

CHINESE STATELETS AND THE NORTHERN BARBARIANS IN THE PERIOD 1400-300 B.C.

by

JAROSLAV PRŮŠEK

The book deals with the relations between the bearers of Chinese civilisation and the Northern Barbarians, as they were called. It takes up once more a question that has been frequently debated in sinological literature during the last 100 years, for the question of the origin of the Chinese people and their civilisation is fundamental to Chinese history.

The book is a result of more than thirty years occupation with the subject and summarises all the existing literature in various European and Asiatic languages.

The author, basing his arguments on a critical confrontation of the Chinese archaeological materials, inscriptions on bones and bronzes, results of Russian excavations in Central Asia and of Chinese sources, reconstructs the settlement of northern China in ancient times and shows what the Ti migrations meant for Chinese history. Up to 660 B.C. contact between the north-east and the south-west of China was much livelier, while after 660 B.C. the north-east became insignificant. The Chinese had to win their lost territories back from the Barbarians step by step, in a series of bitter colonial wars lasting three centuries.

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Czechoslovak Academy
of Sciences

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INTRODUCTION

The book which I am putting before the public today had its origins in a thesis I began working on in Prague when I was studying under Professor J. Bidlo, and continued under Professor B. Karlgren in Sweden from 1928 to 1930. Later I contacted Professor G. Haloun, at that time at Halle University, where he studied the geography of the ancient world and various barbarian tribes in northern China. I paid repeated visits to him in 1930, and at the end of that year I entered my study of the migration of the Ti as a doctorate thesis at the Charles University, Prague. It was agreed between us that Professor Haloun would publish his work on the migration of the Ch'üan Jung while I would publish mine on the migration of the Ti tribes and other northern barbarians. Professor Haloun never published this study, and when I saw him in Cambridge in 1946 he told me in conversation that the whole subject had ceased to interest him and that he would never publish even his material. He may have been influenced by the unfavourable reception given to his work; I very much regretted his decision, for in spite of its shortcomings his work presented a great deal of valuable material and failure to publish it meant a heavy loss for sinology. Although Professor B. Karlgren had a great deal of truth on his side when he criticized historical geography (Karlgren 1946 B, p. 199 ff., pp. 355—356, I cannot feel that he was right to condemn Haloun's work outright. There is certainly no sense in basing far-reaching conclusions on such late sources as Ti wang shih chi or San Huang pen chi, but we should not forget that many localities in China have been inhabited continuously since ancient times, and that certain names have thus been handed down there for thousands of years. There would certainly be no point in trying to decide the site of the capital of the little state of Li (1) in south-east Shan-hsi, which was destroyed by the Chou even before the final liquidation of the Shang dynasty: was it the old district of Li-ch'eng (2), which lay to the north-west of the district of the same name today, or was it Li station,

Li t'ing (3) to the south-west of the present Ch'ang-chih district (4)? We have no reason to doubt, however, that the little state lay somewhere in the foothills round the city of Lu-ch'eng (5), where tradition places it. For one thing it can be traced in place-names like Li-ch'eng, Li-t'ing, the river Li, Li shuei, rising 20 li to the south-west of Ch'ang-chih, and the Mountain of the Duke of Li, Li hou ling (6) which rises above Li-t'ing. The most important clue for the localisation of the state Li is, however, the account of the clash between the Duke of Li and the chief of the Lu tribe, which belonged to the Red Ti as we shall see later. It proves that the territory of the Duke of Li must have been in the close vicinity of the Lu tribe (7) or on their territory. Lu then appears as a district hsien already in the chapter on Geography in Han-shu (ed. Wang Hsien-ch'ien, ch. 28 A, p. 46 a). This is decidedly proof enough that we are right to localize the state Li in the neighbourhood of the present Lu-ch'eng.

I think there is a general conclusion to be drawn from this example: except for special cases we are not likely to succeed in exact localization of individual names, particularly when they were famous because they appeared in the old holy writings. On the other hand, I think we can probably determine the approximate localization in cases where several names are linked in a historical context. What we determine is of course their mutual relationship rather than their exact localization, but that is enough for the requirements of history. That is why I believe that Haloun's proposed localizations were of value, not for the exact determination of sites, but for the mutual relationship between different localities. On the other hand our rule has its negative aspect as well: we must reject those localizations which do not fit into the historical context, even although they may be accepted by tradition. One such localization, clearly unacceptable, will be discussed below when we come to T'ai-yüan (8), a place often referred to in sources of the Western Chou period.

I have made several attempts to rewrite this study, but other more urgent tasks always intervened; yet I felt that Haloun's work and my own ought not to lie unused, for it was clear that the constantly renewed controversy round the origin of the Chinese people and their culture and the part played by alien elements in their formation, would be on firmer ground if the considerable body of existing material on the barbarians of ancient China were critically examined and assessed.

Repeated study of the material convinced me, however,

that Haloun's original conception would have to be rejected; he believed the decisive impulse setting the barbarians to the north of China in motion was the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, the Tocharians, Yüeh-chih on the western Chinese frontier; they in turn set the Ch'üan Jung moving, and the latter then pressed in on the other tribes, especially the Ti. I was not entirely convinced by this theory when I was working with Professor Haloun years ago, but only now have I succeeded in working out what I believe to be a more acceptable hypothesis. I hope that I have been able to give a firmer foundation to Haloun's fundamental idea, and to place it in a broader historical context: the idea that certain events in the Far East, the migrations and invasions of barbarian tribes into northern China, were connected with similar processes in the western regions of Euro-Asia, the migrations of the Cimmerians and Scythians. I believe that what happened in northern China can be interpreted as the consequence of the gigantic historical process which shook the whole of the steppe zone of Euro-Asia in the first millennium B.C. and took the same form at both ends of this belt. The great majority of the tribes living in this steppe zone of Euro-Asia changed over to a new economic and social form, nomadism, based on the breeding of great herds of domesticated animals, especially horses. This new form of economy implied a new division of the steppe and semi-desert regions, and in the ensuing conflicts a new class of warrior-rulers arose, archers on horseback who were a threat to neighbouring regions. This process is one of the illustrations of the close links between the two ends of Euro-Asia — whatever happened at one end had repercussions at the other. I feel that this fact should be particularly stressed today, so that we do not lose sight of the fundamental unity of the historical process throughout the world. A brief summary of my thoughts on this subject appeared in an article (Průšek 1966) and in a review (Průšek 1967) published last year.

My thanks are due to two of my own students, Dr. T. Pokora and Dr. E. Bayerlová, who not only urged me to prepare my work for publication, but gave me active help with the manuscript. My special thanks are due to Dr. Felicitas Wünschová who with unlimited patience and care shaped my text from often illegible manuscripts and corrected numerous mistakes.

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