CHEN TUNG AND THE STUDENT MOVEMENT OF SUNG CHINA

Student movements prevailed during the Sung Dynasty. The main reason was the incompetence of the ruling class and the lack of a strong military force in facing the northern invaders. The weakness resulted partially from a national policy of emphasizing the importance of civil personnel at the expense of military strength. The other factor was Sung's anarchic, irresponsible attitude regarding financial matters. Thus there was danger from being attacked by the enemies - the Khitan in the north-east and Hsi Hsi in the north-west. Early in the twelfth century, Jurchen overthrew Khitan and became a new menace to Sung. Most of the Sung emperors did not know how to find good men to whom they could delegate authority and whom they could trust. They were in favour of peace resulting in accepting whatever peace terms its enemies chose to impose. The Emperor Hui Tsung was a good example. He was very fond of music. He left the control of the state to the villainous Prime Minister, Tsai King and the army was in the hands of an ambitious eunuch, Tung Kuan. In consequence of these, the nation was heavily taxed to pay for the expenses of wars and to upkeep a luxurious court. Party struggles at the imperial court added to the general weakness of the nation.

Due to these reasons, patriotic students tried to rescue the nation. Student movements occurred. The leader of these movements was Chen Tung (1086 - 1127). In the years 1125 to 1127, he presented petitions to his emperor ten times.

In the year 1125, after conquering Liao (Khitan), the Kin set out on a southward invasion. The Kin even descended on Kai-Feng, the Imperial Capital. In an emergency of this kind, Chen Tung, backed by hundreds of college students, presented petitions to Hui Tsung. He revealed that this kind of situation was due to the betrayal of Tsai King, Tung Kuan, Wan Fu, Li Yan, Liang Shi Tseng and Chu Mien. He demanded that these six men be killed. However, under Hui Tsung's protection, they fled southwards with him. Chin Tsung succeeded to the throne.

In the court, certain high ranking officials favoured a policy of conciliation and capitulation, but the soldiers and the civilians stood for the defence of Kai-Feng. Under pressure, the Emperor Chin Tsung was obliged to appoint Li Kang to defend the city. In 1126, the Kin troops besieged Kai-Feng. Li Kang directed a heroic
defence. Meanwhile, reinforcements totalling more than 200,000 men reached the outer position of the city. The invaders were isolated and cut off from their supplies. But despite this favourable situation, the Emperor was determined to seek peace with the enemy. He dismissed Li Kang. The people were exasperated and gathered in thousands in front of the palace with Chen Tung in the fore, demanding that Li Kang be reinstated. The Emperor was forced to yield to popular demand. In face of determined resistance, the Kin troops retreated.

Two months after the departure of the Kin troops, Hui Tsung returned to the capital. In spite of the urgent entreaties of the generals, neither steps were taken to assemble the forces of the empire in preparation for the next invasion of the Kin nor was the capital strengthened. In autumn of the same year, the Kin troops made another attempt to advance southwards. Hardly anything was done to meet this crisis. Chen Tung twice pleaded with the Emperor to take actions against the Kin. However, Chin Tsung did not listen to him.

The southward invasion of the Kin troops was victorious. The Emperor repeatedly appealed for peace. In 1127, the Kin troops took over Kai-Feng, ransacked the city and kidnapped Chin Tsung and Hui Tsung together with many members of imperial descent. Another son of Hui Tsung, Kao Tsung succeeded to the Throne. He made his capital at Shangchin and later the capital was moved to Hangchow. It was known as Southern Sung.

At the beginning, Kao Tsung tried to gain confidence from his people, thus he appointed Li Kang as Prime Minister. However when his position was strengthened, he dismissed Li Kang and appointed Wang Chien Shan. He favoured the policy of conciliation and capitulation. Chen Tung three times pleaded with the Emperor to reinstate Li Kang and dismiss Wang Chien Shan. Wang Chien Shan thus wanted Chen Tung to be killed. Kao Tsung was also worried that the power of this patriotic leader might grow again. So he put Chen Tung to prison and finally killed him at the Prime Minister's instigation.

Although Chen Tung was dead, his patriotic spirit still existed in the hearts of future generations. Student movements did not stop. Student movements continued to occur till the end of the Sung Dynasty.