

Appendix 1: The Dilemma of Imperial Relatives in the Agrarian Empires¹

Rulers of the agrarian empires² throughout history faced the issue of what to do with their imperial relatives. It was most acute at the founding of the dynasty, when the terms of settlement were not yet set and the positions of power not yet institutionalized. During these times, the ruler had to make a decision about where to use the relatives in help ruling, or to isolate them. The problem might also arise in the midst of a mature dynasty especially if a system for the imperial relatives had not been formalized and a succession crisis set off challenges for the throne. This could lead to internal struggles, a breakdown in political order, or even civil war.

To get a sense of this problem, consider the position of the ruler of a new dynasty. He often came to power through military conquest and political maneuver, relying on trusted personnel, many of whom were his sons and brothers. Having seized power, those who aided the founder needed to be rewarded with position, honors, and material rewards. Furthermore, relatives expected to play a role in the new state by dint of their relations. The ruler's sons, for example, possessed a sense of inheritance and made demands for political and financial resources. They also demanded consideration in succession negotiations. In addition to the relatives themselves, the ruler's staff strove to make permanent political and social arrangements so as to preserve their favored positions. They saw the continuation of the dynasty as a means to solidify their power. This created further pressure to institute a system of succession that preserved the structures of power and those who occupied the highest positions. Should the ruler fail to

¹ The arguments here were first developed in a presentation entitled "What should the ruler do with his sons?: The dilemma of imperial relatives in the agrarian empires," delivered at the Workshop in History, Culture, and Society at Harvard University, December 6, 2013.

² By which I mean no more than a large territory ruled by a central hierarchical organization.

navigate these demands he could face dissent in the form of a revolt from his relatives or his staff, a fracturing of interested parties into factions, or a breakdown of government operations.

This was a near universal dilemma for the agrarian empires. The following comparative investigation of how rulers handled it makes three interrelated arguments. First, the rulers had a limited number of options available to them in how to deal with their relatives. Second, the option employed by any given ruler had consequences for the politics of the state and the life of the empire. Third, the method of dealing with relatives was less a choice, but rather largely contingent upon the cultural background, the historical circumstances, and the immediate political situation faced.

THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM AND THE GENERAL SOLUTIONS

In order to conquer and rule, the ruler needed to rely on people with shared interests and investment in the idea of empire under a dynasty and the political privileges that it afforded to certain groups. In short, the ruler needed administrators and military leaders that shared in the vision of the state and who could be trusted. Kin were a logical group to fulfill this role, not merely because of a culture and practices that ingratiate relatives to each other and bound them in solidarity, but also because of the sense of desert of position and privilege as a direct consequence of one's blood relations with the one in power. Kinship offered a guarantee of status based on privilege rather than merit. Kin could thus be trusted in the enterprise at hand and employed in the conquest and operations of the state. Similarly, preservation of the dynasty necessitated some kind of succession scheme that could provide stability for continuous rule. This was important not just to the ruler, but also for his staff, who sought the preservation of their positions.

For these same reasons, the imperial kin posed a threat.³ They too saw themselves as privileged to power and capable of grasping the spoils of conquest; they would vie for the throne. Although they could oppose policy and disrupt politics, it was rare that this group threatened the ruler with usurpation. More often was the threat of a struggle for succession of the throne following the death of the ruler. This was a threat that was ever present, and it could become a burdensome weight on the ruler. Recall Louis the Pious, who assembled the ecclesiastical magnates and met with his advisors shortly after his coronation to discuss the matter of succession. He produced the *Ordinatio Imperii* detailing how succession should work, laying out clear guidelines. The first Yuan dynasty emperor, Kublai Khan, similarly attempted to establish a guideline for succession. The immediate impact of this problem on the ruler and his ability to rule was how it affected his staff and those employed in the administrative and military organizations. Lack of clarity on the future of the regime, whether it be who would succeed the ruler or its continued existence, led to instability. Political actors facing this situation grew uncertain of their future, and not knowing whom to support they would be left to judge the political winds, leading to factionalism and dysfunction.

The rulers of the agrarian empires had three options available to them as they navigated these issues.

1. _The first options was to treat the empire as personal property and divide it amongst the sons. The conterminous empire would be dissolved upon the death of the ruler. Each son would become the ruler of his own territorial kingdom.

³ Elias speaks of the imperial relatives as a threat to cohesion, and as the “chief exponents of decentralization.” Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility*, vol. 2, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939), 132.

2. The second option was to employ the sons and kin in the running of the empire. The relatives would become key political and military actors in the new empire and form the basis of the political order. This could take two different forms: the relatives would be given apanages and allowed to administer the provinces and provide military support; or they would be kept in the capital and employed in the central administration.
3. The third option was less common among the empires. It was to provide for the material means of all imperial relatives but exclude them from political and military affairs, except for the heir apparent, who was to be prepared to succeed the ruler. This amounted to a type of banishment and alienation from society. It could take the form of locking the relatives in a palace in the capital, or sending them out to estates in the provinces and imposing regulations to restrict their movement and association.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Each option had its own set of unique political consequences. Division of the empire among the sons led to civil war; employment of relatives could either accentuate internal political struggles or reify political hierarchies; whereas isolating relatives created problems of finances and personnel.

Division

In the case of the first option of the division of empire, examples include the Franks and Kievan Rus'.

The peoples and groups comprising the states of this first option had a strong culture of kinship organization, coupled with an inheritance practice of the division of landed property. In

the established empires that arose, these practices were carried over into the treatment of the kingdom, whereby the ruler designated areas that his sons would first administer and then inherit as their own kingdoms upon his death. In this way, the conterminous territory that was united under the control of a single ruler was scattered among his sons. The life of the empire lasted only as long as the life of the ruler.

It was no coincidence that these empires existed early in the history of states, and were only loosely administered, lacking highly centralized bureaucracies. In each of these cases, the ideas of dynastic empire had not developed as an ideology, and there was no understanding of a conterminous state that existed apart from the ruler.⁴ The unification of territory was seen as the effort and accomplishment of the founder; the territory was understood as his personal property, which would then be divided among his surviving sons for them to rule over as their own.⁵

The problem with such an arrangement was that it led to struggle among the descendants for more territory or to re-unify the kingdom and achieve similar status as the founder.⁶ Or, if there was peace among the sons, within a few generations the kingdoms would grow too small to continue parceling out land and lead to the mounting of conquest by the sons to aggrandize at the expense of neighboring kingdoms.⁷

⁴ For a good discussion of this issue see François Louis Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy: Studies in Carolingian History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), ch. 6.

⁵ Charles T. Wood, *The French Apanages and the Capetian Monarchy, 1224-1328* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.

⁶ This latter problem was particularly acute with the Carolingians after the death of Charlemagne. See Eric Joseph Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), esp. chapter 3.

⁷ This was the case with Kievan Rus' in the eleventh century. See Martin Dimnik, "The Rus' Principalities (1125–1246)," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Maureen Perrie and Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 98–126; Simon Franklin, "Kievan Rus' (1015–1125)," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Maureen Perrie and Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 73–97; Jonathan Shepard, "The Origins of Rus' (c.900–1015)," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Maureen Perrie and Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 45–72; A.D. Stokes, "Kievan Russia," in *An Introduction to Russian History*, ed. Robert Auty and Dimitri Obolensky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 49–77.

Take the Frankish monarchies, for example. Custom dictated that upon the death of the king his kingdom would be divided among his sons and the territorial constancy of the empire dissolved. This had roots in the lack of idea of an autonomous conterminous empire that existed apart from the king. The king was sovereign and all land was associated with his person. When he died, his kingdom went to his sons, as would happen with private landed property. In his *History of the Franks*, the sixth century bishop, Gregory of Tours, enumerated the consequences of this in his discussion of the rivalries and tragedies of the sons of Clovis and Lothar I.⁸ The Carolingians after Louis the Pious befell the same fate—Louis himself only avoiding it by outliving his brothers. He then tried to implement a regulation of primogeniture with the *Ordinatio Imperii* of 817, but it failed to become institutionalized and the ninth century continued to be plagued by fratricide and revolts among the princes.⁹

Employment

The second option of the ruler was to employ his sons and kin in the running of the state. This could take one of two forms: sending the relatives out of the capital to work in the provinces, or keeping them close, confined in the capital and employed in the operations of the central government. Examples of the first kind include the Yuan, the early Ming, Capetians, and Muscovy. Examples of the second kind include the Qing and Tsarist and Imperial Russia.

There is no general characteristic of the kind of empire that came to employ its relatives in office in one of these forms. Rather, the circumstances behind an empire utilizing this option varied and included the following three circumstances. First, there was the recognition by the

⁸ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. O. M. Dalton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927). Also see the translator's introduction on the problems of succession in the sixth century, esp. p. 136.

⁹ For a good discussion of the succession of Charlemagne and the attempts by Louis the Pious to establish a standard see Ganshof, *The Carolingians and the Frankish Monarchy*, ch. 14, 15. For an evaluation of the ninth century as one

ruler of the need for capable and talented people, as was the case in the early Ming and Qing empires. Competent and trustworthy people were need to staff the government and to lead campaigns; the imperial relatives were a source of personnel who could be relied upon to perform these functions. A second circumstance was the need to give the sons their due inheritance without resorting to the division and dissolution of the state, as in the first option. In the cases of the Yuan dynasty and Capetian monarchies, the rulers gave their sons apanages to administer, but maintained a loose centralization over the realm. The third kind of empire that employed this option was one that was in the process of centralizing. In the course of doing so it attempted to limit the autonomy of the princes in the provinces. Tsarist Russia under Ivan IV and Byzantine under Alexios both pursued this strategy to solidify empire and curtail the independence of their brothers and relatives.

As an illustration of the implementation of these forms, the example of the Yuan shows the use of sons as provincial administrators, and the example of the Qing shows the staffing of central administrative and political offices.

Yuan. The Yuan dynasty was established by Kublai Khan to rule over the settled agrarian territories in 1271. Kublai Khan was a grandson of the famous Mongol conquerer, Chinggis Khan. He inherited his position and assisted in the conquest of parts of the Mongol empire before its slow demise; but he also became a ruler in his own right, going on to conquer and establish the Yuan dynasty. This circumstance of imperial precedence prior to the establishment of the Yuan forced upon Kublai an already existing policy of involving imperial relatives in the military

of succession struggles see Simon Maclean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

administration of the provinces. Neither Kublai nor his successors could effectively dismantle it, although they did try.

The background to the Yuan dynasty was the Mongol empire, founded by Chinggis Khan.¹⁰ Following Mongol rules of inheritance of family wealth, the khan divided the kingdom among his sons, giving them land and making them military leaders. After the conquest of the Jin in 1234, Chinggis' successor, Ogodei began to hand out apanages to relatives. These were hereditary, and the holders of these territories had the power to appoint an administrator, but the local bureaucracies were to be appointed by the imperial court to collect revenues.¹¹ This resulted in an imperial formation of a loosely centralized rule, whereby the provincial administrations had a high degree of autonomy, controlling juridical procedures and appointments.

Kublai Khan attempted to centralize this system when he seized power and establish his Yuan dynasty. He tried to strip the local governments of their power of juridical proceedings and to deny them of their right to appoint a local administrator. Both of these attempts failed due to strong opposition.¹² Kublai also moved to establish primogeniture to ensure an orderly succession, but his eldest son died prematurely leaving that son's eldest son and Kublai's other sons to struggle for the throne when the khan passed. This led to a tradition of counter claims of

¹⁰ For a good overview of the rise of the Mongol empire see Thomas Allsen, "The Rise of the Mongolian Empire and Mongolian Rule in North China," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 321–413. For an analysis of the structure of the Mongolian state see Jennifer Holmgren, "Political Organization of Non-Han States in China: The Role of Imperial Princes in Wei, Liao and Yuan," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 25, no. 1 (1987): 26-35.

¹¹ On apanages see Elizabeth Endicott-West, *Mongolian Rule in China: Local Administration in the Yuan Dynasty* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1989), 91

¹² On attempts at centralization see Elizabeth Endicott-West, "The Yüan Government and Society," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 587–615; Ch'i-ch'ing Hsiao, "Mid-Yuan Politics," in *The Cambridge History of China: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368*, ed. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994):520-521.

legitimacy to the throne, whereby some could cite the precedent of Kublai Khan, while others would call for the Mongol tradition of an election of the council.¹³

Consequences of this arrangement of the imperial relatives were twofold. Foremost, the territorial provinces of the imperial relatives turned them into entrenched magnates. They not only resisted attempts at centralization and fought to maintain their relative autonomy, but they also cultivated local interests pertinent to their circumstance that could contradict those of the central government. Second, succession constantly remained a problem for the Yuan (as it did the earlier Mongol empire). Princes with land, revenue, and military power challenged for the throne, often embroiling the empire in civil strife and even regicide.¹⁴

Qing. The historical circumstances of the Qing differed from the Yuan, as did the politics, all of which led to a different arrangement of how relatives were employed. Unlike the Mongols, the Manchus in the seventeenth century did not have a vast empire, nor clear ambitions to administer territory. Although the incentives for conquer and booty always existed, the impetus and vision of a Manchu conquest remained ambiguous right up to the eve of taking Beijing in 1644 and establishing legitimate rule over the China heartland in the subsequent decades.¹⁵ The consequence of this early situation was the formation of a strong central administrative apparatus but no provincial administration. That is, there was never the need to set up a territorial administration because there was never a large amount of territory to govern, nor much of an empire to divide among sons. Rather, Nurhaci left his sons with independent military units, called banners, which were assigned territory to use for grazing, camping, and hunting. Property and inheritance here was understood not as land but as military position and command of troops.

¹³ Hsiao, "Mid-Yuan Politics," 491-493.

¹⁴ Hsiao, "Mid-Yuan Politics."

When Nurhaci died his seventh son, Hong Taiji rose to replace him. Having asserted himself as the victor of a drawn out political struggle with his brothers for the rulership, Hong Taiji began to expand the central administrative apparatus. He placed trusted relatives in position of administrative power to aide in the running of the state and military conquest. In order to harness the talents of these people and to guard against their threat to his potion he then created a set of ranks and positions to which all of the imperial relatives would be assigned. This effectively turned his sons and kin into a service nobility in the capital. Further restrictions were placed on their movements and military capacities. Imperial relatives would serve the state in political and military capacity by becoming part of the administrative hierarchy.

Isolation

The third option for dealing with imperial relatives was to isolate them from political and military life. This option was less widely used than the other two, but its consequences were just as profound. Examples include the Song, Ming, and Ottoman empires.

Rather than employ their sons and kin in government, the rulers of these empires opted to bar them from political life but provide for their material means. The princes would be kept in the capital in a palace, as in the case of the Song dynasty and the Ottoman, or they would each be given an estate out in the provinces, as in the Ming. In both forms, restrictions would be placed on the activity and movement of the relatives, limiting their association with others and especially their ability to raise and command troops. The sons would certainly be kept on hand and given a genealogical definition of an imperial relative.¹⁶ This was a matter of succession and

¹⁵ On the ambiguity of Manchu aims in conquest see Tsai, “Hong Taiji shiqi de hanguan,” esp. chapter 5.

¹⁶ Contrast this to the Japanese case of giving out sons for adoption by other influential families.

deemed necessary in order to reproduce the dynasty.¹⁷ Although meant to solve the succession problem, it never completely averted political crisis, as the ruler could die without a son, which would require the ascension of a son from a collateral line, and could thus lead to court factions. Or the ruler might favor one son over another and wish to install the favored as heir rather than the eldest, creating opposition among the imperial family and bureaucrats, all of which could lead to political stasis.¹⁸

One of the long-term consequences of this option was a severe drain on the treasury. Cloistered imperial families grew exponentially, and all the members and offspring needed to be fully supported in a life befit of royalty at the expense of the state. Towards the end of the Ming, for example, after two hundred some odd years of imperial births of the sons of sons, the imperial family required 15 percent of all state revenues for support, and as a group they constituted the largest landowners in the Ming, but as imperial relatives their revenues went untaxed.¹⁹ This huge expense contributed to the Ming state's inability to function efficiently and address crisis in the countryside.²⁰ Similarly, the princes in the provinces would make financial demands on the local governments, often causing great financial stress on local administrators.

Another consequence was the lack of a group of advisors that shared the interests of the ruler.²¹ In a bureaucratic monarchy, the ruler not only required council apart from his professional class of administrators, but also needed people who could move between circles in

¹⁷ John W Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven: A History of the Imperial Clan of Sung China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999); Dennis Twitchett, "The T'ang Imperial Family," *Asia Major* 7 (1994): 1–61.

¹⁸ Both of these situations occurred in the Ming. The former with the emperor Jiajing and the latter with the emperor Wanli. See Huang, *1587*.

¹⁹ Wang, *The Ming Princes and Daoism*, 15.

²⁰ Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming*, ch. 9-10; Huang, "Fiscal Administration during the Ming Dynasty;" Hucker, "Ming Government," 24-25.

²¹ On the divergent interests of the ruler and his administration see Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires*.

the communication and execution of orders.²² A link in the chain of command between emperor and bureaucrat needed to be established so that information flowed unobstructed and policy could be formulated effectively and executed efficiently. When the bureaucracy began to pursue their own interests, creating hindrances and oppositions, they needed to be whipped back in line. A strong and tireless ruler could do this, but even so faced obstacles and met the limitations of his rule.²³ The Ming suffered this problem, which led to an over reliance by the emperors on the palace eunuchs in service of links between the inner and outer courts. They came to comprise a class in and of themselves, however, serving their own interests politically and financially at the expense of the state. They became the arbitrators of politics, controlling what information flowed and what policies were suggested and implemented. The lack of consistency and arbitrary communications led to the formation of political factions in the interest of political protection by the actors, all of which led to a breakdown of political order and the inability for government to function and respond to the everyday demands of state operations and crisis.²⁴

To further illustrate this problem, contrast this political predicament of the Ming with that of the Qing. By integrating imperial relatives into government, the Qing rulers had political operatives inside the running of the state who they could rely on.²⁵ These people shared a similar interest with the ruler in the life of the dynasty and preservation of the political position and power of the imperial family. In essence, they could be trusted to represent the ruler's interest over the bureaucracy. The princes of the Qing came to link the inner and outer courts by serving in high administrative office, such as the presidents of the six boards, and at the same time have

²² For an argument of this problem in the Ming see Huang, "Ni Yuan-lu's Realism," Huang, "The Lung-ch'ing and Wan-li reigns," 529-530.

²³ Huang, "The Lung-ch'ing and Wan-li reigns," 557; Kuhn, *Soulstealers*.

²⁴ Esp. see Huang, 1587.

²⁵ Bartlett shows the importance of the imperial princes in assisting the emperor in statecraft in the eighteenth century. Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

access to the ruler.²⁶ Here was another channel of communication open to exchange information quickly and react in a timely manner in the formation and execution of policy. These princes were also trusted to lead troops into the field and charged with the operations and even planning of offensive campaigns. Such employment increased the efficiency of the Qing state, enabling response to crisis and the expansion of territory.²⁷

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE OPTIONS

Throughout this discussion of the political consequences of each option, I have highlighted the background to implementation of the particular option, and discussed in brief the rationale for implementation. Herein lies the third argument: the ruler did not have these options laid out before him with the freedom to choose one over another. Rather, the cultural, historical, and political circumstances shaped the system that came to be employed. In short, the ruler had to work with what he had. There were various forces in operation determining why one option was employed and not another.

Those rulers that employed the first option came out of a culture that lacked a conception of continued dynastic rule over a conterminous territory, but did possess a strong tradition of divided property and inheritance among sons. The new ruler now presiding over a large territory had little room to remake a policy about how to handle his new empire without threatening the legitimacy of his rule and his capacity to administer. Even someone like Louis the Pious, who was quite conscious of this situation and attempted to change the practice both politically and ideologically—and even went so far as to lay down a new code in a text devoted to the matter—

²⁶ On the employment of imperial relatives in the provincial bureaucracy see R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

failed to be able to effect a revolution in cultural understanding and practice. Similarly, Kublai Khan's attempts to limit the consequences of the practice of the division of the Mongol empire among the relatives and to rein in their autonomy met with constant opposition and ultimately frustration. Even the second Ming emperor, Yongle, could not immediately curtail the political and military power of his brothers, the processes only being completed by his son.

In the case of the second option, rulers found themselves in a position of needing trusted personnel to help in the military and administrative affairs of the new state. Relatives filled this role and were naturally drawn upon to lead in military offenses and staff the political offices. The form of the emergent empire determined if these relatives would be employed as administrators in the provinces or become a part of the political elite in the capital. Take the contrast between the Yuan and the Qing, for example. The Mongol empire operated on a principle of conquering vast territories and leaving behind administrators. Chinggis Khan put his sons in offices in the provinces both to help govern these conquered territories, as well as to guarantee them their inheritance according to Mongol custom of division of the father's property. Kublai Khan continued this practice when he moved south into China proper, setting up relatives in the provinces to govern and provide military support. Thus, the policy of apanages emerged out of the prior basis of empire building by the Mongols. The Qing, by contrast, had no such empire before the formation of their centralized state and bureaucracy. Even as they began to conquer and hold territory, there was no consensus among military leaders of setting up an administrative apparatus, and thus no need to set up territorial administrators like the Mongols. When Hong Taiji did begin to form a centralized bureaucracy, it was at a time when the state was still confined to a small region in the north, and the emergent state quickly took the form of a

²⁷ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2005).

centralized and hierarchical political structure. The relatives would be kept close rather than administering the provinces.

In their initial conquests and state building efforts, nearly all of the rulers of emergent agrarian-bureaucratic empires found themselves in this position of needing to make use of their relatives. Only after the passing of the founder did circumstances conspire to force his successors to implement a third option of excluding all relatives from military and political life. The Song, for example, was established with cooperation among brothers, but there was suspicion over the first succession of power, as well as controversy over the institution of primogeniture.²⁸ The creation of an office to look after the imperial relatives and the substitution of their political and military power for honorary titles gradually removed all the relatives from positions of power. The case of the Ming was similar, if not more dramatic, with civil war among the employed sons determining the succession, and the winner of that battle then banning all imperial relatives from political and military life.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This concludes the argument of how the rulers of agrarian empires dealt with their relatives. To summarize the three arguments made above: a survey of the agrarian empires in world history shows that rulers had but three options available to them, that each of these options had distinct political consequences, and that the use of one option over another depended on cultural, historical, and political circumstances.

There are three preliminary conclusions to be drawn from this discussion.

²⁸ Curtis Chung Chang, "Inheritance Problems in the First Two Reigns of the Sung Dynasty," *The Hong Kong Baptist College Academic Journal* III, no. I (1968): 48–74.

1. The first option of imperial division among sons was the least best option for the stability and longevity of the empire. Employed by weak, decentralized regimes, this option led to a breakdown of political order after the death of the founder and often resulted in prolonged civil war and the fragmentation of territory.
2. The success of the second option of employing relatives in statecraft relied upon the use of a standardized set of ranks and titles and the codification of how they were to be given and used. The clarification of the position of individuals, the level of the privilege, and how this related to their operation in the political order mitigated the disruptive tension among actors. When two potential rivals for position were given different ranks and different political assignments, the immediate struggle took primacy and diminished the possibility of factional strife, whereby the ambiguity of the political order forced actors to align themselves accordingly.
3. The third option of isolating imperial relatives from political and military life was a circumstance that emerged from the second option. When a ruler chose to remove all of his sons and kin from government involvement, it was a result of the breakdown of their active engagement in politics and military. In order to ensure the relatives would not continue to pose a threat, they were barred from political life.

This discussion is oriented not towards an explanation of particular societies in particular places at particular times, but rather towards an understanding of the organization of social activity. It is the beginning of an attempt to get at how societies fit together, and how, despite their loosely connected institutions and beliefs, remain so recalcitrant to change.²⁹

²⁹ See Roberto Unger, *False Necessity*.

Such consideration lends itself to a fourth conclusion. A more general conclusion about the broader meaning of this dilemma faced by the agrarian empires over how to deal with the imperial relatives. The conclusion goes something like this: these empires constantly grappled with a problem of internal sociopolitical order that often made them inherently unstable. They were just as prone to upheaval as were those organizations based on individual rule lacking in permanency of administration or legitimacy. In Weberian terms: traditional authority was no more stable than charismatic authority.