

The changing face of civil unrest and the *fanzhen* garrison system during the reign of Tang Emperor Wuzong in China

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The study of the history of Tang China which focuses on the transition from the Tang to the Song Dynasty has recently broadened its purview from the Han Chinese world proper to the whole region spanning eastern Eurasia. In the present article the author focuses on the mid-ninth century civil disturbances occurring among the governors (*jiedushi* 節度使) of *fanzhen* 藩鎮 regional garrisons and their relationship to the Dynastic transition, taking up the concrete example of the rebellion of Liu Zhen 劉稹, the governor of Zhao-Yi 昭義 in Eastern Shanxi Province.

Despite the overwhelming opinion that the rebellion represents an “exception” in the *fanzhen* civil disturbances, the author’s analysis of Liu Zhen’s close advisors shows that the incident should be directly understood as an element of *fanzhen* civil unrest as it developed after the An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion (755-63). Moreover, the fact that the imperial court took on the task of quelling Liu’s rebellion reflects the defeat of the remnants of the Uighur nomadic empire that had risen during that time on the Tang Dynasty’s northern periphery. Also, through its divide and conquer tactic of appealing to common interests it shared with Liu’s army, the court was able to avoid one threat by negotiating over succession to the three garrisons of Hebei. However, due to the large demilitarization of the region after the rebellion, a huge outflow of surplus military personnel into Henan took place, resulting in region becoming racked with brigandage, smuggling and outright rebellion.

Given the situation described above, the author concludes that the rebellion of Liu Zhen and China’s policy regarding the three garrisons north of the Huanghe, as well as the instability characterizing Henan were for the Tang Dynasty problems not exclusively “domestic” in nature, but rather linked to what was going in the hinterlands of Inner Asia. That is to say, from the An

Lushan Rebellion on, in addition to need to defend its northern borders, the Tang Dynasty had to amass a huge military campaign into the hinterlands for the defense of the northern three garrisons. Then during the reign of Emperor Wuzong, with the destruction of the Uighur Empire, the court deployed its northern defense forces to quell the *fanzhen* rebellions raging in the interior. Via such efforts, the court was also able to secure the northern three garrisons, thus almost simultaneously eliminating any military threat to the Middle Kingdom. This is why the court then embarked on the demilitarization of the remote hinterland *fanzhen*, which were now deemed unnecessary. Consequently, the demobilized troops having no place to settle turned into a domestic source of civil unrest.

The rebellion of Liu Zhen was therefore an event which symbolizes the changing situation of the mid-ninth century, in which reverberations caused by the destruction of the nomadic empire of the steppe rumbled through the Taihang Mountains into Hebei, and eventually became an indirect source of civil unrest in Henan.