

IMPERIALLY INSPIRED PHILANTHROPY IN THE
CH'ING: THE CASE OF GRANARIES
IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By

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I

This essay looks into the operation of famine relief in the late K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng periods (1690s through the 1730s) and finds that the Ch'ing policy was strongly shaped by the orthodox Neo-Confucian ideas of Chu Hsi (1130-1200). This was especially true for the Yung-cheng Emperor who made unprecedented attempts to encourage private philanthropy in order to build mechanisms for self-help and self-protection into local Chinese society. These efforts did not succeed and led to a policy of more state management and control over famine relief during the Ch'ien-lung reign (1736-1796).

Specifically, in reviewing the literature about the Ch'ing granary system, as well as the memorials and imperial edicts on this subject, I have asked four questions: 1) What led the Yung-cheng Emperor to look toward the publicly supported granaries as a solution? 2) Why did a great surge of granary construction occur in the middle of his reign? 3) What were the principal advantages and drawbacks of publicly supported granaries? and finally 4) Why did these public granaries decline in the late 18th century?

II

In the Ch'ing period, granaries—other than those intended to supply the needs of the imperial establishment—were created to provide aid in times of

food shortages and famines.⁽¹⁾ There were three basic types:

A. Ever-Normal Granaries (*ch'ang-p'ing-tsang* 常平倉) which were officially managed institutions located in administrative cities. These granaries were stocked with supplies raised from tax surcharges, supplemented by donations from wealthy households and the local officials themselves. The operation of these official granaries was a responsibility of the Ch'ing officials and their subordinates in all respects. The size of these granaries varied with the size of the administrative subdivision and with changes in the regulations through time. A medium-sized district in the 18th century was expected to support a modest Ever-Normal Granary containing 10,000 to 20,000 piculs of grain (600 to 1200 metric tons).

B. Community Granaries (*she-tsang* 社倉) which were not official, but publicly supported, community-based institutions located in rural areas. Grain contributed to these came from the people, both gentry and commoners, and was under the management of trustworthy individuals chosen from the community in which they were located. Official involvement was to be limited to inspections which insured that the grain supplies were administered honestly and equitably. Because of imperial attention, these are a special focus of our concern in this essay. Community Granaries individually were quite small in size, usually 1,000 to 2,000 piculs (60 to 120 metric tons).

C. Obligation Granaries (*i-tsang* 義倉), sometimes translated as "charitable granaries," which were exactly like Community Granaries except that they ordinarily were found in urban places (*shih-chen* 市鎮) rather than in rural areas. The grain in Obligation Granaries also came from private donations and was managed by local individuals. During the Yung-cheng period considerable efforts were made to establish new Obligation Granaries supported by salt mer-

(1) I have used Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1960), pp. 144-83, 549-53, as well as Ch'ü Chih-sheng 曲直生 *Chung-kuo liang-tsang chih-tu kai-lun* 中國糧倉制度概論 (A General Description of the Chinese Granary System, Taipei, 1954), and Yü Yu-yü 于佑虞, *Chung-kuo tsang-chu chih-tu k'ao* 中國倉儲制度考 (An Examination of the Chinese Granary System, Taipei, 1948).

chants (*yen-i-tsang* 鹽義倉) or general merchants (*shang-i-tsang* 商義倉). These varied greatly in size, yet all were much larger than both Ever-Normal and Community Granaries. Examples range from 14,000 to 610,000 piculs of grain (850 to 36,800 metric tons).

In theory the terms *she-tsang* and *i-tsang* respectively refer to granaries in rural and urban locations, but actual usage sometimes did not follow the statutes. Some writers used the term *i-tsang* to refer to any popularly managed granary, while some of the *she-tsang* created in Shantung in the 18th century were located in market towns rather than rural villages.⁽²⁾ The distinctions can be summed up rather simply. The largest granaries were supported by wealthy merchants and located in trading centers. The smallest were rural granaries found in villages or market towns. These two types constitute what were publicly supported famine relief institutions. The most enduring were official granaries located in administrative centers and operated either with imperial funds or the capital of publicly supported granaries which had been appropriated by the state.

Significantly all three types of granaries operated in essentially the same fashion. Once accumulated, their stocks required annual renewal in order to be maintained. Typically, granaries sold about one-third of their supplies in the late winter or early spring at a below-market price (*p'ing-t'iao* 平糶). Only properly registered local inhabitants were eligible for these sales. If times were bad, these local people could borrow grain. Repayment came due in the fall with interest, usually 10%. A poor harvest could produce a waiver of the interest charges. In times of serious need, including both flood and famine, outright grants of grain were made. Also in these times granary officers could forgive repayment of both interest and principal of earlier loans. When depleted, granaries were supposed to replenish their stocks through new donations, or in the case of Ever-Normal Granaries, from new tax sources.⁽³⁾

(2) For example a merchant is recorded to have created two Community Granaries in market towns in Chang-ch'iu *hsien*, Shantung in 1742. *Chi-nan fu-chih* 濟南府志 (1840), 17/6b.

(3) *Ch'in-ting hu-pu tse-li* 欽定戶部則例 (1866 ed.) 17/26a-29b.

Granary operation, then, required sound judgment, honesty and good luck. Managers used three distinct types of transactions: sale at prices below the market, loans, and outright grants, depending on the prevailing conditions. Some transactions were necessary each spring and fall simply to maintain the quality of the stores. The managers' decisions on these matters were subject to review. Officials could be held personally responsible for deficiencies in Ever-Normal Granaries. This same liability applied to those subjects who managed publicly supported granaries. Many of the complaints about granary operations involved the choices these managers made concerning the kind of transaction, the timing, and the choice of recipients.

The economic environment in which these granaries operated varied tremendously in the Ch'ing empire. Depending upon the type of agricultural production, the degree of commercialization, as well as the vagaries of the weather and the success of the harvest, sound management would require different actions and so could not be obtained by following any formula. Given these widely differing circumstances it should be obvious that the fortunes of granaries fluctuated greatly.

III

A year before the great Shantung flood of 1703 occurred, the Director-General of the Yellow River Conservancy, Chang P'eng-ko 張朋翮 advanced his proposals for building dikes, improving the river's flow and stopping the threat of flooding around the huge Wei-shan lake in southern Shantung. Chang P'eng-ko served for eight years (1700-1708) in this difficult post and made major efforts to control the problems resulting from the confluence of the Grand Canal and the Yellow River, which then flowed south of the Shantung peninsula. In 1702 some flooding had occurred in the prefectures of Tai-an and Yen-chou. Early in 1703, the Emperor, on one of his tours, visited Shantung and granted 40,000 piculs (2,400 metric tons) of grain as aid to those prefectures. *The imperial benevolence came in March, early enough

to help ease the famine conditions which were most serious in late winter and spring. ⁽⁴⁾

In the summer of 1703 great rains occurred in Shantung. Summer rains in the North China plain were especially dangerous if the runoff coincided with the annual cresting of the Yellow River in July. In 1703 a disastrous flood resulted in large parts of Shantung, with the greatest damage occurring in two areas immediately east of the Grand Canal. ⁽⁵⁾

The Emperor took immediate action when the situation was reported to him and made exceptionally large grants-in-aid of 300,000 taels of silver and 500,000 piculs of tribute grain (30,200 metric tons). K'ang-hsi himself delivered an analysis of the social conditions in the Shantung countryside which he felt exacerbated the effects of the flooding:

We have journeyed through Shantung on four occasions and have come to know quite a bit about how the people there live. Conditions in Shantung are different from other provinces. The common people till the fields of the people of substance. In a good year the propertied people do well, but the poor get very little. When a bad year comes along, the strong ones, who lack land or a trade, leave in any direction. The old and weak die in the ditches. All our officials in Shantung know about this.

The wealthy (people) with property should be more compassionate. In this kind of a famine year, the situation cannot be completely saved, but still rents could be reduced. Aid to (their) tenants will mean (the landowners) will not have vacant, untilled fields in the future. Also if the people receive such kindness, won't they repay it a thousand fold?⁽⁶⁾

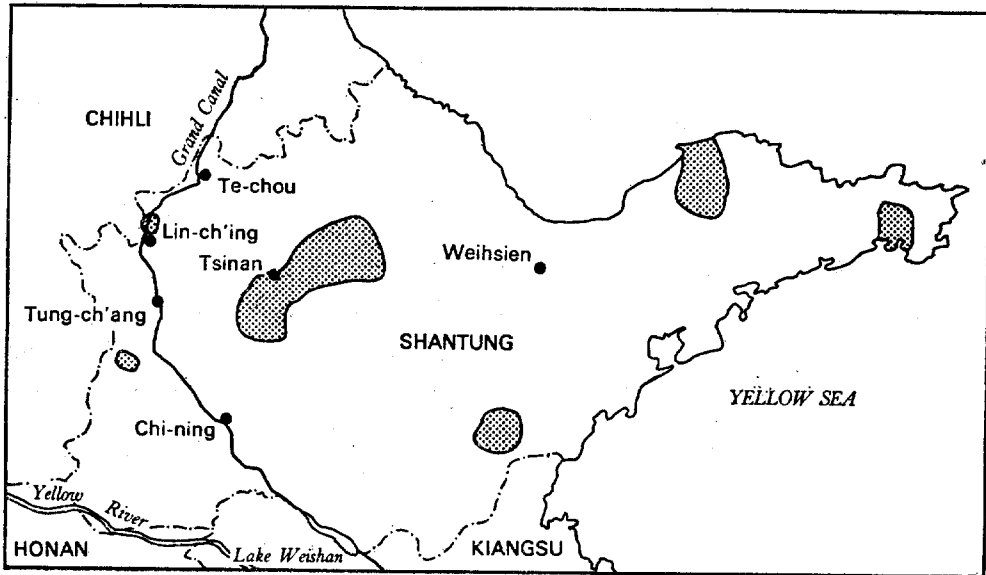
The message was clear. Shantung had a strata of wealthy landlords on whom the obligation for famine relief should fall. If the landlords fulfilled their

(4) *Ch'ing shih* 清史 (Taipei, 1961), 8/99.

(5) *ibid.*

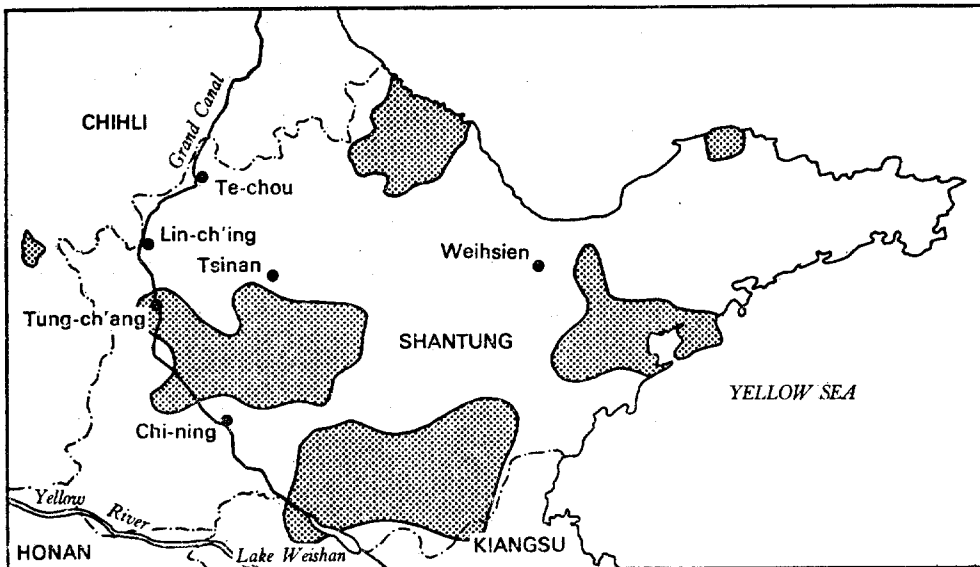
(6) *Tung-hua-lu, K'ang-hsi ch'ao* 東華錄·康熙朝, 16/126.

FAMINE AREAS IN NORTH CHINA, 1730-2



Source: Ch'ing-shih 45/721

FAMINE AREAS IN NORTH CHINA, 1702-4



Source: Ch'ing-shih 45/720

social obligations to their tenants, the results would be future wealth and harmony.

Still, the Emperor authorized additional state aid that went by sea to the Shantung coastal prefectures. This state grain was to be sold at a fixed below-market price; three officials were deputed to specific areas in Shantung to insure that the aid reached the people. Many Shantung famine victims fled the province and trekked all the way to Peking and Tientsin. In the early months of 1704 the Emperor ordered special food kitchens opened to help these people through the winter. Chartered Grand Canal boats took the people back to their homes that spring. These returnees were given money for daily expenses and provisions were made to provide them with seed grain for the sowing in the spring of 1704. ⁽⁷⁾

During the famine the Emperor became dissatisfied with the efforts of the Shantung Governor, Wang Kuo-ch'ang 王國昌, and removed him from office. In a personal interview he severely chastised Chang P'eng-ko for having used stocks of the Ever-Normal Granaries during 1702 for the benefit of the river conservancy projects thereby leaving these official granaries depleted when the real disaster of 1703 occurred. ⁽⁸⁾

The 1703-4 Shantung flood and famine appears to have been the most serious such disaster to hit the Ch'ing empire during the reigns of K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng except for the famine of 1692 in Shansi. ⁽⁹⁾ We have no way of estimating the total numbers of people caught up in this calamity, but it involved several millions. Local gazeteers of the region, including some of the districts not officially counted as famine regions, mention the special severity of that winter and included frequent references to cannibalism. ⁽¹⁰⁾ The harvest of 1704 was good and when K'ang-hsi made another tour in 1705 he mentioned hundreds of thousands of his subjects who turned out along the banks

(7) *Shan-tung t'ung-chih* 山東通志, (1915), 85/11a-12b.

(8) *Ta-Ch'ing Sheng-tzu-jen huang-ti shih-lu* 大清聖祖仁皇帝實錄, 205/1a-b.

(9) *Tung-hua-lu, K'ang-hsi ch'ao*, 11/29b.

(10) *Po-shan hsien-chih* 博山縣志, (1936) 12/45a.

of the Grand Canal in Shantung to watch his progress.⁽¹¹⁾ The countryside had thus recovered within a year.

The next serious floods and resulting famine struck Shantung in the Yung-cheng reign. In 1730 serious flooding hit Chi-nan prefecture when the Hsiao-ch'ing River flooded; many other parts of the province also suffered that year following heavy rains in the month of June. A total of thirty-one districts were affected. The Emperor distributed grain stores to the inhabitants and took money from the Shantung provincial treasury to permit flood victims to repair their homes and farms.⁽¹²⁾

IV

Although Ch'ing dynastic statutes called for the construction of official and public granaries as early as 1654, the records show three great peaks of interest in granary matters, especially publicly supported granaries, in the famine years 1692, 1703 and 1730. In 1692, the year of the Shansi famine, the governor of Shantung, Fo Lun 佛倫, had suggested establishing Community Granaries, and new regulations were issued and tried in the provinces.⁽¹³⁾ In 1703 at the time of the great Shantung famine, Li Kuang-ti 李光地, the governor of Chihli, memorialized the Emperor requesting a new effort to establish Community Granaries. The Emperor endorsed Li's proposal. Li Kuang-ti was a favorite of K'ang-hsi's who served in the Chihli governorship from 1699 to 1705. He also was a leading advocate of Sung Learning school in the K'ang-hsi period and in 1713 published Chu Hsi's works (*Chu Hsi ch'uan-shu* 朱熹全書) with an imperial preface.⁽¹⁴⁾

The great surge of interest in public granaries during Yung-cheng's short

(11) *Ch'ing shih*, 8/100.

(12) *Shan-tung t'ung-chih* (1915), 85/11b.

(13) *Chi-ning chih-li-chou chih* 濟寧直隸川志 (1860), 4/1a-b; also Liu Wen 劉汶, "Yü-pei-tsang tai-ku ssu-i" 預備倉貸穀私議 (A Memorial on Grain Loans from Preparatory Granaries), in *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* 皇朝經世文編 (1821), 39/5a.

(14) A. W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), I, 473-5.

reign is even more pronounced than the earlier two flurries of 1692 and 1703. The year 1730 happens to coincide with the Shantung famine, but in fact, as we shall see, that the Yung-cheng period granary policy was part of a larger plan which may only have been spurred on by the disaster of 1730.

Based on information from the 1840 Chi-nan prefectural gazetteer, Table 1 shows that great efforts were made to construct granaries in the middle of the Yung-cheng period.⁽¹⁵⁾ Three hundred and eighty-four rooms were built and probably stocked in a two year period, 1730-1. This total equals the entire amount of granary construction over the preceding sixty years of K'ang-hsi's reign. The gazetteer unfortunately does not give many dates for construction in the K'ang-hsi period, but the four available ones are 1680, 1689, 1691 and 1694. The information in Table 1 refers to these granaries as official institutions, but it seems likely that most were specially built public granaries with imperial funds, meant to serve as start-up monies, and were absorbed back into the official granary system in the Ch'ien-lung era when it was clear that local support was lacking.⁽¹⁶⁾

This pattern of absorbing or combining publicly supported with official granaries can be seen in the 160 room granary at Te-chou. One-hundred-twenty rooms at Te-chou were part of a granary constructed in 1730 to combine the storage of grain from the local community, the Ever-Normal Granary and tribute grain. The great majority of the reserves must have come from tribute sources, for in 1759 the management reverted to authorities responsible for the transportation of tribute grain. A similar granary existed in Shantung at the important Grand Canal Commercial Center of Lin-ch'ing.⁽¹⁷⁾

The situation in Chi-ning independent department was comparable. The first notation of community Granaries comes in 1692, the year of the Shansi

(15) For example see *Chih-li T'ung-chou chih* 直隸通州志 (1755), 4/21a; also in 1748 the Ch'ien-lung Emperor instructed the Board of Revenue, "Every year the number of Ever-Normal Granaries increases and this hinders the people's food supplies. Henceforth the standard should be the old total from the Yung-cheng period." *Ch'ing-shih* (1961), 122/1467.

(16) *Chi-nan fu-chih* (1840), 17/1a-22b.

(17) *Chi-ning chih-li-chou chih* (1860), 4/1a-4b.

Table 1
Granary Construction in Chi-nan Prefecture
(unit in rooms, *chien* 間)

administrative subdivision	Hsun-chih 1644-1662	K'ang-hsi 1662-1722	Yung-cheng 1723-1735	Ch'ien-lung 1736-1796
Chinan prefecture		80		
Li-ch'eng		42	17*	
Chang-ch'iu		30	24*	24
Tsou-p'ing		11	20*	
Chih-ch'uan	25	38	5*	
Hsin-ch'eng		28	5*	
Ch'i-ho		57	12*	
Chi-tung			18*	
Chi-yang	20		18*	
Yü-ch'eng	25		14*	
Lin-i		15	23*	
Ch'ang-ch'ing		13	25*	
Te-chou	14		160*	
Te-p'ing	31		2*	
P'ing-yuan		24	24*	
Totals	115 rooms	338 rooms	367 rooms	24 rooms

*Constructed in 1730 or 1731.

Source: *Chi-naa fu chih* (1840), 16/1a-14b.

famine, when the Shantung governor, Fo Lun, promoted contributions for these projects. In 1703, when the Chi-ning area was in the midst of a famine, there is no sign of granary construction, but in 1730 a typical surge of activity occurred in both official and publicly supported granaries. Information on the size of these projects is not given. The gazetteer does note that the public granaries, both *she-tsang* and *yen-i-tsang*, were taken over by the official Ever-Normal Granary in 1757.⁽¹⁸⁾

Data from T'ung-chou in Kiangsu supports the pattern found in Chi-nan

(18) *Chih-li T'ung-chou chih* (1755), 4/20a-23b.

and Chi-ning prefectures. T'ung-chou, a great transshipment center for tribute grain, had three official famine relief granaries (as distinct from imperial storehouses) built by magistrates between 1730 and 1735. These totalled forty-nine rooms. The remarkable aspect of T'ung-chou's famine granaries was a separate public institution, an enormous salt merchant granary (*yen-i-tsang*), started in 1725 with a 240,000 tael donation from the Liang-huai salt merchants. This granary had seven branches and by 1737 contained 610,000 piculs (36,800 metric tons) of grain. It was eventually taken over by officials.⁽¹⁸⁾

In Ju-kao, one of the districts subordinate to T'ung-chou, four granaries existed: an Ever-Normal Granary built in 1728 by the local magistrate, another official granary built in 1732, a salt merchant granary built in 1727 and a Community Granary built in 1730. The salt merchant Obligation Granary contained 14,000 piculs (850 metric tons) while the Community Granary was much smaller, only around 1000 piculs (60 metric tons.)⁽¹⁹⁾

The information in this section indicates a general pattern of granary operation during these years after 1690. First, there were experiments with community granaries in 1692 and 1703. Then in the first years of Yung-cheng's reign a new kind of granary, supported by the salt merchants, began to be constructed. Those granaries were quite large. Again in the Yung-cheng period, the Emperor encouraged the construction of both official and publicly supported granaries. By the early years of the Ch'ien-lung reign, however, the emphasis turned away from creating or maintaining public granaries. Instead, these community based and managed institutions were incorporated into the official granary system. In the next sections the focus of attention will shift to why these granaries were thought desirable, how they were financed and what were the principal deficiencies of their operation which produced the reorganization in the Ch'ien-lung period.

V

(19) *Ibid.* 4/23a-b.

Granary operations were only one means of famine preparations common in the Ch'ing. Considerable efforts were made at flood control, especially in the North China macroregion. Several officials, including Chin Fu 靳輔 (1633-92), Chang P'eng-ko (1649-1725) and Chi Tseng-yun 嵇曾筠 (1671-1739) made careers in those years by undertaking flood prevention and water control projects on the North China plain.⁽²⁰⁾ Collections on famine relief such as the imperially sponsored *Records of Assistance* (*K'ang-chi lu* 康濟錄) (1739) divided famine work into three stages: measures of how to avoid disasters, what to do in time of a disaster, and post-disaster measures.⁽²¹⁾ When a natural disaster occurred there were several measures the Ch'ing state commonly employed. These included tax remissions and grants-in-aid of grain or money. Granaries obviously were especially important once the situation turned serious. Ch'ing statutes dating from 1654 called for creation of official and public granaries, but, as noted above, it was not until the 1690s that the Emperor and his high provincial officials considered publicly supported granaries as a general measure of famine prevention.

Three strands come together after 1690 to produce this new interest in public granaries. First, the flood and famine occurrences in the North China region were serious enough to demand exploration of different means of coping with famines. Second, the ordinary means of famine relief—including tax remissions, government grants and even Ever-Normal Granaries—were incapable of meeting the problem. The inadequacy in the countryside of these ordinary means of famine relief bothered the high officials and the Emperor. Rural peasant communities were especially hard-hit by a flood or famine, but were not able to obtain the available aid unless they left their homes. The centers of relief work and aid distribution were in large towns or administrative cities. Flood victims or famine sufferers would leave their residences to go to these centers in hopes of finding some means to eat. Writers of this period, and

(20) See biographies in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (1944).

(21) Edited by Lu Tseng-yu. 陸曾禹

earlier, stressed the need for rural relief, readily available in the villages.⁽²²⁾ Community Granaries (*she-tsang*) fit this need precisely.

Third, the intellectual milieu of both the K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng periods was dominated by a revival of Sung Neo-Confucianism, especially as advocated by its greatest philosopher, Chu Hsi (1130-1200). Chu Hsi himself was an early advocate of Community Granaries. In the late 12th century while in his home community in Fukien, Chu Hsi saw the effectiveness of publicly supported granaries in combatting famine and the resulting social unrest. He wrote extensively about Community Granaries and encouraged them widely. He specifically mentioned in the case in his home area that a small grant of government grain helped start Community Granaries(*she-tsang*), which then could be self-supporting.⁽²³⁾ This example of imperial funds used to start a local granary is important later when we come to Yung-cheng's actions but champions of publicly supported granaries from the K'ang-hsi period advocated locally financed and supported community granaries without significant imperial contributions. Several of the Ch'ing officials who advanced proposals for community granaries, including Li Kuang-ti (1642-1718), Chang Po-hsing 張伯行 (1652-1725) and Chu Shih 朱軾 (1665-1736) were also intellectual champions of Chu Hsi and the Sung Neo-Confucian orthodoxy during the K'ang-hsi reign.⁽²⁴⁾

One of the first advocates of publicly supported granaries in the Ch'ing was Yü Sen 俞森, compiler of *The Complete Book of Famine Administration* (*Huang-cheng ch'üan-shu* 荒政全書) which was published in 1692. Yü's compilation sampled the works of seven writers on the subject, starting with T'ung Wei of the Sung and running through individuals such as his own contemporary, Wei Hsi 魏禧 (1624-1681). About one-third of the collection is

(22) Huang Liu-hung, 黃六鴻, "Chi-chu" 積貯 (Storing Grain), and Liu Wen "Yu-pei-tsang tai-ku ssu-i", *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (1821), 39/1b-2b; 39/5a-6b.

(23) "Ch'ung-an she-tsang chi" 崇安社倉記 (A Record of the Ch'ung-an district Community Granary), in Yü Sen, *Huang-cheng ch'üan-shu* (1692) 10 shang/2b-4b.

(24) See biographies in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (1944).

devoted to granaries, with a large two chapter portion on Community Granaries. In this section he quotes extensively from Chu Hsi's several accounts of involvement with Community granaries. ⁽²⁵⁾

More important for showing the link between the Ch'ing rulers and the public granary concept is Li Kuang-ti, a leading proponent of Sung Neo-Confucianism of the orthodox variety. Li, as noted above, was well-liked by K'ang-hsi and served a long term as governor in Chihli (1699-1705). During this period, in 1703, following the Shantung famine, Li proposed to the Emperor that Chihli be made a testing ground for Community Granaries. If publicly supported granaries could succeed in his province, then the institution should be spread throughout the empire. ⁽²⁶⁾

Li Kuang-ti, who was Fukien native, was one of Chu Hsi's most ardent proponents in these years. He published a definitive collection of Chu Hsi's work with an imperial preface under the title *Chu Hsi ch'üan-shu* in 1713 and after his death was canonized by the Yung-cheng Emperor who shared Li's orthodox Neo-Confucianism. ⁽²⁷⁾ Another important intellectual who adhered to the orthodox Sung Neo-Confucian group was Chang Po-hsing. He had been the intendant at Chi-ning in 1703 and later carried out experiments with Community Granaries when assigned to Yung-p'ing prefecture in Chihli after 1710. ⁽²⁸⁾

In the K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng reigns the ideas of Wang Yang-ming and the School of the Mind generally were in disfavor. The court orthodoxy was Sung Neo-Confucianism, and both Emperors were schooled in this variety, even though it is the critics of this orthodox Sung school that are generally seen by historians as the leading thinkers of that period. ⁽²⁹⁾ Official praise for Chu Hsi was lavish and even included some misguided efforts by Chang

(25) *Huang-cheng ch'üan-shu* (1692), 10 shang and 10 hsia.

(26) *Huang-ch'ao cheng-tien lei-tsuan* 皇朝政典類纂 (1903), 151/5b.

(27) Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (1944), I, 474.

(28) *Huang-ch'ao cheng-tien lei-tsuan* (1903), 151/5b.

(29) Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, *Intellectual Trends of the Ch'ing Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1959), pp. 19-28.

Po-hsing to install figures of Chu Hsi as objects of public worship. ⁽³⁰⁾

In the construction of community granaries, Chu Hsi is repeatedly cited as the model, the inspiration and standard. Still, not even one of the most ardent proponents of Chu Hsi argued that his plans did not need some modification when applied in Ch'ing times. Li Kuang-ti drew a distinction between what was practical in Chu Hsi's time and in the K'ang-hsi era. I see this critical, adaptive approach as indicative of the turn of mind which produced practically-inclined Statecraft school (*ching-shih* 經世) which was the principal challenge to the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. This Statecraft approach looked critically at past models and sought to have all manner of authority tested in actual practice. Writers about granaries from a slightly later period, such as Ch'en Hung-mou 陳宏謀 (1696-1771) or Fang Kuan-ch'eng 方觀承 (1698-1768) showed less inclination to idolize Chu Hsi or Community Granaries. Still, even though critical at times, the Yung-cheng period officials believed that Community Granaries could accomplish their roles as sources of social tranquility and protection against disaster.

If the literature on granaries reflects some of the differences between the promoters of Sung Neo-Confucianism and the new Statecraft school, these some writings also contain evidence of larger shared notions about society which prevailed in the Ch'ing period. It is from these larger broader points of agreement that the great impetus derived to create publicly supported granaries.

The early Ch'ing rulers, both the Manchu nobility and their Chinese officials, held a physiocratic notion of society. Agriculture was the most important source of wealth and its proper functioning constituted the first responsibility of the state. This was true not simply because the Ch'ing derived most of its taxes from agriculture, but because agriculture was the proper sphere of human activity. Commerce and industry were secondary. Those endeavors were organized and taxed, but their prosperity was not as serious a concern as agriculture.

(30) Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (1944), I, 51.

The Ch'ing state took an autocratic approach to managing this physiocratic order. The Emperor and his officials felt that they had a right to intervene to maintain ordered agricultural life whenever necessary. Moreover, they had a duty to check undesirable tendencies in society. Some threats came from floods or famines, but others were found within the character of the people.

In Confucian conceptions of the Ch'ing period, the people had to be trained to appreciate and practice the correct moral principles. In Neo-Confucian terms the emperor was the father of the entire empire, a parent stern, remote and just in his management of affairs for the best interests of all. Officials down to the district magistrate adopted this pseudo-parental role when conducting their assigned duties in administering the affairs of any office or territorial area.

K'ang-hsi's emphasis on the regular public reading of the Sacred Edict meant that the basic principles of this Confucian conception of morality and leadership were to be widely studied—and hopefully imitated—by the local gentry and commoners. Yung-cheng continued and reinforced this basic approach in his expanded versions of his father's sacred edicts, *Sheng-yü kuang-hsün*, (聖諭廣訓) promulgated in 1724. The sixteen maxims of these teachings stressed proper Confucian moral behavior with regard to the state, one's relatives, one's community. Agriculture, learning in orthodox studies, and peacemaking on the basis of Confucian principles all received emphasis.⁽³¹⁾

This approach to ruling emphasized the people's abilities to act in accord with the proper morality if educated and led by those who followed these same principles. The main forms of popular organization in the Ch'ing period—the mutual responsibility system for police functions (*pao-chia* 保甲), for tax functions (*li-chia* 里甲) and for public relief (*she-tsang*)—all rested on the belief that properly educated gentry and wealthy commoners will assume general community leadership in order to benefit their entire communities.

(31) Pei Huang, *Autocracy at Work: A Study of the Yung-cheng Period, 1723-1635* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1974), pp. 190-1.

Both K'ang-hsi and Yung-cheng made great efforts to discourage improper behavior among the local gentry. K'ang-hsi took dramatic action in a case involving improper behavior by a gentry family in the 1660s:

Hu Chien-ching was subdirector of the Court of Sacrificial Worship whose family terrorized their native area in Kiangsu, seizing people's lands, and wives and daughters, and murdering people after falsely accusing them of being thieves. When a commoner finally managed to impeach him, the Governor was slow to hear the case, and the Board of Punishments recommended that Hu be dismissed and sent into exile for three years. I ordered instead that he be executed with his family, in his native place, so that all local gentry might learn how I regard such behavior. ⁽³²⁾

Yung-cheng is even more well-known for his hatred of improper actions by gentry. ⁽³³⁾ This harshness should be seen as the reverse side of Yung-cheng's expectation that the gentry and wealthy commoners would promote a just and tranquil social order. The ideal was to reduce the role of the officials and to create a society which was largely self-governing and self-regulating.

Publicly supported granaries were only one reflection of this outlook, but Yung-cheng's views emerge obviously in his remarks on a 1728 memorial concerning deficiencies in the stocks of Community Granaries in a Hupei district:

Contributions to Community Granaries should be made by choice and cannot be set by statute. I have already issued decrees on the proper handling of this matter two or three times, but whatever (task) is given to the officials, they always enlarge upon. I know from past experience that if the granary stocks are deficient and cannot be made good, then ordering contributions will only give bad people a chance to make trouble. Now according (to the advice given in) Ma Hui-po's memorial,

(32) Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: A Self-Portrait of K'ang-hsi* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 29-30.

(33) Huang, *Autocracy at Work* (1974), p. 270.

“Grain contributions in Tien-men district are deficient and should be levied. At harvest time the local officials should press for contributions by the local people.” This is all wrong. Grain should not be demanded, but collected in accordance with the people’s willingness.⁽³⁴⁾

Yung-cheng, who was the greatest imperial advocate of Community Granaries, turns out to be both an autocrat and a believer in the Sung Neo-Confucian notion that the state did not need to take direct responsibility in all matters. Instead, with continuing education and proper institutions, the educated and wealthy people of the empire would exercise leadership for the common good. This notion was often challenged by experience, but seldom abandoned as a principle by Ch’ing rulers. It is the intellectual foundation on which the efforts to promote publicly supported granaries rested.

This, then, makes clear why the K’ang-hsi and Yung-cheng Emperors, along with their top officials, emphasized Community Granaries. It also helps us understand why in the Ch’ien-lung period, when the statecraft notions held sway, there was less willingness to try again the old ideas which had been tested and found wanting. One major issue remains, however. That is, how were public granaries financed, especially during the Yung-cheng period when granary construction peaked?

VI

Up until Yung-cheng came to the throne, public granaries were financed by individual contributions from a specific area. This basic principle is found in the Community Granary regulations from the 1670s and 1680s which specify various tokens of official recognition for contributors. Regulations also established the principle of local community management and provided that grain collected in one locality could not be commandeered for distribution in another.⁽³⁵⁾

In 1703 after K’ang-hsi endorsed Li Kuang-ti’s experiments in Chihli, the

(34) *Huang-ch’ao cheng-tien lei-tsuan* (1903), 151/3b.

(35) *Huang-ch’ao chang-ku hui-pien* 皇朝掌故彙編 (1902), nei 24/1-5b; *Huang-ch’ao cheng-tien lei-tsuan* (1903), 151/1-2b.

reward system was increased to include more attractive benefits, including freedom for certain miscellaneous corvee duties, in exchange for large donations. In 1715 further additions specified a new sliding scale of rewards stepped in terms of 10 picul (606 kilograms) donations. These 1715 regulations gave higher rewards to wealthy commoners than to gentry who contributed equal amounts because "the good intent of wealthy commoners is greater than that of the gentry."⁽³⁶⁾

Although the terms of the rewards varied in the K'ang-hsi period, the principle remained the same: donors received official tokens as recognition. That token might be the right to wear an official sign of rank or it might be an item of direct monetary value such as freedom from certain tax levies. Still, the whole approach based Community Granaries on local contributions and guaranteed the community character by putting management in local hands, establishing limits to official oversight, and prohibiting grain transfers outside the community.

The evidence indicates that these methods did not work. In 1720, K'ang-hsi noted on a memorial from Chu Shih, the President of the Censorate, his somewhat cynical view of the worth of publicly supported granaries:

In regard to establishing Community Granaries, Li Kuang-ti memorialized about this when he was Governor (of Chihli, 1699-1705) and we instructed him, "Talk is easy, but realization is difficult. You may try it." Li Kuang-ti tried for several years, but without result other than stirring up bad feelings among the people. Chang Po-hsing also memorialized with a claim that Community Granaries were beneficial. We ordered him to make efforts in Yung-p'ing (prefecture, Chihli, in 1715). Up until now, he has not replied if these plans have had good results or not.

We have long and carefully considered this topic. When establishing a community granary, the people who manage it must be selected

(36) *Huang-ch'ao chang-ku hui-pien* (1902), nei 24/5a-6a.

from among the substantial (households). These managers are not officials and have neither (official) powers nor attendants. When they want to have borrowed grain repaid, whom can they send to collect it? In a year of good harvests (if borrowers) are unwilling to repay it, what can be done? If it happens to be a bad year, who can (afford to) repay (their loans)?

First (the managers) collect grain from the people and store it without anyone to guard it. If a deficiency occurs, then (the managers) must make up the shortage. This is (simply) taking the common people's grain and throwing it away. The managers are bankrupted by these responsibilities to the people and for no reason.

Community Granaries were started by Chu Hsi and his ideas can be found in his collected works. (His) methods can only be carried out in small towns and villages. If this proposal (for Community Granaries) were to become a statutory requirement there would be no benefit in carrying it out. Chu Shih's (present) memorial to establish Community Granaries should not be left to others to implement. We order him to go to Shansi to carry it out.⁽³⁷⁾

Experience seems to have made K'ang-hsi wary of proposals about the advantages of such locally managed and supported granaries. The proper Neo-Confucian pedigree of the idea did not carry much authority with him. His son, the Yung-cheng Emperor, was much more inclined to accept the example of Chu Hsi and follow an orthodox Neo-Confucian approach.

The policy regarding public granaries changed in the Yung-cheng period because of an imperially backed reform of the tax system. These reforms, proposed by some of the Emperor's favorite officials including Tien Wen-ching 田文鏡, regularized the wastage (*huo-hao* 火耗) and meltage (*hao-hsien*, 耗羨) charges on tax payments. The result was to control all kinds of irregular exactions and gifts in the tax collection and remission process. These bad practices

(37) *Ibid.*

grew up as a result of the inadequate official salaries and insufficient resources for local administrative responsibilities. Regularization provided adequate funds for local expenditure and was accompanied by new salary supplements (*yang-lien* 養廉) for the officials. (38)

In 1729 the Emperor decreed that some of these new regularized surcharges should be devoted specifically to buying up grain for official and public granaries:

The wastage charges added until now in the provinces should be reduced to 5% per tael and for the time being these levies are to be combined with grain collected from the people and sent to Community Granaries. When the amount (stored in these granaries) is sufficient, then the (practice) should be reduced. (39)

The Emperor added that this would fit in with his policy of seeking voluntary rather than enforced levies from the people and would bring harm to the petty people who looked for profit in the tax and granary system. Also the Emperor insisted that the officials stay out of managing the granaries. In addition to the evidence from Shantung and Chihli cited above, a memorial of 1728 from the Governor of Shensi, Yüeh Chung-ch'i 岳鍾琪, shows that this approach was tested in that province in 1726-7 and produced more than 400 granaries with stores of about 1,000 piculs (60 metric tons) apiece. (40)

Again the evidence indicates Yung-cheng's temporary measure did not establish Community Granaries on a solid footing. Mid-19th century gazeteers usually refer to Community Granaries as abolished or long closed. The process of combining the remaining stores of these declining public storehouses into the official granaries was already underway in the 1750s. Still the Yung-cheng Emperor's intent is clear. He, like Chu Hsi, was going to use official funds—in this case regularized collections of wastage and meltage fees—to start publicly supported granaries. This was the source of the funds used to

(38) Huang, *Autocracy at Work* (1974), pp. 248-58.

(39) *Ch'in-ting Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li* 欽定大清會典事例 (1899 ed.), 193/5a.

(40) *Huang-ch'ao cheng-tien lei-tsu'an* (1903), 151/3b-4a.

build the large numbers of new granary rooms in Shantung in 1730-1 and to fill these rooms with grain. The Emperor's decree quoted above involved only public granaries, but it seems clear that officials used these new tax resources in establishing both official and public institutions.

Yung-cheng then imitated Chu Hsi much more closely than his father. He hoped these official contributions would start up the local publicly managed granaries which then could become self-supporting through interest earned, plus donations from wealthy local inhabitants. This produced a great spurt in granary construction, both official and community, during Yung-cheng's reign, but the granaries did not survive for long. Part of the reason may be found by the gradual reintroduction in the Ch'ien-lung period of some of the irregular tax surcharges which Yung-cheng had sought to eradicate,⁽⁴¹⁾ but we must look for additional reasons to understand why Yung-cheng's hope to realize Chu Hsi's ideal for the community granaries finally was a failure.

VIII

When we come to the final question of why community granaries failed, 18th and 19th century commentators provide a host of reasons. Most of their analysis can be reduced to dishonest or improper management. This general charge is levied against granaries, both official and public, in a wide variety of essays. Such abuses certainly were common and the various methods devised to help one's self, one's lineage, or one's friends through granary manipulation were a legion.

A representative commentary on community granaries is found in the memorial of Yüeh Chün 岳濬 entitled "A Comparison of Today's Community Granaries with Those of the Past" and written in 1740 when he was Governor of Kiangsi.⁽⁴²⁾ Yüeh Chün had been governor of Shantung from 1728 to 1735 when the great spurt of granary construction occurred; intellectually he was

(41) Huang, *Autocracy at Work* (1974), pp. 261-2.

(42) "I she-tsang yu ku i-t'ung shu" 議社會倉與古異同疏, *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (1821), 40/9a-10b.

a conservative supporter of the orthodox Sung Neo-Confucian school. His father was Yüeh Chung-ch'i who had carried out the Community Granary experiments in Shensi in 1726-7, and both were aligned with the powerful official Tien Wen-ching, another supporter of granaries.

Given this background, it comes as no surprise that Yüeh Chün took Chu Hsi's ideas as the standards against which contemporary practices should be measured. Yüeh Chün lists twelve differences between his times and those of Chu Hsi's. Individually his points are rather small matters of management involving items such as maintenance of granary eligibility lists, use of official writs in bookkeeping, loan eligibility conditions, and similar administrative matters. Yüeh Chün's exercise produced no significant suggestions and the only conclusion one could reach was that Chu Hsi's ideas could be implemented satisfactorily with a modification.

A generation later, Li Hu 李湖, who wrote as governor of Kiangsu in 1770, was not as conservative intellectually as Yüeh Chün and his suggestions consisted of three points. First, he wanted the term of granary manager changed; second, he wanted better official supervision of granary accounts and third he wanted simplification of needless red tape which annoyed granary managers.⁽⁴³⁾ In other words, Li Hu too suggested reforms of management and operations.

Two elements stand out as missing in these two 18th century commentaries on the Ch'ing granary system. First, there is little recognition that granary organization and operation must vary considerably with the nature and complexity of economic activity in a particular area. Second, there is no one who admits that the underlying assumption of a general community interest was largely a fiction in Ch'ing times. Both of these points require some further elaboration.

Through literature on Ch'ing granaries are scattered comments which suggest the authors understood different economic conditions might require various

(43) "Cho-ting she-chang chang-ch'eng shu" 酌定社長章程疏 (A Memorial on Regulations for Community Granary Managers), *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (1821), 40/10b-11b.

forms of granary organization and management. The creation of salt merchant granaries in the Yung-cheng reign is testimony to this point, for those granaries ordered "to be constructed in the areas near the salt fields in Liang-huai, in order to provide speedy assistance to impoverished salt-gathering households."⁽⁴⁴⁾ Also, K'ang-hsi, in a passage quoted above, used the old saw that public granaries were more suited to the countryside than the city. This was wrong, for publicly supported granaries survived longer in the cities as means for the wealthy to assuage the sufferings of the poor in times of crisis.

Some essayists even seem to base their arguments on questions of economic differences. Chang Hai-shan 張海珊 (fl. mid-18th century) was a member of a wealthy lineage based in Ch'ang-su in Kiangsu. He wrote:

My home is near Lake T'ai and from Ming times onward we have experienced various alarms and calamities; yet still the situation is one where the people are greater than the available land. It seems an ordinary household tills no more than five mou. Consequently nine out of ten people rely on trade in order to live or are sojourning craftsmen. When Szechwan grain is stopped in the spring period of deficiency, or the movement of outside grain is stopped by disasters, our area is the first to feel the bad effects.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Chang Hai-shan goes on to propose a rather orthodox solution to this problem by setting up Obligation Granaries, but what interests us here is his unusual recognition that it is his area's highly commercialized character which created special food supply problems. Until such differences were widely recognized and appreciated, it seems impossible that the Ch'ing authorities could ever have established a granary system which would adequately serve the varied needs of the Empire.

On the second point, concerning the lack of a real community in rural Chinese settlements, we again have the Emperor and his high officials acting

(44) *Huang-ch'ao chang-ku hui-pien* (1902), nei 24/7b.

(45) "Chi-ku-hui i" 積穀會議 (An Opinion on Grain Storage Societies), *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (1821), 39/6a-7b.

in terms of the accepted social fiction and not admitting to the realities of lineage organization. The granary system, like the mutual protection and tax collection systems, did not take into account the existence of a strong, competing social organization based on descent within communities. This point has been most recently investigated by Hilary Beattie in her excellent book, *Land and Lineage in China: A Study of T'ung-ch'eng County, Anhwei in the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties* (1979), and she concludes:

The history of lineage organizations in T'ung-ch'eng thus confirms Fei Hsiao-t'ung's view that they were deliberately used by the elite to perpetuate themselves and their privileges.⁽⁴⁶⁾

This goal was accomplished, as Beattie has demonstrated, by emphasis on land owning and proper education for lineage males, not through exercising general leadership within the community.

The validity of the proposition that people generally helped their lineage members and had no time for general community responsibilities is difficult to document, but accounts often hint that aid usually was given to clansmen, relatives and friends. A Shantung gazetteer records that an unusual case in 1703 when a wealthy man Chao p'1-yeh 趙丕業 provided relief to large numbers of starving people for his own storehouses, "regardless of their surname." He did not even report those who stole grain from his fields and provided relief work through his sponsorship of public works projects, such as bridge repairs, in his home community.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Thus it would seem that in Shantung too wealthy individuals organized strong lineage groups. These lineage responsibilities took precedence and only in times of major disaster would someone consider granting aid to the community at large.

The real difficulty in operating local public granaries was not the dishonesty of their managers nor the existence of the wrong regulations for their management, but lay in the fact that wealthy individuals in Ch'ing were most

(46) p. 128.

(47) *Po-shan hsien-chih* (1936), 12/47a-48b.

likely to organize to to protect their wealth along lineage lines. Therefore, the natural local leaders had no need nor desire to assume general community responsibilities, such as granaries that duplicated their lineage roles, but offered no corresponding rewards.

VIII

In this essay I have tried to show how granaries were intended to serve as a means of famine relief in the Ch'ing period. Publicly supported granaries, in particular, were advocated in these years as a means of popularly organized and managed relief in the Chinese countryside. In fact, widespread popular support for such public granaries never existed. That illusion resided primarily in the mind of the Yung-cheng Emperor and some high officials of the 17th and 18th centuries. Based on the ideas of Chu Hsi, these men believed that public granaries could flourish, but they did not. Rural Community Granaries failed because they could not compete against the interests of strong lineage organization. Urban granaries, usually supported by merchants, were more practical, but few 18th century observers recognized the special conditions which permitted their success.

The period of apparent achievement in public granary operation comes during the Yung-cheng period. It turns out to be largely an illusion because most were created by imperial sponsorship through special grants from the reformed tax surcharge system. When the special government support was withdrawn in the Ch'ien-lung era, the Community Granary system languished and was reabsorbed into the official granaries.