

The Three Kingdoms in China / L. N. Gumilev - MTF, 1968.

The work describes the history of China in the II-IIIrd century A.D. during the decline of Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period that followed it (the phase of obsoiling of ancient Chinese super-ethnos).

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Л. L.N. Gumilev. "The Three Kingdoms in China.

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Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev Three Kingdoms in China

Investigating the history of the Central Asian nomads, we are faced with a fact, which is impossible to explain without attracting extraneous, it would seem, information from the history of neighboring peoples. From 200 B.C. to 150 A.D. the Han dynasty of China conducted an extremely active foreign policy, which ended in the defeat of the Xiongnu power [3]. In the 4th century China's ancestral lands in the Huanghe basin fell into the hands of nomads. The Huns, Xianbi, Kyans (nomadic Tibetans), even Zilu (a mixture of various tribes) defeated the organized Chinese armies with incredible ease.

On the contrary, the steppes were deserted due to the drought that culminated in the 3rd century AD, and the nomadic economy was in decline. Obviously, the cause of the victory of nomads lies in China itself, and from this point of view for the nomadic historian the era of the fall of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms is of special interest. However, it is not easy to satisfy this interest, because the available manuals give either

too brief an overview of events, or countless small facts, which are very difficult to bring together into a coherent system.

Neither is suitable for our purposes. We need to capture the vector of movement and describe the mechanism of the transformation of a grand empire into a powerless despotism. General statements about the crisis of feudalism do not tell us anything about the course of events and the reasons for the victory of the Sime family, which soon brought China to ruin. Events are made by people, and from this point of view people are interesting to the historian.

It is just as difficult to make sense of the maze of private studies that break down a monolithic era into details, making it impossible to see the forest from behind the trees and bushes. In order to answer this question, we have adopted the method of generalizing the particulars, in order to grasp, in this way, the patterns that led China from greatness to destruction. Only one work has been created in this plan - the so-called "novel" by Luo Guan-chung, *The Three Kingdoms*, written in the fourteenth century. [4].

The definition of this work as a novel is conditional and inaccurate. In medieval China, historical chronicles were written according to a certain canon, and anything that did not meet the requirements of official scholarship was put outside their scope. Luo Guan-ch'un wrote the book for the general reader and naturally eschewed the requirements of scholarship. He introduced dialogues and psychological motivations for the actions of historical figures, but, from our point of view, this does not diminish but increases the value of the historical reconstruction. However, we follow Lo Guan-chung only in the direction of thought, not in evaluation and conclusion, and offer a somewhat different conception, based on the scientific vision of the twentieth century. Confined by the size of this article, we omit a huge bibliography and, based on well-known facts from this perspective, refer the interested reader to works that include only those facts we can explain or that we mention [1], [2], [5].

## Eunuchs

Although the Han dynasty suffered many upheavals, it was strong and stable until the end of the second century. Luo Guan-jung believes that the

culprits of the decline were "perhaps... Emperors Huang-di and Ling-di". [4, p. 13-14], but does not explain why nor because of what they were in this role. Consequently, it is necessary to look for these reasons.

The system of Han monarchy consisted of three elements: central government, civil provincial administration and permanent army. In comparison with the ruling class, all the other groups of the Chinese population were inferior and had no political rights, but they supplemented the ruling class, creating from their milieu the Wu, the physically strong and well-trained men for the army and the police, and the Wen, the intellectuals, for the administrative apparatus. The latter were all Confucianists, which determined the direction of Han policy and their own position. The need for a monstrously vast education led to the emergence of intellectuals closely tied to the dynasty, who fed these intellectuals.

A vast country with a multi-tribal population and persistent separatist tendencies was subject to this rigid system. The firm rule provided the empire's subjects with comparative security from external enemies and relative order within the country, and the fragmented nomadic steppe was not feared. Inherent Chinese tolerance allowed Taoist sages to linger in the provinces, while Confucianists flourished at court. All seemed well enough, but a new danger poisoned a healthy, albeit already disturbed, body.

The stability of government depended on the loyalty of the officials, but the latter were loyal to their country, not to the whims of a ruler. The Confucianists were guided by an ethic they had learned from childhood, and could sometimes sacrifice their careers and money for it. For this reason, they sometimes expressed and held opinions that were contrary to the emperor's wishes. For example, the Confucianists strongly opposed the preaching of Buddhism, despite the fact that Emperor Huang-di had converted to this faith. They also condemned the insane excesses of Emperor Ling-di, who built luxurious palaces and pagodas. In short, the government not only needed intelligent but also humble officials. It found them, and they ruined it.

The practice of using eunuchs to work in chanceries was not new in China, but in the II century AD it became a system. The eunuchs of the lower classes occupied leading positions, concentrated real power in their hands

and formed a kind of caste. They were not constrained by tradition. They fulfilled the despot's will, and amassed huge fortunes through bribery, arousing the people's hatred. But the eunuchs, who had the government in their hands, were subordinated to the army, and this gave them an advantage in the struggle that could not be avoided.

The scholars of Confucianism, i.e. the Confucianists, were the first to act against the eunuchs. In 167, the Colonel Dou Wu and the Tai-fu Chen-fan tried to conspire, but failed to keep the secret and were killed themselves. In 178 Counselor Cai Yung submitted a report to the emperor denouncing the eunuchs and was exiled to the countryside. In the eighties Tai-fu Liu Tao repeated Cai Yong's attempt and was executed. Confucian opposition, inherently limited to legal forms of protest, proved to be insolvent in the face of an internal enemy.

"The Yellow Armbands."

The court eunuchs overestimated their power. Pursuing scholars and clamping peasants, they forced both to block, in other words, they themselves provoked the movement and gave it leaders. In 184, a certain Zhang Jiao declared himself a "Yellow Sky", i.e., the "Sky of Justice" as opposed to the "Blue Sky" of violence, and the revolt of the "yellow armbands" began. Zhang Jiao himself was a man "whose poverty prevented him from obtaining an academic degree. His new teaching was based on the philosophy of Lao Tzu but the magic water that Zhang Jiao used to treat the sick and the capacity to summon rain and wind that was ascribed to him made a great impression on the populace. The prophet began to attract followers, more than 500 of his disciples wandered the country, preaching the "Great Tranquility" and recruiting followers, whose numbers grew by the day. They united in teams with commanders at their head to establish the true faith before the anticipated end of the world. Within half a year the rebellion grew to 500,000 fighters, with Annam and the Huns among the rebels. The government lost control of the country. Han officials hid behind city walls.

The Yellowband Movement was not just a peasant revolt or a political rebellion. It was also marked by a powerful ideological shift: the philosophical system of Lao-tzu was transformed into a religion, Taoism,

which incorporated remnants of ancient Chinese polytheism - the veneration of Sheng, the pagan deities. In this way, Taoism immediately won the sympathy of the broad strata of the peasantry, and in this way the peasant revolt merged with the preaching of a national religion that emerged as opposition to foreign Buddhism that had found a home at the court.

It is clear why it was the teachings of Lao Tzu, and not Confucianism, that were used in the struggle against the Han regime. The regime itself was the work of the Confucians, and they could only resent the botched application of a principle, but not the principle itself. True Confucians are always a bit of a retrograde, for they were brought up on history and respect for their ancestors. Furthermore, Confucianists, being educated, were cut off from the illiterate people, so they spoke out in defense of the dynasty against the ruling nobles, sometimes as conspirators, sometimes as Legitimist leaders, never connecting with the masses of the people.

Even in the face of the deadly danger posed by the eunuchs, the Confucians were unable to lead the resistance; it was the mystic Daoists, who absorbed the creative and restless elements from the peasant masses, for a mystic need not learn a science, but a burning heart and a fervent imagination, and when social hatred, resentment for centuries of oppression and injustice and disgust for foreign favorites were added to this, the civil war became a fait accompli.

The political organization of the Taoists was theocracy. In northern Sichuan an independent Taoist state with a dynasty of teachers-preachers of Taoism was created in parallel with the revolt of the "yellow armbands"; Zhang Ling preached Taoism ideologically, and "the people loved him". [4. VOL. 1. P. 737]. Zhang Heng took a fee in rice for lessons, and Zhang Lu declared himself the ruler of the region and created a school of Taoist propagandists, called gui-zu - "servants of the devil". The followers of Taoism were required to have faith in their lord and to be truthful. Public penance was introduced. For propaganda purposes, hospice houses with free shelter and food were set up. Finally, among the Taoists there were hermits and scholars who lived in the mountains and studied medicine, magic and poetry. This was a Taoist intelligentsia, as advanced as the Confucian intelligentsia and later played a decisive role in the civil war.

However, despite the fact that the country opposed the dynasty, the advantage was still on the side of the central government, as the army remained in its position. The rebellious peasants could not compete with the regular army - lath horse riders and crossbowmen. However, their troops, though they won the battles, were no match for the small rebel units who used guerrilla warfare tactics. What was needed was not punitive expeditions, but a systematic war in all provinces at once. Lin-di was therefore compelled to grant emergency powers to provincial governors and allow the recruitment of volunteers. This permission and the unification of military and civil power on the one hand immediately made each governor the master of his province. Instead of fighting the rebels, the governors did their best to consolidate themselves in their seats. They found support in the large landowners, wealthy but devoid of political participation. The Yuan, Sunei and Xiahou surnames entered the political arena and ranked with the service nobility like Ma Teng, Gongsun Zang, He Jin and with the blood princes of the Liu family. The Daoist rebellion drowned in blood and was finally stifled by 205.

## Soldiers

In the summer of 189, still in the midst of the pacification of the Yellow Bandages, Emperor Lin-di died. He left behind two young sons, Bian and Xie. A struggle ensued: Bian was backed by his uncle, the general He Jin, who relied on his troops, while Xie was supported by his imperial mother and eunuchs. He Jin was victorious at first. The Empress Mother was exiled and poisoned, but He Jin had no time to deal with the eunuchs. They overtook him: they lured him to the palace and killed him. Then the army's hatred of the officials erupted. The troops in Luoyang stormed the palace and killed all the eunuchs, i.e., the entire government.

The next day, regular troops from Shaanxi came to the capital, and the general Dong Jo seized power. To consolidate his position, Dong Jo removed Bian from the throne and imprisoned him; soon the unhappy boy was killed, and the throne was enthroned by Xie under the name of Xiang-di. Thus, the rule of the palace clique was replaced by a military dictatorship and the Confucianist Legitimists were once again in a position of persecution. Ding Yuan's attempt to restore order resulted in Ding Yuan's

assassination by one of Liu Bu's officers. The soldiers surpassed the eunuchs in disorderliness and licentiousness. On one occasion, for example, Dong Jo led his army on a party of villagers. The soldiers surrounded the innocent people and massacred the men, dividing the women and their property among themselves. The population of the capital was told that the outlaws had been defeated, but no one was deceived by this [4. Vol. 1, p. 68].

If the management of eunuchs created discontent in the country, then the soldiers' arbitrariness caused an explosion of indignation. Large landowners and provincial nobility rose to fight against Dong Jo and the army. This class of people had managed to form into a political force in the suppression of the Yellow Bandage Rebellion. Now it began to fight the government under the slogan of defending the emperor and restoring order. But the slogan did not reflect the essence of the matter: zemshchina fought against unbridled soldiery for their heads, lands and wealth.

The rebellion was led by Cao Cao, a military officer from the landowning Shandong family of Xiahou; he was joined by brothers Yuan Shao and Yuan Shu, rich landlords, members of the noble and influential Yuan family, Beiping Gongsun Zang, the governor of Changsha, Sun Jian and many others. The militia was financed by provincial rich men. However, the fight against the regular army was very difficult. Military operations were concentrated on the outskirts of Luoyang. Until the aristocrats had attracted and did not use professional horse riders, condottierov, such as Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, victory was not given to them, but the numerical superiority and sympathy of the population saved them from defeat. Dong Jo was forced to clear Luoyang. Before retreating he executed 5,000 Luoyang rich and confiscated their property; the rest of the population was evicted and driven to Chang'an, where Dun Chjo decided to relocate the capital, and Luoyang was burned.

The provincial militia occupied the ruins of the capital and disintegrated. There was no unity between the commanders - each thought for himself and rushed into his own area, afraid of their friends. Only Cao Cao rushed to pursue Dong Jo. But the militia was no match for the regular army: Dong Zho lured Cao Cao into an ambush near Rongyang and defeated him utterly. After that, the militia finally fell apart, and the commanders began to

fight among themselves, seeking to round out their possessions.

Thanks to this, Dong Jo strengthened in Chang'an, and, having at his disposal the emperor, sent out decrees on his behalf. However, these decrees were not obeyed. The empire began to disintegrate. Terror reigned in Chang'an. Dongjo was more afraid of his cronies than of his enemies. Grandee Wang Yun hatched a conspiracy, and with the help of Lui Bu, already known to us, Dong Jo was killed. Wang Yun seized power, but as he began to punish Dong Jo's closest officers, they rebelled with their units. The rebels took Chang'an and killed Wang Yun. Liu Bu broke through with a hundred horsemen and fled to Henan.

Now at the head of the army were generals Li Jue and Guo Sy. They continued the cause of Dong Jo. They were opposed by the rulers of the northwestern regions-Ma Teng and Han Sui, but were defeated and driven away from Chang'an.

Dong-jo's death proved to be a turning point in Chinese history. No ruler of the region wanted to submit to the rebels holding the emperor captive. But none rose to defend the throne, and the army, which had time to become demoralized and turned into a band of brigands, quietly ate the supplies gathered in Chang'ani.

Soon the generals quarreled and fought among themselves. It could not have been otherwise, for the soldiers, drunk with blood and wine, could not and would not restrain their instincts and refuse the urge to kill. Bloody battles broke out in the streets and neighborhoods of Chang'ani and utter confusion reigned. The Emperor took advantage of this situation to flee to the east with a few of his retainers. The ruler of Shandong, Cao Cao, greeted him there with honor. Li Tszyue, Guo Sih and other officers pursued the emperor, but were met by Cao Cao's already trained troops and defeated head-on in 196. Thus, the second pillar of the Han dynasty - the army - disappeared. Li Qiyue and Guo Xi held on in Chang'an for two more years until they were disturbed there. In 198 their heads were delivered to Cao Cao, who in the meantime had become a cheng-xiang, i.e., head of the government. Let's see how this happened.

Ambitious

Let us go back to 191, when the army cleansed the capital and the country, unleashing the zemstvo militia. The militia collapsed because the generals who represented it were by no means prepared for political activity. They were closely tied to their landed estates and their many clients, but the idea of statehood was alien to them. As soon as the threat from the central government passed, the rulers began to round out their holdings.

To the north, in Hebei, Yuan Shao and Gongsun Zang clashed. In the south, Sun Jian, master of the lower Yangtze, tried to conquer the possessions of Liu Biao, located between the Yangtze and Han rivers, but was killed in battle. His son Sun Tse allied with the ruler of Henan and Anhui Yuan Shu and, with his help, subjugated many counties to the south of the Yangtze. In Shandong there broke out a new revolt of "yellow armbands."; it was subdued by Cao Cao in 192 and included the surrendered rebels in his troops. As a result, his army was one of the strongest he could muster, prompting him to pursue further conquests: he attacked Xuzhou. The ruler of Xuzhou, unable to organize resistance, called in an expert, the celebrated warrior Liu Bei.

Liu Bei appeared with his retinue and brothers Zhang Fei and Guan Yu; the latter was a talented military leader. Liu Bei's entry into the political arena marked a new shift in Chinese social relations. Liu Bei belonged to a thoroughly impoverished nobility; he was essentially declassified and became a constable. The same, with the exception of origin, were his "brothers" - Zhang Fei and Guan Yu. There came an era when the sword trade began to bring huge profits. Liu Bei and his squad broke through Cao Cao's army and saved the day. At the same time, another adventurer, the already well-known conspirator Liu Bu, struck Cao Cao's rear and forced him to lift the siege of Xuzhou. Liu Bu's fate is even more telling than Liu Bei's career. Liu Bu fled Chang'an with a hundred horsemen and roamed China for some time, offering his services to all comers. The noble Yuan rejected the upstart, but Liu Bu still found a master - Zhang Mo, ruler of the Chengliu region, and with his help he formed a 50-thousand army. Taking advantage of Cao Cao's predicament, Liu Bu tried to carve out a domain in Shandong. The motivation of the venture launched by Lu Bu is very interesting: "The Celestial Empire is falling apart; the warriors do what they want... Lu Bu is now the bravest man in the Celestial Empire and with him

you can win the independence". [4. VOL. 1, P. 145].

A similar opinion was expressed by a major politician Lu Su. The idea of China's unity and the idea of a dynasty could be considered lost. At the Battle of Puyan Lu Bu defeated Cao Cao, but did not develop success, limiting himself to capturing a small estate for himself. With this he put himself on an equal footing with the aristocrats. In Xuzhou, Liu Bei did the same, taking power from the old and sluggish local ruler.

The emergence of new rivals made the aristocrats feel class solidarity, and Yuan Shao fielded a 50,000-strong army against Liu Bu. But even before that, Cao Cao, having gone on the offensive, defeated the Shandong "yellows" and Liu Bu, before which the people of Puyang locked the gates. Liu Bu fled to Liu Bei, who took him in. All of these events took place before 196. When the emperor fled from Chang'an and fell into the hands of Cao Cao, the latter became Cheng-syan and began to send decrees on behalf of the emperor. By cunning diplomacy, he managed to quarrel Liu Bei with Liu Bu and Yuan Shu. Yuan Shu defeated Liu Bei's troops, and Liu Bu mastered his inheritance. Liu Bei and his retinue came to Cao Cao's service and were accepted, for condottieri (enforcers) were needed by all challengers.

Yuan Shu was a short-tempered but ambitious man. When he saw that his neighbor Cao Cao had reached the highest position in China. Yuan Shu decided that he was just as good. However, to take the emperor's person from Cao Cao was impossible, there was another way - Yuan Shu declared Emperor himself.

But he was in a hurry: none of the rulers, actually independent, entered into an alliance with him. With his large forces, Yuan Shu could deal with any neighbor individually, but not with all of them together. He quarreled with Liu Bu and tried to capture Xuzhou, but the talented warrior defeated him, while his southeastern neighbor Sun Tse took up with Cao Cao and also opposed the usurper.

The allies swept Hunan from all sides and took the capital of Houchun in 198. The war could not be brought to an end in one campaign, as other rulers - Liu Biao, Zhang Xu, and the "yellow armbands" struck at Cao Cao's

rear. Yuan Shu received a respite, but it was not he who took advantage of it, but Cao Cao. In the same year, 198 Cao Cao, bribing left and right, managed to capture and execute Lu Bu and massacre Zhang Xu, and in the next year, 199, his troops under the command of Liu Bei finished with Yuan Shu. The brother of the latter - Yuan Shao could not help him, as he was busy with the war with Gongsun Jian. Yuan Shao won and became ruler of all of Hebei.

Very different from Yuan, the behavior of Suni. Sun Tse, nicknamed "the little god-yourem", subjugated all the lower reaches of the Yangtze. He pursued a policy that so strengthened his principality that it became a veritable impregnable fortress. Sun Tse began to gather Confucianist intellectuals and give them positions. The Wu kingdom inherited from the Han Empire the healthiest contingent of the scholarly elite, least touched by the general decay.

This selection of people determined the capabilities of the Wu kingdom: it became a citadel of resistance to the general progressive movement of Chinese history, which at the time was on its way to disintegration. The Wu kingdom was therefore more orderly than the other kingdoms and this, together with the natural conditions, made Wu a natural fortress. However, this same circumstance also limited its expansion, since the vast majority of the Chinese people at the time were "yellow," and Taoist ideology could not be tolerated in a strictly Confucian state. Indeed, Sun Tse executed Taoists and smashed the shrines [4. Vol. 1, p. 363].

His successor Sun Quan - a "blue-eyed brat" - somewhat weakened, but did not change the policy of his elder brother, and this prevented him from mastering the whole flow of the Yangtze. Not un-gifted Liu Biao, but the people's hatred limited the principality of Wu to the lower reaches of the Yangtze (Tsyandong). But this will be discussed in more detail below.

## Royalists

Having fallen from Li Qiye's camp into Cao Cao's hands, Emperor Xiang Di did not feel any freer. It is true that here he had decent food and peace, but he was completely disrespected. At the court, relocated to Xuchang (in Shandong), there were several courtiers who remembered the splendor of

the House of Han. The emperor conspired with one of them, Dong Cheng, and he hatched a plot to kill Cao Cao and restore the Han dynasty. The ruler of Xiliang (Gansu), Ma Teng and Liu Bei, joined the conspiracy. Ma Teng went to his fief, and Liu Bei with an army smashed Yuan Shu, when the plot was exposed through the treachery of his house slave Dong Cheng, and all the conspirators were executed. The emperor was once again imprisoned, this time for good. But the success cost Cao Cao dearly: his enemies had an ideological basis for the fight against him. The charm of the House of Han had not yet faded, and under the guise of Liu Bei raised his troops and captured Xuzhou. Yuan Shao allied with him and declared that he stood for "a mighty trunk and weak branches" [4, vol. 1, p. 285], i.e. for a strong central power and limitation of the power of feudal princes. The sincerity of Liu Bei and Yuan Shao was more than questionable, but Cao Cao was caught between two fires.

The forces of the rebels, even Yuan Shao alone, were greater than those of the government. Hebei had a concentration of frontier troops, veterans who had not lost discipline. The Wuhu-ani were allied with Yuan Shao, so his rear was protected. There was no shortage of combat officers and experienced advisers, but Yuan Shao was not fit to be a leader. He was brave and resolute, knew military science, but knew nothing of politics and human psychology. His aristocratic conceit prevented him from listening to what his subordinates were saying, his bravado was turning into stubbornness, his determination into impatience and lack of stamina. He often pushed away the right people, and that was what determined the outcome of the clash.

But Cao Cao was by no means a random man in the position of Chengxiang. He was also an aristocrat, but without the shadow of arrogance. Cao Cao suffered defeats more than once, but his iron stamina allowed him to profit from them as if from victories: he lost battles and won wars. He could easily sacrifice the life of a friend or brother if it suited him, but he did not like to kill unnecessarily. He practiced lying, betrayal, and cruelty extensively, but also paid tribute to kindness and loyalty, even against him. People he attracted and cherished. These, of course, were not the kind of people who would sneak into the Wu, to Sun Quan, but wandering knights, adventurers, careerists - the people of this century - would flock to Cao Cao. Cao Cao kept pace with the times, and fortune smiled on him.

The war began in the fall of 199 Cao Cao put up roadblocks, not daring to attack the pre - rising enemy forces. Liu Bei defeated the army sent against him, but not supported by Yuan Shao, could not develop success. The winter suspended hostilities, and in the spring of 200. Cao Cao went on the offensive and defeated Liu Bei, who fled to Yuan Shao.

Gathering all his strength, Cao Cao rushed north and defeated the northern vanguard at the Battle of Baima, but in his rear, in Junan, broke out a new rebellion of "yellow armbands," and to subdue him, he lost the pace of the offensive. In the fall of 200. Cao Cao resumed the offensive and defeated Yuan Shao's forces at Guandu and, in the summer of the following year, at Qanting. Meanwhile, the restless Liu Bei moved to Zhongnan and led the defeated "yellow", which for 15 years of incessant forest warfare had become outlaws. He wanted to strike at the rear of Cao Cao and take defenseless Suichang. Cao Cao and his light troops forced his way to Junan and defeated Liu Bei. With the remnants of his gang, Liu Bei went to Liu Biao and entered his service. The condottieri once again changed his master.

In the spring of 203 Cao Cao again rushed on a campaign to the north. Yuan Shao died and his sons entered into bloody strife. Hebei's capital, Jizhou, fell, and Yuan Shao's children fled to the Wuhuans, and then on to Liaodong.

The Liaodong ruler, anxious to please the victor, beheaded the fugitives and sent their heads to Cao Cao. The Yuan-Huang allies were defeated by Cao Cao's troops in 206, and some of them were led to Inner China and settled there. The Huns voluntarily submitted and sent Cao Cao a lot of horses as a gift [4. T. 1, p. 419].

The revolt of the "Yellow arm bands" finally ended: the Black Mountain commander Zhang-Lastochka surrendered and brought his supporters. Cao Cao's army grew to 1,000,000 men due to the inclusion of surrendered northerners and "yellows". The main strength of this army was the lancers and mounted archers; both were attracted by Cao Cao's generosity and the possibility of a fast career. There was no equal army in China, and it seemed that Cao Cao's hegemony was a matter of the near future. So

thought himself Cao Cao, and, pacifying the north, rushed to the south, first to finish with Liu Bey, and secondly, to bring to submission Wu, which in the meantime has become an independent principality.

## Hermits

The strengthening of Cao Cao for some groups in China boded serious complications. The first to worry were the splinters of the House of Han: the princes Liu Biao in Jingzhou (the area between the Han River and the Yangtze River) and Liu Zhang in Yizhou (Sichuan). High-born but talentless, they did not know how to prevent trouble. Liu Biao supported Liu Bei, but a strong party arose in his palace, demanding an agreement with Cao Cao, for which it was necessary to send Liu Bei's head to Chengxiang.

There was no unanimity in Wu: the civilian officials were in favor of peace and submission, for they would then remain in their seats. The military wanted to resist, for at best they expected to serve as privates in the victor's army. The military had the swords, and Wu decided to resist, using the Yangtze River and his magnificent fleet for cover.

In the most difficult position were the inspirers and ideologues of the "yellow" movement - the Taoist hermits. Cao Cao could forgive and accept the "Black Mountain" brigands, pardon and release the rebellious peasants of Rongnan, but there could be no mercy for the preachers of the "Great Calm" teaching, who raised a bloody civil war, and they knew it. The Taoists' bet on a mass, i.e. peasant, movement was beaten.

Against the army one needed an army too - a professional, skilled and obedient one. Liu Bei's pinned-to-the-wall squad turned out to be just that. Although Liu Bei began his career with punitive expeditions against the Yellow Armbands, the common danger brought the anachorets and condottieri closer together. In 207 Liu Bei was visited by men who called his advisors "pale-faced adherents". [They advised Liu Bei to turn to truly talented people. Zhuge Liang, who bore the Taoist nickname of the "Dormant Dragon." He presented himself as such. Liu Bei trusted him and events took an unexpected turn.

First of all, Zhuge Liang drew up a new program. He renounced the struggle for hegemony in China as an impossible task. He would cede the north to Cao Cao, the east to Sun Quan, with whom he believed it necessary to form an alliance, and Liu Bei offered to take over the southwest, particularly the rich Sichuan. Zhuge Liang hoped to wait out the hard times there. What was fundamentally new in the Taoist program was that the dismemberment of China was transformed from an unfortunate necessity into a goal. This aristocrat of the spirit saw the means to achieve the goal in demagoguery, in "agreement with the people. Zhuge Liang had very little time to prepare for the inevitable war, but he used it wisely. Liu Bei began to be transformed into a folk hero (which no skillful propaganda would do!), and this made it easier to recruit warriors from the people. The results were immediate. In the spring of 208 Liu Bei broke the enemy's barrier and captured the city of Fancheng. Cao Cao was concerned about this and launched an offensive with large forces, but Zhuge Liang defeated his vanguard at Mount Boma. In the autumn of 208 the main Cao Cao's forces marched and simultaneously Liu Biao died. Government supporters seized power in the capital of his province.

Liu Bei had enemies in his rear and it was pointless to resist. Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang began a retreat, and after them - an unprecedented event - the whole population rose: the old people, women and children, leaving their belongings, leaving their homeland in a foreign country to the south. Cao Cao did not let this happen; in the north he was welcomed as a liberator, even here he wished to appear as a humane ruler, but no one wanted to talk to him. Meanwhile, Liu Bei and his generals fought rearguard battles and delayed the enemy, saving the fleeing population. In the end Liu Bei's troops were defeated at Changban, but most of the refugees managed to cross to the southern bank of the Yangtze, where Zhuge Liang managed to organize a defense. Cao Cao gained territory, but victory was not given to him.

Yangtze - the river is wide, in some places up to 5 km, and forcing it without proper preparation Cao Cao did not dare. True, at the surrender of Jingzhou he received a fleet, but the newly subdued southerners were unreliable, and the northerners could not fight on the water. While Cao Cao was pulling up the war entered a new phase. At the Battle of Chibi (Red Cliffs), Cao Cao's fleet was burned by the Southerners' brigands, but their

counteroffensive to the north stalled as the Northerners had an excellent reserve cavalry. Only Liu Bei, who had time to seize Jingzhou and Nanjiang (an area south of the Yangtze) and establish an independent principality, won.

It is unlikely that Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang would have held on to the small triangle between the Hanshui and Yangtze rivers, especially since the alliance with Wu was broken immediately after victory. Sun Quan himself claimed the lands captured by Liu Bei, and even arrested the latter when he came to negotiate.

True, the arrest was veiled: Liu Bei was married to Sun Quan's sister, but in fact it was an arrest, and Liu Bei had to flee. Deprived of an ally, Liu Bei could not have fought off Cao Cao, but he was unexpectedly lucky. At a time when the northerners were preparing to march and even formed an alliance with the Wu, in 210 the northwestern princes, long kept in the shadows, made an appearance. The ruler of Xiliang (Gansu) Ma Teng - the last undisclosed member of the royalist plot - came to Xuchang to introduce himself to the governor, and on his way organized an attempt on his life. The attempt failed; Ma Teng and his entourage paid with their lives for the failure. Then the son of the murdered Ma Chao and a friend of Han Sui raised troops and took Chang An. Cao Cao moved against them with the entire army, but the Chinese lathists were hard to fight with Kiang spearmen - Ma Chao's allies. Only by luring Han Sui to his side, Cao Cao secured victory. Ma Chao fled to the Qiangs, repeated the attack in 212, but was defeated again and went to the Lao leader Zhang Lu in Hanzhong.

## Twins

Liu Bei's success was due to two reasons. Firstly, the proximity to the Taoists attracted the sympathy of the masses to him, and because of this after the defeat he was stronger than he was, because the displaced peasants were only attached to him. Secondly, his Taoist connections were not advertised, and in the eyes of all China he acted as a fighter for the idea of the Han Empire. This idea outlived the empire itself and, being no longer relevant, continued to influence minds. Liu Bei and his brothers enjoyed acting as defenders of the empire far more than they did as leaders of a peasant revolt.

In 210, Liu Zhang, ruler of western Sichuan, asked Liu Bei to help him get rid of the Taoists Zhang Lu, who were holding out in eastern Sichuan and in Shaanxi. On Zhuge Liang's advice, Liu Bei brought troops into Sichuan. He could have easily captured Liu Zhang and this was demanded by his Taoist advisors, but he did not do so, reasoning that Liu Zhang was a member of the imperial Han family and his kinsman. On the contrary, he went into military conflict with Ma Chao, then serving under Zhang Lu.

Ma Chao did not get along with the Taoists and defected to Liu Bei. It cost Pan Tu, Liu Bei's Taoist adviser, a lot of work to cause a conflict between Liu Bei and Liu Zhang, as a result of which Liu Zhang was taken prisoner, and Sichuan went to Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, who came to him. Thus, the base for the kingdom of Shu was established.

Zhuce Liang had not only to fight the obvious enemies, but also to overcome the opposition of his closest associates. Since then, he did not move away from Liu Bei, influencing the weak leader, and entrusted the management of Jingzhou to the talented warrior Guan Yu, but the latter was also as far from understanding the politics as Liu Bei.

The situation of the new kingdom was very tense. Sun Quan demanded that Jingzhou be given to him, while Cao Cao went to war with Zhang Lu and in 215 eliminated the last stronghold of Taoism. Zhuge Liang managed by partial concessions to push Sun Quan to war against Cao Cao, but Cao Cao defeated the South (215). However, this diversion thwarted the Sichuan offensive and gave Liu Bei the opportunity to fortify.

The internal situation in North China was also turbulent. The mario-nostic Emperor Xiang-di made another attempt to get rid of his commander in 218. Several courtiers conspired and mutinied in Xuchang. The city caught fire. Troops outside the city, seeing the blaze, came and suppressed the rebellion. Earlier, Cao Cao ordered the Empress, implicated in the plot to be executed and married Xiang Di to his daughter. The unfortunate emperor was under surveillance even on the bed of sleep. In 215, having strengthened himself, Cao Cao took the title of Wei van, which legalized his position, and moved against Liu Bei.

In the spring of 218, Sichuan became the target of the northern attack. Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei came out of the mountains and launched a counteroffensive. Thanks to the strategic talent Zhuge Liang and the combat experience of the junior commanders selected by him, Cao Cao's army was defeated by autumn, and Hanzhong - the former lands of Zhang Lu - fell to Liu Bei.

Encouraged by his success, Liu Bei took the title of khan in 219. The strengthening of the Shu kingdom worried Sun Quan, and he concluded an alliance with Cao Cao. In 219 the war continued in another area: Guan Yu suddenly attacked and took the fortress of San-yang (on the bank of the river Han-shui) and besieged Fanchen-fortress on the road to Süichanu. The northern army, which came to rescue Fanchen, was killed by floods, and the position of Cao Cao became critical. But here again it was affected by the origins of the three brothers: under the rule of Zhuge Liang people of Jinzhou were staunchly loyal to him; after his departure for Sichuan this alliance was broken, and the masses fell into political apathy, because Guan Yu was not their man. Sun Quan took this into account. His troops attacked Guan Yu from behind, from the Yangtze River. The population was promised safety and Guan Yu's warriors were promised amnesty. Guan Yu's army dispersed, while he himself was captured and executed. The victors divided the conquered area in half. This victory so strengthened Wu that from that time there was a long period of political equality in China.

In 220 Cao Cao died and his son, Cao Pei, forced Xiang Di to abdicate and established a new Cao Wei dynasty. In response, Zhuge Liang enthroned Liu Bei in Sichuan and named the Shu Han Dynasty, i.e., adopted a program to restore the Han Empire. Zhuge Liang was an experienced politician, he knew that the ghost of a dead dynasty could be used as a banner to fight the enemy, but in essence Shu was as little like Han as Wei. Both empires were new phenomena and fought to the death.

Cao Pei's usurpation was unpopular and Zhuge Liang wanted to seize the moment to strike quickly. The plan promised success but was thwarted by Liu Bei. Liu Bei did not understand politics. Instead of marching north, he mounted a punitive expedition against the Wu Kingdom (221) with a vast army. At first, he was successful, but the talented young general Lu Sun

managed to delay Liu Bei's offensive, pushing him back into the forests south of the Yangtze and destroying Shu's warehouses and camps by a forest fire. Liu Bei's demoralized army was defeated in 222 at Iljin. Liu Bei retreated to Sichuan with the remnants of his army, and in 223 died of grief. The third brother, Zhang Fei, was killed at the beginning of the campaign by two officers whom he flogged. So ended the lives of the three named brothers, still revered in China as guardian spirits of warriors. Liu Bei was succeeded by his son, but all power in Shu was concentrated in the hands of Zhuge Liang.

### Three Kingdoms.

The inertia of the popular upsurge that had crushed the Han Empire was drying up. There came an era of crystallization. Severe defeat at Iljin threatened the existence of the Shu: if Lu Sun had developed success, he could have mastered Sichuan. But he needed all the available military forces to do so, and Cao Pei did not doze off. He decided to take advantage of the lack of troops in the east and capture Wu. However, Lu Song stopped the offensive, returned in time with troops to the east, and in 222 A.D. at Zhushu defeated Cao Pei's army. Zhuge Liang, gaining full power, concluded an alliance with the Wu in 223, so Cao Pei's new offensive in the south-east was stymied.

Preparing to continue the fight against Wei, Zhuge Liang had to provide his rear. In the south of Sichuan, in the Yizhou region, in 225, local rulers and Man foresters rebelled. Zhuge Liang made a campaign to the south, crushed the rebels and generously treated the captive leaders of the Man tribes and pacified the militant "savages". Since 227 Zhuge Liang began a war against the kingdom of Wei.

All three Chinese kingdoms had a different structure, as noted by the Chinese themselves. The principle of the *kingdom of Wei* was "Time and Heaven," i.e., fate. The Cao family kept pace with the times and time worked for it. Cao Cao declared that "ability is higher than conduct", so he rejected Confucianism. Courageous and unscrupulous individuals had quick careers and, as demoralization increased, the number of adventurers

increased, there was no shortage of human resources. Cavalry was the strength of the northerners and, bordering the Steppe, they could replenish it. Abandoning the warlike intentions of the Han dynasty, the Wei emperors established peace on the northern frontier and an alliance with the Qian.

*The Wu became an empire in 229.* It continued the Han tradition of granting privileges to the learned Confucianists and the hereditary bureaucracy. Like any conservative system, Wu policy was doomed. Sun Quan's successors brought to power temporaryists, such as Zhuge Ke, assassinated in 253. Struggles of court cliques and intrigues developed. The ruling elite no longer cared about the people, because they relied on the police and the army. Taxes were raised but funds were spent on court luxuries. Wu proclaimed "Land and Convenience", i.e., the advantage of territory sheltered by the great Yangtze River, which for the time being guarded it from invasion, but Wu was saved even more by Shu.

*The kingdom of Shu* was a most interesting and remarkable phenomenon. But its principle of "Humanity and Friendship" was never realized. Shu arose from a combination of the high intelligence of Zhuge Liang and the daring of Liu Bei's thugs. By capturing together, the rich Sichuan, they were given the material means to accomplish "great deeds."

To understand the situation, geography must be considered. Sichuan is like an island within China. The fertile valley is surrounded by high cliffs and can only be accessed by mountain paths and suspension bridges over precipices. The people of Sichuan were isolated from China's political life and lived a subsistence life. Everything Zhuge Liang and Liu Bei cared about was alien to the people of Sichuan, so their support was passive. Zhuge Liang understood this and strove with all his might to break out on the Middle Plains, where he wanted to find echoes of the teachings of the Yellow and the chivalrous concepts of the Han supporters; with both he could find common ground. For this purpose, he undertook six campaigns from 227 to 234, but the talented Wei general Sima Yi paralyzed all his attempts. Meanwhile, Liu Bei's son and his court were sinking into philistinism and the quagmire of provincial life. In Chengdu, the capital of Shu, the actual power went to the eunuchs, and while the brave men died in the war, the country and the capital prospered. Zhuge Liang had no successors in Sichuan, and he handed over his cause to a defector from

North China, Jiang Wei. Jiang Wei tried to continue Zhuge Liang's cause, but did not have even half of his talent. Shu armies in 249-261 began to suffer defeats, their spirit fell. Finally, the northerners went on the offensive.

In 263 two armies moved to Sichuan to finish with the Shu kingdom. The first, led by Zhong Hui, tied up the Shu army of Jiang Wei; the other, led by the talented Deng Ai, made its way over the cliffs, with no roads. The warriors, wrapped in felt, rolled down the rocky slope. Many of them were broken, but the rest were faced with a rich country devoid of leaders and warrior spirit. The improvised militia was easily defeated and the capital Chengdu surrendered with the emperor in 264. The talented commanders, however, paid with their heads for their victories.

On the orders of Sima Zhao, the Wei Cheng-xiang, Zhong Hui arrested Deng Ai, but realizing that he himself faced the same fate, made a deal with Jiang Wei and rebelled. However, the troops did not follow him and killed the rebellious warlords. Deng Ai was released from custody, but in the turmoil, he was killed by his personal physician. Sima Zhao appeared with an army in Sichuan and imposed absolute order there. The principles of Time and Heaven had triumphed over the ideals of Humanity and Friendship.

## Reunification

The Wei Kingdom was elevated and strengthened by the ancient landowning nobility, to which the founder of the dynasty himself belonged, and by the professional military, who joined Cao Cao for personal gain. Both groups differed in their upbringing, attitudes, tastes, ideals, i.e., in all elements of their worldviews. For as long as the wars and rebellions of a third group of court acolytes lasted, the first two supported each other, but when the situation was settled, they found it difficult to live together.

The nobility took advantage of family ties to the dynasty. This manifested itself in the disgrace of the commander Sima Yi, and, although it was not without provocation by Zhuge Liang, the important thing is that the provocation was a success [4, T. II, p. 395]. However, to repel the hordes of Zhuge Liang without professional troops was impossible, and Sima Yi was summoned from exile and reinstated in 227 AD.

After the death of the Emperor, Cao Rong in 239 A.D., the leaders of his young adopted son Cao Fan were Sima Yi and Cao Shuan. The leader of the "nobility" Cao Shuang pushed Sima Yi out of power, he, in turn, led a rebellion in 249, and most of the soldiers and officers supported him. From then on, the Sima surname became in the same relationship to the Wei dynasty as the Cao surname had been to the fading Han dynasty. Sima Yi died in 251. His children Sima Shi and Sima Zhao continued his cause.

The landed nobility responded to the coup d'etat with revolts in 255 and 256. But 70 years of constant warfare had emaciated the Chinese zemstvo and so reduced the elite that it no longer had a decisive voice. Power was now placed on the blade of the sword. Sima Yi himself was a military man of the old school; his children were typical "soldier's emperors", like the Romans of the same time. Sima Zhao's son, Sima Yan, cast aside all restraints and, having deposed the last Wei sovereign, himself ascended the throne in 265. Curiously, shortly before the coup, a man dressed in yellow clothes, who called himself "the Prince of the People," roamed the bazaars and prophesied that the emperor would be replaced and that "great prosperity" would come. [4. VOL. II. P. 741].

The attitude of the remnants of the "yellow people" to the events was reflected here: they could not forgive the Wei dynasty for defeating them, but were ready to reconcile with another dynasty with which they had no personal accounts. Fatigue became a decisive factor in Chinese history.

The Wu kingdom suffered the fate of the Eastern dynasties. In 265, Sun Hao ascended the throne, proving to be suspicious, cruel and dissolute. The luxury of the palace burdened the people, and the courtiers lived in constant fear, for those in disgrace had their faces skinned and their eyes poked out. At the same time, Sun Hao, unable to assess the real situation, cherished a plan to conquer all of China and, in 280, went into conflict with the Jin Empire. At that time to mobilize the people was for Sun Hao "the same as to put out the fire by throwing kindling into it" [4. VOL. II. P. 749].

On the other hand, Sima Yan showed great restraint and came forward only when his intelligence revealed that the unpopularity of the Wu government

had reached a climax. Then he moved 200,000 men and the entire river fleet, prepared in the upper Yangtze, south. After the first skirmishes, in which the northerners prevailed, the southern troops began to surrender without a fight; the campaign turned into a military jaunt. Sun Hao surrendered at the mercy of the victor, and in 280. China was once again united.

The Jin was a soldier's empire. The "young rascals" of the Han era, after several setbacks, achieved power. By the end of the third century, the enormous potential of ancient China was exhausted.

During the Three Kingdoms period, all energetic individuals became visible and died. Some (in yellow scarves) for the idea of the "great peace", others for the red Han Empire, some for their loyalty to their leader, others for their own honor and glory in the posterity, etc. After the terrible cataclysm, China socially represented a cluster of ashes. After the census in the middle of the II century, about 50 million people were counted in the empire, and in the middle of the III century only -7,5 million. Even the most mediocre government could now govern an impersonal mass.

Yan's coup ended the Confucian legacy, if not de jure, then de facto. In every office were totally unprincipled, amoral scoundrels who divided their time between stealing from their subjects and dissolute debauchery. This was a time of such decay that China recovered from it only 300 years later, purged by the fires of the Barbary invasions.

All decent people turned away in horror from such a vile profanation of Confucian doctrine and turned to Lao Tzu and Zhuang Tzu. They ostentatiously refused to wash or work, refused every hint of luxury, and drank heavily while visibly abusing the dynasty. Some disgraced themselves with mud to show their disdain for order, but the hysteria did not serve the opposition well or harm the dynasty in the slightest. On the contrary, China grew weaker and weaker. The number of talented people decreased with every generation, those who appeared were of no use and in the 4th century the Jin dynasty deservedly died of the Hun's swords, the Chinese long spears and the Syan's sharp arrows.

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