

Biography of Liu Chin from the Ming shih, ch. 304

(Text #15)

Translated by
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Liu Chin's native place was Hsing-p'ing. (1) Originally he was a son of the T'an lineage, but since he was introduced [into the eunuch service] under the aegis of a eunuch official whose name was Liu, he appropriated that surname. (2) During the reign of [the emperor]

- (1) A county in Shensi province, approx. 30 miles west of Hsi-an (Sian) prefecture. Liu Chin was probably born sometime around 1451-52, based on a note in Hsieh Fen's (cs. 1521) *Hou chien lu* 後鑑錄. Hsieh's work includes recopied documents from the archives of the Ministry of Justice (Hsing-pu) and is an invaluable source for corroboration of details. On page 36 (as it appears in *Ming shih tzu liao ts'ung k'an*, v. 1, Kiangsu Jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1981) we see that the Ministry listed Liu Chin as sixty *sui* at the time of his execution.
- (2) The Chinese reads (MS: 7786) "mao ch'i hsing 冒其姓." *Mao* by itself has a range of meanings: "to cover a corpse's head," "a hat," "to stave off, oppose," and also a homophone for "resentment." The combination, "mao hsing," appeared as early as the *Han shu*, 55: Wei Ch'ing chuan, p. 2471, in which it is glossed as "to take a false name, as if one's head were cloaked." By Ming times it was a stock phrase for the false appropriation of something, often the taking of another's surname by eunuchs. The historian has capitalized on undertones in order to elicit a feeling of duplicity in Liu's actions.

NOTE: For philological exercises of this type it is often best to consult the *P'ei wen yün fu* (in this case see 83/24 p.3284, middle). Compared with first-level research tools like *Chung wen ta tz'u tien* and *Dai Kan Wa jiten*, its quotations of primary allusions are usually more extensive, there are more entries, and it pays considerably more attention to the literature of the post-T'ang period. In addition one is spared

Hsiao-tsung [1488-1506] he was charged with a capital crime and was acquitted.(3) Later he obtained a post in [the future] Wu-tsung's Eastern Palace.(4) When Wu-tsung acceded to the throne, Liu was put

a circular route through the Japanese language, as in the case of the *Dai Kan Wa jiten*. I shall discuss this matter further at other relevant places in the footnotes.

KEYED READING: MS 304-5, pp. 7765 f.

This keyed reading of other eunuch biographies is crucial for interpreting the biography of Liu Chin. One finds that some eunuchs are praised for their actions and their careers, and a few are consistently vilified. Look for similarities in the careers of the hated ones. What, in the eyes of the Ch'ing compilers of the MS, were the criteria for good and bad? Are these criteria old ones in China? Are the same catch-words used over and over again?

(3)

KEYED READING: MS 15, pp. 183-97.

Does the historian really intend his readers to find information on this event in the *pen-chi* 本紀 of Hsiao-tsung? Or is this "reference" merely a loose chronological setting? *Pen-chi* (Annals) are not the same kind of historical genre as a biography.

RESEARCH TOPIC: According to the DMB:942 no other details of this event are known. It is probably true, but one might try anyway to check the assertion. Collate any data concerned with Liu's early crime. Aside from the keyed reading in note # 2, check MSL, "Hsiao-tsung shih-lu," MTC (which often discusses sources in the "k'ao-yi"), Wang Shih-chen and Ting. Would private letters and histories help? In the last category one of the most important is the notice on Liu Chin by Wang Ao, a valuable contemporary source. (See the third *ch.*, pp. 11b ff.) There we learn about events in Liu's early career and can deduce that he was born about 1445. However, there is nothing about this capital crime.

(4) "Eastern Palace" traditionally meant the residence of an heir apparent. Throughout the Ming dynasty it was a fully staffed enclave in the capital, with guard units, entertainers and tutors. See MHY:463-64, for a description of some of the higher officials serving there. Also see TMHT 43, 52, and 73 for descriptions of the intricate protocol required for audiences, lectures on classics, and music. The Palace Guard

in charge of the Eunuch Bureau of Musicals and Theatricals;(5) and along with the following: Ma Yung-ch'eng, Kao Feng, Lo Hsiang, Wei Pin, Ch'iu Chü, Ku Ta-yung, and Chang Yung, got favored [by the emperor] because of long-standing gratitudes [to them]. People

and other eunuch officers were instrumental in running much of the ceremonial and day-to-day life there. (Titles associated with officials attached to the heir apparent frequently became ad hominem honorifics only. See Hucker, "Govt. Organ.," p. 17.)

- (5) Chung-ku ssu (lit.: bureau of bells and drums); I follow the translation supplied in DMB:942. MS:1818-20 lists all the regular eunuch offices. This one is one of the four bureaus (ssu), with a small and somewhat irregular staff. Its main functions were: ceremonial court drumming, and plays and music in the private quarters.

KEYED READING: 1) MS 15, 16, pp. 183-214;

2) MS 74, pp. 1818-20

Read 1) for references to Liu Chin's appointments. Is there pertinent material there? Read 2) for a description of the posts into which Liu was thrust at this early point in his career.

RESEARCH TOPIC: An introductory study could be made concerning eunuch offices in the Ming, their role in court politics and the occurrences of eunuch usurpation. See Ting and Crawford. (Crawford cites the views of late Ming and Ch'ing historians on the subject.) The chapters for vol. 7 of CHC on the Ch'eng-hua and Cheng-te reigns, by Drs. F.W. Mote and J.P. Geiss, respectively, offer much material on this topic; see especially Geiss' section on Liu Chin.

It would be most interesting to determine whether the political nature of these offices changed noticeably in favor of eunuchs from Hsiao-tsung's reign to the height of Liu Chin's power. If so, how did it happen? See my notes #9 & 45 below, and comments by Ting, p. 78, about the abuse of appointment power in the bureaucracy. See MTC:1462 on the eunuchs' purported control of Wu-tsung's movements in 1498 when he was still heir apparent. Note also MTC:1534-35 which says that the new emperor (Wu-tsung) was intent on changing his father's style of government, and began right off by ignoring the anti-eunuch posthumous instructions.

called them the "Eight Tigers," but Liu Chin was the most insidious. (6)

Liu had always admired the way Wang Chen [d. 1449] conducted himself, (7) and so constantly offered [to the emperor] falcons,

- (6) The text, p. 7786, reads "*erh Chin yu chiao-hen* 而瑾尤狡狠." *Chiao* ranges from "sly, cunning," to "trouble-making child," "beautiful, but empty inside," or a kind of dog. The second word, *hen*, means "the sound of fighting dogs" or "vicious." The historian's choice again acts to portray Liu as harmful and voracious, like a perverse child or a violent beast. Note that in some other sections of MS the eight are called *pa-tang* 八黨, the Eight Partisans; see MS 181, p.4813, and *K'ao-cheng*, ch. 35, p.27a (p. 500 of the modern edition).

KEYED READING: MS 304-306

Browse through all of the biographies in these *chüan*. Do other eunuch or bad civil official biographies use similar expressions to describe a villain? If so, does it have any bearing on the problems discussed in note #2? How would you characterize the attitude of the historian toward the collusive officials on the one hand and the eunuchs on the other?

(7)

KEYED READING: MS 304, pp. 7772 ff.

Wang Chen, with whom we have become acquainted in Section One, was one of the first palace-educated eunuchs. He was assigned to the heir apparent, Chu Ch'i-chen (Ying-tsung), and manipulated him in order to gain full control for his eunuch clique. Many of Wang's political ploys (ingratiating and entertaining the emperor, staffing of certain offices) were repeated by Liu Chin.

RESEARCH TOPIC: An interesting topic might be to collate sources for Wang Chen and come to a conclusion about Wang/Liu career similarities. See MTC, Ting, W. Franke in the DMB: 1347-49 (plus the sources listed there); and there is some discussion of Wang Chen in F.W. Mote, "The T'u-mu Incident of 1449," in Kierman, F.A., Jr., and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, 1974, pp. 243-72. Liu's admiration for Wang Chen leads to the question: did he emulate Wang consciously from what he might have read or heard? Does the historian imply anything about the eunuchs' intelligence, or merely their ability to copy? Note what the historian says about eunuchs once they had begun to be educated: MS 304, p.

sporting dogs, singing and dancing, and wrestling matches. He also led the emperor on incognito excursions.(8) The emperor greatly enjoyed all this, and gradually came to trust and use Liu, advancing him to the Directorate of Palace Buildings and also to chief commander of the imperial garrisons.(9)

7766.

- (8) *tao ti wei-hsing* 導帝微行. *Wei hsing* literally means to go about dressed as a person of general low status, or at least lower than one's own. This expression derives from the sense of *wei* that means base, common, lowly. In some instances it is made clear that this phrase means to go about in common or lowly dress (*wei-fu* 微服). See, for example, MTC:1809. Since an emperor was in theory the most noble and highly-ranked individual in society (*chih tsun chih wei* 至尊之位), if he dressed in anything other than his formally prescribed robes, he was dressed beneath his status. Hence the term is commonly used to describe emperors who went about in disguise and can be loosely translated as 'going about in disguise.'

Later on in his reign the Cheng-te emperor usually dressed up for his excursions as a military officer or a general. In the readings suggested in notes #15, 18 and 20 some material is found concerning sporting pleasures as the aim of the emperor's trips at this point. In the keyed reading to note #20 Han Wen specifically charges that the emperor is being "led about" (*tao*) in his search for sexual pleasures. See also MTC:1547 and Wang Ao, p. 12a.

- (9) The first office is *Nei-kuan chien*; I follow the translation in DMB:942, which seems to be correct. The director supervised chiefly the palaces, tumuli, granaries, etc, constructed by the imperial Peking army corps. The directorate also took charge of various stores and building supplies. TMHT 188:2563 gives details of the subalterns who supervised convict workers in maintaining the imperial buildings; they were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works. See Hucker, "Govt. Organ.," pp. 24-25.

The second title is *tsung-tu t'uan-ying*. DMB:942 has "military training corps." However, one of the early functions of the various Peking Training Divisions, originally crack troops, had been the repair and construction of government

Hsiao-tsung's posthumous edict had done away with the eunuch supervisors of weapons, the city-gate controllers, and the [eunuch] intendancies.(10) Liu followed none of the regulations [in it], and

buildings. The establishment of the imperial garrisons after T'u-mu in 1449 (again see F.W. Mote, "T'u-mu") indicates that *lao-chia* 老家, i.e. overage or weak soldiers, were culled from the crack troops in order to increase the numbers of servants or laborers at the capital. By the late fifteenth century eunuchs controlled these corps. (See Wu, pp. 107-08; TMHT 134:1891; Hucker, *Cens. Syst.*, p.77; Ting, pp. 153 f., and F.W. Mote, forthcoming chapter, CHC, v. 7, on the Ch'eng-hua and Hung-chih reigns, where military reorganization is discussed in relation to the role of eunuchs.)

KEYED READING: 1) MS 74, pp. 1819-25 & 72, p. 1754
2) MS 89, pp. 2176-79

Read 1), the "Treatise on Officialdom," for any details concerning the Directorate of Palace Buildings and 2), "Treatise on the Military," for the Imperial Garrisons. Do you think that the historian has actually "referred" us to the treatises? What governmental dichotomy perennially concerned statesmen, remonstrators and historians in China? What was always of grave national importance? Is there any significance in the two offices' having existed in functionally separate branches of the bureaucracy?

RESEARCH TOPIC: Collate materials on eunuch usurpation of the military. Note how one of the first acts of Wu-tsung was to appoint a eunuch as garrison defender; MTC:1535. Check MTC for any elaboration or for official speeches against such eunuch appointments. (For example: MTC:1482 tells us that Liu Chien and his compatriots petitioned successfully for the appointment of an ennobled civil official to head the *t'uan-ying*; MTC:1550 describes the struggle over this post between Liu Chin and Hsü Chin, leading to Liu's appointment.) Was there any kind of connection between the Directorate of Palace Buildings and the garrisons?

(10) The first term is *chung-kuan chien-ch'iang*. The second title is *ch'eng-men*, and the third, *chien-chü*.

KEYED READING: MS 74, pp.1823-25
K'ao-cheng, ch. 35, p. 27a (new edition, p. 500), suggests that the character *ch'iang* (firearms, weapons, lances) should be *ts'ang* 倉 (warehouse, storage depot), in which case the

line "*pa chung-kuan chien-ch'iang*" should be changed and translated "dismissed the eunuch supervisors of warehouses."

There is evidence to support both readings. *K'ao-cheng* claims, citing MSL, that at this time eunuchs from the *nei-kuan chien*, which supervised the palace, were put in charge of all warehouses and depots, and that Liu Chien and others strongly objected to this. (A brief search through MSL, "Cheng-te" 1, has so far not determined the source for all this, although it may yet be found by other users of the manual.) On the other hand, the position of *chien-ch'iang* did exist in the eunuch military bureaucracy, yet was a relatively low post. See, for example, the description of the offices in the administration that supervised the capital garrisons (*t'i-tu ching-ying*) in MS 74, p.1821. It seems, however, that since the Ch'eng-hua reign (1465-1487) the term had been used to commission eunuchs sent to inspect garrisons and was in that respect similar to other eunuch commissions like *shou-pei*. There was in fact a dispute during the first year of the Cheng-te reign about recalling the *chien-ch'iang* from garrisons in Kansu, Ninghsia and Kuang-ning. See Wang Shih-chen, p.4149. Since the appointment of eunuchs from the palace to oversee storehouses that had not previously been under their jurisdiction was a serious matter and one without precedent, it seems reasonable to conclude that this was what the compiler of Liu Chin's biography had in mind and that Wang Sung-yü's *K'ao-cheng* emendation should stand. In regard to *chien-chü*, both TMHT 21, p.373 and MTC:1519-20 mention them as the separate office levels inside the *nei-fu*.

RESEARCH TOPIC: MTC:1535 mentions imperial instructions apparently related to eunuch grand defenders. Translate the passages there. They mark the beginning of political struggle under Wu-tsung and will be useful as documents for the research suggested in footnote #15. But the exact text of the edict referred to here in the biography might not be found anywhere. The one quoted in MSL 224, p.4244 mentions nothing about these three office titles.

What was the fiscal role of the eunuchs in general? MTC:1540-41 has some information, not, however, concerning these particular posts. Translate the relevant passages. What does it reveal about eunuch resistance to civil officials at the onset of the reign? There was at this very time a general fiscal crisis, about which the MTC supplies some details. What does this suggest about the eunuchs' motives? Also, try to chart analytically the structure of the three jobs as described in the keyed reading. List chronologically the name and rank changes and summarize the duties.

urged the emperor to command the eunuch grand defenders(11) each to offer to throne 10,000 ounces of silver. In addition, he petitioned for the establishment of imperial estates, which gradually increased to over 300. The metropolitan region(12) was thrown into great turmoil.

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- (11) *nei-ch'en chen-shou* 內臣鎮守; The first half of the phrase is merely another common term for "eunuch" (also *huan-che* 宦者, *nei-kuan* 內官, *nei hsiao-ch'en* 內小臣, *hun-jen* 闈人, *ssu-jen* 寺人, *nei-shu* 內豎, *t'ai-chien* 太監, *huan-kuan* 宦官, *chung-kuan* 中官, etc. See MHY 39:698). The second half is a regular title under the Ministry of War. See Hucker, "Govt. Organ." pp. 25, 39, 62. In the garrison system each garrison had a grand defender, several circuit defenders (*fen-shou*), and fort or city defenders (*shou-pei*). These became predominantly occupied by eunuchs (see TMHT 126:1799).

RESEARCH TOPIC: Perform keyed readings similar to the first group in note #9. Refer also to the secondary literature discussed in that note. Does this post bear on the same research question?

- (12) In this case: the lands around the imperial capital of Peking, i.e. Pei Chih-li. Like those in Nanking, they were directly administered by various court agencies. (During most of the dynasty the Ming had thirteen provinces (*sheng*) plus the two Metropolitan Districts, Peking [Pei Chih-li] and Nanking [Nan Chih-li], whose internal organizations were similar to the others). The estates mentioned were often acquired forcibly from landlords in the metropolitan region. See MS:1402 ff. and Hucker, "Govt. Organ.," pp. 5,7,38.
- (13) *Wai-t'ing* 外廷; in other words, those officials (civil and military) whose offices were located outside the wall of the Imperial City (*huang-ch'eng* 皇城). See Map #1 and also the example of outer court offices in Map #5. They were entitled to and obliged to participate in court audiences and numbered about 600. The inner court (*nei-t'ing*) consisted of officials in the Secretariat (Nei-ko), i.e. special Hanlin academicians whose offices were just inside the Wu Gate, the eunuch staff led by the head of the Directorate of Ceremonial (Ssu-li chien), and others. The Grand Secretariat developed into a