VI

OPERATION OF THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

In its historical perspective, as seen in the last chapter, traditional Chinese government was never purely secular, but instead there was always an intimate interplay between religious and political forces. From the twelfth century on, large-scale organized voluntary religion wielding independent political influence retreated into the background, and the reassertion of the Confucian state provided an opportunity for certain classical religious elements to develop once more their function within the framework of the political institution. This function lay mainly in giving religious sanction to the ethicopolitical order of the state. It was in this direction that religion developed its political role in harmony with the Confucian principles which insisted upon secular control of political power.

Effectiveness of the Mandate in Modern Times

It is a familiar fact that many of the religious influences in Chinese political life stemmed from the basic concept of Heaven and its subordinate system of deities as a supernatural force that predetermined the course of all events in the universe, including political events. Of central importance to this concept was the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, the symbol of legitimacy claimed by every dynastic power and widely accepted by the common people. The grand imperial sacrifice to Heaven, which struck the Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the most impressive institution in the Middle Kingdom, was continued with all

its traditional solemnity and splendor throughout the entire Ch'ing period (1644–1911). Thus stated Hughes:

> There was the solemn rite of the emperor's worship of Heaven, when as the representative of his people he presented himself at the great Altar of Heaven. After due fasting and with his great officials in their gorgeous robes to support him, the greatest monarch on earth prostrated himself before something which was not represented by any image, something which was above him and his people as the blue sky was above the white marble altar, something without whose providence in the ordering of seasons the people could not live, and by whose commission he held his throne.[1]

This one classical religious tradition was neither displaced by foreign beliefs nor tarnished by time through its more than three thousand years of existence and development. The founding of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1644 and the coronation of each successive monarch until 1909 was accompanied by the most sumptuous sacrifice to Heaven and Earth[2] as a symbol of receiving the Mandate of Heaven to rule the empire. Throughout the duration of that dynasty, the administrative district in and around the national capital of Peking was named Shun-t'ien Fu, the Prefect in Accord with Heaven. In 1850, when reviewing the position of the dynasty in the face of the raging Taiping rebellion, Emperor Tao Kuang reiterated that, "We, the Great House of Ch'ing, received the Mandate from Heaven."[3] Four years later, Emperor Hsien Feng tried to justify his dynastic power in the face of that spreading rebellion by reaffirming the same claim: "I rule the people as a representative of Heaven."[4]

Similar pronouncements abounded in the edicts of every monarch in the entire Ch'ing period, particularly when the political power of the dynasty was challenged by dissension or rebellion. The imposing and stately sacrifices to Heaven were meant to be testimony to these pronouncements. In normal as in troubled years, such pronouncements and sacrifices served as tangible reminder to the people that the power to govern was not an affair among men, but an arrangement between Heaven and the ruling group.

Similar significance was embodied in the popular myth that the

emperor was the incarnation of the dragon. As the most powerful living creature, the mythological dragon dwelt in the clouds and was intimately associated with the heavenly forces that controlled rain and other climatic elements so essential to agriculture. Hence the use of the dragon and cloud pattern as the basic decorative motif on the embroidered imperial robes, on palace buildings, and on objects used by the imperial household. All these were traditional means of associating Heaven and its forces with the imperial power.

This basic notion of political power as a divine commission from Heaven did not die with the end of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911, for an impressive sacrifice to Heaven and Earth constituted part of the preparation by which Yüan Shih-k'ai, the Republican renegade, attempted his abortive restoration of the monarchical system in 1915. At that time, the provincial assemblies of the shaken Republic were maneuvred into issuing a declaration urging Yüan to assume the "supreme position in accordance with Heaven's will."[5] The following story continued to circulate in Peking from the time of the restorationist crisis to the 1930's. Yüan's cook served him rice every day in a treasured porcelain bowl in his bedchamber. One day the bowl fell from the cook's hand while he was in the chamber, and broke. To save himself, the cook said to Yüan, "As I was entering your room with the rice bowl, I suddenly saw a huge dragon stretched on your bed. I became frightened and the bowl fell from my hand and broke." Yüan, so the story goes, was very pleased and did not punish the cook. Whether or not there was such an incident is inconsequential. What is significant is that the story circulated among the people in the capital at a time when the restorationist movement needed supernatural justification to help it gain popular support.

Sanctifying the Supremacy of the Central Political Power

Thus, through impressive sacrifices, official pronouncements, and popular lore, constant effort was made to associate imperial power with Heaven and the heavenly forces. The reasons for such effort are well recognized by students of Chinese culture.[6] The basic factor was the overwhelming power of Heaven and its forces. There

was no more readily observable symbol of supremacy above man than the mysterious, limitless heights of Heaven. The regular movements of the heavenly bodies symbolized Heaven's regulative power to keep the universe in stable order. And the power of the heavenly forces to produce the proper succession of seasons was of particular importance to an agricultural people.

Any individual or group that succeeded in convincing the people that they were the earthly representatives of such forces would enjoy in the public mind Heaven's sanction and would share Heaven's superhuman power. Thus, in 1881, in introducing the subject of official sacrifice, the local gazetteer of Ma-ch'eng county of Hupeh province quoted the ancient classical statement: "Just as there are ten planets in Heaven, there are ten classes among men; it is for the low [classes] to serve the high [classes], and it is for the high [classes] to be in communion with the gods."[7]

Investing political power with sanctity is universal with primitive tribes as well as with premodern states.[8] But with the Chinese state, there was an additional factor underlying the constant effort to impart a divine character to imperial political power in order to ensure its supremacy and to inspire awe and respect. This factor was related to the failure of Confucianism as the state orthodoxy to present a theory of the origin of monarchical power, thus leaving this power without an ultimate secular justification.

The Confucian principle of *government by men of merit through selection* (the civil service examination system) was the basis for the authority of the administrative officials, but not for the power of the monarch. Theoretically, the principle of merit was extendible to the head of the state, for Confucian classics abound with discussions of the qualities an ideal head of the state should possess. He should, for example, have sagelike wisdom and perfect self-discipline; he should have a boundless heart for benevolent government; he should devote himself completely to public duties; he should know not only the "Way of Man" (*jen tao*) but also the "Way of Heaven" (*t'ien tao*).[9] Centuries of Confucian literature kept harking back to mythological rulers like Yao and Shun for examples of such ideal heads of state.

Some of these qualities may be considered what Max Weber

called charisma, the gift of grace, and they already carry an element of the divine. In spite of the Confucian theory that through cultivation and effort such qualities are attainable by men, history showed no such examples. Setting up such standards resulted only in lengthy imperial titles given to rulers through the centuries, titles that claimed sagely wisdom, unusual abilities, and perfect virtues, all in order to create an aura of superhuman qualities around the imperial personage. Such titles, often mockeries of the real qualities of their owners, served to inspire awe and respect and to represent post-facto justifications for power. The establishment of such standards also gave a pontifical character to the traditional imperial edicts, which were called "sage will" or "sage instruction." As we will soon see, these titles and standards also formed a part of a Confucian "ideal pattern," designed for moral control of power. But there still remained the question of why a person of falsified merits should be permitted to occupy the seat of supreme power.

In the Confucian orthodoxy, another unanswered question was how an ideal person was to attain the position of monarch, even granting that he could be found. Neither Confucius nor Mencius saw fit to dwell on the mythological "yielding of power" by a sage monarch to a successor chosen purely on the ground of merit, and the formula was glaringly impractical in an actual power struggle (as seen in the yielding of the Han throne to Wang Mang in A.D. 9 under duress). Mencius' theory of revolution by the people was a negative measure for removing tyrants, not a positive formula for selecting a meritorious person and installing him in the position of supreme power, and the theory never was developed into an institutionalized principle. It may be suggested here that the Confucian sense of practical politics and its emphasis on universal harmony prevented the full development of a theory of revolution or the extension of the idea of the civil service examination system to the selection of the head of state.

At any rate, in founding the Confucianist doctrine, both Confucius and Mencius chose not to elaborate on the question of the origin of imperial power, but rather to confine themselves to formulating a body of ethicopolitical principles defining the duties

and guiding the actions of a ruler after power was placed in his hands. In subsequent centuries the Confucian tradition offered no objection to—in fact, implicitly accepted—the historical adage, "The one who won [power] became a king; the one who lost [power] became a bandit." It was plainly the familiar expedient formula of accepting power as an accomplished fact and then trying to harness with it the pressure of moral prescriptions.

This accomplished fact represented success in the struggle for dynastic power through the most sanguinary and destructive violence. Post-facto moralization of the situation alone would not be sufficient to wipe away the bloodstain from the winner and build respect and confidence in him and his new position of power so as to stabilize the institution of government. Beyond moralizing, a supernatural explanation was needed to force popular acceptance of the new leader. Such a supernatural explanation was supplied by the Will and Mandate of Heaven, which favored the winner; the outcome of the whole struggle was part of the predetermined course of events, unalterable and unchallengeable by men. And, above all, Heaven as the predeterminer of events stood as the supreme judge of universal morality. It was in this sense that the people accepted the winner as part of an overwhelming fate, assenting to him along with the moral precepts attached to the situation as ordained by Heaven. Thus the awe and respect for the supernatural was a vital factor in putting the coat of morality and honor on a dynastic founder, who was basically a master at the manipulation of force and violence.

In the subsequent events of a dynasty, should the monarch be a charismatic figure capable of exemplary leadership, his effective political performance partly became the justification of his power. But, should he be mediocre or derelict in his duties, some other justification for his power was needed in order to maintain the people's respect and confidence in the institution of government. It was here again that Confucian orthodoxy accepted the arbitrary concept of the divine sanction of political power.

The question has often been raised as to how the rulers received the "Mandate" from Heaven. Such mystery was not explained by Confucianism or by any other doctrine, nor was such explanation

necessary. More than anything else, the Mandate of Heaven was invested in the office of the throne, rather than in the person of the ruler. It was the possession of the office, as symbolized by the performance of the sacrificial rites to Heaven and Earth, that imparted a sacred character to the person of the ruler. The divine endorsement of the office, and not the person, enabled Confucian doctrine to justify the change of a ruling house as the situation arose. It was in this way that the administration of the empire was stabilized on an arbitrary center of supreme power which was justified not by the secular consent of men but by the sanctifying power of almighty Heaven.

Inspiring Confidence

Besides endorsing the supremacy of the imperial power, divine sanction from Heaven also inspired confidence in the governing authority as a stabilizing factor in the political structure of the empire. If chance and the limitations of empirical knowledge were factors in the development of cultic worship in social and economic activities, the same factors applied to the development of the state cult of Heaven and Earth and its system of subordinate deities. Even the most effective ruler could not assure perfect success in the complex affair of ruling a vast empire, as natural calamities and human upheavals might upset his plans. At times of uncontrollable crises, it was again natural that man would draw confidence and strength by appealing to the supreme power of Heaven.

A prominent example of this was the religious activity of the imperial court during the Taiping rebellion. At the height of the rebellion, edict after edict was issued by the emperor to enlist the help of the gods to suppress the rebels. When at last the rebel capital of Nanking was recaptured in 1864, there was a burst of religious activities, including the impressive imperial sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, the supplication to the spirits of the imperial ancestors, and the numerous sacrifices to local deities by officials in the provincial communities, all offering thanks for divine assistance in the great achievement. Thus, an edict from Emperor T'ung Chih in that year stated that the widespread destruction wrought by the

rebels had angered both the gods and men, that the imperial government had launched its campaign in the name of Heaven, and that the success in recapturing the city of Nanking was "due solely to favored protection from Heaven and affection from the spirits of the sage ancestors." [10]

Such religious activities and pronouncements reflected the court's lack of confidence in human abilities alone to restore control over the empire and a tendency to draw inspiration from the supernatural realm. Even if we should doubt the sincerity of the rulers, these edicts and sacrifices neverthless impressed the people with the notion that Heaven and the gods continued their sanction and support for the house of Ch'ing. Still effective as a guiding political principle was Confucius' statement that a state, if forced to, could forego defense and even food, but it could not stand without the people's confidence in the government (*Lun yü,* Book VII, chap. 7). Even in times of peace and order, the imperial government needed religious sanction from Heaven to help maintain the people's confidence. In times when the people's confidence in the government was shaken by its inability to maintain unchallenged supremacy, public belief in supernatural help was so much the more necessary.

The Popular Foundation of the Mandate of Heaven

The question may be raised as to how the common people came to believe in the idea of the Mandate of Heaven and to accept the supremacy of imperial power partly on the ground that it was a predetermined course ordained by the gods. The question is particularly pertinent in view of the relatively tenuous tie between the central imperial power and the intimate life of the common people. As the common people were rather unconcerned over the central government, one questions how religious ideas about the central political power made such a deep impression on the minds of the people.

Many factors were involved. Secular matters, such as the possession of naked force and coercion by the government, the occasional devastation of war, the exaction of taxes and levies, and the

intermittent exercise of law and justice, all brought the central political power into the intimate life of the people. But so far as the religious belief connected with political power was concerned, the idea of the Mandate of Heaven rested on the popular acceptance of Heaven as the supreme power which predetermined all events in the universe, from great affairs of state to humble occurrences in the individual's life.

The theology of Yin-yang and the Five Elements provided a mystical explanation for the relationship between the heavenly forces and the affairs of state; the succession of dynastic powers was thought to be predetermined by the rotation of the Five Elements.[11] The same theology also interpreted the predetermination of all personal events by the set of forces of Yin-yang and the Five Elements, which were connected with the movement of the stars in directing the mystical operation of time, which, in turn, determined the nature of personal events.

Hours of the day, for example, were designated by twelve Chinese characters representing the "twelve earthly branches," and the years were designated by the combination of these characters with ten other characters representing the "ten heavenly pillars." Each time unit stood for a certain combination of heavenly and earthly forces at work. The meeting of these forces at a certain hour in combination with a certain day in a certain month in a certain year might be harmonious and lead to good luck, whereas another combination might mean an antagonistic meeting of forces and lead to misfortune. The idea was similar to that of combining Friday and the thirteenth day of the month, which signifies bad luck in the Western tradition. A man born at a certain time, because of the rare combination of harmonious forces at that time, might be destined to mount the throne, while another person born at a time when there was an antagonistic meeting of mystical forces might be fated to die of starvation. The results of human action were similarly predetermined by the particular time such action took place. Thus, a person's whole career and fate depended on the operation of these mystical forces as they affected him. And so the magic-oriented common people would not take any major action, from holding a wedding to opening a store, without consulting the

religious almanac for an auspicious time. The same theology of Yin-yang and the Five Elements underlay the theory of *feng-shui* (geomancy), which interpreted the effect of a certain space or the location of a building or a grave upon the luck or misfortune of the affected individuals. Space, no less than time, was involved in the operation of the mystical forces of Yin-yang and the Five Elements. Fuller descriptions of the beliefs in the magical influences of time and space are abundant in other works dealing with Chinese mysticism and superstitions.[12]

Observers have generally regarded these practices of divination and geomancy as a chaotic mass of ignorant superstitions. Actually they represented a well-coördinated system of religious concepts containing the belief in the power of Heaven and Earth to predetermine the course of all events, large or small, by controlling the time and space within which they occurred. It was because the people believed in Heaven's power to control the fate of their personal lives that they came to embrace the idea of the Mandate of Heaven and the divine character of the supreme political power. Otherwise, the worship of Heaven as a political cult would have been something quite distant from the intimate experience of the people. In this sense, the theology of Yin-yang and the Five Elements served as a link between the supernatural basis of the affairs of state and the intimate life of the people.

Universalizing Influence of Heaven

The universal acceptance of the supreme power of Heaven over all gods and man provided the imperial power with an important religious basis for the political integration of a vast country. The immensity of China, its variegated geographical settings, and the complexity of ethnic backgrounds in the local communities all tended to breed religious and political variations that might have threatened the unity of the empire. But when Heaven was accepted as the supernatural power that governed all the gods regardless of faith or creed, and when Heaven was used as the sanctifying authority for the central political power, the effect was to increase the empire's unity by subordinating to central control a variety of local

religious traditions that otherwise might have become sanctioning symbols for local political autonomy. The supremacy of Heaven over all gods created a hierarchical system out of the numerous local deities, which otherwise would have presented a chaotic conglomeration of mutually exclusive religious traditions, a situation that would have inevitably affected the unity of the empire's political life. Heaven thus represented a universalizing influence in the imperial unification of diverse localistic beliefs and traditions. Under this system the peasants in Chekiang or Kwangtung province might be intensely devoted to local gods and spirits stemming from a particular ethnic background, but these deities were a part of the hierarchy of supernatural powers subordinated under Heaven, the formal worship of which was monopolized by the central political power.

Ethicopolitical Significance of Heaven—the "Interaction Between Heaven and Man"

With the acceptance of social and political life as Heaven-ordained came the development of the popular attitude of "Obey Heaven and adjust to time; be content with oneself, and accept fate," an attitude that was most conducive to the consolidation of the power position of the rulers. But this predetermined course of events, however inevitable it might be, needed an ethical content in order to create a submissive attitude in the populace. The inculcation of moral meaning into political power yielded an ethicopolitical order that was essential to the stability of the political institution. It was in this connection that religion came to play another influential political role.

Religion and the Moralization of Power

It has been previously pointed out that the Confucian orthodoxy extended implicit recognition to the winner of the violent struggle for power as the legitimate ruler, and then imposed on him and his government a body of institutionalized ethicopolitical precepts and rules. Confucianism repeatedly emphasized rule by ethical virtue as against rule by force and law. The principle was symbolized by the

Confucian key term of *cheng chiao,* or government through educational guidance. By this formula the Confucian orthodoxy inculcated moral meaning into imperial power, power that had generally been acquired through ethically unmotivated channels of violence and coercion. The moralization of power gave a stability to the institution of government which could never have been achieved by force alone.

The moralization of power had added importance for the governing of as vast an area as the Chinese empire with but a simple political structure and a strikingly small number of officials. In the nineteenth century there were only about 40,000 official positions for the management of the central and local government agencies that ruled over 3,500,000 square miles and an estimated population of 400,000,000.[13] This contrasts with some 1,500,000 officials in Communist China in 1957, in addition to the ruling elite of 12,000,000 members of the Chinese Communist Party and 23,000,000 members in the Youth League as part of the governing apparatus.[14] The system of formal imperial government stopped at the county level, with counties averaging about 200,000 population each. Without the assistance of the Confucian ethicopolitical order that was internalized into the conscience of the people, a scantily staffed formal government would not have been able to maintain unity and order in the extensive country.

But the effective operation of the ethicopolitical order depended partly on religious influence, especially in a traditional society such as the Chinese. One apparent reason was the ability of religion to inspire awe, respect, and a sense of overwhelming universal destiny for the ethicopolitical order that had incorporated the religious element into it. Another reason was that no moral system or ethicopolitical order could be infallible in actual, long-term operation. History as well as personal experience abounded with cases of morally undeserved successes and ethically unjustifiable miseries. Such instances raised doubts on the soundness of the ethicopolitical order and tended to weaken its hold on the individual's conscience. It was here that the idea of a superhuman destiny came into operation to remedy the ever-present moral fallibility of the secular political system. This may be seen in two major aspects of Chinese

religion: the theory of "interaction between Heaven and man" (to be discussed immediately below) and the ethicopolitical cults (to be considered in chap. vii).

The Moralization of Heaven

The theory of "interaction between Heaven and man" was a familiar corollary in the state cult of Heaven worship. Developed in Han times (206 B.C. to A.D. 220) by men like Tung Chung-shu, the theory became institutionalized into a guiding political concept and yielded voluminous apocryphal literature. Interpreting this theory with respect to the political life of the land became an official responsibility of the court astronomers down to the end of the nineteenth century, and the common people continued to believe in it up to the present time, as shown by Communist propaganda against it during the eclipse of the sun on Chinese New Year's Day in 1953.

The theory itself was rather simple and unsophisticated. In the ideal state, the world of man and the world of nature operated as a harmonious whole. When man, either the ruler or the people, committed evil acts, he upset the order of universal harmony, and Heaven would respond by either sending warnings before the act was committed or by meting out punishment afterward. The warnings would be in a variety of forms of extraordinary phenomena of nature, such as an eclipse of the sun, especially on an unusual day such as New Year's Day, the appearance of a comet, the falling of a star, or the birth of abnormally formed animals or humans. Examples of Heavenly punishment would be droughts, floods, unseasonable precipitation, earthquakes, fire, and destruction by lightning. When portents appeared or when punishment descended, it was time for man to mend his ways, to redeem his sins, and to try to restore harmony to the universe.

The primary political significance of such an interpretation of nature was obvious. It was the investment of moral meaning into what otherwise would have been morally meaningless forces of nature. It was true that the power of natural forces, as symbolized by Heaven, had been the essence of the cult of Heaven worship which helped to impart an awesome quality to the political institution of the state. But, as popular acceptance of a political institution must

be founded on concepts of ethics and justice, the idea of power alone, however superhuman and awe-inspring, would not have been sufficient to enable the worship of Heaven to play its vital role. The operation of natural forces might be morally blind or indifferent, damaging or benefiting good and evil men alike regardless of their ethical quality. This was what Lao Tzu meant when he characterized Heaven and Earth as unkind, treating all things as "grass and dogs," with indifference. And it was the widespread misery devoid of moral meaning in the latter part of the Chou period (sixth to third centuries B.C) that led to a certain degree of loss of faith in Heaven and gave rise to rationalistic thoughts on the subject. In order to become the center of a faith capable of inspiring confidence in a political institution, Heaven and its system of natural forces needed to acquire a moral connotation.

This is what the theory of "interaction between Heaven and man" sought to achieve. Accepted by the rulers and the people alike, Heaven represented not merely a powerful but also a morally meaningful body of forces, operating on ethical principles which were fully binding on man as an integral part of the universe. In all cultures, extraordinary phenomena of nature have always been associated with religious ideas. In China, through this theory, such phenomena were interpreted as manifestations of the ethical motivation of the universe, as symbolized by Heaven. Power and ethical motivation together made Heaven a most suitable sanctioning authority for the political institution.

Down through the centuries since the Han times, this theory was used as a tool of power politics. Political factions blamed each other for misdoings that called forth Heaven's rage in the form of portents,[15] and rebels accused the ruling dynasty of misgovernment as witnessed by the appearance of extraordinary phenomena. But in the modern Ch'ing period, as in many former dynasties, the ethico-political interpretation of extraordinary natural phenomena became the sole monopoly of the state, and the circulation of free interpretations was drastically prohibited by law. Under these circumstances the theory of "interaction between Heaven and man" became a justification for the power position of the ruling dynasty. This role of Heaven was particularly clear at the time when the dynasty faced challenge from rebellions.

In 1814, for example, an edict by Emperor Chia-ch'ing, on the subject of two rebel bands that were disturbing the area near the capital, started with the assertion that ". . . the principle of interaction between Heaven and man . . . never failed to work." The edict further stated that, since the successful suppression of the rebellion led by Li Wen-ch'eng in Hopei province in the previous year, the area had had seasonable rain and snow and there were abundant crops of wheat and millet, bearing evidence to "Heaven's forgiveness and benevolence." But, the edict continued, the band of rebels led by Lin Ch'ing was still causing disturbance in the area near the capital, thus preventing "seasonable snow in the winter and timely rain in the summer," and this was "punishment from Heaven." Hence the emperor offered sacrifice at the temple of the god of the Black Dragon, pleading for forgiveness from Heaven and for rain from the dragon god.[16]

Again, from 1851 to 1854, as the great Taiping rebellion ran rampant over half the empire, Emperor Hsien-feng offered sacrifice to Heaven nine times in four years, pleading for Heaven's help in suppressing the uprising, and edict after edict blamed the rebellion for all the floods, droughts, and unseasonable weather that caused agricultural damage in different parts of the country. This was echoed in the apocryphal records of the local gazetteers throughout the empire. A typical example may be found in an entry in the Ch'uan-sha county gazetteer for the year 1861:

> In the latter part of the sixth month, the Comet appeared with a sparkling tail of several tens of feet [warning of a forthcoming war]; on the nineteenth day and night of the seventh month, howling of ghosts was heard in all directions, and destructive storms and torrential rains followed immediately; on the nineteenth day of the twelfth month, the Taiping rebel forces captured this county, and this was followed by three days and nights of extremely heavy snow starting from the twenty-seventh day of the month; the bitter cold stopped traffic on the roads, and the people were deprived of food. . . .[17]

Thus, the unseasonable precipitation, the comet, the torrential rains, and the unusually bitter cold were all expressions of Heaven's anger at the rebellions, especially the Taiping rebellion, which was interpreted as having disturbed the harmony of the state and hence

as having dislocated the proper order of the universe. The ruling dynasty had religious justification for its campaign to restore its power, and had a religious explanation for the failure of the ethico-political order, for all calamities and miseries were attributed to the disturbing acts of the rebellions. Imperial edicts on this subject usually carried self-deprecations by the monarch for dereliction of duty, but these were in conformity with Chinese polite humility, and they in no way interfered with his claim to the status of being the Son of Heaven, nor did they weaken the interpretation of continued divine support for the dynastic power and of Heaven's anger at the rebels for the dislocation of the cosmic order. In any event, Heaven as the supreme authority took final responsibility for meting out calamities and sufferings, and the dynasty was thus theoretically spared from being the direct target of popular discontentment and attack.

The political effectiveness of this cultic theory depended on its popular acceptance. The presence of lengthy apocryphal sections in modern local gazetteers of all counties attested to the wide currency of this belief among the population. Even in the mid-twentieth century, in the towns and villages, the appearance of extraordinary phenomena seldom fails to arouse speculations and comments on their connection with human events as ordained by Heaven.[18]

Whether the educated ruling class sincerely believed in the theory is another matter. From Wang Ch'ung in Han times to many like-minded rationalists through the subsequent centuries, the fallacy of the theory had been more than once pointedly exposed. But such a rationalistic interpretation of nature never gained wide acceptance partly because of the fact that the theory of "interaction between Heaven and man" was founded not on the appeal to empirical truth but rather on the emotional need for superhuman assurance.

The traditional educated class inherited the outlook of Confucian rationalism, and hence it might not be thoroughly and sincerely convinced of apocryphal interpretations. But there was also the profound Confucian sense of destiny based on predetermination by Heaven. Few living Chinese who received a classical education can ever forget the familiar Confucian lines, "When a nation is about to flourish, there are sure to be happy omens; and when it

is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens."[19] The frequent quotation of this line in current comments on politics by Chinese critics shows the unconscious influence of supernatural ideas on the Confucian mind. All these induced the traditionally educated man to take a more serious view of the theory in the prescientific age, when man's knowledge about the abnormal phenomena of nature was limited. Even if rationalistic views weighed more heavily on the Confucian mind, it was the Confucians who wrote the apocryphal literature and started many of the superstitious rumors; they understood the function and effectiveness of such a theory as a political tool for harnessing the masses or in struggling for power.