 28, 35.

138 Both *Twitcheit*, Introduction, page 25, and *McDermott/Yoshinobu*, Economic change in China, 960–1279, page 347 et seqs., stress this point with regard to the later privatization of agrarian

ring States"-period and to unify China in the late third century. It would, however, at longer term, even if legalist policies to some extent repressed trade and merchants,¹³⁹ enrich the latifundia owners, impoverish the small peasantry and drive the state into collapse. In 206 BC, immediately after the death of the First Emperor of the *Ch'in* and before two decades of its nationwide rule had lapsed, major peasant revolts broke out,¹⁴⁰ which already ended the *Ch'in* dynasty,¹⁴¹

The *Han* dynasty succeeded the *Ch'in* dynasty, yet the situation for the peasants did not improve. "Ownership of great tracts of land developed in conjunction with natural calamities and the Han taxation system. The peasant farmer lived on the margin of subsistence... Even though the burden of year-round cultivation and labor service was very heavy, this would be greatly increased in times of flood and drought or of exceptionally high taxation. The peasants were then forced to sell their crops at half the market price or to borrow money at high interest rates. Entrapped in a spiral of debt, they ultimately had to dispose of their land, their houses and even their children. Land sold in this way came into the hands of local wealthy people, merchants or usurers, mostly members of powerful families, who thus build up large holdings."¹⁴² Like in Greek and Roman history this led to ever-present claims and proposals for the redistribution of land, the revival of the *tsing tien* system (well field-system), or even to a certain amount of practical measures to that aim (including the Solon-style liberation of enslaved peasants). In 44 BC the "reformist" (pro *Ch'ou* and pro Confucius) *Kung Yü* became advisor to Han Emperor *Yüan ti* and implemented several anti-modernist (anti-Han Fei, anti-Shang Yang, anti-*Ch'in*), economic reforms. He even asked to return to a pre-monetary economy. This was, yet, of course, not put into practice. At the same time, at the instigation of *Shih Tan*, a proposal to redistribute large land holdings and to limit the maximum size of land holdings was accepted in principle, yet never implemented.¹⁴³

The Han-emperor *Wang Mang* (9–23 AD) attempted a land reform under which all able-bodied men were to receive a standard allotment of land. Families with more land would, thus, be obliged to distribute the surplus to land-poor relatives

land following the An Lushan rebellion in the T'ang dynasty (following 755 AD). McDermott/*Yoshinobu*, ibidem, page 348, also note that "virtually all signs of grain production and productivity increases come from the south of China", where private agrarian property had been accepted for a longer time.

139 Bodde, *The state and empire of Ch'in*, page 59.

140 Vogelsang (2013) page 125.

141 See *Sadao*, *The economic and social history of former Han*, page 548 et seq. The First Emperor of the *Ch'in* is the emperor who was buried with the terracotta soldiers near modern Xi'an, around 210 BC.

142 Loewe, *The former Han dynasty*, page 204.

143 see Loewe, *The former Han dynasty*, page 204, 205.

or neighbors.¹⁴⁴ Of course, the execution of this policy was opposed and blocked by wealthy “magnate” families in state offices. They preferred to pursue their personal interests in continued land accumulation.¹⁴⁵ Wang Mang’s reforms failed and he was killed. While the heads of failed Roman reformers were sometimes exposed at the forum Romanum, Wang Mang’s head was allegedly kicked around in Shang’an (today’s Xi’an).¹⁴⁶ In general, “by the middle of Later Han the growth of large landed estates was becoming a dominant characteristic of some of the provinces”.¹⁴⁷ This greatly weakened the Han government’s possibilities to exert control over the peasantry, “from whom it required tax revenues and labor services, and resulted in considerable decentralization towards the end of the later Han.”¹⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, the final period of the *later Han*, thus, saw decades of civil conflict and near anarchy under the *Yellow Turbans* and other popular rebellions, leading to the end of the Han in 220 AD.¹⁴⁹

China had now lost its unity and was split up in several regions. The reign of the *Northern Wei* and of the *Jin* dynasties, again, saw distributions of 3 or 3,5 hectares of agrarian land to adult men and of 1,5 hectares to adult women for lifetime use. The short-lived *Sui* dynasty (581–618 AD), which reunified the country again after more than three hundred fifty years, too, executed an egalitarian agrarian policy and centralized the state against the opposition of the nobility. It, furthermore made war against the Turks and in Korea and unleashed gigantic building projects. It built the Emperor’s Canal, two nearly new capitals, Daxing and Luoyang, and initiated extensive reconstructions of the Chinese Wall. It appears, however, that the good it had done to the small peasantry with one hand was more than compensated by excessive taxation and corvée services, which enabled these projects. Unluckily, a major flooding of the Huanghe (Yellow River) worsened the situation, which led to insurrections of both the small peasantry and of the nobility. A member of the nobility, Li Huan, took Daxing by force and erected the T’ang dynasty.¹⁵⁰

The *T’ang* dynasty was to last longer, from 619 – 907 AD. Alike the Jin, Wei and Sui, it initially pursued an equal land distribution policy. It also created hundreds of self-sufficient military settlements, erected granaries, and otherwise supported the small peasantry. In addition, the economy generally flourishes in the “Golden Age” of the T’ang (Emperor Xuangzong 713–756 AD). Yet, a rebellion of general *An Lushan* and of *Li Shimin* following 755 AD caused a severe rupture. The rebellion depopulated

144 Bielenstein, Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty and, later Han, page 232.

145 Sadao, The economic and social history of former Han, page 558.

146 Vogelsang (2013) page 169.

147 Loewe, The structure and practice of government, page 490. See also Sadao, The economic and social history of former Han, page 555.

148 Sadao, The economic and social history of former Han, page 559.

149 Twitchett, Introduction to volume 3, page 2 et seq.

150 Vogelsang (2013) page 233–243.

many of the largest and richest provinces and put an end to the control of the central state over the provinces and, thereby, also to the official claim of the emperor owning the agricultural land and of its prerogative to carry out recurrent land redistributions. The loss of control of the central state, because of the destruction of local land registers,¹⁵¹ finished off its grip on local land taxation and its funding. Local and regional autonomous units, which grow out of former state commanderies, erected independent power centers and administrations. Afterwards, the central state could only undertake “spasmodic efforts to distribute vacant lands amongst dispossessed households, and to limit the accumulation of land. While after the An Lushan rebellion “lip service” is still paid “to the Confucian maxim that all land remain(s) the emperor’s land”, a “de-facto-recognition is given to individual landholders”.¹⁵² This privatization was basically to last. Since “the mid-eighth century... most of the Chinese economy would operate (on private economic arrangements) for the remaining twelve hundred years of its imperial history.”¹⁵³ Between 820 to 884 AD disorder and social banditry turned into an almost general popular rebellion of immense proportions. The rebel leader *Huang Ch’ao* even captured the T’ang-capital Sh’ang an in 880, slaughtered state officials, looted the city, and held it for more two years.¹⁵⁴ Foreign powers conquered more and more former T’ang territories and the T’ang central state and its order collapsed in 907 AD.

The *Sung dynasty* (960–1279 AD) reunified large parts of China in 960 AD and moved its center to the south. It saw a series of popular rebellions since its establishment and several ministers made attempts to strengthen the small peasantry through land distributions. After the so-called *Ch’ing-Li* reforms (1043–1045) had failed or been revoked,¹⁵⁵ *Wang An-shih* (1021–86) was to become the most notable Sung reformer. As he explains himself in his own manifesto, the so-called “Myriad word memorial”, he pursued the purpose of enriching the nation and strengthening its military power by, as *Smith* puts it, a “tentacular multi-level effort”.¹⁵⁶ Once more, with reference to an idealized Ch’ou dynasty, he redistributed agrarian land to revitalize the peasant economy and supported the success of the new peasants with parallel water-control and irrigation projects. To give a number, it is known that between 1070 and 1076 the reform administration under Wang initiated 10.793 water control and land reclamation projects, reclaiming a total of... approximately 38.829.779 acres of land.¹⁵⁷ Wang also implemented a state-run rural credit system,

151 *McDermott/Yoshinobu*, Economic change in China, 960–1279, page 347.

152 *Twitchett*, Introduction, page 25.

153 *McDermott/Yoshinobu*, Economic change in China, 960–1279, page 322.

154 *Somers*, The end of the T’ang, page 683 et seq. (746).

155 *McGrath*, The reigns of Jen-Tsung (1022–1063) and Ying-Tsung (1063–1067), page 316–323.

156 See the extensive account by *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085, page 347 et seqs.

157 *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085, page 393.

called “green sprouts”, which enabled the purchase of tools and seed, and specifically helped to bridge the vulnerable period of the agrarian year after the consumption of last year’s harvest. Furthermore, Wang An-shih had technical tutoring provided to peasants promoted the favorable early ripening Champa rice.¹⁵⁸ Following the early Han and the Tang, he settled farmer-soldiers in Northern border regions on state farmlands (*pao-chia*-system).¹⁵⁹

Like *Tiberius Gracchus*, more than a thousand years before him, Wang An-shih expected opposition and was highly power-conscious. He publicly denounced the “engrosser families”, who appropriated the land of small peasants¹⁶⁰ and “who do nothing but collect interest of tens of thousands of strings of cash each year”.¹⁶¹ In a further similarity with the Gracchi brothers, he distrusted the normal bureaucracy and set up a “specific apparatus” to execute his reforms, staffed it with his followers, and tried to tilt the odds in the expected power struggle by placing people loyal to him in key posts and seeking control over the council of the state.¹⁶² Ultimately, though, his reforms also failed, if, as it appears, less because of the resistance of the gentry but because they were sacrificed, like in the case of the Sui, for the state’s own short-term fiscal imperatives. As *Paul Jakov Smith* puts it, the reform policies “one after another... were metamorphosed into the claws of a predatory bureaucracy whose sole purpose was to gouge new revenues out of the economy.”¹⁶³

Accordingly, the ancient social master drama continued to haunt the *Sung dynasty* two hundred years later. By then *Chia Su-tao* (1273–75) made a new effort of reforms. He set a ceiling on total land holdings and the state reserved the right to buy up to one third of land above it and to transform it into public land in support of the army. When the state began to exercise this right, the policy, foreseeably, met, fierce opposition from the latifundia owners. Historians surmise that this resulted in an estrangement between the latifundia owners and the Sung dynasty, which helped to bring the Sung down in favor of the Yüan dynasty a few years later.¹⁶⁴

158 *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085, page 395 et seqs and *Golas*, The Sung fiscal administration, page 170 et seqs. See also *McDermott/Yoshinobu*, Economic change in China 960–1279, pages 363 and 394.

159 *Golas*, The Sung fiscal administration, page 174, 199.

160 *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085, page 392. (This contribution contains a particularly elaborate study of the reform policies of Wang An-shih and of their problems).

161 For references and extensive account of Wang An-shih see *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, 1067–1085, page 348 et seqs. (390).

162 *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, page 368.

163 *Smith*, Sheng Tsung’s reign and the new policies of Wang An-shih, page 394. Once more, the state collecting taxes in money rather than in kind, combined with currency shortage and deflation, proved especially ruinous for the small peasantry, which often had to resort to selling its working capital to honor its tax obligations (*ibidem* page 442).

164 *Golas*, The Sung fiscal administration, page 167.

The Mongol *Yüan dynasty* (1271–1368 AD), too, began with policies supporting the small peasantry, e.g., by agricultural communities and by efforts to limit the financial burden placed on them.¹⁶⁵ After the conquest of South China by the *Yüan*, lots of agrarian land were given to the small peasantry. However, caused by warfare, building projects, e.g., the prolongation of the Emperor's Canal from the Huai river to Dadu (later Beijing), the *Yüan* resumed to heavily tax the small peasantry. A climate change and bad harvests worsened their situation, which led to several peasant insurrections, from the so-called “White Lotus” to the “Red Turban-Rebellion” of 1351–1366. The latter ultimately brought the *Yüan* dynasty down.

Often peasant revolts had only paved the way for the formation of a new dynasty by a nobleman, a bureaucrat or a political entrepreneur out of the old ruling elite. The *Ming dynasty* (1368–1644 AD), yet, was, in fact directly erected by one of the very leaders of the insurrection that had taken down the *Yüan* dynasty. *Zhu Yuanzhang*, leader of the “Red Turban-Rebellion”, became the first Ming-emperor Hongwu. He, at first, also supported the small peasantry. While it initially continued to enjoy protection under *Hongwu's* successor *Yongle*, who moved the capital to Beijing, this policy was, though, not upheld for long. It appears that financial demands resulting from the military defense against the Mongols and the Manchu, and a major war in Korea against Japan, led to immense costs for mercenary armies. Furthermore, later Ming emperors seem to have, indeed, lost control over their own court and its luxury spending. The situation was amplified by the rigid effects of a *de facto* commodity money-regime, specifically of Spanish and Portuguese silver, which came to China in the 16th and 17th century.¹⁶⁶ While the silver stimulated trade, it rendered tax-payments for small peasants often unbearable. Nature, too, was unsupportive. A “Small Ice Age”, a significant drop of the average temperature, and a series of poor harvests, ultimately led to years of great popular insurrections between 1627 and 1644.¹⁶⁷ After one insurrection army, under *Li Zicheng*, had conquered Luoyang and Xi'an, pillaged Kaifeng, and taken Beijing in 1644, where his troupes plundered private homes and killed Ming state functionaries in a savage frenzy, this ended with Ming emperor Chong Zen famously hanging himself near the imperial palace. A Ming general, *Wu Sangui*, decided to now join forces with the Manchu against the peasants' rebellion. Together with the Manchu, he drove the peasants' “Great Shun-regime” and *Li Zicheng* out of Beijing, and the Manchu established a new rule as the *Ch'ing* dynasty.¹⁶⁸

165 Endicott-West, The *Yüan* government and society, page 599. Rossabi, The reign of Khubilai khan, page 448, 475.

166 See Gernet (1972) tome 2, page 210.

167 Gernet (1972) tome 2, page 173 et seq.; Vogelsang (2013) page 408, 409.

168 See Shouyi (2010) page 329–332 and 337 et seq.

Even after the Ch'ing dynasty had been established in Beijing, the actual assumption of control by the Manchu in all of China took further 39 years until 1683,¹⁶⁹ with the terrible price of, as often estimated, around twenty million dead. These wars, in which the remnants of the Ming dynasty were often supported by peasant rebellions, led to the formation of many small independent farms, in particular in the southern Yangtse-region. The Ch'ing supported them by water-control and irrigation projects and reduced taxes for small peasants, in fact several times, to a rather low level. The taxes initially still sufficed the central state's needs as Ch'ing were comparatively effective in collecting them. The Ch'ing, once more, also established military-agrarian settlements, and, thus, their dynasty flourished.¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, this was to change. The Ch'ing increasingly lost control over their military apparatus, the provinces, and the central state's spending and the fiscal situation worsened. Following attempts to now raise taxes again, the agrarian situation aggravated as well and the Ch'ing, consequently, saw large peasant and other rebellions, of which the White Lotus, the Nien war and the Taiping peasant war were the most notable. The *Taiping peasant war* became the most extensive and enduring peasant rebellion in Chinese history and world history. Growing out of over hundred local uprisings, it lasted from 1850 to 1864, mostly dominated the Yangtze valley, and led to the formation of the "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom", which controlled significant parts of Southern China. The rebel army grew quickly to 120.000¹⁷¹ or even 500.000 troops, as they claimed,¹⁷² captured Nanjing, renamed it into Tianjing, the heavenly capital, and held it until their final defeat. They fought huge battles against armies of the Ch'ing and marched to Beijing, where they, yet, failed. Although the Taiping rebellion was a civil war, it was one of the largest and most bloody wars in human history with an aggregate number of dead around 20–30 million (more than WW I). Like many peasant rebellions, the Taiping had eclectic sectarian beliefs and practices – one of its leaders declared himself younger brother of Jesus Christ. The Sectarianism of the Taiping rebellion made it difficult to unite it with other simultaneous rebellions; otherwise, the insurrectionists' might have grown even larger and their power might have lasted longer.¹⁷³ These rebellions contributed greatly to disarming the Ch'ing dynasty to Western attacks, in particular since the First Opium War of 1840.

169 See *Shouyi* (2010) page 329–332 and 337 et seq.

170 *Vogelsang* (2013) page 427–430.

171 *Kuhn*, The Taiping rebellion, page 275.

172 *Chungqiang/Nierui* (2014) page 1942.

173 Taiping means "great peace". For accounts of the Taiping rebellion see *Chungqiang/Nierui* (2014) page 1938 et seqs.; *Shouyi* (2010) page 393 et seqs., page 403 et seqs. *Kuhn*, The Taiping rebellion, page 264 et seqs.

Figure 9: Simplified table of dynasties, agrarian situation, reforms and revolts (Part I: From Ch'ou to T'ang)

Dynasty	Capital	Agrarian situation, reforms and revolts
Xia before 1700 BC... – Shang 1700 to 1000 BC...		
Western Ch'ou 1000 to 771 BC	Shang'an (today Xi'an)	"Well field-system" (Tsing tien) widely applied. Rather equal plots of land available for peasants' families who pay taxes.
Spring and Autumn 722- 481 BC; Warring States 453–221 BC...		
Ch'in 221–206 BC	Xianyang (near today's Xi'an)	Shang Yang, advisor to the Ch'in king, ends "well field-system" around 361 BC. Agrarian land privatized. Landless peasants are settled on fallow land, of which they become owner. Initial strengthening of peasantry. However, small peasants soon lose their land to gentry. Major peasants' revolt follow after death of First Emperor, which allow the Han dynasty to conquer power.
Western Han 202 BC-9 AD	Shang'an (today Xi'an)	Han dynasty establishes military-agrarian colonies in connection with defense against the Xiongnu and its expansion, but they later collapse. <i>Wang Mang</i> (9–23 AD) nationalizes agrarian land and prohibits private property to protect the small peasantry. He fails, also following natural catastrophes, and is killed. The Decay of small peasantry contributes to Fall of Western Han.
Eastern Han 9 AD-220 AD	Luoyang	A Gentry dominated economy and society. Initial measures to support small peasants. But peasants later lose their land. Peasants' rebellions as "Yellow turban" (184–196 AD) and "Five-bushel rice-sect"-revolts (188–215 AD). Fighting these revolts strengthens military commanders. One of them, Dong Zhuo, burns down Luoyang ends Eastern Han dynasty.
Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties 209–581 AD partially apply land distribution policies		
Sui 581–618 AD	Daxing (today Xi'an), Luoyang	The <i>Sui dynasty</i> , too, executes land distribution policies, but huge costs of wars, building projects and a flooding of the Huanghe river lead to insurrections of small peasants and the nobility, ending the Sui-dynasty.

Dynasty	Capital	Agrarian situation, reforms and revolts
T'ang 619 – 907 AD	Shang'an	The T'ang dynasty, too, initially pursues equal land distribution and other policies in favor of the small peasantry. After the rebellion of General <i>An Lushan</i> and <i>Li Shiming</i> in 755, local separatists gain power and foreign states conquer territories. This leads to the collapse of the T'ang.
Five Dynasties 907 – 960 AD...		

Figure 10: Simplified table of dynasties, agrarian situation, reforms and revolts (Part II: From Song to Ch'ing)

Dynasty	Capital	Agrarian and fiscal situation, reforms and revolts
Sung 960–1279 AD	Kaifeng, Hangzhou	After the Sung dynasty largely reunites China, it sees a series of popular rebellions. The reformer <i>Wang An-shih</i> (1021–86) initiates land redistributions, water-control and irrigation projects, a state-run rural credit system, and technical tutoring for peasants. The reform fails – probably because of the state's own short-term fiscal imperatives. <i>Chia Ssu-tao</i> (1273–75) makes a new effort for reforms by setting a ceiling on total allowed holdings of agrarian land and claims a right of the state to buy up land above this limit as public land. The consecutive opposition from the latifundia owners may have contributed to the fall of the Sung to the Yüan dynasty.
Yüan (Mongols) 1271–1368 AD	Dadu (today Beijing)	The Yüan dynasty initially supports the small peasantry. Later excessive taxation, partially caused by warfare and building projects, and bad harvests, worsen its condition and peasant rebellions, e.g., the “ <i>White Lotus</i> ”-movement and the “ <i>Red Turban-Rebellion</i> ” bring down the Yüan dynasty.

Dynasty	Capital	Agrarian and fiscal situation, reforms and revolts
Ming 1368 – 1644 AD	Nanking, Beijing (1421)	The <i>Ming dynasty</i> was erected by one of the leaders of the “Red Turban-Rebellion”, which had brought down the <i>Yüan dynasty</i> . The small peasantry initially enjoyed significant protection under him as emperor <i>Hongwu</i> and his successor <i>Yongle</i> . Financial demands from the military and wars and the loss of control of the court’s luxury spending as well as the effects of a <i>de facto</i> commodity money-regime, together with a “Small Ice Age” made the situation for the small peasantry unbearable. Following years of great popular insurrections between 1627 and 1644 Ming general <i>Wu Sangui</i> joined forces with the Manchu and helped to establish the Ch’ing dynasty.
Ch’ing (Manchu) 1635 – 1911 AD	Beijing	The establishment of <i>Ch’ing dynasty</i> all over China involved, particular in the southern Yangtse-region, the widespread formation of small independent farmers. The Ch’ing erected military-agrarian settlements, organized water-control and irrigation projects, lowered taxes for peasants and established an effective system to collect them. The flourishing of the Ch’ing dynasty ended with is ongoing loss of control over its military apparatus, its provinces, the state’s spending and the agrarian and fiscal situation: This resulted in large peasant and other rebellions, with the <i>Taiiping peasant war (1850–1864)</i> , with an aggregate number of dead of around 20–30 million, as the most terrible. These internal evolutions contributed to disarming the Ch’ing dynasty to Western attacks, in particular since the First Opium War of 1840.

Section 4. The failure of conservatism/restoration, ancient prosthetics and their dilemmas

A story with a result known in advance

The general result of the ancient master drama

The story, which the ancient master drama tells, is of the type of a tragedy. Its result is everywhere the same: It ends with the appropriation of the small peasantry’s land by large wealth owners and with the small peasants’ successive social annihilation. They are ejected from what had previously been the one and only large landowning