

The population of the Ming dynasty, insofar as it can be ascertained, has been recorded as follows:

In the twenty-sixth year of Hung-wu (1393) the total number of households in China was 16,052,860, and the total population was 60,545,812.

In the fourth year of Hung-chih (1491) the total number of households in China was 9,113,446, and the total population was 53,281,158.

In the sixth year of Wan-li (1578) the total number of households in China was 10,621,436, and the total population was 60,692,856.

It is not surprising that the population of China should reach a high peak after T'ai-tsu<sup>29</sup> had pacified the country;<sup>30</sup> it is strange, however, that the population should decrease from that peak after China had enjoyed a long period of peace.<sup>31</sup> During the civil war period<sup>32</sup> the areas north of the Huai River<sup>33</sup>

were so devastated that nothing was left except a sea of tall grass. Yet the population of China increased during this period. Moreover, it began to decline from then on until it reached a very low point in the T'ien-shun period (1457-1464). It rose again during the Ch'eng-te period (1506-1521).

What were the factors that caused the population to decline? According to Chou Ch'en,<sup>34</sup> a major cause of the increase or decrease of population was the strict enforcement, or the lack of it, of the population registration law; it had little to do with the actual increase or decrease of the population in question. When the law was not strictly enforced, people simply failed to register. Many of them had either secured the protection of powerful, influential families or, disguising themselves as artisans, had taken residence in either of the two capitals.<sup>35</sup> Some were traders who traveled all over China; others lived in boats with their families. In any of these cases they were extremely difficult to trace.

There was, however, an even more important factor. Emperor Ming Hsüan-tsung (r. 1426-1435) once remarked to his ministers that throughout the long history of China, population increased when there was peace and declined when there was war. This is the truest statement insofar as the increase or decrease of population is concerned. . . .

A land survey was conducted in the twenty-sixth year of Hung-wu (1393), and the total amount of cultivated fields in China was reported to be 8,507,623 *ch'ing*. This amount was so large that it seemed that all arable land had been put under cultivation. . . .

In the fifteenth year of Hung-chih (1503) the total amount of cultivated land in China was 4,228,518 *ch'ing*. The ratio between privately owned and government-owned land was seven to one.

In the sixth year of Wan-li (1578) the emperor,<sup>36</sup> acting upon the recommendation of Grand Chancellor Chang Chü-cheng (d.1582), ordered the survey of all cultivated fields in the empire. . . . The total amount of cultivated fields was 7,013,976 *ch'ing*, about 3,000,000 *ch'ing* larger than that of the Hung-chih period (1488-1505). . . .

<sup>28</sup> The authors were famous scholar-officials of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This selection is taken from "Economics I" (*shih-huo yi*); *History of the Ming (Ming shih)*, roll 77.

<sup>29</sup> Ming T'ai-tsu or Chu Yüan-chang (1328-1398), founder of the Ming dynasty.

<sup>30</sup> This refers to the population of 1393.

<sup>31</sup> This refers to the population of 1491.

<sup>32</sup> This refers to the war between Ming Hui-ti (r.1399-1402) and his uncle Chu Ti. The latter won and ascended the throne in 1403 as Ming Ch'eng-tsu or Yung-lo (r.1403-1424).

<sup>33</sup> Located in modern Anhwei province.

<sup>34</sup> Chou Ch'en (*chin-shih*, 1404), serving in the Ministry of Public Works in the 1420's, was an able administrator of finance.

<sup>35</sup> Peking and Nanking.

<sup>36</sup> Ming Shen-tsung (r.1573-1619).