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**The Nature of Provincial Political
Authority in Late Ch'ing Times: Chang
Chih-tung in Canton, 1884-1889**

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The Nature of Provincial Political Authority in Late Ch'ing Times: Chang Chih-tung in Canton, 1884-1889

By DANIEL H. BAYS†

AFTER the Taiping Rebellion, Governors-General and Governors had access to resources and performed functions which were formerly outside their purview. These resources were mainly the new provincial armies which had defeated the Taipings, and the *likin* taxes which had been invented to sustain the armies. Leading provincial officials such as Li Hung-chang also found themselves initiating and implementing, on a local basis, 'self-strengthening' economic projects ranging from arsenals to mines. They tended to be stationed longer in the same posts, and to have a certain amount of say in the appointment of their subordinates.¹

This general state of affairs is understandably characterized as 'provincialism' or 'regionalism'. However, the implication has been that this situation somehow detracted from central government power and prerogatives for the remainder of the dynasty, thus contributing to its fall. Moreover, it is easy to equate this sort of administrative regionalism with the 'provincial nationalism', distinguished by gentry participation in national issues, which became an important political factor after 1900.² A continuity between the two phenomena is vaguely implied.

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The following are abbreviations for some of the most often cited sources:

NCH: *The North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette* (Shanghai, weekly edition of the *North China Daily News*).

PG: *Peking Gazette* (translations from the unofficial court organ appearing in *The North China Herald*).

Sun Yü-t'ang: Sun Yü-t'ang *et al.*, eds., *Chung-kuo Chin-tai Kung-yeh-shih Tzu-liao, ti-i-chi, 1840-1895 nien* [Materials on the History of Modern Industry in China, First Collection, 1840-95], 2 vols. (Peking, 1957).

Collected Works: Chang Chih-tung, *Chang Wen-hsiang-kung Ch'üan-chi* [Collected Works of Chang Chih-tung], 6 vols. (Taipei, 1963 reprint of 1928 Peking edition).

¹ See, for example, the long introduction by Franz Michael to Stanley Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army: a Study in Nineteenth-century Chinese Regionalism*, Seattle, 1964. Also Michael's earlier study, 'Military Organization and Power Structure of China During the Taiping Rebellion,' *Pacific Historical Review*, 18 (1949), 469-83.

² For some abstract thoughts here, see Joseph L. Levenson, 'The Province, the

Top provincial officials, through cronies running their own personal 'machines', presumably identified more and more with the areas in which they were stationed and put their personal, localized interests ahead of those of the dynasty, even if inadvertently.

I will try to show that this was not the case with Chang Chih-tung (1837-1909), at least not from 1884 to 1889, when he was Governor-General of Liang-Kwang (Kwangtung and Kwangsi). Chang was of course later Governor-General of Hupei and Hunan for most of the years from 1889 to 1907, where he was a much more important figure on the national scene than he was in the 1880s. But his position at this time, in a province far from the capital and traditionally hard to supervise, affords us a chance to assess the duties, concerns, and political relationships of a high provincial official of the times. After viewing his activities as a whole, I think it will be apparent that Chang functioned as a rather lonely 'centralizer' perched atop a resisting provincial inertia.

EARLY CAREER

Unlike men such as Li Hung-chang, who first rose to national prominence through military exploits against the Taipings, Chang Chih-tung (a native of Nan-p'i, Chihli) advanced in his bureaucratic career entirely through traditional civil offices, largely on the basis of his literary skills, until he was over forty years old.³ Something of a prodigy, Chang achieved *sheng-yüan* status in 1850, at the age of thirteen, and was placed first in the Chihli provincial examination in 1852. He finally passed the metropolitan examination in 1863. Due to the personal intervention of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi, who liked his paper and advanced his rank in the palace examination, Chang finished near the

Nation, and the World: The Problem of Chinese Identity', in Albert Feuerwerker *et al.* (eds.), *Approaches to Modern Chinese History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 268-88. Also Chang P'eng-yüan, 'The Constitutionalists', and John Fincher, 'Political Provincialism and the National Revolution', in Mary C. Wright (ed.), *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913*, New Haven, 1968, pp. 143-84 and 185-226, respectively.

³ For general accounts of his career, see Meribeth E. Cameron, 'The Public Career of Chang Chih-tung, 1837-1909', *Pacific Historical Review*, 7.3, (September 1938), 187-210; the same author's contribution to Arthur W. Hummel (ed.), *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Washington, D.C., 1943, pp. 27-32; Thomas W. Ayers, 'Chang Chih-tung and Chinese Educational Change' (Harvard doctoral dissertation, 1959); and Hu Chün, *Chang Wen-hsiang-kung (Chih-tung) Nien-p'u* [Chronological Biography of Chang Chih-tung], reprinted in Shen Yün-lung, ed., *Chin-tai Chung-kuo Shih-liao Ts'ung-k'an* [Collections of Materials on Modern Chinese History] (Taipei), vol. 47.

top of his *chin-shih* class, and was immediately made a first-class compiler in the Hanlin Academy.⁴

From 1867 to 1877, Chang served two tours of duty as provincial Director of Education (*hsüeh-cheng*), first in Hupei, then after three years of instructing undergraduates in the Hanlin Academy, in Szechwan. In 1877, Chang returned to duties at the Hanlin Academy, where he remained in various capacities until 1882. At the age of forty, he had already compiled a respectable record as a Confucian scholar, teacher and educational administrator, and though he was soon to become involved in national politics, his deep concern for China's educational system and its Confucian content would remain with him throughout his life.⁵

Chang first entered the national political scene in 1879. He and several other conservative and outspoken scholars collectively became known as the *ch'ing-liu* party.⁶ They now provided Tz'u-hsi with an adequate argumentative shield against the furore caused by the high-handed tactics employed by the Empress Dowager in installing the infant Kuang-hsü as emperor on the throne.⁷

As a result of this incident, Chang, one of the most articulate spokesmen of the group, rapidly rose in rank, gaining five new appointments in 1880 and two more in 1881.⁸ Others also received promotion, and the group as a whole became an important factor in court politics and policy-making until the Chinese defeat in the war against France in 1884-85.⁹ Chang's reputation had also been enhanced in 1880 during the Ili crisis, when he submitted an eloquent memorial advocating war with Russia and execution of the negotiator Ch'ung-hou.¹⁰ Thus it was probably no great surprise when he was appointed Governor of Shansi in early 1882.

Chang's tenure in Shansi lasted slightly over two years. During that time, he displayed many of the concerns, both local and national, which he would continue to show later at his more important post in Canton. Predictably, one of his first moves was to found an academy.¹¹ However,

⁴ Ayers, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-40.

⁵ This paragraph is based on Ayers, chapter 3. This aspect of Chang's career is the main focus of his analysis.

⁶ Hao Yen-p'ing, 'A Study of the Ch'ing-liu Tang: The "Disinterested" Scholar-Official Group (1875-1884)', *Papers on China*, 16 (1962), 40-65; also see Lloyd Eastman, 'Ch'ing-i and Chinese Policy Formation During the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 24.4 (August 1965), 595-612.

⁷ Ayers, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See the articles by Hao Yen-p'ing and Eastman.

¹⁰ Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Ili Crisis: A Study of Sino-Russian Diplomacy 1871-1881*, London, 1965, pp. 70-7.

¹¹ Ayers, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

this Confucian moral dedication carried over into his official duties as well. He tracked down corrupt local officials through audits of financial accounts from previous years, and pushed through a massive campaign against opium cultivation in the face of considerable local resistance.¹² Among his other projects was the improvement of administrative efficiency through such measures as consolidation of frontier posts and resurvey of landholding. He also tried to achieve financial reforms such as commutation of all taxes in kind, including items of tribute to Peking, into cash, and rejuvenation of the salt monopoly.¹³

Despite his distance from Peking, Chang maintained a rather belligerent interest in national issues, especially the growing tension with France over Vietnam. In late 1883 he sent the throne a long and detailed plan for war preparations.¹⁴ Yet Chang showed considerable flexibility and openness to new ideas while in Shansi. Finding in the Taiyuan archives some of Timothy Richard's suggestions to the former Governor, Tseng Kuo-ch'üan, Chang, according to Richard, attempted to hire him to implement some of his ideas.¹⁵ Just before his transfer in 1884, Chang tried to set up a provincial 'Bureau of Foreign Matters' (*yang-wu chü*), and issued a proclamation calling for talent to staff it, saying that 'in these troublous times strange and curious learning must be encouraged, for it is of urgent importance.'¹⁶

In April 1884, Chang was summoned to the capital, and on 22 May he was appointed acting Governor-General of Liang-Kwang.¹⁷ There were undoubtedly many reasons for this significant promotion. Not the least was his continuing good relationship with Tz'u-hsi at a time when she was dealing with potential court opponents. New appointments for Chang and others were announced on the same day that Prince Kung and his followers were purged from the Tsungli Yamen.¹⁸ Moreover, recently cut off from court politics, Chang had not made as many

¹² PG of 28 November 1883, in *NCH*, 30 January 1884, p. 123. Also *NCH*, 27 February 1884, pp. 226-7.

¹³ These particular items are included in a report by a correspondent of 27 November 1883 which appeared in *NCH*, 2 January 1884, p. 10.

¹⁴ This was one among three memorials submitted the same day, all urging the court to stand firm on Vietnam. *Collected Works*, 'Tsou-i' [Memorials], 7 : 9a-23b.

¹⁵ Timothy Richard, *Forty-five Years in China*, New York, 1916, pp. 172-3.

¹⁶ The entire proclamation translated in *NCH*, 22 August 1884, p. 216.

¹⁷ Hu Chün, p. 71, says Chang received the summons on 25 April (Kuang-hsü 10/4/1), while 22 April (Kuang-hsü 10/3/27) is given by Ch'ien Shih-fu, *Ch'ing-chi Chung-yao Chih-kuan Nien-piao* [Tables of Important Officials in Ch'ing Times], Peking, 1959, p. 200. His appointment was made permanent in August.

¹⁸ Lloyd E. Eastman, *Throne and Mandarins: China's Search for a Policy During the Sino-French Controversy 1880-1885*, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 103-4; also Ch'ien Shih-fu, p. 200, for other provincial appointments on this date.

enemies through rash impeachments as had some of his *ch'ing-liu* friends.¹⁹ Finally, there remained the fact that by all accounts Chang had done a creditable job as Governor of Shansi, and had shown considerable thought concerning the pressing problem of Vietnam, bordering both Kwangtung and Kwangsi, in his memorials on war preparations.²⁰ Chang went to Canton and took over the seal of office from his predecessor, Chang Shu-sheng, in early July, and according to a British correspondent made a very good impression upon arrival.²¹

DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

Before interpreting Chang's conduct during his five years in Canton, it is first necessary to describe it. The position of a Governor-General at this time was ambiguous and complicated. Traditional functions such as tax-collecting and pacification still had to be performed. Yet new demands on an official's time and energy were made by war, the operation of the treaty system, and any self-strengthening projects he sponsored.

I have divided Chang's activities in these years into categories of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional', meaning essentially pre- and post-Taiping. But this should not obscure the fact that his many duties and functions overlapped, and he was burdened with a vague but vast responsibility for everything which went on in his jurisdiction.

One broad characteristic of Chang's position is worth noting at the outset. He functioned more like a 'super-governor' of Kwangtung than a supervisor of both provinces under his nominal control. He dealt with the Governor of Kwangsi more or less on a basis of equality, probably due to the great distance between them. However, he was usually able to dominate Kwangtung affairs, and for two long periods of time got along with no Governor, without perceptibly hampering administration.²² This was partly due to his own forceful personality, but it is also indicative of a generally neglected institutional trend in the late Ch'ing period. Governors-General increasingly usurped the position of the Governors of the provinces in which they were stationed; these governorships would later be abolished briefly in 1898, and permanently in 1905.

¹⁹ Ayers, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3.

²⁰ See, for example, praise of Chang and his achievements in Shansi by the editors in *NCH*, 27 February 1884, p. 215, and 4 July 1884, p. 6, where Chang is referred to as the 'Reformer *par excellence* in the country'.

²¹ *NCH*, 25 July 1884, p. 95.

²² Ch'ien Shih-fu, pp. 199-205.

TRADITIONAL DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

Activities dealing with pacification, efficiency of administration, and finances were those for which the imperial bureaucracy had been designed. Although today they can be viewed as less important than non-traditional functions, at the time they were among Chang's major concerns. Moreover, he usually sent punctual, detailed reports on these matters to Peking.

In particular, keeping the peace in one's jurisdiction had always been a major responsibility of Chinese officials, and it remained so in Chang's day. Kwangtung, on the fringes of the empire, had always been a difficult province to keep pacified, and it was no different in the 1880s. During the Sino-French War, there were several uprisings of Hakkas and Triad secret society groups; some of these had just occurred when Chang arrived in 1884.²³ A potentially more serious source of disorder was the demobilization in 1885-86 of the irregular troops which had been recruited during the war. Chang, in cooperation with the military commanders, seems to have carried out this demobilization fairly well.²⁴

Widespread lawlessness, including banditry, piracy and violent clan feuds, characterized the immediate postwar period and constituted a perplexing problem for Chang. A British correspondent reported in early 1886 that 'Viceroy Chang is about at his wits' end in devising means wherewith to suppress these disorders.'²⁵ The situation called for stringent measures, and Chang utilized them. During 1886-87, he coordinated a massive campaign of the top provincial military-commanders, who went on 'inquisitorial tours' of the province, compelling the surrender of lawbreakers and weapons, and executing hundreds of 'criminals' on the spot.²⁶ This restored some stability to the interior of the province, but well-organized pirate bands, with hideouts in Hong Kong or Macao, continued to ravage the coastline.²⁷

²³ Note *NCH*, 12, 19, and 26 March 1884, pp. 292, 311 and 347, respectively. For an interesting analysis of pacification problems around Canton in earlier decades, see Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966. Problems remained in the 1890s. See Harold Z. Schiffrin on the situation in 1895 in *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, chapter 2 on the Canton uprising.

²⁴ *NCH*, 14 May 1886, p. 508. Also 9 December 1885, p. 655, and 18 June 1886, p. 647.

²⁵ *NCH*, 20 January 1886, p. 62.

²⁶ An early report by Chang and Governor Ni Wen-wei in *PG* of 28 March, in *NCH*, 25 June 1886, p. 668. Later, *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 13 : 30b-34b and 14 : 8b-14a; *PG* of 7 October in *NCH*, 27 October 1887, p. 456.

²⁷ See Chang's memorial of late 1889, just before he left, in *PG* of 20 November in *NCH*, 20 December 1889, p. 752. Also Schiffrin, chapter 2, for the 1890s.

Another major task of law enforcement which Chang encountered was a large uprising of Hakkas and Li aborigines on Hainan Island, which first broke out in 1886.²⁸ After a long and difficult campaign which took the lives of 362 officers and over 1,000 troops, the island was completely pacified by 1889. Chang himself took great interest in the campaign, sending some of his closest advisers to supervise operations, and even paid a personal visit to the island in 1888.²⁹

On the basis of his previous record, Chang had a reputation as a strict moralist and energetic administrative reformer when he arrived in Canton. His activities there only added to this reputation. Several months after taking office, Chang submitted a memorial requesting punishment of several officials for blatant peculation of funds. He clearly described the extent of corruption in the province and his determination to eradicate it. Chang said: 'It is impossible to describe in detail the numerous abuses that prevail amongst the whole official class, civil and military. . . . Bribery, corruption and favouritism have, moreover, become by long usage simple matters of course, and so rife that they defy denunciation, for such a course would necessitate the withdrawal of so large a number of officials that the process would be impracticable.'³⁰ A few months later, in castigating another official, Chang again expressed his vexation that the funds which he had worked hard to accumulate were so often embezzled by grasping bureaucrats.³¹

Local gentry were, of course, often involved in the corruption of officialdom or engaged in their own illegal enterprises, and Chang did not hesitate to attack head-on these activities. In a memorial of 1887, he noted that the illegal behaviour of bad gentry was often overlooked in the past, and while he 'has always treated deserving members of the gentry with studied courtesy', he 'has never hesitated to expose those of their number who have domineered over the people'.³² One of the most important areas where Chang clashed with gentry privileges was the assessment of land taxes on reclaimed tidelands and river banks. Taxes on these rich lands, almost all landlord-owned, had long been evaded, and when Chang set up a special office to survey them, he began a running battle with powerful gentry interests that continued through his entire tour of office. Some defiant clans resisted until the end, and when they threatened to take vengeance on other provincial

²⁸ The first report appears in *NCH*, 24 February 1886, p. 200.

²⁹ See Chang's final report on the Hainan situation in *PG* of 10 December 1889, in *NCH*, 10 January 1890, p. 40. Also the *Shen Pao*, in *NCH*, 3 February 1888, p. 136.

³⁰ *PG* of 5 May, in *NCH*, 12 June 1885, p. 675.

³¹ *PG* of 16 July, in *NCH*, 19 September 1885, p. 343.

³² *PG* of 2 July, in *NCH*, 15 July 1887, p. 72.

officials after Chang's transfer to Wuchang was announced in 1889, Chang, enraged, requested that they be forever struck off the civil service rolls.³³ Despite Chang's continuing vigilance and denunciations, and the fact that his requested punishments were usually granted by the throne, the net results of his one-man crusade are dubious.³⁴ Only a few years after his departure from Canton, the extent of corruption under his successor may have wiped out any progress Chang in fact made.³⁵

Concerning provincial financial affairs, Chang was at first forced to make the best of a very bad situation. The debts contracted by the province during the Sino-French War were large, estimated by one observer at more than thirteen million taels (about nineteen million dollars).³⁶ To repay these debts, Chang's only recourse was to get as much tax remission as possible from Peking, squeeze local commercial taxes and *likin* for all they were worth, extract forced loans from gentry and merchants, and cut the salaries of provincial officials, including those of his own staff.³⁷ However, this crisis had passed by 1887, when all the extra war taxes had been rescinded. Chang in that year began to take measures to foster the long-range economic growth of the province by requesting the reduction of duties and export restrictions on iron ore, so as to provide incentives for mining.³⁸

One of the devices which Chang undoubtedly used to help tide the province over its financial embarrassment of 1885-86 was the lifting of the prohibition against gambling and government licensing of the *wei-hsing* lotteries, long a favourite pastime of all Cantonese.³⁹ This

³³ This all began in 1886; see *NCH*, 3 November 1886, p. 476. Chang's report on the general results of this reform is in *PG* of 16 November in *NCH*, 6 December 1889, p. 692, and his blast at the gentry in *PG* of 19 December in *NCH*, 17 January 1890, pp. 64-5.

³⁴ The number of incidents of this sort defy citation. The *Collected Works* and *NCH* record them every few months from 1885 through 1889.

³⁵ Schiffrin, pp. 59-60, describes the exceedingly corrupt practices which flourished under Li Han-chang in the early 1890s.

³⁶ This estimate from *NCH*, 27 August 1886, p. 222. Also see *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 17 : 1a-11a, for a description by Chang himself of the financial bind he was in in mid-1886.

³⁷ The British were quick to note (and disapprove of) the heavy taxation of commerce, of course; *NCH*, 1 April 1885, p. 378, and 10 February 1886, p. 149. Also *NCH*, 2 July 1886, p. 3, 7-8, and 4 September 1886, p. 254.

³⁸ *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 19 : 11b-12b.

³⁹ See *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 11 : 1a-8a, for the joint memorial by Chang and P'eng Yü-lin to legalize the lotteries. This form of gambling was based on the surnames of provincial and metropolitan examination candidates. For a very interesting description of its operation, and the huge profits accruing to its proprietors, see a long two-part article in *NCH*, 11 January 1888, pp. 33-4, and 20 January, pp. 57-9.

lucrative enterprise remained in operation long after it had outlived its original purpose, and its profits became one of the important sources which Chang was able to tap in order to finance his self-strengthening projects.

NON-TRADITIONAL DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

Among Chang's non-traditional activities were national defence, foreign relations, and 'self-strengthening'. These were all interrelated, of course, since self-strengthening projects were usually seen as contributing directly to national defence. For top provincial officials to have functions in foreign relations was not a novelty, and some might want to call it a 'traditional' activity. Yet in the context of the treaty system, foreign relations as viewed by provincial officials was something very untraditional.

Upon taking up his new post in the middle of the Sino-French War, Chang was confronted with urgent logistical duties of supplying the Chinese troops in Tongking with munitions and provisions. He seems to have thrown himself into this task with great energy. In an edict of early 1885, Chang was commended for 'acquitting himself with great credit . . . both in the mobilization of troops and in the raising of military supplies'.⁴⁰

Chang was also responsible for coastal defence along the strategically important Kwangtung shoreline, the need for which was made starkly clear by the débâcle at Foochow harbour in August 1884. During the French war he shared this responsibility with the ageing warrior P'eng Yü-lin, Imperial Commissioner (*ch'in-ch'ai ta-ch'en*) for Coastal Defence, and together they took measures to strengthen the system of forts and defence works along the vital approaches to Canton.⁴¹ Apprehension about foreign intentions in the South and incidents along the Chinese-Vietnamese border kept tension high well after the war ended, and Chang continued to press for an improved Chinese defence capability for the remainder of his time at Canton.⁴²

In the summer of 1885, he sent to the throne a broad plan for sea defence, training students in Western military methods, and construction of weapons and warships.⁴³ That same year he reported the hiring of

⁴⁰ Translated in *NCH*, 18 February 1885, p. 189.

⁴¹ See, for example, reports by British observers in *NCH*, 15 August 1884, p. 185, and 29 August 1884, pp. 234, 243.

⁴² For such incidents, see *NCH*, 24 September 1886, p. 335; 3 November 1886, pp. 476-7; 1 December 1886, p. 585.

⁴³ *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', II 16a-24b.

German instructors to drill provincial troops, and submitted plans for the organization of a modern navy.⁴⁴ In 1886–87 he established three modern military schools, all modelled on German organization and employing foreign instructors.⁴⁵ He also expanded and modernized the already-existing Canton Arsenal, which was shown to be loosely organized, poorly run and completely inadequate during the Sino-French War.⁴⁶ Between 1886 and 1888, it was infused with several hundred thousand taels which Chang solicited from local civil and military officials, gentry and salt merchants, improving considerably its capacity for bullet output and enabling the construction of several small gunboats suitable for river patrol.⁴⁷

Chang also bore chief responsibility for the local conduct of foreign relations under the treaty system. His attitude towards the Western consuls and the foreign business interests which they represented were for the most part distant, arrogant and stubborn. He generally kept the consuls waiting for hours on the rare occasions when he granted them interviews; he was often peremptory and rude, and he did not hesitate to engage in polemics with them if he thought he could score telling points.⁴⁸ However, there is no evidence that he violated the letter of the treaties, and on one of the most explosive issues of the time, 'missionary incidents', Chang fulfilled his responsibilities to provide protection for foreign lives and property. Despite the xenophobia which flourished among the volatile Cantonese, there were no anti-foreign outbreaks during his five years there which remotely compared with the riot which took place in 1883, only a few months before his arrival.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 11 : 24b–27b, 13 : 1a–12a.

⁴⁵ Ayers, *op. cit.*, pp. 144–6. There were a Torpedo School, a School of Telegraphy, and a Naval and Military Officers' School. Plans for the officers' school were made as early as 1885, but it was not completely operative until 1889.

⁴⁶ For the history of the Canton Arsenal, see Sun Yü-t'ang, I, pp. 455–65. It had first been set up in 1874; Whampoa shipbuilding facilities purchased from the British had been added in 1876. The arsenal apparently consisted of separate plants for manufacture of ammunition, other military supplies, and the boatworks, but it did not have facilities for weapons manufacture. See P'eng Yü-lin's performance report of 1884 in Sun Yü-t'ang, I, p. 465.

⁴⁷ Wang Erh-min, *Ch'ing-chi Ping-kung-yeh ti Hsing-ch'i* [The Rise of Military Industries in the Ch'ing Period], Taipei, 1963, p. 94, and Sun Yü-t'ang, I, p. 562, table 9. According to Sun, a total of 800,000 taels was subscribed, but some of this was paid to the Foochow Shipyard for gunboats ordered and constructed there.

⁴⁸ *NCH*, 22 May 1885, p. 588; 7 October 1885, p. 397; and 16 July 1886, pp. 62–3, where the British applaud his effective rebuttal of the French consul over a matter of property damage claims. He did, however, satisfactorily entertain US Minister Denby when he visited Canton in 1886; *NCH*, 7 May 1886, pp. 476–7.

⁴⁹ For that incident, see Lloyd Eastman, 'The Kwangtung Anti-Foreign Disturbances during the Sino-French War', *Papers on China*, 13 (1959), 1–31. For typical

As was the case with many other nineteenth-century Chinese leaders, the humiliation of military defeat and the apparition of China's weakness led Chang to advocate 'self-strengthening' (*tzu-ch'iang*) measures.⁵⁰ Hence his activities after the French war in improving Kwangtung's coastal defences, introducing Western-style military training, and modernization of the Canton Arsenal. Chang soon wanted to go even further and construct an entirely new arsenal at a different location, one capable of producing modern rifles and cannon. From 1888 to the summer of 1889, he corresponded frequently with the Chinese minister in Berlin, Hung Chün, concerning what equipment to purchase.⁵¹ On 3 August 1889, only five days before his transfer to Wuchang, he submitted a long memorial outlining his plans. He had received three-year pledges to cover the costs of 380,000 taels from the same officials, gentry and merchants who had subscribed to the previous project at the Canton Arsenal from 1886 to 1888, and half of this sum had already been forwarded as advance payment.⁵² This proposed arsenal was later finally built in Hanyang.

Chang's advocacy of modernization was not limited to military matters, however; he embraced both parts of the self-strengthening slogan, 'rich country, strong army' (*fu-kuo ch'iang-ping*). He was especially anxious for China to develop its own capacity to produce items of manufacture for which the country was becoming increasingly dependent upon foreigners, and thus to halt the erosion of its wealth. The beginning of self-strengthening industries in Kwangtung was due entirely to the initiative of Chang, and since regular official revenue sources were already overburdened with demands, it was also up to him to devise whatever means of financing came to hand.

Men trained in 'Western learning' were also a necessity for the construction and operation of China's own modern enterprises, and Chang increasingly sought out men with such talents for his staff.⁵³ He also planned a 'School of Western Arts' at Canton, although it was not set up until 1893 at Wuchang.⁵⁴

Chang's first major effort at non-military self-strengthening was the comments on the fragility of Westerners' security in Canton, see *NCH*, 25 July 1884, p. 95, and 3 December 1884, pp. 630-1.

⁵⁰ Wang Erh-min, p. 93, and Ayers, p. 135, describe the effect of the war on Chang.

⁵¹ Sun Yü-t'ang, I, pp. 518-20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 520-3.

⁵³ See *NCH*, 17 March 1886, p. 287, for the observation that Chang was already at this time employing younger officials who had a smattering of foreign knowledge over better Chinese scholars who had no such skills. Also note the more detailed treatment of this question below.

⁵⁴ The planned curriculum included mining, electricity, chemistry, botany, and international law. Ayers, pp. 167-9.

establishment of a modern mint. By the summer of 1887 he had already ordered, this time through the Chinese minister in England, complete sets of equipment for the coining of both copper cash and silver dollars.⁵⁵ In his report at this time, he made it clear that his ultimate aim was to make China self-sufficient in currency, including the mining of copper and silver ore for the mint.⁵⁶ The mint, with a production capacity of two million copper cash per day, was built and fully operative by the time Chang left Canton, although its performance fell short of his hopes.⁵⁷

Chang indicated his intention to build a cotton mill in communications with Li Hung-chang in late 1888.⁵⁸ In the spring of 1889 he corresponded intensively with Liu Jui-fen, the Ambassador to the United Kingdom, on the types of machinery to be purchased and the foreign experts that he wanted to hire.⁵⁹ However, his memorial reporting his actions and requesting imperial approval came only in September 1889.⁶⁰ Again, he left no doubt that his purpose was to keep the textile market from being completely captured by foreign producers and to preserve as much of China's wealth as possible within its borders. In planning for capital equipment and early operating expenses, Chang seems to have initially tapped only one major source of funds for this project. This was the *wei-hsing* lottery merchants, who subscribed 400,000 taels for 1889 and had promised another 560,000 for 1890.⁶¹

During the spring of 1889, at the same time that he was planning the cotton mill, Chang committed himself to a far more ambitious project, the construction of an ironworks. After consulting both Liu Jui-fen in London and Hung Chün in Berlin, Chang placed an initial order for equipment and foreign engineers from London in June.⁶² This order was worth about 400,000 taels (£83,500), not including shipping charges,

⁵⁵ *NCH*, 5 August 1887, pp. 160-1.

⁵⁶ Reprinted from *The Chinese Times* (Tientsin), in *NCH*, 12 August 1887, pp. 181-2.

⁵⁷ It was a large and impressive establishment, covering fifteen acres of ground and housed in sturdy buildings. *NCH*, 12 April 1889, pp. 434-5. Also *NCH*, 28 September 1889, p. 380.

⁵⁸ Chang technically had to obtain Li's permission, for Li had received official monopoly rights for ten years for his Shanghai Cotton Cloth Mill. James Morrell, 'Two Early Chinese Cotton Mills', *Papers on China*, 21 (1968), 66.

⁵⁹ Morrell, *op. cit.*, 67. Chang had obviously by now made a regular practice of working through the Chinese ambassadors in London and Berlin. As Morrell notes, this probably assured him good quality equipment at a reasonable price. There is evidence, in fact, that he may have been taken in in some of his early purchases from foreign firms, giving him reason to be circumspect in his orders. A British correspondent reported that some German gunboats which the Kwangtung government had bought during the Sino-French War were nothing but 'crotchetty and patched-up tubs', *NCH*, 20 January 1886, p. 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶² Sun Yü-t'ang, II, p. 744.

of which 130,000 had to be advanced as a down payment.⁶³ However, Chang had turned again to the *wei-hsing* lottery merchants and had obtained a pledged subscription of 1,400,000 taels for the projected iron-works, so he could plan on funds not only to pay for the equipment, but to provide buildings and hire a work force before it arrived.⁶⁴ Like his other enterprises, he waited until it was practically too late to back out before officially informing the throne of its existence, but in his long memorial of late September, 1889, he was at his most eloquent in justifying it.⁶⁵ He noted that iron and steel were vitally important for all of the other self-strengthening industries, and that the nation was wasting much wealth by not learning to make its own. Moreover, an iron industry could make many products for general daily use, and would also stimulate the iron mining industry by its demand for ore.

It is likely that Chang actually envisioned a huge and many-dimensional industrial and commercial entrepôt coming into existence around Canton under his supervision. Though such grandiose plans do not seem to appear in his official papers, neither did the others I have described until they were well advanced; the throne was not informed until they were irrevocably under way. There is evidence that Chang was in fact in the preliminary stages of planning such projects as the construction of a broad, electrified bund along the entire river bank in Canton, and building a railroad between Canton and Kowloon, when he was transferred.⁶⁶

By 8 August 1889, when he received notification of his transfer to the Governor-Generalship of Hu-Kwang (Hupei and Hunan), Chang was working practically full time on his self-strengthening enterprises. After much hard work spent in recruiting a capable staff and in scraping together the financial backing for these projects, and with contracts signed for large amounts of equipment and several European advisers, some soon to arrive, the news of his transfer must have been a shock.

In the spring of 1889 Chang had submitted a memorial offering the alternative of a Peking-Hankow railway to the controversial Tientsin-Tungchow railway sponsored by Li Hung-chang. This scheme may have been accepted by the throne simply because it was the only real compromise proposal to emerge from a canvass of the top provincial officials.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 747.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 838.

⁶⁵ This memorial is in Sun Yü-t'ang, II, pp. 746-8.

⁶⁶ *NCH*, 11 January 1889, p. 28, and 22 March 1889, p. 356. Also 'Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance,' Annual series no. 574, Canton, 1888, in *British Sessional Papers, House of Commons*, 1889, vol. 100, p. 517.

⁶⁷ Wu To, 'Chin-T'ung T'ieh-lu te Cheng-i' [The Dispute over the Tientsin-Tungchow Railway], *Chung-kuo Chin-tai Ching-chi-shih Yen-chiu Chi-k'an* [Researches

Later, after the Manchu Governor-General of Hu-Kwang, Yü-lu, declined to take responsibility for the construction of the railroad, it was only logical that the court should turn to the man who proposed it, and Chang, according to standard accounts, was thus transferred.⁶⁸

He was undoubtedly caught by surprise. His August orders to move were urgent (he was not even to make the customary stop at the capital, but to proceed directly to his new post). Yet he filled the courier bags and telegraph wires with memorials and memos on various items of unfinished business for over three months after he received them, and he was not able to leave the province until late November.⁶⁹ There were rumours at the time of Chang's great reluctance to leave, even of his attempts to have the appointment rescinded.⁷⁰ While this is possible, such speculation probably derived from Chang's lingering at Canton tying up loose ends rather than from any real attempt to thwart the imperial orders.

PERSONAL, PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL POWER

From what sources did Chang derive the effective power he was able to wield as Governor-General of Liang-Kwang? Was he an agent of the throne and the central government, or a spokesman for provincial interests? Did he operate independently enough to construct his own private systems of authority and control? The above description of his activities would seem to place Chang on the side of central and national, not local and private, power. Consideration of the composition of Chang's 'personal power base', if that is the proper term for it, and of his relationship with other elements in the political structure, sheds further light on these questions.

on the Modern Economic History of China], 4.1 (May 1936), 75, argues for this interpretation. Forces allied with and arrayed against Li's plan were at a standoff, and some sort of compromise solution was a necessity.

For a more recent treatment of this railroad controversy, see Li Kuo-chi, *Chung-kuo Tsao-ch'i te T'ieh-lu Ching-ying* [Early Chinese Railroad Enterprise], Nankang, Taiwan, 1961, pp. 74-85. Both Wu and Li note that a major factor in the opposition to the proposal of Li, which was also backed by Prince Ch'un (I-huan), was the power of the grain tribute lobby, which feared loss of its perquisites on the Tientsin-Peking route. But there was also considerable criticism of Li for purely political reasons, according to Li, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁸ Wu To, *op. cit.*, 125, and Li Kuo-chi, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶⁹ The rate of entries in the *Collected Works* rises sharply after notice of his transfer and reaches fever pitch in the last few days before his departure. Chang's timetable from Canton through Hong Kong and Shanghai to Wuchang, where he arrived in late December, is in Hu Chün, pp. 105-6.

⁷⁰ *NCH*, 18 October 1889, p. 470.

A personal staff of specialists and advisers (*mu-fu* or *mu-yu*) had long been a necessity for provincial officials from Governors down to district magistrates.⁷¹ This was even more the case for those officials who became involved with projects demanding communications in Western languages and knowledge of modern technology in late Ch'ing times.⁷² Chang was no exception here, and he began the task of developing and maintaining such a staff soon after his arrival in Canton. His men were a diverse lot. Some of them were officials or expectant officials from other parts of the country whom he knew and whom he had requested to be transferred to Canton and put at his personal disposal.⁷³ Others may have been carryovers from the staff of his predecessor or other local officials.⁷⁴ Still others were recruited independently or through men already in his service.⁷⁵ They remained with him for varying lengths of time, some for twenty years or more; a few later made their own careers, at least one rising to very high office.⁷⁶ The great value which Chang placed upon the services of some of these men is shown by his efforts to retain them when they might have been taken from him; he specifically requested that at least five of them be allowed to accompany him to Wuchang in 1889.⁷⁷

The duties of Chang's *mu-fu*, like their backgrounds, were varied. Some were traditional style secretaries, and others were utilized by Chang as his agents in the administrative and financial reforms which he attempted to carry out. There is evidence that he used them as *agents provocateurs* to test the honesty of other officials, and that he

⁷¹ Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ch'ing Period*, Berkeley, 1968, chapter 2, traces the development of the *mu-fu* system, especially in Ming and Ch'ing times.

⁷² Folsom studies this general problem through the example of Li Hung-chang.

⁷³ In late 1884, two military officers, both from Shansi, and an expectant prefect were sent to him; *PG* of 24 August in *NCH*, 22 October 1884, p. 451. In 1885, he requested that the Shansi circuit intendant Huang Chao-lin be sent to him; *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 10 : 13b-14b.

⁷⁴ In early 1885, he requested the retention of the expectant prefect Ts'ai Hsi-yung, a foreign affairs expert who seems to have been in Canton for some time before. *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 10 : 8b-9b. Ts'ai became one of Chang's most valued assistants in both Canton and Wuchang.

⁷⁵ Ku Hung-ming, for example, was recruited in Hong Kong by one Yang Yü-shu, a subordinate of Chang. Howard L. Boorman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, 4 vols. projected, New York, 1967-, II, p. 250.

⁷⁶ Ku Hung-ming was with Chang until 1905; Boorman, II, p. 251. Liang Tun-yen, a former student in Jung Hung's China Educational Mission to the US, later became Minister of Foreign Affairs; Hummel, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

⁷⁷ In late 1888, he had requested that Lu Wei-ch'i and Ts'ai Kuo-chen be kept in his service at Canton; *PG* of 15 December 1888 in *NCH*, 11 January 1889, p. 36. Also *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 28 : 32b-34a.

placed his own staff members in command of some military units whose loyalty may have been suspect.⁷⁸

One of the most important duties of Chang's advisers came to be the management and supervision of his self-strengthening projects. The command of fairly technical terms displayed in his communications with the Chinese envoys in London and Berlin must have partly derived from these men, and one of the five whom he wanted to accompany him to Wuchang he designated as general supervisor of the cotton mill.⁷⁹ As his interest in mining intensified in connexion with the projected ironworks, he sent a deputy to Chihli to inspect Li Hung-chang's K'ai-p'ing mines, and after his transfer to Hupei he sent men to various places in Hunan and Hupei, even as far away as Szechwan and Kweichow, in search of potential sites for iron mines.⁸⁰ He turned to foreign engineers and technicians as the complexity of his projects increased. Some of these, contracted for through the envoys in Europe and originally intended for employment in Canton, were already at work in the Hupei-Hunan area early in 1890, testing for iron and coal deposits and making preparations for the physical plant of the enterprises.⁸¹

Thus Chang certainly did depend for a good part of his official effectiveness upon a group of men who were outside the control of either the central government or other provincial officials, and responsible only to himself. But such a staff was a necessity for adequate performance of one's duties, and its utilization alone is not conclusive proof of scheming to build a private empire on the part of any official. Moreover, the central government always had a fairly good idea of who these men were, for many of them remained on civil service rolls in some capacity even while on leave of absence in Chang's service, and Chang was not always necessarily able to secure their transfers when he wished.⁸²

The self-strengthening enterprises themselves were almost completely dependent on Chang's energy and imagination for their development. He planned them and made personal arrangements for their financing without notifying Peking until months later, and there was no one in the Canton area with the power of supervision over them as long as Chang

⁷⁸ *NCH*, 23 July 1886, p. 87, and 12 January 1887, p. 33.

⁷⁹ This was Hsüeh P'ei-jung. Morrell, *op. cit.*, 70.

⁸⁰ *NCH*, 15 March 1889, p. 324, and Sun Yü-t'ang, II, 768.

⁸¹ *NCH*, 31 January 1890, p. 116.

⁸² He had to make at least two requests for the transfer of the Shansi circuit intendant Huang Chao-lin, and even then there appears no firm evidence that he ever obtained his services. *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 10 : 13b-14b and 12 : 22a-23a.

did not use regular revenue funds. However, the capital which he raised was by no means 'his own'. Rather it was made available to him because of the power which his office gave him. Chang and P'eng Yü-lin had originally been responsible for the licensing of the *wei-hsing* lotteries, for example, and the threat of withdrawal of the licences must have been potent enough to shake these funds loose. This situation was made clear when Chang found that he could not lay his hands on pledged Cantonese subscriptions after his transfer to Wuchang. The sum of 400,000 taels which had been subscribed for the cotton mill in 1889 was probably forwarded to London as a down payment on the ordered equipment, but the subscribers were able to default on most of the 560,000 taels promised for 1890.⁸³ Apart from the 130,000 taels advanced to London in 1889 as partial payment for ironworks equipment, the *wei-hsing* lottery merchants, after Chang's departure from Canton, reneged entirely on the remainder of their pledge of 1,400,000 taels.⁸⁴

This latter turn of events put the financing of the ironworks and its related mining projects almost entirely at the mercy of the central government, since Chang had as yet few private sources to tap in Hupei. The court did in fact provide a grant of two million taels through the Board of Revenue in connexion with the planned Peking-Hankow Railway.⁸⁵ However, rising tension with Russia and Japan in the north-east led the government to divert funds there for Li Hung-chang's Kwantung Railroad beginning in 1890.⁸⁶ This led to a great slowdown in the ironworks project, until Chang could mobilize more local capital for it. But it does seem significant that the central government stepped into the breach with the initial grant in 1889, even if it could not follow this up.

Chang did not take the initiative to have the arsenal, cotton mill and ironworks moved to Hu-Kwang. He first assumed that his replacement, Li Han-chang, elder brother of Li Hung-chang, the nation's foremost

⁸³ Morrell, *op. cit.*, 76-8. At this point, the desperate Chang transferred to Hupei a sum of 200,000 taels which actually belonged to the Shansi Reconstruction Bureau, and which he had borrowed in 1884 to meet maritime defence expenses. The money had been invested in Canton or Hong Kong instead of returned, but Shansi had regularly been receiving the interest payments.

⁸⁴ Sun Yü-t'ang, II, p. 838.

⁸⁵ Sun Yü-t'ang, II, p. 750, Wu To, *op. cit.*, 126, and Li Kuo-chi, *op. cit.*, p. 85. This initial grant was a victory of sorts for Chang's argument that railroad building should be viewed in the context of national economic development; first build an ironworks, then use the steel rails it produces to build the railroad. Li Kuo-chi, pp. 83-5, describes the jockeying between Li Hung-chang and Chang which went on in the autumn of 1889 because of policy differences on railroad construction.

⁸⁶ Li Kuo-chi, p. 85. This was vindication for Li's position that railroads should be tied directly to national defence and built rapidly with rails bought abroad.

self-strengthening reformer, would be willing to carry these projects through to completion.⁸⁷ In his September memorials to the throne on the cotton mill and the ironworks, he did not mention transferring either of them away from Canton. In an October exchange of telegrams with Liu Jui-fen in London, he assured Liu that financing for both projects remained secure, telling him to continue to forward all bills to the Governor-General's office in Canton.⁸⁸ In the case of all three enterprises, it was only after Li Han-chang showed extreme reluctance to carry them forward, that in late 1889 and early 1890 their transfer was decided upon between the Admiralty, Li Hung-chang, and Chang himself.⁸⁹ Thus it would appear that Chang's acceptance of continuing responsibility for the three enterprises stemmed more from fear of their neglect than from a desire to keep them under his personal control.

RELATIONS WITH THE PROVINCE AND THE THRONE

Chang dealt constantly with both the Peking bureaucracy, of which he was an extension, and the local bureaucracy, which he himself headed. His career in Canton indicates that he identified with the former rather than the latter.

Chang probably viewed himself as being quite close to the throne, and in particular to the Empress Dowager. The early favour shown by her raising his palace examination rank, his role in supporting her in 1879 at a time when she needed help, and her subsequent bestowal of rapid promotions on him in the early 1880s were the kind of ties which were important in traditional Chinese politics, to say nothing of more modern times. Moreover, despite the new practical powers which accrued to provincial officials like Chang in the latter part of the nineteenth century, they still operated within the same basic institutional structure which had served to implement the unquestionably dominant central power of the great early Ch'ing emperors. Even if requested *post facto* and *pro forma*, the imperial sanction had to be obtained on all matters of importance.

⁸⁷ See Chang's telegram to Li of 23 August 1889, fifteen days after the new appointments were announced, in which he expressed hope that he could entrust his fledgling enterprises to Li Han-chang. Sun Yü-t'ang, II, p. 745.

⁸⁸ For the two memorials, Morrell, *op. cit.*, 69, and Sun Yü-t'ang, II, pp. 746-8; for Chang's telegram to Liu, Sun Yü-t'ang, II, p. 748.

⁸⁹ For the cotton mill, Morrell, *op. cit.*, 70; for the arsenal, Sun Yü-t'ang, I, pp. 523-7; for the ironworks, Sun Yü-t'ang, II, pp. 749-50.

There is considerable evidence that Chang depended greatly upon both his institutional and personal ties to the throne while in Canton, and that these relationships constituted perhaps his most important ultimate guarantee of security and effectiveness at his post. Unlike Li Hung-chang in the North, Chang did not build up around him in the provincial bureaucratic machinery of Kwangtung a network of officials with whom he was intimately acquainted and able to cooperate.⁹⁰ Relatively few of his *mu-fu* seem to have had important official positions, and although there did appear on the scene from time to time men with whom Chang had a previous relationship, or with whom he developed an ability to work closely, they were not numerous. Kao Ch'ung-chi, who had been judge (*an-ch'a-shih*) of Shansi when Chang was Governor there, became financial commissioner (*pu-cheng-shih*) of Kwangtung in 1886 and Governor of Kwangsi in 1888; Wu Ta-ch'eng, an old *ch'ing-liu* associate of Chang in the early 1880s, was Governor of Kwangtung from late 1886 to 1888, and later of Hunan from 1892 to 1895; Cheng Shao-chung, commander-in-chief (*t'i-tu*) of Kwangtung from 1885 on, whose retention in that position was specially requested by Chang in 1887, was given the same post in Hunan in 1890.⁹¹ Chang was able to work constructively with these men, among others, and though his influence may not have been decisive in their posting to his jurisdiction, their presence must have enhanced his effectiveness.

On the whole, however, Chang seems to have had distinctly poor relations with his fellow provincial officials in Canton. This was partly due to his energetic and wilful personality, as well as to his moralistic campaigns against the irregular practices that had long since become habitual behaviour for many officials. The friction which ensued produced, within a year of his arrival, the circulation of rumours by the gentry and officials of Canton to the effect that Chang was incompetent, totally unfit for his position, and better suited for duties at the imperial library in Peking.⁹² The tension between Chang and the provincial officials, led by the Governor, Ni Wen-wei, increased in 1886. There were reports of a complete rupture between Chang and Ni over Chang's meddling in affairs outside his jurisdiction, and even of Ni and P'eng Yü-lin having requested Chang's removal on grounds that he was ruining the province under the guise of reforming abuses.⁹³ During

⁹⁰ See Spector, *op. cit.*, chapter 10.

⁹¹ *NCH*, 18 June 1886, p. 647; Hao Yen-p'ing, p. 91; *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 24 : 1b-3a; and the relevant pages in Ch'ien Shih-fu, the most important source for this sort of information.

⁹² *NCH*, 4 March 1885, p. 250, and 18 April 1885, p. 438.

⁹³ *NCH*, 17 February 1886, p. 172; also 24 February 1886, p. 200, and 3 March

1886 and early 1887, speculation was rife in Canton over Chang's impending demotion or transfer.⁹⁴

The specific issues in question here are not clear, but their general nature is. I believe they must have stemmed directly from Chang's efforts to reform the practices of officialdom and extract more resources from the local gentry. The heavy postwar taxes which Chang imposed, his insistence on bringing reclaimed lands under taxation, his frequent requests for funds for his enterprises, and his constant complaints about the behaviour of provincial bureaucrats would all naturally mobilize these elements against him. Indeed, the difficulties which Chang encountered in his various endeavours points to an informal alliance between provincial officials at nearly all levels and the Cantonese gentry.

This could fairly be called a 'provincialism' of sorts, but one which Chang was fighting, not cultivating. Moreover, I believe this local resistance was not so much a result of post-Taiping changes as it was a form of the traditional cooperation between local officialdom and society.⁹⁵ The alliance had become formidable, however, if, as it seems, it was headed by Governor Ni himself.

At any rate, Chang stood firm. In a later memorial, he informed the throne: 'I am well aware that my action has given rise to much ill feeling against me, and has caused unfounded reports to be industriously circulated by people who are waiting for an opportunity to trip me up, but I will gladly face the storm of obloquy for the sake of the public interests involved'.⁹⁶ The power of the throne came down hard on the side of Chang. On 2 June 1886, Ni Wen-wei was removed and ordered to Peking, Chang being designated acting Governor.⁹⁷ From now until his departure in late 1889, Chang held this concurrent position for nearly half the time. Of three persons appointed as Governor during this time, only one actually took up the post. This was Wu Ta-ch'eng, a 1886, p. 231. It is unlikely that P'eng was involved here. Old and ailing, he was about to leave for the Yangtze. There are no traces of complaints against Chang in his memorials preserved from the mid-1880s. See *P'eng Kang-chih-kung Tsou-kao* [Memorials of P'eng Yü-lin] (1891, no place of publication given).

⁹⁴ *NCH*, 3 March 1886, p. 231, 20 October 1886, p. 422, and 12 January 1887, p. 33.

⁹⁵ For only one of several good sources on this traditional interaction between local officials and gentry see the concluding chapter of Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Local Government in China Under the Ch'ing*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962.

⁹⁶ *PG* of 2 July translated in *NCH*, 15 July 1887, p. 72.

⁹⁷ *NCH*, 11 June 1886, p. 618. It was rumoured that Ni met with his replacement, T'an Chün-p'ei, on the latter's way to Canton later in the year, and so terrified him by his account of Chang's habits that T'an managed to have his appointment rescinded. *NCH*, 22 December 1886, p. 671.

former associate of Chang.⁹⁸ There is no evidence of any friction between Chang and Wu. These developments must have considerably strengthened Chang's hand in Canton.

Provincial bureaucrats were not the only ones who were capable of obstructing a vigorous self-strengthening official, of course. Li Hung-chang had long been harassed by carping critics in and around the court and the organs of the central government in Peking. In 1889, Chang, who had years before joined in some of the attacks on Li from his sanctuary in the Hanlin Academy, found himself on the receiving end of the same sort of tactics when he re-entered the murky world of court politics through the Tientsin-Tungchow railroad controversy. Opposed to Li, Chang, and others who condoned any sort of railway building at all were several zealous censors and academicians who were at least partly the spiritual heirs of the old *ch'ing-liu* group of the early 1880s.⁹⁹

Besides incurring the opposition of obscurantists in the Censorate and the Hanlin Academy, whose influence on the throne may have been debatable, Chang became the target of sniping by far more formidable figures in the court. Especially after his transfer to Hu-Kwang, but even before, there seem to have been attempts by Weng T'ung-ho, the powerful President of the Board of Revenue, and probably others as well, to discredit Chang and his activities for purely political reasons.¹⁰⁰ Several of Chang's last-minute reports from Canton in October and November, just before his departure, were criticized, in at least one case the criticism originating in the Board of Revenue.¹⁰¹ And some of his requests—for example, one to transfer his bodyguard of two hundred well-trained soldiers and a quantity of arms and ammunition for them to Wuchang—were refused.¹⁰²

It is difficult to discern in the complicated morass of court politics at this time just how operative were Chang's relationships with the throne and other political elements. His 'personal power base',

⁹⁸ The other two were T'an Chün-p'ei, Governor of Hupei, transferred in June, who went on to Yunnan in December 1886 without ever taking up the post, and Liu Jui-fen, minister to England, who was named to replace Wu in August 1888, but who also never took over the office. Eventually Li Han-chang became concurrent Governor when he replaced Chang. Ch'ien Shih-fu, pp. 109-205.

⁹⁹ Wu To, *op. cit.*, 119, draws a rather direct relationship between the two groups. I would not. The original group (as listed in Hao Yen-p'ing, 91), except for Chang and Wu Ta-ch'eng, who had also become a practising official with a revised regard for needed reforms, was largely destroyed politically by the Sino-French War.

¹⁰⁰ Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, 'Weng T'ung-ho and the Reform Movement of 1898', *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, new series, 1.2, April 1957, 120-2.

¹⁰¹ *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 26 : 11a-15b; *NCH*, 29 November 1889, pp. 662-3, and 10 January 1890, p. 41.

¹⁰² *Collected Works*, 'Memorials', 28 : 34a-35a, and *NCH*, 17 January 1890, p. 65.

largely consisting of his own staff, swung no weight in Peking, and his ties with other provincial officials were not such as to offer him much security, as has been shown. One area where he might have at one time expected support, the ideologically conservative precincts of the Censorate and Hanlin Academy in Peking, no longer viewed his activities with approval. It appears, therefore, that he remained dependent upon his ties with the throne to defend his position.

However, it is possible that at this time, mid-1889 and after, these ties were not as strong as they once were. In March 1889, the Kuang-hsi emperor Tsai-t'ien, now seventeen years of age, took over the nominal management of government, and the Empress Dowager 'retired' to the Summer Palace.¹⁰³ Although it is generally accepted that Tz'u-hsi continued to dominate the political scene, whatever role the young emperor may have been accorded (and the trappings of power cannot always be dismissed as meaningless) constituted a potential change in Chang's relationship with his most direct source of security and effectiveness, the throne. He had no personal relationship with the young sovereign, as had his new rival, Weng T'ung-ho, the former tutor of Tsai-t'ien and by all accounts his trusted mentor.¹⁰⁴ One could speculate that whatever increased difficulties Chang began to encounter in 1889 were partly due to this duality of power at the centre between Tsai-t'ien and Tz'u-hsi, if it indeed existed, and the fact that Chang had sure access only to the latter. His transfer to Wuchang itself, at a time when probably he would have preferred to remain in Canton, may have been a reflection of this new situation. It is not inconceivable that the young emperor was persuaded that the ambitious projects initiated by Chang during the previous year, as well as his future plans for Canton, were undesirable at a post so far from the capital, and that it would be better to have him closer to Peking.¹⁰⁵

As Kwang-ching Liu has pointed out in his study of Li Hung-chang's activities in Chihli, the independence of action enjoyed by leading provincial officials in the late nineteenth century should not be overstressed.¹⁰⁶ Chang's power, like Li's, was limited. In his five years at Canton, he indeed initiated many projects on a regional resource

¹⁰³ Hummel, *op.cit.*, p. 732.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ This is largely speculation, of course, and ignores the very practical reason for Chang's transfer given by Wu To and Li Kuo-chi, which I have mentioned above—that the man who proposed the railway project could be expected to implement it. However, it cannot be dismissed as fantasy, I think, until we know more about court politics during these years.

¹⁰⁶ Kwang-ching Liu, 'Li Hung-chang in Chihli: The Emergence of a Policy, 1870-1875', in Feuerwerker *et al.*, *Approaches*, p. 104.

base, and used his own staff to enhance his effectiveness. But his own view of himself was certainly that of a loyal servant of the interests of the central government and the nation as a whole, and he depended greatly upon his ties to the centre to maintain his position, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

Nevertheless, while the administrative regionalism which existed in late Ch'ing times cannot seriously be compared with the socially demoralized warlordism of the Republic, neither should it be dismissed as insignificant. Despite their many shortcomings, the self-strengthening projects initiated by Chang, Li and others constituted Confucian China's best hope of entering the modern world without having to destroy itself in the process. Yet these projects had to be implemented, at least at first, within the traditional framework of political tension between the centre and the provinces. This made them vulnerable to attack by court officials and at the same time gave rise to some competition between different areas of regional development, since little central initiative or coordination was present.¹⁰⁷ Self-strengthening, therefore, was hampered not because those advocating it chose to work at a regional level, but because they were forced to do so, in the absence of a drastic overhaul of the bureaucratic structure and its relations with society.

And in this framework, the new nationally significant projects which they sponsored were obstructed by a provincialism not of their own making, but one based on the operations of the traditional political structure itself. This would be the case until the lower levels of officialdom and gentry society raised their sights beyond the limits of local affairs and began to be touched by national issues, and it would take the events of the 1890s and 1900 to bring this about. In the meantime, Chang Chih-tung, along with other scattered officials operating on a provincial basis, worked in the interests of the central government and the national polity as best he could.

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¹⁰⁷ This is really another entire topic in itself. The clash between Chang and Li Hung-chang over railway development strategy in 1889-90, alluded to earlier in this paper, is but one example.

