CHAPTER 5

The Roots of Sorcery Fear

On their way to join the rebellion of Wu San-kuei (1674–1681), two sorcerers *(shu-shih)* stopped to pass the night at a county town. One lay down to sleep against the western wall. The other said, "Don't sleep under that wall. It is going to collapse at 9 P.M." The other said, "Your arts are not sufficiently profound. The wall is not going to collapse toward the inside, but toward the outside." When the hour arrived, the wall collapsed toward the outside, just as predicted.[1]

In the early eighteenth century, there was a retired official in Ch'ang-shu, a connoisseur of magic tricks, who was visited by all the famous sorcerers of the day. Once there came a monk who could cause images to appear in his begging bowl; there could be seen the great ocean, with fish and dragons leaping. The monk invited the official to travel with him in the mountains. They stopped for refreshment at a temple, whereupon the monk suddenly disappeared. When the official inquired of the temple monks, they answered, "Oh, he said you were going to shave your head and remain here, never to return home." When the distressed official pleaded with them, they offered to release him if he would donate 100,000 ounces of silver for the repair of the great hall. The official had to give them a chit for the whole amount. His companion suddenly reappeared, thanked him ceremoniously, and showed him the magic begging bowl. There the official saw his whole household assembled before his own front gate. Suddenly he found himself actually standing before the gate, with

no trace of the monk. When he went inside for his money sack, it was missing 100,000 taels. In their place was his chit. Some people said this was done by White Lotus magic.[2]

An eighteenth-century resident of Ch'ang-chih named Ch'en had a beautiful and talented daughter. Once a wandering Taoist beggar caught a glimpse of her and stationed himself with his begging bowl near the Ch'en gate. When the Taoist saw a blind man exiting, he asked his business. The blind man answered that he had been called in to tell the family's fortunes. The Taoist alleged that he himself had been asked to serve as an intermediary for the girl's marriage and that he needed to know her birth-signs (the year, month, day, and hour of birth). When he had the information, he departed. Some days later, the girl felt her legs grow numb and fell into a trance. Drawn mysteriously out of her house, she found herself on a deserted road with only the Taoist leading her on. He brought her into a house that seemed like her own, then drew a knife and stabbed her to the heart. She felt her soul floating out of her body and could see the Taoist daubing drops of her heart's blood upon a wooden doll while muttering incantations. She felt that she was one with the wooden doll. "Henceforth," commanded the Taoist, "you must do my bidding. Fail not!"[3]

From the curious to the hideous, these are samplings of the thousands of sorcery stories in Chinese fiction and folklore. What I call "sorcery" in such accounts is the enhancement of personal power by manipulating the spirit world, which is the general definition I shall use. "Sorcerers," in this sense, were persons who were portrayed as having several kinds of enhanced power: *cognitive* (the power to see through time and space, but mainly to foretell the future); *telekinetic* (the power to move matter through space); and *biodynamic* (the power to manipulate life-force by extracting it from living beings or instilling it into inanimate matter). These powers were commonly described as "arts" *(shu)*, which suggests that we should call them "sorcery" rather than "witchcraft," following Evans-Pritchard's distinction between powers that can be learned by anyone (sorcery) and powers innate to the

practitioner (witchcraft).[4] There is no single Chinese term that embraces all the meanings of sorcery, largely because "sorcery" is not a unified Chinese concept.[5] Establishment foes of unauthorized communications with the spirit world used the general terms *hsieh-shu* or *yao-shu* (evil arts) and *tso-tao i-tuan* (deviant ways and perverse principles). Both terms appear in the language of the criminal codes. Also used were *yao-jen* (wizard or sorcerer) and *yao-shu* (books of sorcery). Common folk might use less opprobrious terms, depending on exactly what was thought to be going on. A sorcerer might be *shu-shih* (lit., an educated man who possesses magical arts). A spirit-medium might be called *wu*, a very ancient term for communicators with the world of shadow. There exists no comprehensive study of Chinese sorcery in any language.[6] I shall explore that vast subject here only from certain angles that relate to the events of 1768. These involve ideas about the human soul, about the magical animation of inanimate objects, and about how one could protect oneself against sorcery. What beliefs could give rise to a vision of soulstealers fearsome enough to drive ordinary subjects to homicide and an emperor to a disruptive national campaign?

Body and Soul

The Separability of Soul from Body

The notion that human agency can divide a person's soul from his body rests on a complex belief about the composition of the soul itself. The Chinese believed in a soul with multiple aspects.[7] A very old tradition held that in the living person dwelt the *hun*, or spiritual soul, and the *p'o*, or bodily soul. This dualism existed as early as the second century B.C., by which time it was already linked to the cosmological dualism of *yin* and *yang*, which, by joining, brought the world (including the human person) into existence. Like *yin* and *yang*, the two parts of the soul exist harmoniously in the body during life and separate at death. The *hun*-soul corresponds to the *yang* (associated with maleness, light, and activity) and the *p'o*-soul to the *yin* (femaleness, heaviness, and passivity). The *hun*-soul governs the higher faculties (mind, heart); the *p'o*-soul governs the physical senses and bodily functions.[8] For our purposes, the point to notice is that the light, volatile *hun*-soul may be separated from the *living* person with alarming ease. It normally separates during sleep. It normally

returns, of course, but its absence, if prolonged, produces various kinds of pathology and abnormality, including disease, trance states, madness, or death. The Dutch sinologue J. J. M. de Groot found, in his southeast Chinese community (Amoy), that "fright, anxiety, and sleeplessness may be associated with prolonged absence of the soul from the body."[9] Soul-loss seems to have been especially important in the etiology of children's ailments. Nineteenth-century sources such as de Groot are echoed by modern fieldwork in this respect. In contemporary Taiwan, loss of soul is blamed for listlessness, fretfulness, or sickliness in children. The soul may have been driven out as the result of "fright," in which case the child may be cured by taking him back to the place where he was frightened and calling back the soul.[10]

The idea of "recalling" a soul that has been separated from its body is a very ancient one. It is associated with death ritual as well as with healing.[11] It seems to have played a part in shamanistic death rituals in south-central China by the early third century B.C. By Han times it is part of a ritual called *fu* (recall), of which pictures have been recovered from a second-century B.C. tomb (Ma-wang-tui): immediately after someone has died, a member of the family, acting as a "summoner," climbs to the eastern eave of the roof and, facing north, waves a set of the deceased's clothes, calling "O! Thou [name of deceased], come back!" Because it was assumed that the soul was *temporarily* separated from the body during sleep or unconsciousness, it might be coaxed back by such things as familiar clothing. The ritual has been taken to mean "to summon the *hun*-soul of the dead back to reunite with its *p'o*-soul" on the assumption that the *hun* is the airy component of the spirit, quick to dissipate and relatively easy to separate from the body, whereas the *p'o* departs rather slowly on its journey back to earth. This explains why the *hun*-soul is the part that has to be recalled.[12] (It is the *hun*-soul that is the target of eighteenth-century soulstealing—*chiao-hun*.)

Voluntary and Involuntary Soul-Loss

Chinese believed that the soul could be separated from the body by both voluntary and involuntary means. Communication with the dead could involve either "soul-travel" (shamanism) or "spirit possession" (mediumism). Soul-travel, in which the shaman sent her soul to the nether regions to visit the dead, was considered a hazardous practice,

to judge by stories of the occasional trouble shamans had in getting their souls back.[13] Such stories reveal a nagging anxiety that the soul might not find its way back to its body, or that the body might meanwhile be thought dead and consequently destroyed (related, perhaps, to the fear of being thought dead while only asleep).[14]

Even more alarming, however, was the idea of *involuntary* soul-loss. In addition to the "fright" or other trauma[15] that might jar soul from body, a soul might actually be stolen by either human or supernatural agents. "Vengeance-seeking ghosts" or demons might be held responsible.[16] De Groot's Amoy informants told him of "a certain class of mischievous spectres, who are fond of drawing the vital spirits out of men." These demons are called *tsou-ma t'ien-cheng* (heavenly spirits riding horses), or *pan-t'ien hsiu-ts'ai* (literary graduates living halfway in the sky). A person who falls unconscious is taken to a priest (*shih-kung*, Taoist exorcist) who will practice a rite called *ch'iang ching-shen* (snatch the spirit) to recover the soul from "the invisible being" who has stolen it.[17] Soulstealing ghosts were known to lurk along roadsides at night, and many were the tales of "wretches who, having been accosted by such natural foes of man, were found dead on the roadside without the slightest wound or injury being visible: their souls had simply been snatched out of them." Roadside privies were particularly favored by such demons, because it was there that "man is so lonely and helpless."[18] As if such invisible specters were not fearsome enough, evil men were also thought capable of soulstealing. These sorcerers might write paper charms that worked on their victims by contagious magic.[19]

"Soul-calling" was employed, both as a death ritual and as a cure for childhood illness. In the case of the recently dead (whether adult or child), it expressed the survivors' unwillingness to accept the finality of death and their affection for the departed: they would cling to him and bring him back if they could. In the case of children, I have already mentioned that temporary soul-loss (perhaps caused by "fright") was blamed for various pathological symptoms. In such instances, the parents resorted to the ritual of soul-calling. The ritual was commonly called either *chao-hun* or *chiao-hun,* both meaning "to call (or summon) the *hun*-soul." Recall that *chiao-hun* is the same term as that used to describe soulstealing. Both devoted parent and malign sorcerer "called" the soul—the one to rejoin it *to* the body, the other to call it *from* the body.

Henri Doré observed late Ch'ing soul-calling rituals in Yangtze Valley communities. Here is one from Anhwei:

> [T]he method employed in recalling the soul of a child is as follows: the child's name is first mentioned, then the person adds "where are you amusing yourself, come back home." Or thus "where were you frightened, return home" . . . If for instance the child's name is Ngai-hsi, little darling, the person will say: "little darling, where have you been scared, where have you been amusing yourself? Come back home." Another following behind, replies "he has returned." While they shout to burst their sides, a person within the house places the clothes of the deceased child on a broomstick, near the house or the door-way, and watches attentively whether a leaf or a blade of grass has moved in the vicinity, or whether an insect has been seen flitting by . . . any such occurrence is a sign that the soul has returned.[20]

That the ritual action of the murderous soulstealer can be described in the same phraseology as that of the loving parent reveals in it a special loathsomeness. As shown in Chapter 4, the language of the *Ch'ing Code* indicates the peculiarly perverse character of sorcery: like the Black Mass of European demonology, it upended and mocked the most common human rituals associated with orthodox social life.

The fear of soul-loss grew from general assumptions about the biodynamic power of sorcerers: their ability to cause harm by proxy, giving life to inanimate matter by stealing the vitality of the living from a distance. Because such biodynamic sorcery played a major part in the panic of 1768, it is worth discussing briefly here. The objects by which sorcerers exerted biodynamic power could be of numerous sorts, but the commonest seem to have been paper mannikins *(chih-jen)* that were brought to life by incantations. The popular stories of the "strange tales" sort are full of such paper men.

A Ming dynasty story tells of a sorcerer in Kwangtung named Li who practiced "Prior-to-Heaven Magic Calculation," a kind of prognostication. He said he could enliven "paper cutouts of men and horses, and of double-edged swords that could decapitate men." He also had a technique that could restore the dead to life. Such an accomplished magician was eventually recruited into a rebel band led by White Lotus sectarians.[21]

A Hupei literatus named Wu publicly ridiculed the powers of Chang Ch'i-shen, a highly respected local sorcerer, who was thought to be able to steal men's souls. Expecting Chang's revenge, Wu armed himself with a copy of the ancient divination manual, *The Classic of Changes (I-ching)*, and sat up that night waiting.[22] An armored demon burst into the room and attacked him, but when Wu smote it with the book it promptly collapsed upon the ground. Wu saw there only

A soul-calling ritual for a dead child.

a paper mannikin, which he inserted between the pages of the book. Next, two dark-faced goblins rushed in and were similarly disposed of. Shortly a tearful woman appeared at the door, claimed to be the wife of the sorcerer, and begged Wu to release her husband and sons, whose souls had entered the paper mannikins. There now remained at her home only three corpses, she wailed, which would not be revived once the cock had crowed. Wu scolded her, saying that she and her family had done enough damage and deserved their fate. However, out of pity he gave her back one mannikin. The next morning he learned that sorcerer Chang and his elder son had died, leaving only the younger son alive.[23]

The universal fear of paper mannikins as sorcerer's agents is surely associated with the common use of paper figures (of servants, horses, houses, tools, and other useful items) in funeral rites. De Groot relates that in Amoy, representations of human figures were used to inflict harm on one's enemies by sorcery,

> mostly very roughly made of two bamboo splinters fastened together crosswise, on one side of which is pasted some paper supposed to represent a human body. They are not larger than a hand, and those of men are distinguished from those of women by two shreds of paper, said to be boots. They are called "t'oe sin" [Mandarin: *t'i-shen*], "substitutes or surrogates of a person," and may be had, for a cash or so a piece in every shop where paper articles are made and sold for sacrifice to the dead and the gods, for they are also burnt as slaves for the dead in the other world.[24]

From mannikins used for transmittal to the shadow world for the *good* of the dead, to mannikins used as a conduit for magical *evil* toward the enemies they represent, to mannikins that may be used by others to harm oneself: evidently these connections were readily made. The use of "parts of the body and clothing" of the intended victim was another way of transmitting harm by biodynamic sorcery.[25] Biodynamic powers could also be acquired by the symbolic use of parts of human bodies: "The instrument of the sorcerer is a human soul, or some portion of it, obtained by appropriating certain parts of the body of a living person, but especially such organs as are deemed to be more especially impregnated with his mental or vital power. An image is then provided for his soul to settle in, and the latter totally subdued by the sorcerer to his will by charms and spells."[26]

Hair and the Evil Arts

As we observed in the sorcery prohibitions of the criminal code, biodynamic sorcery may have evoked both the Confucian horror of bodily mutilation and the culturally deeper horror of cannibalism. In any event, soulstealers' use of human hairs to extract soul-force and then transmit this force to paper cutouts of men and horses were magical practices well rooted in the popular mind. The same acts (extracting soul-force and using it to enhance one's power) were attributed to the masons of Te-ch'ing.

A properly trained sorcerer could use a victim's hair as a medium for extracting his soul even when the victim was a stranger—as was indeed the case with most of the soulstealing we encounter in 1768. There was no need to know such personal facts as the victim's name or his birth-signs. A Ming Dynasty novel relates the story of a certain monk who was born from an egg, and whose birth-signs down to the day and hour were therefore uncertain. An aspiring sorcerer hoped to use this "egg-monk" as the unwitting victim of a soulstealing experiment. His master assured him that, with his technique, it was not necessary to know the monk's birth-signs. "If you lack his birth-signs, you just need to get a piece of his underwear, along with some of his hair or fingernails," and recite over them the necessary spells.[27] If such items would do the trick, then perhaps even the victim's name might be dispensed with. A sorcerer of one's own community—a kinsman or neighbor—who knew one's name or birth-signs could inflict harm without the intermediacy of a personal object. This is what was attempted by peasant Shen Shih-liang (of Chapter 1), who wrote the names of his detested nephews upon paper slips for mason Wu to pound atop bridge pilings, and by the murderous Taoist of Ch'ang-chih, who enchanted his victim by discovering her birth-signs. But the outsider, the stranger-sorcerer, had to do his dirty work without such intimate knowledge. Here was the point of hair- and lapel-clipping: it placed one at the mercy of complete strangers. The notion that a sorcerer could enchant the inanimate ejecta or clothing of an unknown victim was the natural complement of a fear of strangers.

That hair has magical power is believed in many cultures. I suggested, in Chapter 3, some reasons why the Manchu tonsure may have been so stubbornly resisted by Chinese in the wake of the conquest. Here the same question arises in the context of sorcery: what was the connection among hair, power, and death? Edmund

Leach's suggestion that people subconsciously associate the hair with genitalia seems to me over-specific, given the range of ethnographic evidence on the subject.[28] I prefer the more general formula that he attributes to "older anthropologists" such as Frazer, to the effect that "ritual hair symbolizes some kind of metaphysical abstraction—fertility, soul-stuff, personal power."[29] Evidence from Punjabi culture shows that hair is used as an implement in sorcery precisely because it absorbs and stores fertility: a barren woman may clip hair from the head of a first-born child to cause him to be reborn in her own womb. The long, matted hair of a holy man *(sadhu)* is particularly prized because it has stored up so much fertility power (from the prolonged sexual abstinence of its wearer).[30] The power of hair to absorb and store spiritual power is certainly visible in Chinese evidence. In Cantonese funerals, hair seems to be an absorber of fertility-laden spiritual essences: married daughters and daughters-in-law of the deceased "are expected to rub their unbound hair against the coffin just prior to its removal from the village." James L. Watson believes that this intentional absorption of death pollution is thought to enhance fertility and lineage continuity, almost *as if* the soul of the deceased were reentering the lineage through the women's hair.[31] The soulstealing affair continually calls attention to the importance of hair in the lives of monks, and not only in the tonsure ceremony where they lose it. One reason monks were so often found carrying hair was that tonsure-masters commonly kept some hair of their disciples (those they had shaven and whose monastic education they were responsible for). But apparently not only intergenerational ties were served by this retention of hair. Monks were known to exchange such hair with one another along the road in order to "link destinies" *(chieh-yuan)*, perhaps to broaden the variety (and hence the potency?) of soul-force one was carrying and thereby reinforce one's links to the whole *sangha* or body of monks.[32]

Sorcery Prophylaxis

The soulstealing crisis of 1768 was marked by the frantic efforts of ordinary people to counter the baleful effects of sorcery, whether by lynching suspected sorcerers or by employing magical remedies. Magic could quash magic, as shown by the doughty Hupei literatus who smote demons with *The Classic of Changes*. Indeed, premodern China (and today's China to an extent we do not know) was an arena in which supernatural harm and supernatural remedies were arrayed

in grim and deadly battle. Mankind was, in de Groot's words, "engaged every day in a restless defensive and offensive war" against malevolent spirits.[33] In this war there were, of course, professionals: the ritual specialists who conducted exorcisms and funerals and prescribed the geomantic alignment of buildings. The foot soldiers, however, were laymen. They relied upon a vast written and unwritten armory of spells, charms, and behavioral formulae for warding off evil.[34]

The use of charms and amulets to "ward off evil" *(pi-hsieh)* was universal. Much of this protective activity was directed at vengeful ghosts *(kuei)*, which proceeded from the *yang* aspect of the soul: spirits of the dead that had not been ritually cared for. In the same manner, there were remedies against magical evil inflicted by sorcery. Because the masons of Te-ch'ing were objects of a common popular suspicion of builders, let me illustrate charm remedies by referring to builders' hexes. According to the missionary folklorist N. B. Dennys, writing from Canton: "There is a well-known legend amongst the Cantonese of a builder having a grudge against a woman whose kitchen he was called upon to repair . . . The repairs were duly completed, but somehow or other the woman could never visit the kitchen without feeling ill. Convinced that witchcraft was at the bottom of it, she had the wall pulled down, and sure enough there was discovered in a hollow left for the purpose 'a clay figure in a posture of sickness.' "[35]

Why did people associate builders with sorcery? The Chinese believe that the ritual condition of buildings influences the worldly fortunes of their inhabitants. It is only natural, then, that builders had special responsibilities for practicing "good" magic when putting up structures. The timing, layout, and ritual order of construction were deemed essential to keeping evil influences out of the completed building. Of course, anyone capable of "good" magic is also capable of "bad." A carpentry manual popular in Ch'ing times, the *Lu-pan-ching*, accordingly contains not only rules for proper ritual construction but also baleful charms for builders to hide atop rafters or under floors. Quite evenhandedly, it also includes charms to be used *against* such evil builders.[36] Here are some examples of carpenters' baleful magic:

> A drawing of a broken tile inscribed with "Ice melts" [the rest of the expression is "tiles scatter"—implying collapse or dissolution]. Appended is a charm: "A piece of broken tile, a jagged edge, hidden in joint of roof-beam, husband die and wife remarry, sons move away,

servants flee, none will care for the estate." (To be hidden in a joint of the main roof-beam.)

A drawing of an ox-bone. The charm: "In center of room hide ox-bone, life-long toil, life's end death but no coffin, sons and grandsons will shoulder heavy burdens." (Bury under center of room.)

A drawing of a knife among coils of hair. The charm: "A sword worn in the hair. Sons and grandsons will leave and become monks. Having sons who found no families, perpetual misery. Widow and widower, orphaned and childless, do not forgive each other." (Bury under threshold.)

But the reader is also offered powerful magic for defending the household against builder-sorcerers:

When building a house, various kinds of carpenters, masons, and plasterers will plot to poison, curse, and harm the owner. On the day when the roof-beam is raised, offer a sacrifice of the three types of animal, laid out on a horizontal trestle, to all the gods. Then recite the following secret charm of Master Lu Pan [patron saint of carpenters]: "Evil artisans, do you not know that poisons and curses will rebound upon yourselves, and bring no harm to the owner?" Then recite seven times: "Let the artisan [responsible for the sorcery] meet misfortune." [Then say,] "I have received the proclamation of the Supreme Ruler [the Jade Emperor] ordering that I shall suffer no harm from others, and that all will redound to my good fortune: an urgent decree." Burn copy of charm in private place, especially where no pregnant woman can see you. Mix ashes with blood of black and yellow dog, then dissolve in wine. On day main roof-beam is raised, serve to builders (three cups to boss). He who is plotting sorcery will himself receive the harm. (Copy in vermilion ink and paste atop roofbeam.)

Such visions of offensive and defensive magic display the anxieties that affected most common people all the time: premature death, ritually faulty burial, loss of children, lack of proper ritual care after death. Although these anxieties center on building-sorcery, they really reflect a view of the world in which human fortunes are generally vulnerable to supernatural vandalism. In the unending confrontation between gods *(shen)* and ghosts *(kuei)*, human life needs the protection of whatever arts *(fa* or *shu)* can be mobilized, either from ritual specialists or from laymen's lore.[37]

Suspicions of the Clergy

In the campaign against soulstealing, Buddhist monks and the occasional Taoist priest were the prime suspects from the very beginning.

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

Two builders' curses and an antidote: (1) the ox-bone curse; (2) the knife-in-hair curse; (3) the householder's ritual antidote for all such curses.

Why was Hungli so quick to believe in these monkish master-sorcerers and to turn the energies of the state against them? And why was the common man so quick to pounce on the nearest monk whenever fears of sorcery crossed his mind?

Official Treatment of the Clergy

The commoner's daily battle against evil spirits was mirrored, at the very top of society, by the concerns of the imperial state. Even as it prohibited sorcery, the state was itself constantly dealing with the spirit world. On every level of officialdom, from the imperial palace to the dustiest county yamen, agents of the state were intermediaries between man and spirits. Their role marks them, in a sense, as priests: communicating with the gods on behalf of mankind to ensure the proper ordering of worldly events, primarily good conditions for agriculture and peace for the realm. At the top, the emperor himself presided over solemn annual sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. At the bottom, the county magistrate (a little emperor in his own realm) regarded the City God (*ch'eng-huang*, a magistrate of the spirit world), as an essential coadjutor in governing.

Although the common man was barred from celebrating the imperial and bureaucratic cults, he did share some of their theology. Formal worship of Heaven was a monopoly of the monarch, but the common people were already inclined to believe in Heaven's power in human affairs. Because everyone's fate was governed by heavenly forces (the succession of the "five actions," *wu-hsing*, and the interplay of the cosmological powers of *yin* and *yang*), people easily accepted the connection of imperial Heaven-worship with human felicity. And because the fate of the individual soul after death was thought to depend on a judgment of merit by the City God, commoners considered that worship of that deity by local officials was performed on behalf of the community as a whole.[38] If the state were to sustain these popular beliefs in its own spiritual role, it had to watch carefully for potential competitors.

The state's inclusive claim to be the rightful manager of man's relations with spirits led to elaborate procedures for regulating the organized Buddhist and Taoist clergy. There was, of course, something a bit absurd about the state's rules regarding the clergy. The majority of ritual specialists were not "enrolled," in any formal sense, under organizations that could be held to account for their activities.

The priests of the popular religion, who headed an eclectic, deeply rooted system of community practices, were not even full-time clerics, in the sense that we might expect from a Western context. For the state to forbid ambiguous status, insist on clear-cut demonstration of master-disciple relationships, and require registration of all religious practioners were ludicrous presumptions in view of the actual practice of Chinese religion. Marginality (as the state would define it) was built into the social status of most ritual specialists. To fasten upon them regulations such as those I shall summarize here would have erased popular religion itself, which of course the state (in those days) would have found an impossible task. This simple fact gives discussions of "state control of religion" an unreal and fantastic aspect.[39]

Nevertheless, the attempt was made. We have to regard it as an indication of state attitudes, rather than as a "system" that actually functioned in anything like the way it was intended to. According to the rules, all temples and monasteries, along with their clergy, had to be registered and licensed. It was illegal to build a temple without formal approval of the Board of Rites. In the same spirit, the state had for centuries required Buddhist monks and Taoist priests to obtain certificates of ordination *(tu-tieh)*.[40] Why was the late imperial state so concerned to register and control ritual specialists? When the ninth-century T'ang empire confiscated vast monastic properties and returned tens of thousands of monks to lay life, the reason was partly economic: a man's withdrawal to a monastery removed him from the liabilities of taxes and labor service and so deprived the state of revenue. Yet this purpose was irrelevant in the late empires, when labor-service obligations had been commuted to money payments and assessed along with the land tax, in effect replacing corvée by paid labor. A review of the Ch'ing efforts to control the clergy suggests other purposes.

Although licensing and registration of monks and priests had been practiced by the preceding Ming Dynasty, it was not until 1674 that the Manchu throne issued its first general instructions on state governance of the clergy. In Peking, offices were established for the supervision of Buddhists and Taoists, each to be staffed by sixteen monks or priests, members apparently to be initially selected by the Board of Rites, but to be replaced by co-optation from among the capital clergy. The members of these supervisory bodies were to be reported to the Board of Civil Office *(li-pu)*.[41] A parallel system was decreed for the provinces: offices staffed by selected monks and

priests were established in prefectures, departments, and counties.[42] They reported up the regular chain of bureaucratic command.

The supervisory offices were to regulate the deportment of monks, priests, and nuns, to ensure that they honored their vows by proper discipline. Beyond this, however, was the all-important licensing. Here the point was not so much to maintain the purity of the clergy themselves as to insure against unreliable laymen representing themselves as clerics. The Throne feared that "riffraff and ruffians" would falsely assume clerical habit and claim to be invoking the spirits of (religious) patriarchs *(tsu-shih)* through divination. Such powers to communicate with spirits and foretell the future would generate "heterodox doctrines" and "wild talk" that could attract ignorant people to become their followers and form illegal sects. By heterodox doctrines and wild talk, the Throne meant not only pretensions to magical powers by sect leaders but also prognostications about the fate of the existing political order. Imperial decrees on this subject show special sensitivity to religious activities in Peking, the seat of dynastic power. Temples and monasteries in the capital were forbidden to "establish sects and hold assemblies where men and women mix together" (a hallmark of popular religion—and further evidence, to the imperial mind, of moral degeneracy). Nor were they allowed to "erect platforms to perform operas and collect money, sacrifice to the gods, or carry them in procession."[43]

Emperor Hungli himself was particularly irritated by ambiguity of status, which led him to try to extend the regulations on the *organized* clergy (those in major monasteries or temples) to the vast majority of ritual specialists in lay communities. His first major pronouncement on the clergy concerned persons who might be called secular clergy—actually the majority of ritual specialists: those who lived permanently outside monasteries and temples, owned property, and even married. Such men played a vital role in communities by serving in funerals and exorcisms, and otherwise filling people's needs for ritual services. They were subject neither to monastic discipline nor to state control. After denouncing the decayed state of clerical morals and learning, Hungli ordered that these secular practitioners be forced either to live in monasteries or temples, or else return to lay life. Their property, save for a bare subsistence allowance, was to be confiscated and given to the poor. When it appeared that the decree was causing panic among clergy in general and provoking disorder in the provinces, Hungli protested that he had never meant to harm those who

hewed to clerical discipline. The problem, rather, was public order. These secular personnel "steal the name of clergy but lack their discipline. They even engage in depraved and illicit activities. They are hard to investigate and control." The reason he was requiring that they obtain ordination certificates "was so that riffraff would not be able to hide in their midst and disgrace Buddhism and Taoism." The newly enthroned monarch was evidently surprised by the reaction to his harsh measures. He now recoiled from the confiscation order: "Finally, how can Our Dynasty's relief of the poor depend on the seizure of such petty properties?" The decree was rescinded. But, burdening the monarch's mind, there remained the irksome existence of a mass of ritual specialists who were not under any kind of state supervision.[44]

Hungli's view of the Buddhist clergy was colored by prudish Neo-Confucian attitudes toward sex. Of course, the clergy's own internal regulations required chastity, and the *Ch'ing Code* prescribed special penalties for monks who lured married women into adultery. Yet clerical fornication seems to have evoked from Hungli a particular loathing and vindictiveness. In 1768 a monk near Nanking was accused of having sexual relations with several married peasant women. Governor-general G'aojin noted that the Nanking area "easily harbors criminal monks *(chien-seng)*," because there were so many clerical establishments that it was hard to keep track of them all. Accordingly, G'aojin had his county officials keep alert for bad clerical behavior. Authorities near Nanking discovered that the present culprit, a "depraved monk," had been engaging in such conduct for years and had even bribed a local headman not to report it. He had also amassed considerable wealth by renting out plots of his monastery's land to tenants. "For such a depraved monk to amass wealth and flout the law at will [through sexual misconduct] is a great injury to the morals of the community," wrote G'aojin. The ordinary penalties in the *Ch'ing Code* seemed insufficient for this culprit, who should, he recommended, be sent to Ili to serve as a slave in the military colonies. Hungli replied that even such a penalty would be "too light." "Such depraved and evil monks have long injured local morals." The culprit should be "beaten to death immediately in order to make manifest Our punishments. How can he deserve anything more lenient?" G'aojin replied that he was indeed to blame for recommending too light a sentence. Not only would the criminal be beaten to death, but it would be done in the presence of all the monks

of Nanking, as a warning to them all. Two-thirds of the monastery's property was to be confiscated.[45]

This bloody one-upsmanship between Hungli and his imperial in-law suggests that monk-bashing was a source of moral satisfaction for rulers who considered the clergy to be mostly hypocrites and corrupters of the community. Such expectations of clerical behavior made it plausible to connect them with other harmful and immoral activities, such as sorcery. Aggravated by officials' alarm over what they perceived to be an alarming growth of the clerical underclass, described in Chapter 2, these imperial fears of the clergy were made to order for a nationwide sorcerer-hunt. Along with beggars, the clergy, particularly those in small temples or out on the road, were among China's most vulnerable groups, with no protection forthcoming from kin or community. But why were the general public such avid participants in the persecution of 1768?

Clergy, Beggars, and the Common Man

In view of the prominent place of Buddhist monks among sorcery suspects in the 1768 scare, it is somewhat surprising that the two major eighteenth-century collections of supernatural tales (by P'u Sung-ling and Yuan Mei) picture the Buddhist clergy as relatively benign. Sorcery aplenty is attributed to Taoists, such as the homicidal Taoist beggar depicted at the beginning of this chapter. By contrast, Buddhists are attacked mainly for hypocrisy or for immorality (particularly sexual license—a theme common in European anticlericalism). The phrase "sorcerous Taoists and licentious Buddhists" *(yao-tao yin-seng)* sums up the difference.[46] We shall have to look beneath the level of elite story-writers to discover a plausible source for popular fears of monks.[47]

In a society fearful of strangers, several aspects of monks' lives seem to have placed them in harm's way. One is the long, sometimes permanent condition of being a novice: the period between taking the tonsure ("leaving the family"—*ch'u-chia*) and receiving ordination. Although being ordained required a long period of study under a master (a senior monk) and generally had to be completed in one of the elite "public monasteries," becoming a novice was relatively easy and informal. The subject pronounced his intention of renouncing lay life, had his head shaved by his tonsure-master (the "master" or *shih-fu* who would now be responsible for his training), and began to

observe the "ten prohibitions" (chastity, vegetarianism, and so on). Having left his own family, he now acquired a monastic "family," in which his master served as a surrogate parent and his fellow novices as brothers. A very large proportion of monks were brought up in the monastic life from adolescence. Their training generally took place in small "hereditary" temples: those run by monastic "families" and passed down from one generation to the next. Only years later, if at all, was a monk ordained at one of the large "public" monasteries.

In the meantime the novice was part of a large intermediate stratum of the unordained, a stratum easily entered and indeed easily exited. Although classified by the state (and by society at large) as a "monk" *(seng)*, he was forbidden to reside in any of the large, elite monasteries. Such "monks" probably constituted the majority of the Buddhist clergy, and most soulstealing suspects (including two of the Hsiao-shan monks; see Chapter 1) were in fact of this group. The government's suspicions centered on such men, and it would not be surprising to find that popular fears ran along the same channels: these were men in limbo, neither of the orthodox family system nor of the certified clerical elite. This fact should lead us to question the usefulness of the designation "monk," which was used in government documents to describe virtually anyone with a robe and a shaved head, whatever his state of religious commitment or education. Many of these men, or perhaps even most of them, were not unambiguously in any of the approved categories that gave bureaucrats the reassuring idea that they had society under control.

Rootlessness was another suspicious mark of the novice. Once tonsured, he was often cast into the life of the road. The search for religious instruction, or a pilgrimage to pay respects to the grave of an "ancestor" of his monastic family, were common reasons for travel. Another, perhaps the most common, was begging: small temples commonly lacked enough land endowment to support their inhabitants, and lacking adequate donations or fees from requiem masses, begging was the only way out. Monastic begging was not universally approved (some monasteries forbade it), and attitudes toward mendicant monks were sometimes not much different from those toward beggars in general.[48] Nevertheless, eighteenth-century documents show that begging monks were everywhere to be seen.

Popular attitudes toward monks were probably conditioned by both of these situations: the ambiguous status of the novices (of the *sangha* but not really in it), and by the general ambivalence toward begging

(an occupation of the rootless and shiftless, yet somehow sanctified by the holy poverty of the clergy). Toward Taoist priests, popular attitudes were probably more unreservedly fearful.

Taoist practitioners were conventionally associated with various forms of magic (alchemy, exorcism, and the search for immortality). This made them logical suspects when the "evil arts" were at issue. Although their normal community functions were such benign practices as healing-exorcism, their demonic role in fiction suggests that magical arts were considered to be turned readily to evil uses.[49] Buddhist monks, whose main community function was assisting the souls of the departed through the underworld, were not sorcerers in quite the same sense, which may explain their relative benignity in popular stories. Yet we may wonder whether, in the popular mind, the various sorts of ritual specialists were as sharply distinguished when they were strangers to the community. Wandering Buddhist monks might have seemed unpredictable and inscrutable, for example, when compared with monks based in a local temple whom everyone saw at neighborhood funerals. And it takes little imagination to perceive the menace of a "wandering Taoist." Local ritual specialists were comparatively "safe," in that their community roles were known. Indeed the neighborhood exorcist probably seemed about as threatening as the family doctor. But outsiders were another matter. To them might reasonably attach more general suspicions about people with special ritual powers.

Where commoners might fear ritual specialists for their magic, gentry scorned them for their shiftlessness. A collection of lineage homilies from Chekiang points out that every occupation has its "principle of livelihood" *(sheng-li),* whether scholar, farmer, artisan, or merchant. "But then there are those lazy, idle drifters who wander about as Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, vagrants, or ruffians, who are registered in no native place. These people are not living according to any principle of livelihood. There is no 'principle' for living without a principle of livelihood, just stealing a living from Heaven and Earth."[50]

The taint of death pollution. An authority on Cantonese society writes that funerary priests (in this case, roughly speaking, Taoist) bear a definite social stigma "because of the nature of their work," rather like morticians in our own society. "Their neighbors . . . are never completely comfortable in their presence." The reason is the death pollution that is thought to adhere to their bodies. Even though these

priests "make every effort to avoid direct contact with the corpse or with the coffin," they cannot wholly dissociate themselves from the dangerously polluting aspect of their profession.[51] Ritual specialists in the community make their living particularly at funerals, a job that puts them continually near the coffins of the newly dead. We have, as yet, no confirmation that fear of death pollution, so evident in South China, contributed to popular ambivalence toward the clergy in the rest of the country, but we cannot rule it out.

The sorcerer as outsider. The mix of reverence and fear in which commoners held ritual specialists is especially meaningful in the light of the clerical underclass of late imperial times. Wanderers with special spiritual powers were a unique sort of danger, and perhaps (given Min O-yuan's account) an increasingly visible one by the mid-eighteenth century. Studies of other cultures suggest that sorcery is often imputed to outsiders: Alan Macfarlane notes, on the basis of African and English data, that "men who wander about the country" are natural targets of sorcery accusations.[52] Sorcery, which (unlike witchcraft) involves no innate powers but merely the manipulation of magic techniques, is essentially impersonal: the evil done is more like vandalism than vendetta. The absence of community ties therefore would make wandering mendicants (whether clerical or lay) logical suspects. Though they would lack a personal motive, they would also lack social inhibitions and community responsibilities. Add to this the xenophobia of the peasant villager toward outsiders of any sort, and sorcery is quite a reasonable fear.[53]

In Chinese popular religion, the pervasive fear of aliens is expressed in the serious ritual business of propitiating "ghosts" *(kuei).* These are conceived as unattached spirits who lack the family ties that would otherwise provide the sacrifices that would ease their distress and dispel their rancor. Dangerous social and political marginality in the *yang* or temporal world is closely associated with dangerous spiritual marginality (ghostliness) in the *yin* or shadow world.[54]

In the cases of 1768, foreignness was nearly always a detonator of soulstealing panic. It was often noticed, at first contact, as linguistic difference, by which strangers were instantly marked. Here the contrast with shamanism could not be sharper. In Cantonese communities, for example, shamans must be well-established members of the community in order to perform their job, which is to hold at bay the malevolent spirits of the discontented dead: a task that requires intimate knowledge of village social relationships.[55] It appears that

"good" or "safe" ritual specialists (community priests, shamans) *must* be community members, whereas "bad" or "dangerous" ones (sorcerers) *cannot* be. If so, it is likely either that fear naturally attaches to aliens, or that sorcery accusations within the community would be so harmful to social relations that they cannot be permitted—or perhaps even conceived of. Hence it is upon the stranger that suspicion must fall.[56]

The Social Terrorism of Beggars

In one respect, mendicant clergy were more vulnerable to sorcery charges than were lay beggars. Those who make a profession of communicating with the spirit world can readily be imagined to have ways of making spirit forces serve their personal ends: the very stuff of sorcery. Nevertheless, sorcery charges were also leveled at many lay beggars during the soulstealing panic. Most often they were merely doing the legwork for evil monks (going about clipping queues for them). Fear of beggars, however, had nothing to do with mastery of ritual "techniques." Quite the opposite: it was their ritual invulnerability that made them dangerous.

Monks and beggars were the poorest and most defenseless groups in Chinese society. They were supported by no influential kinsmen, they had little or no economic reserves. Monks, as we have seen, had such important functions in community ritual that they could not be dispensed with. But how were beggars able to persist in their way of life despite public scorn and loathing? The reason seems to be that, however helpless in the respectable social world, they had the power to make the public fear them. People had two reasons to fear beggars: "contamination" and "ritual sabotage," which are in fact closely related.

Contamination. Dread of contamination enabled a beggar to make people pay to keep him at a distance. What all observers agree was a carefully cultivated (and conventional) filthy and ragged appearance—the beggars' uniform, as it were—may have excited pity, but also stirred revulsion; people shunned a beggar's touch. This practical concern to avoid diseases (such as running sores, which beggars ostentatiously displayed) was closely joined to a fear of spiritual pollution. The death of a beggar on one's premises could have "drastic cosmological implications," because his ghost would then have to be exorcised at some expense and with dubious effect.[57] The job of

[To view this image, refer to
the print version of this title.]

A beggar makes a scene in front of an official's palanquin and is wrestled away by yamen attendants. More beggars, carrying their sleeping mats, are exiting over the bridge, at right.

pallbearers, conventionally allotted to beggars, also tainted them with death pollution, which was good to stay away from. To be "touched" for money by such people was preferable to being touched physically.

Ritual sabotage. Here we are cutting close to the core of soulstealing fear. Where was respectable society most vulnerable to attack? All the riches and connections in the world were no protection from being bullied by men who had nothing to lose. Hence it is no surprise that weddings and funerals were occasions of customary payoffs to beggars. Failure to give the beggars their due could (and sometimes did) result in gangs of ragged and filthy people barging into the festivities, their very presence embarrassing the hosts and, much worse, ruining the efficacy of the ritual. The danger was bad enough at weddings but could be ritually fatal at funerals: one nineteenth-century account tells of angry beggars actually jumping into a grave to prevent a burial from proceeding.[58] People were vulnerable to such terrorism because they felt their defenses against supernatural forces to be so tenuous, and the battle between beneficent and hostile spirits so evenly drawn. As we have seen, the nexus between body and soul was another danger point that was vulnerable to attack by malevolent forces. In this situation, social outcasts gained a peculiar power, precisely because they themselves were already so polluted or so unlucky that they seemed to care neither for social "face" nor for cosmological fortune. The mere "touch" of the queue- or lapel-clipping beggar was enough to awaken fears of lethal pollution. By extension, a beggar's anger was cause for alarm because his polluted nature was entirely compatible with magical terrorism. The beggar's *curse* at one who refused alms carried more than mere rhetorical force.

Our exploration of Chinese sorcery reveals two related structures of fear, both of which involve the fragility of a spiritual-corporeal link. The popular fear was of soul-loss: the delicacy of the bond between soul and body meant that agencies either natural or supernatural could sever it. Dreams and disease were dangers to the stability of this link, as was of course malevolent magic. The imperial fear related not to the individual but to the collectivity. The integrity and durability of Heaven's Mandate required recurrent confirmation through the imperial rites. It could be severed by natural agents (the cosmological forces visible only in nature's disasters and omens), as well as by turbulent men who wished the state ill. Such men's communication with spirits was both stoutly denied and sternly prohibited. The way imperial dignitaries scoffed at any spirit-link except

their own confirmed a deeply founded anxiety about the longevity of their own mandate. For commoners, the sorcerer's magic menaced the vulnerable link between body and soul. For the imperial elite, it imperiled the tenuous link with heavenly powers. What bred such fears at both the top and the bottom of the social scale, in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, is worth considering after we have pursued the soulstealing story further. Against the soulstealing evil the Throne is now about to mount a national campaign, in the course of which the link between sorcery and politics will become plainer.

CHAPTER 9

Political Crime and Bureaucratic Monarchy

We now have read several stories: about sorcery panic spreading among the common people; about a monarch becoming convinced that sorcery is a mask for sedition; about agnostic bureaucrats struggling to cope with demands from both sides but failing to satisfy either. These stories are layered one upon the another, several texts written on a single historical page. Beneath them lies another story, the hardest to read: how local events—including the sorcery scare—served as fuel for running the political system.[1]

Sorcery played its part in the political system as the kind of event I shall call "political crime." Political crime included sedition in all its various guises, whether religious heterodoxy, literary innuendo, or outright revolt. Because it threatened the foundations of the system itself, political crime was considered distinct from the ever-present corruption, which merely reduced the system's efficiency. But if this were the case, why were not the bureaucrats as concerned about it as the monarch? It was, after all, their system too. The answer must lie at the core of bureaucratic monarchy itself, at least as we see it in the Chinese case. Documents from the sorcery crisis suggest why political crime was a monarch's issue and not a bureaucrat's issue. The heart of the problem was the relationship between routine and arbitrary power.

Routine and Arbitrary Power in the Bureaucratic Monarchy

Study of the Chinese political system under the late empires has produced two largely distinct literatures: on the structure, personnel, and values of the administrative bureaucracy;[2] and on the development of the imperial institution, particularly the imperial communication system.[3] As a result, we now have a more sophisticated view of officialdom as a way of life; and a view of the ruler that makes him part of a political system, rather than a remote and all-powerful despot. I wonder, however, whether we have yet discovered how arbitrary power interacts with bureaucratic routine over a long period within a single system.[4] We still tend to assume that the two are inversely related: the more of one, the less of the other; as one grows, the other shrinks. The tendency of social analysis since Max Weber is in fact to show that, in the long run, autocrats yield to bureaucrats. Yet I believe that arbitrary and routine authority may not have been incompatible in the Chinese system, and may indeed have found ways to live side by side.

In his celebrated description of the Chinese polity, Max Weber actually avoids confronting the issue of how arbitrary and routine power interact. Instead, he characterizes the Chinese monarchy as incompletely centralized, and its operational norms as uncodified. The limitations of his data shielded him from a view of either arbitrary power or codified routine. The emperor himself is a shadowy figure in Weber's treatment of Chinese bureaucracy. Under the "average ruler," authority was not "centralized."[5] Weber presumably believed, however, that Chinese bureaucracy would be powerless when faced with a *non*average ruler because it lacked specialization (only modern "bureaucratic experts" can compete effectively with the "absolute monarch," whom they can dismiss as a "dilettante").[6] Although he uses the term "bureaucracy" in referring to the Chinese system, Weber actually includes that system not under "Bureaucracy," a subject heading he reserves for the specifically "modern" type, but rather under "Patriarchal and Patrimonial Domination."[7] Just as shadowy is Weber's notion of the codified routine through which the Chinese bureaucracy was disciplined and controlled. Though the "patriarchal" monarchy was able to achieve an "authoritarian and internalized bondage" of the officials by transferring them frequently and thereby keeping them from forming regional power-bases,[8] the "patriarchal character of the political association . . . was opposed to

any development of formal law."[9] "Formal law," for Weber, must have included administrative codes by which the bureaucracy itself might be regulated. Although for these reasons Weber could not pose the problem sharply in the context of the Chinese state, his historical logic suggests that he saw arbitrary and routine power as incompatible. History tends to replace the former with the latter through routinization and rationalization.[10]

In his classic treatise on the evolution of the Prussian state, Hans Rosenberg distinguishes between "dynastic absolutism" and "bureaucratic absolutism." By "absolutism," Rosenberg means power essentially unchecked by constitutional limits or by compromise with influential social strata. By "dynastic," he emphasizes the dominance of the monarch himself ("a royal bully," as he describes Frederick William I) over society at large, as well as over the corps of "royal servants" recruited to carry out his orders. This system Rosenberg also characterizes as an "experiment in royal monocracy." Although he does not describe in detail the interaction between the "monocrat" and his bureaucracy, the implication is that the "hideous spirit of fearful obedience to authority" that infused Prussian society at large was a projection of the bureaucracy's own state of mind.[11] Nevertheless, Rosenberg asserts that even under the early Hohenzollerns, royal control relied upon minutely regularized procedures: the "public law" that governed the bureaucracy as well as the populace.[12] We are left uncertain about how "monocracy" or dynastic absolutism preserved its freedom of action within a system of regulations that were designed to reduce the operation of government to a finely tuned routine.

If there was a purely "arbitrary" component to this system, it was unstable and short-lived. It fell victim to "an unremitting struggle for replacing arbitrary royal powers . . . with general legal rules." Even under Frederick the Great, monocratic power was frustrated by officials who had "real power to obstruct and divert" by manipulating information and other acts of bureaucratic "sabotage." Under Frederick's weaker successors, the bureaucracy succeeded in securing itself against arbitrary sanctions by introducing life tenure and due process into the bureaucratic personnel system. The result, as Rosenberg describes post-Napoleonic Prussia, was a state ruled by career bureaucrats ("bureaucratic absolutism"); the monarch was simply the "top functionary."[13] Here arbitrary and routine power were subject to a historical process that weakened the one to the advantage of the

other—a process like Weber's "routinization" and "rationalization." In Rosenberg's Prussian case, arbitrary and routine power could not long coexist.

"Bureaucratic monarchy" reads like an oxymoron. To the extent that it is "bureaucratic," what scope is left for the monarch? To the extent that it is monarchic, how can one man's autocratic power coexist with a system of universal rules? Both monarch and bureaucrat were caught in this dilemma; both were ambivalent toward formal administrative procedures. The monarch had to regulate his thousands of bureaucratic servants by written codes, to ensure that everyone stuck to the administrative procedures that underlay his own wealth and security. At the same time, he was naturally concerned to maintain his own distinctive position, his extra-bureaucratic power and autonomy. Consequently he had to struggle unceasingly to avoid becoming bureaucratized himself. Much of the normal business of government involved him in sanctioning decrees drafted for him by the Grand Secretariat, or in ratifying appointments of candidates presented to him by the Board of Civil Office. Faced by his document-drafters with a narrow range of choice, the busy monarch found himself "functioning" as a cog (albeit a bejeweled one) in a document-processing machine. How was he to break out of this trap and assert his position as master, not functionary?[14]

The bureaucratic official, for his part, was bedeviled by minute regulations on the form, timing, and routing of paperwork, fiscal and judicial deadlines, and the relations of superiors to subordinates. To break any of these regulations exposed him to impeachment, fines, transfer, or dismissal. Yet these onerous regulations at least drew certain boundaries around his responsibilities and offered him some protection from arbitrary demands by superiors and even by the monarch himself.[15]

The Monarch's Control of Bureaucrats

Rules yield predictability and standardization. They also limit the freedom of the one who applies them. In this sense they are a great leveler of status: those who apply and monitor the rules may become as entangled by them as those who are subject to them. The Ch'ing autocrats accordingly had to pick their way carefully between routine and arbitrary models of command. When rules were ineffective, the

remedies included not only more rules but also procedures that rested upon arbitrary power. From early in his reign, Hungli was impatient with rules that did not work. His remedies included both tightening the screws of the routine bureaucratic machine and finding ways to inject his own arbitrary power into it. How he did this can be seen most readily in his efforts to evaluate his officials.

Surveillance of Efficiency and Conduct

At the heart of monarchic control lay the evaluation of officials: estimating their qualifications for appointment, surveying their conduct in office, and periodically evaluating their fitness for service. The history of Hungli's reign suggests how hard it is to force a bureaucracy to discipline itself. His despair at the system he inherited led him to seek alternative means of control.

The essence of the official control system was the distinction between crime and administrative failure. Criminal penalties, for corruption or worse crimes, were handled by the Board of Punishments after the culprit had been impeached and removed from office. Administrative sanctions *(ch'u-fen)* were handled by the Board of Civil Office. These penalties, which involved demotion in rank, transfer to a less desirable post, and monetary fines, covered a broad range of misdeeds, of which most were failures to meet deadlines or quotas (for solving criminal cases or collecting taxes), concealment of information, or other breaches of standard operating procedure. No official dossier was without its record of *ch'u-fen* offenses. Here are some examples of typical offenses and their penalties, drawn from the 1749 edition of the *Regulations of the Board of Civil Office, Administrative Sanctions:*

> An official who fails to report the fact of a grain-transport boat's sinking: to be reduced one grade and transferred.
>
> If an official supervising the collection of the land tax falls short [of the quota] by an amount less than one-tenth, he is to be blocked from promotion and fined a year's [nominal] salary. If he is short a tenth or more, he is to be reduced in rank by one grade . . . and if he is short five-tenths or more he is to be dismissed from office.
>
> If a local official, fearing to be disciplined for laxity in arresting criminals, under some pretext intimidates a plaintiff and forces him to avoid

> using the word "robbery" and not report it as such, . . . he is to be removed from office.[16]

Although Chinese government has long included special organs to investigate and impeach officials for incompetence and wrongdoing, their history since medieval times has been one of decline. The branch of government generally called "the Censorate" (under the Ch'ing, *tu-ch'a-yuan*) historically had duties of both remonstrating with the emperor about his conduct and keeping an eye on the bureaucracy. At least as early as the seventh century A.D., "remonstrance" upward was secondary to surveillance downward. But over time even the independent surveillance function was eroded. The Manchu conquerors inherited from their Ming predecessors a Censorate that had largely lost its ability to supervise field administration. "Surveillance offices" *(an-ch'a-ssu)* in the provinces had, by the late sixteenth century, already assumed the regular judicial work of provincial government. The Manchus completed their incorporation into the provincial bureaucracy, and we now refer to these officials as "provincial judges."[17] Although there were censorial offices in the capital to check on the work of metropolitan officials, they were largely engaged in combing documents for irregularities. And although there were "provincial censors" charged with overseeing provincial administration, these men were actually stationed in Peking, which meant that the "eyes and ears" of the sovereign were considerably dimmed outside the capital. Accordingly, the job of surveillance in both capital and provinces mainly fell to line bureaucrats, each of whom was responsible for watching the conduct of his subordinates. To symbolize how administration and surveillance were melded, a provincial governor bore the brevet title of vice-president of the Censorate, to indicate his special responsibility to scrutinize the conduct of his subordinates. In effect, the bureaucracy was really watching itself.[18]

This kind of in-house bureaucratic surveillance followed two modes: *ad hoc* impeachment (for both incompetence and criminality), and periodic evaluation leading to triennial fitness reports for all officials, reports that also served as the basis for impeaching substandard officials. In both these modes, the process relied largely on the work of line bureaucrats and rather little upon the Censorate. Of 5,151 impeachment cases in the Ch'ien-lung reign, less than 8 percent were initiated by the Censorate, with the rest by line officials in Peking

or the provinces.[19] Though Hungli believed that both modes worked badly, he identified the problem most clearly in the triennial fitness reports.

The Triennial Evaluations

Periodic evaluation of officials has a history as long as that of Chinese government.[20] The Manchus inherited the system from the Ming and had installed it even before the conquest.[21] By the mid-eighteenth century the basic elements of the evaluation for civil officials[22] were the Capital Investigation *(ching-ch'a)* which included all Peking officials except those of the three highest ranks, and the Grand Accounting *(ta-chi)*, which included provincial officials except for governors-general, governors, and provincial treasurers and judges.

For both the capital and provincial systems, the cumbersome procedure was that every year an official would be rated *(k'ao-ch'eng)* by his superior officer. These ratings served as raw material for the triennial evaluations. In the capital, the triennial registers would be aggregated by the heads of the Six Boards, and in the provinces by the governors. The registers (bound traditionally in imperial yellow) were then forwarded to a review commission consisting of officials from the Board of Civil Office and the Censorate, along with one Han and one Manchu grand secretary. The commission would then review the "yellow registers" and decide who should be promoted, demoted, or retained in office. The cases of men due for promotion or demotion would then be the subjects of separate memorials to the Throne from the Board of Civil Office. Men whom the Throne approved for promotion as "outstanding" *(cho-i)* still had to be recommended in separate memorials by their superiors. Strict accountability applied in these cases of promotion for merit. In the case of lower-level officials, recommendations had to note whether there were any outstanding treasury shortages or unresolved court cases that might block promotion. If any were subsequently found after promotion, the recommender himself would be punished by demotion and transfer.

The apparent rigor of this system seems less impressive when we examine the actual documents used in it. To begin with, the format was extremely stereotyped. The registers, sometimes known as "four-column books" *(ssu-chu-ts'e)*, contained, for each man, a single page with four headings: "integrity" *(ts'ao-shou)*, "executive performance"

(cheng-shih), "native talent" *(ts'ai-chü)*, and "physical fitness" *(nien-li)*, listed in that order. Under each heading, one of three standard ideographs would be filled in:

Standard Format for Triennial Evaluations

Category	Integrity	Executive Performance	Talent
Highest	Incorrupt	Assiduous	Exceptional
Middle	Careful	Diligent	Good
Lowest	Ordinary	Ordinary	Ordinary

Based on their ratings, officials would be grouped into three ranks. The criterion for ranking was the number of categories in which an official received better-than-average ratings. For instance, an official who received ratings of "incorrupt *(ch'ing)*," "assiduous *(ch'in)*," and "exceptional *(yu)*" in the first three categories was ranked in group one. ("Physical fitness" seems not to have played a part in the group rankings. If age or illness made the official unfit, he was impeached in a separate procedure.) Those with two above-average ratings were grouped in group two; and those with one or none comprised group three.[23] All three groups, however, were considered fit for duty. Those in group one might be recommended for promotion, which was done in separate memorials attesting to their "outstanding" *(cho-i)* qualities. Also in separate memorials, those whose general fitness was below standard were impeached *(chiu-ho)*. The provincial triennial evaluation *(ta-chi)* used substantially the same format but added, for each official, a four- or eight-ideograph evaluation *(k'ao-yü)* that offered an overall assessment of performance.

How little latitude these fitness reports permitted the evaluating officer! The scale of qualities was hardly fine enough to make careful distinctions among officials. Hardly more revealing were the four- or eight-ideograph evaluations on each man's file in the "Grand Accounting." An examination of numerous eighteenth-century yellow registers suggests that evaluators were choosing their comments from standard phrasebooks. The specificity is still crude, the result bland. Here are a few examples from a 1751 list of magistrates from Chihli ranked in the middle grade *(erh-teng)*. One is reminded of a third-grader's report card, prepared by a teacher who is strug-

gling for something special to say about each of her charges ("participates actively in class, written work neat").

"Conduct perceptive, executive performance conscientious"
"Executive performance diligent and careful, fit for his post"
"Official conduct careful, management diligent"
"Talent perspicuous, management diligent"
"Official conduct careful, management conscientious"
"Conduct sincere, management diligent"[24]

One would expect that in the subsequent recommendations for promotion there would be more to say. Indeed the ratings are more complimentary, but the format is just as confining and stilted:

"Intelligent and clever, administration very capable"
"Perceptive and skillful, administration resolute"
"Mature and honest, administration diligent and careful"
"Bright and able, administration wholehearted"
"Talent outstanding, administration resolute"[25]

Although one finds minor differences of vocabulary among provinces (suggesting that each provincial yamen had its own handbook of such stock phrases), the impression left by these registers is of officials who were struggling to differentiate subordinates whose records seemed generally acceptable but of whom they had little or no personal knowledge.

Such stilted, conceptually cramped procedures grew naturally from bureaucratic life and reflected the mentality of the men who applied them. First, there was the need to avoid risks. Recommendation of a man who later turned out to be disappointing (or worse) could incur penalties for the recommender. Perhaps the more closely the criteria of merit hewed to a narrow, unexpressive format, the more likely were officials to risk making recommendations, on the principle that the less said, the better. Furthermore, descriptions of *acts* rather than analyses of *character* were more easily defensible, should anything go wrong. Second, the evaluations probably were adequate to describe what bureaucrats themselves considered a "good" official. In a rule-ridden environment, the best official was the one who caused the fewest problems—that is, who exemplified largely negative virtues by avoiding trouble. In any bureaucratic system, to excel can be risky.

Nor are whistle-blowers and boat-rockers appreciated. The overzealous official trips over rules more often than does the cautious plodder. Hence prudence, circumspection, and diligence were prominent values in the routine evaluations.

Systemic Blocks to Routine Control

Hungli's Despair at the Routine System

Hungli had nothing against routine evaluations as such. On the contrary, he recognized that they "affected the fundamental institutions of state" *(ta-tien)*. The trouble was, he believed, that they were applied carelessly and dishonestly. Seven years into his reign, he complained that the Grand Accounting in the provinces was "an empty letter" and was administered "sloppily or perfunctorily." Good officials were not recommended, bad ones not impeached. Personnel evaluations hinged on affairs of the moment and said little about long-term conduct. Judgment of an incumbent official rested on whether the governor-general and governor happened to like him, and might not accord with the man's general reputation. Officials were recommended for promotion through personal favoritism, and scoundrels were shown leniency. "Only the faults of educational officials or petty functionaries are casually noted, so as to make up the necessary numbers." By such chicanery was the autocrat undone: "Our governors-general and governors are Our arms and legs, heart and backbone. If they treat such a crucial government function as mere routine, on what can We rely?"[26] Evaluation in the Capital Investigation he considered just as perfunctory.[27]

In the hands of the review commission, the triennial yellow registers got the same off-hand treatment. Hungli complained that unworthy candidates for promotion or reassignment were not screened out but were passed right through to imperial audience. "It should be possible at a glance to see [from the registers] whether a candidate is up to the job. But the Nine Chief Ministers *(chiu-ch'ing)* [that is, the review commission responsible for inspecting the registers] pass the buck to the Board of Civil Office, the Board of Civil Office passes it to the Nine Chief Ministers; and the result is that they all pass it to Us!"[28] The monarch knew that, rather than face up to the task of making personnel judgments that might arouse resentment, the bureaucracy passed the job to the one man who could always take the heat.

The routine inflation of evaluative phrases *(k'ao-yü)* was all too apparent to Hungli when a candidate for appointment received radically disparate ratings from two evaluators, or when a man he knew to be a bumbler came before him with glowing recommendations. The Yunnan governor recommended one of his circuit-intendants with a *kao-yü* of "experienced and of solid character."[29] But Hungli reviewed the man's record and found that the preceding governor had characterized him as "aged and infirm," defects that the passage of time would hardly have remedied. The new governor had, he complained,

> said nothing about his age and infirmity. And the *k'ao-yü* of all his other subordinates show only superior traits and no deficiencies. Now human talent is variously distributed. Some men are of decent character but not very able; or they are efficient administrators but insincere in their inner natures . . . but in [the new governor's] memorial, the evaluations are very general and there is absolutely no differentiation among them. It seems that in the whole province there is not a single official who can be criticized!

The *k'ao-yü* of a certain Taiwan circuit-intendant read "youthful and vigorous, of fine character, able and intelligent, apt at administration."[30] Hungli: "But We know him very well. He has a bit of cleverness, but his character is definitely not sincere, and his administrative behavior merely consists of complying with the formal requirements of his job in order to dispose of his public duty. He never had solid abilities, and his physical vigor is not that great either . . . This shows how provincial officials do not take seriously the job of evaluating personnel." Although he was aware that laziness and laxity were part of the trouble, Hungli also knew that reliable routine personnel control was hampered by certain systemic problems.

Patronage versus Discipline

The provincial governors were line administrators as well as evaluators. Hence they acted under compulsions that went with their office.[31] One of these was a powerful desire for a certain kind of personal image, which can be roughly translated as "magnanimity" *(k'uan-ta)*. The essence of a good patron, this quality warmed what might otherwise be a cold, objective bureaucratic relationship between a province chief and his subordinates. "Magnanimity" in a patron meant a concern for the human needs of his clients. Though the patron's practical payoff was loyalty, his symbolic reward was a

certain personal image, one that was sullied every time he had to throw the book at a subordinate and thus treat him as a misaligned cog in a machine rather than as a human dependent. The dignity of the superior was hurt along with the career of the subordinate.

In what respect could local officials be considered dependents or clients of governors? Though the general answer is surely the paternalism that tinctured the entire Chinese bureaucracy, the specific answer lies in the governor's power to recommend his subordinates for appointment, transfer, or promotion. Except for the small number of local posts that were rated highest in administrative difficulty and were filled by recommendation of the Grand Council[32] and except for a portion of posts set aside to be filled directly by the Board of Civil Office, governors had the privilege of recommending men for particular posts within their provinces. If a governor certified that there was no suitable candidate among bureaucrats of his own jurisdiction, he could recommend someone from outside. Even in categories of appointment that the administrative code specifically placed outside their reach, governors pushed relentlessly to expand their appointive power, a power basic to personal patronage networks. Given the speed at which provincial personnel rotated from post to post, such networks could rapidly grow to national scale. Information in the *Collected Statutes* indicates that *at least* 30 percent of all posts, from circuit-intendancies down to county magistracies, were in categories that could be filled through a governor's recommendation.[33]

Quite apart from the danger of cliques and factions, however, Hungli had constantly to deal with governors' desire "to acquire a reputation for magnanimity," which made it hard for them to evaluate personnel honestly.[34] Hungli scolded G'aojin (then serving as Anhwei governor) for submitting an implausible evaluation of a previously dismissed subordinate who was now due for reassignment: "In the case of a man who has already left office, there is nothing to prevent [his superior] from skirting the truth about him in order to elicit the admiration of his subordinates. This bad practice among governors-general and governors of purchasing reputation *(ku-ming)* is wholly inappropriate."[35] Of course, Hungli considered "magnanimity" of this sort perfectly appropriate when exercised at the *top* of the system, namely by himself. Indeed, it may be a law of bureaucratic practice that every official tries to reserve this genial quality to himself (or those above him), while holding his subordinates to strict application of the rules.

Once a governor had recommended an official for a post, it was awkward for him to admit a mistake. Hence evaluations tended toward a certain consistency: no governor was likely to change his opinion of a subordinate he had recommended until the man's performance, either good or bad, was so egregious that he had no choice. Hungli complained that, if a man of modest ability had been recommended for an easy post, his superior would seldom report any outstanding accomplishments; if a promising man had been recommended for a hard post, then he would seldom report faults.[36]

Reading the Leader's Mind

Another systemic evil that stymied personnel evaluation was called "seeking to accord [with the desires of one's superiors]" *(ying-ho):* that is, currying favor by molding one's judgments to conform to what one believed the boss wanted. This produced ludicrous distortions in the routine evaluation system, as officials trimmed their standards to the winds of imperial preference. The problem was endemic to the highest officials in both capital and provinces. "When We are lenient in one or two cases in which leniency is appropriate, then all the officials scurry to be lenient. When We are strict in one or two cases that require strictness, then they all scurry to be strict." On the surface this might seem to be a case of "the grass bending before the wind"—a commendable deference to royal leadership. But in reality, Hungli warned, "it stems from self-interest and self-aggrandizement." Ignoring the "great principles," acting without proper estimation of right and wrong—were these really the right way to advance in honor and rank? When officials in the capital need correction, "We can personally admonish them." In the provinces, however, "the governors-general and governors have sole charge of their jurisdictions. If they are determined to conform themselves to whatever they think We want, without any firm views of their own, then their subordinates will flock to do the same in order to curry favor with their superiors," and national affairs will really be in parlous straits.[37]

Obstacles to Impeachment

Like any system of accountability, the personnel evaluation process included one self-defeating mechanism that nobody knew how to cope with: reporting misconduct was dangerous to the reporter, but so was failure to report it. The administrative code included a range

of penalties for "failure to investigate" *(shih-ch'a)*. Failure to report a subordinate for dereliction of duty made one liable, oneself, for administrative discipline. But if one did report him, a whole range of other embarrassments might surface (including tales he might bear about his colleagues, whom one had also "failed to investigate") that might have even worse results. Hungli knew that penalties for "failure to investigate" hindered his access to information. Reporting heterodox sects, for instance, was dangerous to an official's career. "Because it arose in his jurisdiction, and hence would adversely affect his fitness report, he might consider covering it up."[38]

Here are some penalties visited upon officials who "failed to investigate," from the administrative code of the Board of Civil Office:

> In the case of an official who receives bribes in the course of duty, and whose misconduct is not reported, [when the affair finally comes to light] a prefect stationed in the same city will be charged with failure to investigate and will be demoted one grade and retained in his post. A circuit-intendant will be fined a year's [nominal] salary.[39] A prefect not in the same city but stationed within a hundred *li* will be fined one year's [nominal] salary. A circuit-intendant will be fined nine months [nominal] salary . . . When a governor-general or governor impeaches an official in a "failure to investigate" case, let him clearly state in his memorial the distance [from the scene], to serve as data for investigation. If there is a misstatement of the distance, any official through whose hands the memorial passes will be demoted two grades and transferred.[40]

In sensitive cases, willful failure to impeach could bring, not a slap on the wrist, but real terror. When one of his trusted province chiefs concealed information in an impeachment case of 1766, Hungli complained that he had been personally betrayed.[41] "Chuang Yu-kung has received Our highest favor and has been selected for choice appointments. Yet he has the nerve to strut about, flaunting his favored status . . . This case is one in which he has intentionally deceived Us!" Not only was the ingrate cashiered, but his case was switched from the track of administrative discipline to that of criminal sanctions. Chuang was arrested, haled to Peking for interrogation by the Grand Council, had all his property confiscated, and was jailed to await decapitation. Yet the point was not to destroy but to chasten. Hungli granted him amnesty some months later and appointed him acting governor of Fukien.[42]

Hungli, who well knew that bureaucratic culture made impeach-

ment distasteful to his province chiefs, read memorials carefully and was not easily fooled. He discerned a system of mutual protection by which governors shielded the reputations of their immediate subordinates, the provincial treasurer and provincial judge, from charges of "failure to investigate." The governor's impeachment memorial would say, "just as I was writing this, the reports of the provincial treasurer and provincial judge reached my desk and were not at variance from my own inquiries." Scoffed Hungli: "This might really occur once in a thousand or a hundred cases; how could it turn up every time?" From then on, when a governor was impeaching a subordinate, he was to state whether his information came from his own inquiries or from a report, and exactly how it had been conveyed.[43] Because impeachment for irregularities in impeachment was subject to the same irregularities, could the monarch ever be confident that routine procedures would produce sound evaluations of personnel? He saw himself confronting a system in which vertical clique-formation within the provincial bureaucracy made it hard for that bureaucracy to police itself. Higher officials and their subordinates "form cliques behind the scenes" and "collude by mutually ingratiating and coercing . . . These evil ways must be rigorously stamped out."[44] They were not, however, likely to be stamped out through the routine procedures of bureaucratic control, and Hungli knew it.[45]

Nonroutine Systems of Evaluation

Confidential Reporting from the Field

Given what he saw to be the futility of routine evaluation, the monarch naturally made the most of opportunities to inject autocratic power into the system. But to do so he needed reliable, undoctored information. From the beginning of his reign, he tried to get confidential personnel evaluations from the provinces. If governors would not evaluate their subordinates honestly through the open channel for fear of stirring up resentment, perhaps reporting confidentially in palace memorials would make them feel more secure. In the first year of his reign, Hungli had so instructed them.[46] "Now, in the beginning of Our reign, We are not well acquainted with the men serving as circuit-intendants and prefects in the provinces. You [governors] may report on the worthiness and the activities of your sub-

ordinates through [confidential] palace memorials." Yet even in the confidential channel the province chiefs felt insecure. Three years later, Hungli complained that his original decree was being ignored.[47] All governors had "reported once," but not since. He pointed out that governors customarily kept their posts longer than their subordinates, so that the passage of men through various jurisdictions opened a splendid opportunity for fresh evaluations. Now all governors were to send confidential memorials *(mi-tsou)* "from time to time." Yet to enforce this demand required ceaseless struggle. In 1759 Hungli was shocked, but perhaps not surprised, to find the governor-general of Liangkiang sending in sheer boilerplate through the confidential channel: "Recently We happened to be examining a memorial from Yenjišan evaluating his subordinates. In it, Wei Che-chih still appears as Huai-an prefect, and Dingcang still appears as Hsu-chou prefect. These men held these posts more than ten years ago! How come there were no follow-up evaluations of them? This is a matter for confidential memorials, which can do no harm to one's reputation for magnanimity."[48]

Confidential reporting was also sabotaged by collusion in the field. Hungli was frustrated to find that his province chiefs were getting together to smooth out differences in their evaluations of the subordinates they had in common, which deprived him of independent views. This practice came to light when he was comparing two confidential reports on personnel: one from a governor-general and another from that official's subordinate, a governor. "The *k'ao-yü* they have entered for their subordinates are largely the same. We then went back and compared the memorials they had submitted last time, and there was absolutely no difference there, either. It was astonishing." These confidential memorials, he wrote, were vital reference material for appointments. "We keep them all in the palace to consult from time to time and We do not allow court officials to know their contents." Accordingly each provincial official "ought to report his own views. Not only is it unnecessary for officials to consolidate their views to demonstrate unanimity, it is actually better that they do not do so, so that We may refer to both in making Our judgments." If province chiefs got together to present a unified view, "what is the use of memorializing confidentially?"[49]

Hungli's goal, evidently not attained to his satisfaction, was to deroutinize the bureaucratic evaluation system by collecting secret intelligence through another channel. The trouble was that his

agents, in both channels, were the same. Apparently nobody retained much confidence in the confidentiality of the palace memorial system. That system was not, as it turned out, sufficient to pry open the provincial bureaucracy's grip on personnel evaluation.

Hungli's Rejection of New Routines

One solution that did *not* commend itself to Hungli was making the recommendation process even more routinized and precise. A censor charged that promotion recommendations from governors were full of "empty words," stock phrases such as "intelligent and able, conscientious and effective," vacuous clichés with little relevance to how the official actually had performed. The censor favored concrete accounts of official performance, in the form of a list of what a man had actually done. If the appointee did not live up to his billing, his recommender would be held accountable.[50]

Not unreasonable on the face of it, Hungli responded. But what would constitute "concrete accomplishments"? Those the censor had suggested, such as "founding schools, enforcing the *pao-chia* system [in which households were registered in decimal groups and made responsible for actions of their neighbors]"—these, too, were mere "empty words." After all, if *pao-chia* were ever *really* enforced, "how come local authorities cannot promptly catch bandits and escaped criminals?" Looking deeper into the matter, the admirable principle "government by men, not by laws" could not be realized by "setting up procedures that will simply generate conventional documents." Hungli ruled out any solution that involved further routinization, particularly generating more paperwork that could serve to ritualize or formalize government. But if the monarch ruled out more effective routines, what was the answer? Apparently it was the direct injection of imperial power.

The Imperial Audience System

The Ch'ing inherited the venerable system by which all regular officials were "escorted to audience" *(tai-ling yin-chien)* before being assigned to a post (in addition to the triennial audiences that all high officials were expected to request). The "escorting" was done, for civil appointments, by the Board of Civil Office; and for military, by the Board of War. The daily accounts of audiences in the official

Court Diaries *(ch'i-chü-chu)* record throngs of officials passing through the audience chamber. Though one might suppose that such meetings were nothing but mass prostrations and perfunctory benedictions, it is astonishing to discover the detail with which the monarch interviewed each man. And he really expected the prostrate candidate to speak up.[51]

Here was the autocrat using his personal insight without the benefit of a standard phrasebook. Our evidence for this process consists of sketches, from the vermilion brush itself, of officials who came to imperial audience, written on the candidate's *vitae* (sometimes called *yin-chien-tan* or *lü-li-tan*). Hungli's father had evidently considered himself a keen judge of character.[52] From him, even a short interview evoked a shrewd character sketch, proof of the sage's capacity to judge men. Though Hungli's comments were briefer and blander, they had enormous power to propel or derail a man's career. The monarch's face-to-face impressions naturally overrode the routine judgments of the governor on the scene. Hence the career of an official with good marks from the field could be ruined by a bad audience. One hapless provincial judge brought to audience from Chekiang impressed Hungli as crude and boorish, "ignorant of proper ceremonies." When asked what he had to report about Chekiang affairs, he produced from his sleeve a poster he had prepared to overawe the commoners with graphic displays of the "five punishments." This struck Hungli as indelicate, and he fired off a query to the man's superior. The reply was that the judge had committed no administrative offenses and, although he lacked refinement, his integrity was quite sound, and he was "up to the job of Chekiang provincial judge." Hungli nevertheless had him fired the following year.[53]

Although Hungli's sixty-year reign must have produced thousands of these documents, only nineteen (from various years) have been recovered.[54] It is instructive to compare these vermilion comments with the stilted *k'ao-yü* that were generated by the routine evaluation system.

Li Shan: The man seems a decent sort, can be appointed. But his capacities are really only up to the post of circuit-intendant. (1747)

Ch'u Yung-chung: The man may actually make something of himself. Circuit-intendant seems about right. (1751)

Chou Yuan-li: A keen and capable talent. (1758)

K'ung Chi-tung: Not up to his earlier record. He seems a fellow who is looking for a life of ease. (1758)

Yao Li-te: Durable, will make something of himself. (1761)
Chao-lin: Seems to have a conscience. He can be appointed. But could he be a bit short on talent? (1761)
T'an Shan-chung: Smart, seems likely to make something of himself. He may be a bit insubstantial. (1762)
Yang Ch'ung-ying: Seems appointable. But he may be too clever by half. Conscientious. (1762)
Ma Sheng-chiao: Durable. Can appoint him. In the future, he'll make something of himself. (1762)
Shan Liang: Seems appointable. (1764)
Wu Chao-chi: A bright person. Even if We don't promote him [now], he'll still have opportunities to show his cleverness. Then We'll see. (1764)
Ti Yung-ch'ih: Seems intelligent. (1764)
Liang Chao-pang: He seems about right for this post. But he is not a great talent. (1766)
O Lu-li: Decent, conscientious. Seems durable. (1768)
Li Yuan: Appropriate, but not for a post that's too demanding. Seems all right. Appoint him. (1770)
Ku Hsueh-ch'ao: Unavoidably of the Soochow clique. Not a very great talent. (1773)
Te-er-ping-a: Can appoint him. (1780)
Chang T'ing-kuei: All right. (1781)
Shen Jung-hsu: Well, all right. (1783)

Extracted from these comments, here are the evaluative phrases:

Positive characteristics

Decent *(chung-hou)*
Has gumption, can make something of himself *(yu ch'u-hsi)*
Keen and able *(ching-kan neng-shih)*
Durable *(chieh-shih)*
Has conscience *(yu liang-hsin)*
Smart *(ming-pai)*
Intelligent *(ts'ung-ming)*
Dutiful *(pen-fen)*

Negative characteristics

Lazy *(t'u an-i)*
Short on talent *(tuan yü ts'ai)*
Insubstantial *(po)*
Not a great talent *(fei ta-ch'i)*

Hungli is, of course, making judgments on the basis of face-to-face encounters, perhaps colored by prejudices (the characteristic distrust of Kiangnan literati, for example) or previous impressions (most of these men he has met in previous audiences). He is, then, judging character (as best he can discern it—credit him with some modesty for using the word "seems," *ssu,* frequently) rather than judging performance. The list of character traits most appealing to him is headed by the phrase (common in spoken Chinese today) *yu ch'u-hsi,* which I have rendered "has gumption," or (if referring to the future) "will make something of himself." There may be an implied distinction between a man who relies on his own talents and one who clings to the patronage of others. Certainly it distinguishes the leader from the mere careerist who hews narrowly to the safe track.

Other phrases indicate that Hungli admired the virtues of solidity: "durable" *(chieh-shih)* suggests perseverence, hardiness of spirit, the kind of man who can hold his own in a troublesome post. "Decent" *(chung-hou)* and "dutiful" *(pen-fen)* are close to virtues marked in the bureaucratic evaluations. For Hungli they probably distinguish a solid character from the trickster who will exploit public office to his own advantage. The opposite of these solid virtues is "insubstantial" *(po),* the mark of the lightweight whose surface abilities are not rooted firmly in character. Intelligence *(ming-pai, ts'ung-ming)* is a virtue of which just the right amount is wanted. Hungli is put off by the fellow who is "too clever by half," who uses his wits as a substitute for more substantial virtues.

The man whom Hungli failed to find, among this fragmentary sample at least, was the "great talent," the rare candidate who is destined for a top ministerial post. He often used the term with a negative to derogate a man who was clearly *not* an outstanding talent. Such quality is always more obvious in its absence than in its presence, and "not a great talent" is a fair comment on a man whose most evident trait is lack of genius. Even Chou Yuan-li, who was only a prefect at the time of this audience but who was to rise two decades later to the post of board president, was no "great talent," at least not at the audience I have just cited.

The monarch was concerned with character and talent as, indeed, were the formulaic entries of the routine system. Yet there are striking differences in the way the audience notes portray the ideal official. That image includes qualities of toughness, genuineness, and energy—colored equally by courage and ambition—that we call

"gumption." This is the mark of the proud, hard-driving achiever: a leader, not a rule-ridden functionary. Caution and diligence, the marks of the reliable paper-shuffler, are not what Hungli sought for membership in the "club" of higher provincial and capital officials.

The Upper-Level System: "Political Appointments"

The principle of "the higher the post, the less routine the appointment" must be common to all bureaucratic systems. "Political appointments," as we know them, offer the chief executive the chance to install personal friends, or at any rate persons who share his views, in positions of power. Hungli plainly regarded the personnel in higher provincial and capital positions as too important for routine handling. He rejected a proposal to bring provincial treasurers and judges under the Grand Accounting, because he knew that punishing malfeasance in such sensitive posts could not wait for the routine triennial review.[55] Although governors-general and governors, along with the upper crust of capital officials, were, in practice, exempt from the triennial evaluations, they had nevertheless been obliged to offer "self-evaluations" *(tzu-ch'en)* instead. Hungli simply tired of reading these prolix and probably formulaic documents, and in 1752 he abolished them.[56] He would, he announced, personally reward and punish officials on that level whenever he wanted. "The evaluation and selection [of high officials] will be daily borne in Our own breast," and hence for them the triennial rhythm of evaluation was pointless.[57]

Yet bearing such weighty material in his breast was not quite reassuring enough, and six years later he seemed to edge back toward formalism. Although the self-evaluation only produced "an endless procession of documents, with no value for practical government," no evaluation at all would make high officials complacent. Now the Board of Civil Office was to prepare, at the time of the Capital Investigation, one register for capital officials of rank three and up, and one for governors-general and governors, furnished with updated *vitae* for the emperor's reference. He was, however, hardly relaxing his direct control over these political appointments, but rather serving notice to his political appointees that he was not about to let their careers settle into comfortable ruts—to become routinized by default.

> Even though We already have a thorough knowledge of whether they are worthy or not, there may yet be those who advance and retire together, seeking emoluments and behaving like horses loath to leave their stables [that is, are routine careerists]. If such men avoid major gaffes and continue to fill their posts adequately without being regularly evaluated, then when they have hovered around for a long time their official performance cannot but be harmed.

The selection and evaluation of political appointments, both as a formal system and as practical politics, operated by a set of rules that was distinct from the routine system. Although the Board of Civil Office was involved in the process to some extent, the monarch's autocratic power cut across its routine procedures at every step. The higher the official, the less routine the procedures for his appointment and discipline, and the more direct the impact of the autocrat's personal power. Although this is only what one might expect, we need to know more exactly how this personal power was expressed.[58]

Ritual Behavior

The monarch's control of his "political appointees" rested largely on his personal relationship with them. This relationship was a two-way communication, proclaimed by the monarch and acknowledged by the bureaucrat. The monarch's constant and conventional recourse to expressions like "arms and legs, heart and backbone" (the upper echelons) is visible everywhere in the documents.[59] The bureaucratic acknowledgment closed the loop of this dialogue of dependency and control. This acknowledgment shows up pointedly in the ritual that immediately follows an official's audience with the emperor and his assumption of a bureaucratic post: the submission of a "gratitude *(hsieh-en)* memorial" by the newly appointed official.

In a modern context, the gratitude memorial might seem the most abject of documents. It expresses utter personal dependency. Where is the "status honor" that is supposed to characterize the exalted scholar-bureaucrat? The "gumption" quotient seems low, if not nonexistent. It is an "oriental-despotic" document, a long verbal kowtow. Here is an example from 1769, which is worth quoting whole:

> Wu Ta-shan, Governor-general of Hukuang, respectfully memorializes, humbly expressing gratitude for Imperial Benevolence:
>
> Your humble official's nature is undistinguished, stupid, and base. I have received Your Majesty's munificent benevolence, have been nourished and raised by Your Majesty to the extent of repeatedly being

appointed to provincial office. I am ashamed that I have in no way repaid Your Majesty, but rather my errors have multiplied with time.

Now I have received the extraordinary generosity of Your Majesty's appointment to fill the post of Hukuang Governor-general. On the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month of last year, I journeyed to the Palace, kowtowed before the Imperial Countenance, and respectfully received Your Majesty's sacred instructions. My feelings on that occasion are eternally engraved upon my inmost parts. Your Majesty's having also conferred on me gifts in rich profusion, Your Majesty's benevolence has exceeded all bounds, and Your Majesty's favor has reached an extreme.

Though even dogs and horses know how to repay their masters, yet I, your humble official, though I have a human heart, have yet dared fail to recompense you by serving you with utmost sincerity. What can I do, but with my whole heart and strength reverently obey Your Majesty's instructions to govern my jurisdiction and, without fraud or concealment, to repay, in all matters great and small, Your Majesty's immense generosity?

This, with your humble official's exceeding gratitude and humble sincerity, I respectfully memorialize, kowtowing, in gratitude for the Imperial Benevolence, humbly praying for Your Imperial Majesty's royal perusal.

(Vermilion: "Noted.")[60]

That this language was repeated, with minor variations, in every gratitude memorial does not justify dismissing it as "mere" ritual. It was the symbolic form of a basic political fact. The fact that it was repeated makes it, like other rituals, more significant rather than less. It was a ritual of largesse and gratitude that sustained the relationship between sovereign and high official.

Even in the ordinary conduct of business, the symbolism of dependency had its place. Operational documents, too, were framed in ritually significant forms. For example, it was normal for a memorialist to quote, in full, the imperial order to which he was responding. This was not only good bureaucratic practice, to keep the documentary chain clear for purposes of reference. As a ritual act, the writer often quoted his master's words at much greater length than his own humble reply.[61] Another common form of verbal prostration occurred when the memorialist humbly quoted the vermilion interlineal scoldings he had received when his memorials were returned.[62]

These documentary rituals reinforced the official's personal link to his sovereign, a relationship first established by the man's appointment. The moving force was reciprocity, as expressed in the gratitude memorial we have just seen. These ritual humiliations were signs, not

of degradation, but of special status: in Confucian terms, these gentlemen were not tools. They could be scolded, ridiculed, or punished by their imperial master, as an errant son by a stern father. But the relationship was not abject, because they were presumed to have "human hearts," and hence the capacity to act like men, not machines or dumb animals. Unlike mere clerks, they were neither artifacts of a body of rules nor automatons controlled by routine procedures.

The imperial effort to achieve closer control over bureaucrats had to reach resolutely beyond routine procedures. The audience system, the gathering of confidential evaluations, and the partial separation of top officials from the routine system all played parts in this effort. In Hungli's bureaucracy, the routine components grew weaker as the ranks of the men he was dealing with grew higher. At the very top of the system (the province chiefs and the heads of the administrative boards—the "club,") the grammar of communication was highly personal. The personal relationship was stated and restated, both in operational documents and in ritual instruments such as the gratitude memorials. Dereliction of duty was treated as a personal affront to the monarch, a breach of trust that could only stem from ingratitude. Higher officials in both provinces and capital were, as a result, operating in two modes: they were formally still subject to the standard administrative discipline system *(ch'u-fen)*, by which the monarch could turn them over to the Board of Civil Office for administrative punishment *(i-ch'u)*. In addition, however, they were directly exposed to the attention of the emperor, who used the personal relationship—amply robed in ritual—to goad, to blame, and to frighten.

The personal relationship was played out both in the domain of ritual and in the domain of events. Certain classes of events—preeminently "political crime," as I have defined it—provided the best medium for nourishing the personalistic discipline that bound the upper layers of China's bureaucratic monarchy. It was the sort of occasion Hungli could use to keep his top officials from slipping away from his personal control and into the rhythms of routine and cronyism.

The Operation of Imperial Control in the Soulstealing Crisis

The soulstealing crisis was a particularly suitable context for personalistic discipline because it was so ill founded a case. The imperial

spleen could be vented upon provincial officials for failing to turn up master-sorcerers—a failure that was inevitable because no master-sorcerers existed. That the case was so ill founded, Hungli certainly did not know at the time. It would be no more true to say that he "used" political crime than to say that political crime "used" him. Political crime was a context that called forth monarchic behavior of a certain type. That behavior was shaped by long-term structural features of the bureaucratic monarchy. Officials' failure to unearth master-sorcerers was variously attributed to sloth, dithering, coddling incompetent subordinates, Kiangnan decadence, and personal ingratitude. These shortcomings were perennial foci of imperial concern. We have seen how difficult it was for Hungli to cope with them in routine circumstances. The overall impetus of a political crime like soulstealing was to shake bureaucrats out of patterns of routine behavior that they used, so effectively, for their own protection; and to give Hungli a context in which to confront his problems with the bureaucracy head-on.

Cracking Down on Subordinates

We have seen how frustrated Hungli was with governors' failure to use administrative discipline on their subordinates. The image of crafty local officials withholding information from indulgent and credulous province chiefs was an imperial stereotype of bureaucratic behavior. His governors, believed Hungli, compounded laxity by gullibility. Governor Asha, in Honan, who had assured his master that the sorcerers must possess secret techniques to render themselves invisible and escape detection, got back vermilion ridicule: "If *you* think this way, it is no wonder your subordinates do not prosecute the case conscientiously and are deceiving you!"[63] Hungli assumed that withholding information from superiors was standard practice for county officials who sought to avoid trouble, and the belated revelations of the spring queue-clipping scare proved the point. Having embarrassed G'aojin and Jangboo over their failure to report the spring queue-clipping incidents, Hungli berated them for their lax control of local officials. The magistrates of Ch'ang-chou, Yuan-ho, and Wu-hsien who had reported "that there had been no queue-clipping incidents in their jurisdictions" were really "the ultimate in perversity and deceitfulness." G'aojin was ordered to verify the actual number of clipping victims in each county, then impeach the magis-

trates.[64] The monarch soon had to back off from this stance, however. The chastened Jangboo was planning to impeach the magistrates but leave them on the job to prosecute the case. Hungli now worried that they might then be too intimidated to report anything at all. Although there definitely had been cover-ups by local officials, and cover-ups *for* local officials by province chiefs, wrote Hungli, Jangboo had better hold off on impeachments for the moment. Vermilion: "If you do [impeach them], will they be willing to make any reports? Better just supervise them in prosecuting the case, then impeach them after the criminals are caught. Handling it your way will not solve the problem, and you probably won't catch the chief culprit."[65] The point, however, had been made: provincial supervision of local bureaucrats had to be tightened.

Restating Norms of Official Behavior

Nothing offered surer protection to the local bureaucrat than the boundary around his jurisdiction. He was responsible for everything that went on within it, but it followed that everything outside it was someone else's problem. Yet this routine norm conflicted with the nonroutine side of the provincial official's identity: his master's business was boundless, and as his master's personal servant he was not protected by boundaries in cases affecting dynastic security. Hungli wasted no opportunity to hammer home the point. The master-sorcerer Yü-shih was said to be hiding in Su-chou, Anhwei. Governor Jangboo wrote apologetically that Su-chou, since it was not in Kiangsu, was outside his jurisdiction, and that he was loath to cross the provincial boundary in pursuit. Hungli objected that even in ordinary criminal prosecutions officials cooperated to make arrests across boundaries. In this extraordinary case, how could they use boundaries as an excuse? Provincial officials ought to take "the Dynasty's public business" *(kuo-chia kung-shih)* as their main task. Tender concern for "amity among fellow officials" was not "the Way of public-minded and loyal official service." If all officials were "stymied by bureaucratic obstacles," unable to proceed with urgent business, "what kind of governmental system is that?"[66]

In cases of political crime, bureaucrats found functional boundaries to be no better protection than territorial ones. When Governor Feng Ch'ien wrote that he had entrusted the interrogation of sorcery suspects to his provincial judge, a perfectly reasonable step in normal

times, the monarch dressed him down for buck-passing: "What sort of case *is* this, that you have to follow precedent by turning it over to the provincial judge? Ought you not *personally* to conduct judicial investigations every day? The habitual work-style of the provinces is truly hateful!"[67]

Reinforcing the Personal Relationship

Besides the whip of criminal sanctions for outright corruption, the monarch grasped two reins to control his provincial bureaucrats. One was the routine system of administrative discipline, by which he could refer an official's case to the Board of Civil Office for reward or punishment (the *ch'u-fen* system). The other was the nonroutine application of autocratic power, behind which loomed unspecified sanctions ranging from loss of favor to loss of property, freedom, or life. We can assume that the latter was no idle speculation in the official mind: Hungli was known to have repaid serious dereliction of duty, either in waging war or crushing sedition, with brutal severity.[68] In Hungli's rhetoric of personal control, duty neglected was trust betrayed. When the provincial judge of Kiangsu, Wu T'an, admitted that he had failed to inform the Throne about the spring soulstealing cases, the monarch cracked the vermilion whip: "When you were serving in the Board [of Punishments] you were an outstanding official. As soon as you are posted to the provinces, however, you take on disgusting habits of indecisiveness and decadence. It is really detestable . . . you take your sweet time about sending in memorials, and there isn't a word of truth in them! You have really disappointed my trust in you, you ingrate of a *thing (pu-chih-en chih wu)!*"[69]

A natural complement to the gratitude memorial, such rhetoric was, in its milder forms, part of a ritual exchange. A standard response from the culprit would be a conventional expression of fear and humility, such as "I am so fearful that I cannot find peace of mind *(sung-ch'ü nan-an)*" or "I blush with shame and have no place to hide *(k'uei-nan wu-ti),*" conventional expressions that graced hundreds of provincial memorials.[70] Yet royal trust traduced might lead to real terror. Governor Funihan was surely aware of what had happened to his predecessor in Shantung, Juntai, who, sixteen years earlier, had been caught covering up evidence in the Bogus Memorial case of 1751–52. Juntai had failed to pass on information that a copy

of the Bogus Memorial had turned up in his province. Because the "memorial" impugned the monarch's personal behavior (and possibly the dynasty's legitimacy), it is not surprising that Hungli vented his fury on this luckless bannerman. The governor had "disgraced his post and shown ingratitude for Our benevolence," and was "wholly ignorant of the sovereign-minister relationship."[71] Hungli jailed the ingrate and confiscated all his property. Political crime subjected the tidy formal garden of bureaucratic life to the harsh gale of autocratic power. That is why the soulstealing case was an imperial issue and not a bureaucratic one.

Bureaucratic Resistance

How the bureaucracy responded to such royal bullying must be teased out of the documents with some care. There seem to have been several varieties of resistance. Some was, no doubt, calculated; some may have been simply the viscosity of bureaucratic procedure that stalled prompt response to urgent demands. Some may have been the disdain of agnostic officials who could not bring themselves to take soulstealing seriously. Some may have reflected fear of how the prosecution might affect bureaucratic careers. And finally, some may have been principled refusal to prosecute innocent commoners on trumped-up charges.

That there was resistance is beyond doubt. It started before Peking got wind of the spring incidents in Kiangnan: these curious affairs were simply not reported to the Throne. Because preemptive control of information did not succeed in keeping the matter quiet, various kinds of damage control followed. Every one of the measures I am about to describe can be explained on other grounds. Taken together, I am persuaded, they indicate a cautious, pervasive resistance to autocratic pressure. That they were concerted is unlikely, that they were deliberate cannot be proved. But neither connivance nor deliberation is needed to make the case. The bureaucratic work-style, which followed well-worn mental tracks, was quite enough to do the trick.

Busy Inaction: Wu Shao-shih in Kiangsi

When someone told Hungli, a year before the soulstealing crisis, that people were referring to his Kiangsi governor, Wu Shao-shih, as "old

Buddha" (a compliment), he was concerned lest the old man had become so passive and indulgent that he could not attend to business.[72] Wu was in fact seventy, the patriarch of a family of noted jurists.[73] So highly did Hungli esteem the family that Wu and his sons, Huan and T'an, had been allowed on two occasions to serve in the Board of Punishments together, postings that would normally have been precluded by the "rule of avoidance" that kept families prudently separated in bureaucratic assignments.

East of Kiangsi's core area, the valley of the Hsin River offered convenient access from neighboring Chekiang, whence rumors of soulstealing seeped into the province as early as mid-June. Governor Wu did not report them. Instead, he told Hungli later, he had "verbally ordered" his subordinates to be watchful for "suspicious persons" traveling about. No arrests were made, and nobody reported any queue-clipping in Kiangsi. Hungli, unwontedly restrained toward this elderly and respected figure, contented himself with a mild rebuke: not reporting the rumors had been "an error on your part." In early October, however, Wu proposed a dragnet more finely meshed than that of any other province: a corps of spies "who would change both their clothing and their surnames" to cover every county and report suspects to officialdom every ten days. Also, every prefecture would appoint special agents to inspect "Taoist and Buddhist temples, as well as shrines and academies, whether busy or secluded." Wu soberly warned his master about practitioners of "deviant ways and black arts": They "establish an organization that purports to burn incense and do good deeds," which "overtly gathers men and women from among the ignorant rustics, but covertly hooks up with desperate scoundrels." Under pretext of avoiding calamities and defending against bandits, they "concoct magic sayings, prepare weapons, and lure followers." All suspicious persons, whether Buddhist monks, Taoist priests, or persons of furtive demeanor or uncertain abode, were to be reported promptly to local officials. (Vermilion: "Probably empty talk. Very hard to believe.")[74]

Indeed, absolutely nothing came of it. With profuse and abject apologies, Wu reported six weeks later (after Hungli had called off the prosecution) that not a single queue-clipper had been found.[75] No documents survive to suggest even a roundup of "usual suspects," like those faithfully reported by governors of neighboring provinces. What can we make of it? Either Wu's dragnet was never deployed, or else it failed to catch plausible suspects. Conspicuously lacking are

the torture and perjury we have seen in other provinces. We have to conclude, I think, that Governor Wu was simply not prepared to pursue what he considered a bad case, and that the somber warnings and elaborate preparations he conveyed to the Throne were so much window dressing. Governor Wu got away with it: not only did the sovereign not rebuke him, but the following year he named him president of the Board of Punishments. Shielded by his juristic reputation, and also perhaps by his immediate superior, imperial in-law G'aojin, Wu was not so easily to be disciplined for his unwillingness to play with the team.

Diversion: The Prosecution of the Soochow Sectarians

Wu's Shao-shih's younger son, Wu T'an, was provincial judge of neighboring Kiangsu and, like his father, was a respected legal scholar. He had decided, like his superiors, not to report the spring soulstealing cases to the Throne. He, too, had later been embarrassed by Textile Commissioner Sacai's exposure of the cases and had faced the withering imperial attack that I related earlier. But soon this "ingrate of a *thing*" was able to send his master more creditable news. Around September 28, three weeks after receiving his vermilion scolding, he reported that, although he had caught no soulstealers, he had discovered, through his own investigations, eleven "sutra halls" established by lay Buddhist congregations just outside the Soochow city walls.[76] Two related groups were involved: the Greater Vehicle sect *(Ta-sheng chiao)* and the Effortless Action sect *(Wu-wei chiao)*, the latter of which, it will be recalled from Chapter 6, had been persecuted in Pao-an just a few weeks before. The Wu-wei sect, and possibly the Ta-sheng sect as well, revered the patriarch Lo Ch'ing and had been banned by imperial order since 1727. Now some seventy people were arrested by Wu T'an. Their depositions revealed the astonishing fact that these groups had been in existence, in their present locations, since the year 1677, when the first of their sutra halls had been erected.[77]

We must shift to conjecture here. I infer (though I cannot prove) that proscribed sects of this size could not long have remained unknown to some level of local government in a busy city like Soochow. County functionaries probably had been extorting protection money from them for years. Not by nature secret groups, the sects afforded solace and shelter to Grand Canal boatmen from the grain-

tribute fleet, and some of those living in the halls were evidently retired boatmen. The provincial judge, pressured to produce soul-stealers, must in turn have pressed his subordinates for results. Someone down the line must have decided that the secretarians would make a fair substitute. Turning in these inoffensive but vulnerable groups would, for the moment, appease the imperial appetite for prosecutions and would allow the shamefaced Wu T'an to display his attention to duty. Hungli, predictably, responded harshly—toward the sectarians. He ordered that they be treated severely in order to discourage others from joining such sects, and that they be questioned narrowly on possible connections to soulstealing. Wu T'an was to be especially vigilant for "seditious writings" like those unearthed in Pao-an.[78]

Criminal prosecution of the sect also triggered the bureaucratic impeachment of officials who had "failed to investigate" it.[79] Because the sects were deemed to have been active in and around Soochow since 1677, when the first sutra hall was built, a host of former officials of several counties, along with their superiors, were technically accountable for having failed to prosecute it.[80] The cumulative result was laughable. The list of former incumbents to be disciplined retroactively included sixty-eight county magistrates, twenty-two prefects, fourteen circuit-intendants, thirty-two provincial judges, twenty-nine provincial treasurers, twenty-six governors, and fourteen governors-general. Many of course were already dead, and some were excused because they had served in the jurisdiction less than six months. Others were let off because they had taken part in breaking the case. Some had since risen to high position: Yenjišan, former Kiangsu governor, now a grand secretary and grand councillor, was slapped with a fine of nine months' nominal salary, which for a man in his position had about the force of a parking ticket. Though a few lower ranks suffered demotion and transfer, most got off with token penalties. This elaborate impeachment proceeding was an embarrassing farce, yet Wu T'an and other Kiangsu leaders may have accounted it a modest price to pay for relief from Hungli's relentless pressure.

Unanimity: The Chueh-hsing Case

In the matter of the amorous monk of Hunan, whose story I related in Chapter 7, Governor-general Dingcang afforded his sovereign

scant satisfaction. After Chueh-hsing had recanted and told the full story of his dalliance with the young wife of innkeeper Liu, he had been absolved of soulstealing charges and had merely been beaten and exiled for adultery. Dingcang returned to his yamen in Wuchang and wrote Hungli on October 31 that no progress had been made in the sorcery prosecution. The monarch was furious. He now understood the reason for Dingcang's conscientious desire to travel more than two hundred miles to be present at the investigation. Vermilion: "You use your tricks and hateful techniques once again to present unanimity in order to close a case *(shen-ch'u wan-shih)*. How can you be said to earn your governor-general's salary? What can be done about a shameless, useless thing like you?"[81] Nothing in the rules required the presence of the governor-general at a provincial trial. We can safely assume, along with Hungli, that provincial officials had presented a united front so that he would have had to discipline the lot of them if the outcome were not to his liking. The record is full of cases in which interrogations were attended by a number of officials on the scene, presumably for safety in numbers. A seamless joint report by high provincial officials would more likely turn aside imperial wrath than a report from an isolated bureaucrat, and would minimize the danger of a discrepant opinion from someone else.[82]

Routinization: Switching to a Safer Track

Karl Mannheim observed that "the fundamental tendency of all bureaucratic thought is to turn all problems of politics into problems of administration."[83] By this he meant that bureaucrats are incapable of seeing beyond their "socially limited horizon," their rationally ordered sphere of work, to the clash of irrationally generated interests in the larger political world. I would credit Ch'ing bureaucrats with more insight and guile, and assume that they were quite capable of purposely redefining political problems as administrative problems.

In the soulstealing case, there are numerous instances in which bureaucrats did their best to channel the monarch's urgent, nonroutine demands into conventional, routine channels. After all, showing attention to duty was the next best thing to achieving concrete results, and a hard-pressed official had many routine activities in which he could busy himself, with minimal risk. For example, the *pao-chia* system of mutual responsibility had long been on the books but was

always in need of updating and tightening up. The Nanking provincial treasurer dutifully suggested such a measure during the sorcery prosecution as a way of checking the backgrounds of all commoners in the Nanking area. Hungli saw the suggestion for what it was: a device to seem busy but avoid the unrewarding task of ferreting out soulstealers. Vermilion: "This is all empty talk. The habits of you provincial officials are really hateful."[84] G'aojin himself was not above suggesting an empire-wide re-registration of monks and priests, most of whom were "failed literati" and whose heterodox ways did the populace much harm. G'aojin assured His Majesty that he dared not reply on "empty words." Vermilion: "You have not caught a culprit in ages. How can you say 'no empty words'?" It was easy enough to unleash a routine crackdown on a vulnerable group, and the monarch plainly understood what was going on.[85] A similar proposal, floated by the Chekiang provincial judge, suggested that monks and priests who lacked ordination certificates be required to carry travel passes with them on their wanderings.[86]

By routinizing the search for soulstealers, local bureaucrats were falling back on familiar techniques (such as *pao-chia*) that were not susceptible to short-term evaluation. An official could in any case count on having been transferred before the results could be assessed. The effect would be to divert a case from the emergency channel into the routine channel, where local bureaucrats were less vulnerable. This stratagem was not, however, notably successful in diverting the alert Hungli from his purpose.

The Bureaucratic Monarchy as a Social System

The documentary record of the soulstealing crisis projects a double image. The bolder lines depict the day-to-day prosecution of sorcery. The subtler pattern is the relationship among the writers and readers of documents. In this double image, we perceive the two aspects of the Chinese imperial state: as *instrument* (managing the realm in the interests of its proprietors, the Manchu monarchy and the Sino-Manchu elite); and as *system* (allocating power and status among political actors). The state-as-instrument (I shall call this "the government") fits our commonsense understanding of government: institutions set up to accomplish tasks such as collecting taxes, maintaining order, and waging war. The state-as-system (which I shall call "the bureaucratic monarchy") consists of relationships among men whose

careers are measured by prestige and power, mobility and security, within a hierarchical order. Every document generated by an "event"—whether a routine report on taxes or an urgent report on insurrection—must be read both as description of an outer reality and as a reflection of the political needs of its author. ("Political needs," of course, were not necessarily narrow, selfish interests. They might also encompass the writer's principled defense of his institutional turf.) The interaction of men within the state-as-system was not insulated from "events" in the world of action. On the contrary, it was such "events" that made the two aspects of the state meaningful in terms of each other.

"Event" has a slippery meaning to us, but in Chinese bureaucratic practice it was a unit of accountability. It had a beginning (when someone could first be held accountable for it) and an end (when someone could be rewarded or punished for the way he handled it). An official's career was formally measured by his performance, and performance was measured by how well he handled specific tasks. Were taxes collected in full? Were crimes solved on time? Were rebellions forestalled or quelled? Were floods prevented or their victims relieved? A notable success or failure was, in terms of accountability, an "event." It was generally an "event" that gave one official an occasion to impeach another, or to patronize him by pointing to his merits. "Events" were opportunities not only to advance one's own fortunes but also to serve the needs of patrons and clients, and so to embroider the fabric of personal connections that sustained a man in public life.

So besides keeping the realm in order, the government had another role to play: it provided the symbolic resources for the operation of the bureaucratic monarchy. Just as the bureaucratic monarchy lived on the economic surplus of China's society, it depended on society for the "events" that served as raw material for the operation of its internal relationships. The internal machinery of the bureaucratic monarchy processed all such "events" and transformed them into power and status.

Like every other relationship in the bureaucratic monarchy, that between Throne and bureaucracy, the central axis of the system, consumed raw material in the form of "events." The monarch needed concrete occasions to assert his dominance over the bureaucracy, to punish men in his black book and to reward those in his favor. A provincial-level official was not merely a functionary in an organiza-

tion; his every public act was informed by the personal relationship he bore to his sovereign, a relationship confirmed by an imperial audience when he was appointed, and by regular audiences thereafter. The quality of this personal relationship and its complex interplay with the formal, "objective" structure of bureaucratic government was largely defined by the "events" in which the official participated. Only through "events" did the relationship become part of the documentary record.

Yet the bureaucratic monarchy was not simply a passive receptor of whatever its social environment might provide in the way of "events." Instead, men were capable of some selectivity in which "events" they chose to handle, and indeed in the way they defined them. An actor in this system could shape "events," redefine them, or even manufacture them, if that would redound to his advantage within the system. Similarly, it was possible to screen out "events" that were likely to harm one's interests. Of course, such selectivity could only operate within limits; a major popular uprising could be neither cooked up nor screened out. But both monarch and bureaucrat could use the documentary system to influence the way an event was defined or perceived. The soulstealing crisis could certainly be manipulated this way. Popular panic forced it to the surface of public life. Yet the meaning attached to sorcery by the bureaucratic monarchy was clearly influenced by the needs of the various actors within it. All who handled this "event" appear to have done so with an eye to power and status relations within the official world.

What I am suggesting is that, besides being a genuinely urgent problem for government, the sorcery crisis of 1768 provided an outlet for Hungli's deepest misgivings about the state. To say that Hungli intentionally used the soulstealing crisis to whip his bureaucracy into line would be to reach beyond the evidence. The evidence does show, however, that Hungli was used to thinking about bureaucracy in a language born of his inmost concerns: routinization and assimilation; and that the power of this language—to define and to motivate—grew enormously in an environment of political crime.

The link between sorcery and Hungli's deeper anxieties about the empire is to be seen in his vermilion rescripts. He wrote them quickly: no drafts, no drafters. There, in the bare outcroppings of his thought, are his spontaneous perceptions of the issues before him. The *context* of these rescripts was the prosecution of sorcerers, but the *content* was the control of bureaucrats. Hungli detested sorcery and feared

its effects. But his reaction to it was colored by what he thought were the persistent ills of his realm: routinization, assimilation, the baleful effects of Kiangnan culture, all of which mocked royal power. The language by which he goaded his officials to action against sorcery shared the tone, and indeed the vocabulary, of his long-term frustration with the bureaucracy. He could vent this frustration only in the context of concrete events. Now, in the context of this one, a political crime, the vocabulary was about bureaucratic behavior.

Yet how far could the monarch push such a tainted case without raising doubts about his own behavior? As the case collapsed, the Throne had to be shielded from falling debris. Embarrassed and angry, Hungli ended the soulstealing prosecution with a search for scapegoats in the bureaucracy. But he wanted it both ways. Governor Funihan had misled him by suggesting that soulstealers' confessions had been extracted without the use of torture, and the man had to be degraded and humiliated. Other bureaucrats, however, had abused his trust by failing to prosecute the case vigorously enough. This negligence had allowed sorcery to spread around the empire. Only by punishing officials who had shown laxity toward sorcery could he demonstrate, to his descendants no less than to his contemporaries, that he had been right to prosecute the case in the first place.

As a final flourish, the monarch's fury focused on the newly appointed governor of Shansi, Surde, fresh from six years of service as provincial treasurer in Soochow and already under fire for tardy reportage of sorcery cases. He had memorialized on Shansi soulstealing only after Hungli had raised the matter. Vermilion: "This shows that you haven't rid yourself of the hateful habits of deceit you picked up in Kiangnan."[87] When the case finally collapsed, Surde was singled out for special abuse. He "had served in Kiangsu the longest," and had been "deep-dyed with the ways of the hateful [Kiangnan] clique." When the soulstealing affair first emerged, he did not report it (although he was still serving in Soochow at the time). Later, as Shansi governor, even numerous cases of sorcery did nothing to change his ways. He had "impeded the prosecution most profoundly." Hungli demoted him to the rank of provincial judge and sent him to an unpleasant post in remote Sinkiang.[88] What better place to scourge Kiangnan decadence from a bannerman's soul?