

in concept, methodology and argumentation, a document of the Han learning movement. Might not the Sung learning reaction have been triggered by the very position of political and intellectual dominance Han learning had attained in the project? At the very least, it can be argued that Sung learning began with Yao Nai, that Yao's experiences at the Ssu-k'u Commission were a turning point in his career and intellectual life, and that the editing of his draft reviews provided him with first-hand experience of Han learning which dominated political and intellectual life at the capital. The proposition that the spread of Sung learning was precipitated in part by the Ssu-k'u project is only a hypothesis, but it is one based on strong evidence from both Yao's life and the Ssu-k'u project itself.

Whether or not the above hypothesis can be sustained, the foregoing evidence suggests that the Ch'ing government indeed had a role to play in the process by which scholarly insight became received wisdom affecting established conceptions of the moral and social order in eighteenth-century China. But in playing that role, the government was guided by the opinions and perceptions of its most articulate subjects, serving more as an arbitrator than as an ideological policeman. As chapter 6 will show, it was not that the Ch'ien-lung government had abrogated its prerogative of censorship, or that the emperor and his ministers were insensitive to the political implications of ideas. But in their view the relationship between the court and the Chinese elite, or at least its more dynamic and articulate elements, was critical to the success of Ch'ing rule in China. To preserve that relationship, it was important that the court listen to the views of the Han learning movement. As the concerns of Chinese intellectuals changed, the orthodoxy of the Ch'ing court had to change with them. While it was probably a source of regret to some that Yao Nai left state service, it was probably a source of pleasure to more that Han learning, with its promise of realizing the age-old ideals of Chinese society, had found its place in Ch'ien-lung's reign of virtue.

## 6

### *Ch'ui-mao ch'iu-tz'u:*

#### Blowing Back the Fur and Examining the Faults

Twentieth-century critics have often seen the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* project as a cover, even a pretext, for the massive campaign of censorship and suppression which raged through China in the 1770s and 1780s. In his study of the Ssu-k'u project, Kuo Po-kung asserts that the suppression of certain forms of literature was a primary purpose of the Ssu-k'u compilation.<sup>1</sup> The first four of the thirteen "real motives" for the Ssu-k'u project (as opposed to the real reasons given in edicts and rescripts) which Yang Chia-lo imputes to the Ch'ien-lung Emperor in *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu kai-shu* all involve destruction of various forms of history and literature.<sup>2</sup> Even L. Carrington Goodrich, whose 1935 work *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-lung* introduced the campaign to Western readers and proved, in the face of some doubt, that it had actually occurred, declares that from the opening of the Ssu-k'u project, "a systematic search [for seditious books] on a huge scale was inseparably linked with it."<sup>3</sup> Implicit in these characterizations are two assumptions; first, that the emperor planned the campaign from the very beginning of the Ssu-k'u project, and second, that its massive scope was in accord with his wishes.

This picture of the relation between the Ssu-k'u project and the campaign against sedition is problematic in several respects. Why would an emperor, in the midst of a reign of unparalleled prosperity and power, undertake a campaign that was bound to disrupt the intellectual community, would require immense commitments of time and energy from provincial and local officials, and would create

a potential for social disruption within the realm? If, on the other hand, it was not the emperor's intention to launch such a massive undertaking, how did it begin and grow? What was the role of the intellectual community, which had otherwise been so influential in shaping the course of the Ssu-k'u project, in what has been called the worst crime against Chinese literature since the burning of the books by the First Emperor of the Ch'in? To answer such questions, central to understanding Ch'ien-lung and his era, a reconsideration of the literary inquisition is necessary.

Fortunately, two sources, available since the works quoted above were published, make possible such a reconsideration. One is the collection *Ch'ing-tai wen-tzu-yü tang* (Archives of literary cases during the Ch'ing dynasty), edited by Ch'en Yuan and published serially between 1931 and 1935, which includes edicts, memorials, and legal depositions of the major cases of the inquisition. The second is the archives of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, opened to the public in the last twenty years, which contain local officials' reports to the central government on book collection procedures and results.

These new sources, as well as previously published materials, suggest that the censorship developed in three stages. The first, lasting from February 1772 to September 1774, saw most of the book collection for the Ssu-k'u project but very little banning. Only gradually was the policy of censorship and suppression formulated; not until 10 September 1774 did the emperor order a systematic campaign against seditious books. During the second phase, from September 1774 until December 1780, the campaign grew rapidly but largely for reasons outside the emperor's control. Partly because the nature of sedition was still ill-defined, and partly because the rewards for successful prosecution were great, the effort afforded opportunities for many to advance their interests with hastily formulated indictments and overly severe enforcements. As these opportunities and the punishments for dereliction of duty became known, the campaign acquired a momentum perhaps beyond the imaginings of its initiators. The central government stepped in during the third phase of the campaign, December 1780 to the end of the reign (1796), to systematize procedures for identifying and collecting treasonous books, and to reduce the potential for social disruption. A shift of leadership at the highest levels of the Ch'ing bureaucracy accompanied this change of policy. This chapter will examine the three phases of the campaign.

*The Origins of the Campaign*  
(February, 1772–September, 1774)

Censorship was not new to the Ch'ien-lung Emperor in 1772; he had banned several works during his reign, as had all his Ch'ing predecessors. Political interference with the written word was, in fact, as old as the Chinese imperium itself. Had the emperor desired in 1772 to suppress certain works or categories of works, he need not have created an elaborate cover for doing so. But the imperial motive in the campaign of literary suppression of the 1770s went beyond this; the court sought not merely to suppress a few books, but to expunge an idiom of protest from the Chinese political lexicon. Just as in the compilation of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*, what the emperor did not say about book suppression in his initial edict on the subject was as important as what he did say. The startling stridency of imperial language on censorship masked complex motives.

The first mention of censorship in connection with the Ssu-k'u project occurred in an edict issued in April of 1773. The debate within the Grand Council over Chu Yun's proposals of tasks to be undertaken in conjunction with the Ssu-k'u project had just been completed and the Ssu-k'u Commission established. The April edict began with a summary of that debate and the goals of the book collection project. The Emperor then noted that rather few provincial governors or private collectors had complied with his order that they submit rare and valuable books to Peking, and speculated:

It must be that provincial governors, knowing that the books were not all from one hand, feared that there might be some expressions of a rebellious or seditious nature in them, whereupon they themselves would be held liable. . . . In their turn, the owners of libraries, noting the apprehension of the governors, were secretive and not forthcoming. . . .

Digressing briefly, the emperor offered a relatively tolerant view of how differing opinions on philosophical or historical issues could arise.

When men of learning write books to set forth their theories, each pours forth his own beliefs. There are sometimes contradictions, and sometimes untruths. This is unavoidable. In fact, the contradictions and untruths are usually obvious, and there is no reason why books [containing them] should not be collected and stored together with [more trustworthy accounts]. And if the wording is sometimes offensive or

treasonous, . . . this is because these are the bigoted views of former men which have no contact with the present. Why should there be so much fear?<sup>4</sup>

Such an edict would surely not have been issued unless there had been some evidence of fear on the part of local officials and book owners. Yet, in principle, there was nothing new here: the views that the state had a role to play in intellectual life, and that when misunderstandings arose, it was the duty of a wise and benevolent emperor to correct them, were widely held. The fear book owners felt probably derived not so much from the abstract principle the emperor was expressing, as from the specific "bigoted views of former men" which all knew to exist. As the works of Hsieh Kuochien in China and Lynn Ann Struve in the United States have shown, a considerable literature describing the seventeenth-century transition from the Ming to the Ch'ing dynasties in China survived into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Most of this literature was written from the point of view of the Chinese, and was written a few years after the events it described. It chronicled in vivid language the not-always savory events of the day, and portrayed the emotions of the Chinese who saw the native Ming dynasty fall to the Manchu house. Moreover, eighteenth-century scholars occasionally used such sources; as recently as April of 1772, Ch'a Shih-kuei, a literatus who held office as a district magistrate, was punished for compiling a treatise on the late Ming period and the Ch'ing conquest based on private histories (*yeh-shih*) unfavorable to the Manchus.<sup>6</sup> All of the official documents about the book suppression campaign, and most of the subsequent analyses of its aims, suggested that the primary concern of the campaign was the destruction of this anti-Manchu literature.<sup>7</sup>

In the edict of April of 1773, the emperor probably meant to allay officials' fears by acknowledging a potential that all knew to exist. By September of 1774, however, the balance between gathering the best books, and suppressing offensive ones had shifted. Anti-Manchu literature was clearly on the emperor's mind, and the problem was to establish a procedure for finding and destroying it. The emperor set forth his concerns:

Now, over ten thousand books have been submitted by the several provinces, but none has been singled out as offensive. How is it possible that among such a quantity of literature bequeathed by former generations,

not one should contain a trace of sedition? During the period at the end of the Ming, unauthorized histories were very numerous, and in them both defamatory and eulogistic comments were expressed, according to the authors' own prejudices. It stands to reason that among the rumors and gossip, there must have been some defamatory to our dynasty.

He further ordered provincial governors to publicize his orders promptly:

Therefore, let an order be transmitted to the governors and governors-general to delegate trustworthy men to go to those households which have already supplied them with books, and explain my edict clearly. Let them be told that if they own books which they should not possess, they must hand them over with all speed and will not be held to account. . . . But if after this edict there are still those who secrete mischief-working books, then it must be that these books are being intentionally withheld. If such books should be discovered, their owner's crime be beyond forgiveness.

One should not underestimate the significance of this shift in tone. In both language and substance, this edict represented a departure from previous officially stated policy. The emperor's references to sedition were far more specific and threatening in 1774 than they had been in 1773; "the bigoted views of former men which have nothing to do with the present" became "rumors and gossip . . . defamatory to our dynasty." Where the emperor sought in 1773 to allay officials' fears, he seemed to want in 1774 to arouse them. Referring by name to ten governors, he asked:

[These] are all officials . . . whose fathers too have served our dynasty. If they see books hostile to the dynasty, be they privately preserved anecdotes or collected works of poetry or prose, there is not one of them but ought to show hatred. How can they permit these things to be hidden and circulated illicitly to mislead future generations? We cannot understand what these officials did when they encountered these books in their investigations. We command them to memorialize faithfully in this regard.<sup>8</sup>

Punishments were authorized for the first time for those who withheld books.

On the other hand, one should not overestimate what was being attempted. Very little, if any, of the literature seized in the book suppression campaign of the 1770s incited readers to rebellion against the government as it existed in the eighteenth century. Unlike *The Rights of Man* against which a contemporary British government

would soon direct its sedition statutes, or *The Revolutionary Army* which the Ch'ing government would proscribe in the twentieth century, the literature of the eighteenth-century "inquisition" in China did not propose new conceptions of government or oppose existing models of authority. It was seditious only in the sense that it echoed historical challenges to Ch'ing authority, and questioned Manchu morality in rather abstract terms. The material which the court sequestered in the 1770s and 1780s was treasonous, in that it revealed matters the court would probably have preferred kept secret, but the secrets so exposed could only be used as weapons in an ideological combat. There were, to be sure, truly seditious and treasonous materials around in the eighteenth century; but such works—collections of official memorials which did reveal state secrets, or the manifestos of White Lotus rebels—were involved in the suppression campaign only tangentially. From the point of view of content, the Ch'ien-lung Emperor and those around him seemed like peacetime generals who were determined to fight the last war; they focused not so much on eighteenth-century challenges to Ch'ing rule, as on seventeenth-century idioms of protest. It simply would not do for a secure, legitimate, and powerful Chinese ruler to tolerate racist slurs particularly when, as the emperor had every reason to expect, such works could be fairly easily eliminated. Just as the compilation of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* was ultimately meant to demonstrate the legitimacy, in traditional Chinese terms, of Ch'ing rule, so the campaign of book suppression was meant to show that the regime had always held a justifiable control over the Chinese state.

At least six provincial governors responded to the emperor's order to memorialize faithfully on book collection procedures. Two governors merely reported that they had not seen any seditious books in the course of their investigations, and that new procedures for locating and destroying treason had been instituted.<sup>9</sup> Four governors submitted more informative reports, however. Governor P'ei Tsung-hsi of Anhwei wrote that he had submitted a total of 516 books on six occasions for the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*, but had not found any instances of sedition. Since other figures show that Anhwei submitted a total of 516 books for the *Ssu-k'u*, it is clear that the process of assembling books for the compilation was complete in that province before the search for sedition began.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Governor Yü Wen-i of Fukien reported that 203 volumes, virtually the entire contribution of his province to the compilation, had been submitted but no

seditious materials found.<sup>11</sup> In Kwangtung the collection of books for the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* was complete in 1773, a year before the order to collect seditious books was issued; and in Kiangsi, half the provincial contribution to the compilation had been dispatched before the censorship began.<sup>12</sup> It is, of course, possible that the governors were not reporting truthfully on the extent of sedition in their provinces; but they could not be lying about the number of books forwarded to Peking. These figures show most clearly that the collection of books for the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* and for the literary inquisition were two separate endeavors, and that the policy of collecting books for censorship was a new one in 1774.

Why the emperor undertook this policy direction in 1774 was less clear. No single event in the political or intellectual history of the 1770s can be said to have triggered the censorship campaign; nor did it develop from the suggestions of officials in Peking or in the provinces.<sup>13</sup> The initiative for the campaign came from the emperor himself, or from his very closest advisors. It came, in short, from deep within the inner court, which is to the modern historian one of the most impenetrable areas of the Ch'ing government. The only clue to the emperor's motives was a shift in his literary and scholarly interests which took place in the 1770s, a shift reflected in his patronage of scholarly projects in the early 1770s.<sup>14</sup>

During his sixty-year reign, the Ch'ien-lung Emperor commissioned over ninety scholarly works. Fifteen dealt with Manchu language, Manchu history, or the history of the last years of the Ming dynasty. Eleven of these were commissioned between 1772 and 1781, and two which had been commissioned earlier were expanded and reissued in the late 1770s. The result of all this work was a new, officially certified record of the Manchu's rise to power and a standardized system for transcribing Manchu and Mongol names into Chinese. The censorship of the late 1770s seems to have been closely related to this series of publications.

The sequence and timing of the imperial commissions for works on Manchu history and language were suggestive. The first books were concerned with Manchu and Mongol language. In 1771, a new edition of the *Ch'ing-wen chien* (Glossary of Manchu language) was commissioned.<sup>15</sup> Shortly thereafter work was begun on the *Liao Chin Yuan shih kuo-yü chieh* (A Chinese gloss on the histories of the Liao, Chin and Yuan dynasties).<sup>16</sup> In the mid-1770s the imperial attention seems to have shifted from correcting extant historical texts to

writing new histories; and several works tracing Manchu genealogy and recording the victory over the Ming were ordered.<sup>17</sup> The new definition of sedition formulated in the edict of September 1774 perhaps reflected this shift in imperial interests: in order for the new works on Manchu history to be believable, older ones had to be destroyed or discredited. The sequence of works on Manchu history reached a culmination in 1781 when, in a single year, three new studies of Manchu customs were ordered.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of a reediting of the *Liao Chin Yuan shih kuo-yü chieh* ordered in 1791, no further Manchu history books were commissioned after the early 1780s. As will be argued below, a significant change of procedure and general retreat from the goals of the censorship campaign also took place in 1781.

The emperor's view of the new record of Manchu history which he was commissioning was expressed in edicts ordering the works undertaken, and prefaces he wrote personally for the books produced. One theme of these writings was that Manchu language and history, though different from Chinese, deserved as much respect and attention from scholars and bureaucrats. He worried, for instance, that because the sound *t'u* in Manchu names (a common syllable) was sometimes represented in the *Ming-shih* with the Chinese character meaning "rabbit" rather than the character meaning "map" or "portrait," later scholars would assume that the *Ming-shih* editors were ridiculing Manchu culture in the manner of Confucian "praise and blame" historians. He therefore ordered a committee to correct and standardize transcriptions of Manchu and Mongol place names in the *Ming-shih*.<sup>19</sup> He remarked in another edict that the Chinese habit of classifying alien peoples according to the direction from which they approached China; as northern barbarians, southern barbarians, and so forth, obscured ethnic differences among various tribal groupings, and thus did an injustice to the Manchu heritage.<sup>20</sup> A clear retelling of Manchu and late Ming history would, the emperor remarked in his preface to the *K'ai-kuo fang-lueh*, show Manchu rule in China to have been "more glorious than the achievements of Han and Ming, not to mention T'ang and Sung."<sup>21</sup> Underlying each of these projects was an effort to rectify a perceived historiographical injustice done the Manchus by earlier historians. The search for anti-dynastic books which the emperor ordered in 1774 would have been a natural outgrowth of this effort.

While no one event or concern can be shown to have been

responsible for the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's assertion of the importance of Manchu language and history in the 1770s, several possibilities may be suggested. The emperor may have been troubled by the decline of Manchu military readiness which was particularly apparent in the second campaign against the Chin-ch'uan (1770-1776) and the suppression of the Wang Lun rebellion in 1774. The former was an extremely protracted and costly affair in which, on one occasion, a Manchu army under General Wen-fu was completely annihilated.<sup>22</sup> A similar rout in the Wang Lun campaign was avoided only when Manchu troops fled from the scene of battle, an event which elicited an edict from the emperor in October 1774 castigating the Manchus for forgetting their military heritage and neglecting the skills of archery and horsemanship associated with it. The Wang Lun Rebellion itself, and the unnerving ease with which White Lotus-inspired rebels were able to organize and attack a strategically critical area along the Grand Canal, may also have served to remind the Ch'ing court of its own vulnerability.<sup>23</sup>

The emperor's interests and fears may also have been aroused by a cache of documents which was apparently rediscovered in the course of the editorial work of the early 1770s. Both the *Ch'ing-wen-chien* and *K'ai-kuo fang-lueh* were based on papers in the Manchu language which have come to be known as the "old Manchu archives" (*chiu Man-wen tang*). These documents recorded in vivid and revealing detail the history of the Manchus from 1621 until 1633 and 1635 until 1636. In a recent doctoral dissertation, Gertraude Roth Li has compared the texts of the old Manchu archives with the *K'ai-kuo fang-lueh* produced by Ch'ien-lung's editors. She finds that the editors suppressed information on the social and economic condition of the early Manchus, the opposition of Chinese living in Manchuria to Manchu rule, and the opposition among Manchu princes to the rule of Hong Taiji (1627-1644). Some of the items suppressed, such as tales of Chinese poisoning the wells in Manchuria to eliminate their powerful but uncouth overlords, had ominous implications for Sino-Manchu relations. One can well see how the discovery of such material could have triggered an imperial desire to set the record straight, and to search for other writings of the same sort.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, it is possible that the emperor's interests in Manchu history and literature reflected the situation of factionalism at the Ch'ien-lung court. As has been suggested in chapter 3, there appear to have been bureaucratic factions at the court throughout the

reign; in the early 1770s, a faction of Chinese scholars was led by chief grand councillor Yü Min-chung, while another group was coalescing around the Manchu bodyguard Ho-shen. The emperor may have wanted or needed to balance this patronage of Chinese scholars with comparable support for a collection of works on the Manchu heritage. Certainly, the ability to attract imperial patronage was an important measure of the strength of any faction at court. It cannot have been completely coincidental that most of the Manchu compilations were edited by Ho-shen and A-kuei, or that the series of publications culminated in 1781, just at the time when Ho-shen and A-kuei became chief grand councillors.

The historical circumstances surrounding the origins of censorship have been discussed at some length, in order to suggest that the collection of books for the banning and for *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* were two separate albeit parallel endeavors. The *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* was meant to be a monument to the success of the dynasty and the prosperity of the reign, and a resource for scholars and rulers of ten thousand generations. The censorship was undertaken to expunge from the historical record signs of early Sino-Manchu conflict and Chinese disrespect for Manchu custom, heritage and tradition. Both projects, of course, demonstrated the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's profound belief in the importance of the written word as a source of ideological justification, and his almost obsessive concern with his place in history. But the two efforts were not related as pretext and reality; they were two distinct outgrowths of the combination of power and vulnerability, pride and sensitivity that characterized the rule of Manchus, and particularly the Ch'ien-lung Emperor, in China.

#### *The Growth of the Literary Inquisition (1776-1782)*

The search for sedition initiated in 1774 became, over the next seven years, a campaign of major proportions. Thousands of suspect volumes were sent to the capital, provincial governors and their subordinates spent an increasing proportion of their time examining seditious books and processing sedition cases, families were turned against themselves, and a major potential for social disruption was created. There was no indication that any of these consequences was intended by the court in 1774. But once initiated, the campaign acquired a malignant momentum of its own. Censorship grew in scope and ferocity as new groups with differing interests were swept

into the process, and as bureaucrats and the scholarly community realized that the procedures of search and destruction could be turned to their personal ends. The evolution of inquisition procedures and the growing response to them therefore reflected as much the character and interests of the literate community as they did imperial initiative.

The censorship of the 1770s and 1780s took place in three stages. First, book collectors were informed of the types of works sought and were instructed to submit any questionable works in their holdings to provincial authorities. Then, the submissions were evaluated and a preliminary determination of the character of works was made in the provincial capital. Finally, books judged to be censorable were forwarded to Peking for final evaluation; when it was decided that a particular book was to be destroyed, governors were ordered to search for the woodblocks used to print it and ship them to the capital as well. There was no single sedition statute; rather, as provincial governors and their subordinates encountered difficulties in carrying out their orders, they evolved *ad hoc* solutions, reporting them to the court and receiving imperial sanction as necessary.<sup>25</sup>

These procedures paralleled those used to assemble and edit the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* but, owing to the rather different character of the tasks involved in the two efforts, different actors became dominant and different interests emerged. As in so many cases in Ch'ing history, similarity of form masked important differences of function. Although it seems an exercise in an historian's *ex post facto* moral casuistry to differentiate too sharply among those who collaborated in the two efforts, some distinctions can be made. The intellectuals who dominated the *Ssu-k'u* project were men of influence and position, or scholars whose intellectual achievements gave them access to the world of influence. They collaborated willingly in an enterprise which they expected to benefit them individually and collectively. The book suppression campaign became essentially a police action, albeit one carried out in the context of a society willing to sacrifice a great deal for the maintenance of orthodoxy. Almost inevitably, such an action offered different opportunities to those who participated in it than the *Ssu-k'u* project, opportunities based more on the punishments involved in such an effort than the benefits accruing to those involved.

The task of informing book collectors of the imperial will was entrusted, at least in Hupei, Chekiang, and Anhwei provinces and

the jurisdiction of the governor-general of Liang-chiang, and probably in other jurisdictions as well, to a group of functionaries known collectively as "local educational officials." These were, of course, the same individuals who had staffed the book bureaus responsible for gathering, evaluating and copying.<sup>26</sup> Since they were often natives of the districts in which they served, and responsible for the intellectual development and political activities of those who took the examinations in their districts, they were the natural officials for the court to rely upon in the search for anti-Manchu books. As the gatherers of materials for the *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu*, they had been responsible for gathering about half the books used in the compilation (see chapter 3). They were, however, rather less successful in the initial phases of the book suppression campaign, and the reasons for this suggested something of the nature of local educational officials as a group. The image of these officials, at least in court sources, was of failures, men who had grown old trying to succeed on examinations, and who were unable to secure any other positions. Judging from the number of times the adjectives "feeble and debilitated" (*lao-shuai*) were applied to them in imperial edicts, this image was common at the highest level of Ch'ing government.<sup>27</sup>

There is reason, however, to suspect this image. Although seldom the subject of essays and biographies—educational officials were most likely to turn up in historical sources as the preceptor of beloved memory of one accomplished scholar, like Shao Chin-han's grandfather Shao Hsiang-jung, or the sworn enemy of another—they were not insignificant figures. As events in the book suppression campaign were to show, educational officials, or at least expectant educational officials could be quite vigorous. Moreover, local educational officials had some power in Chinese society: they had authority over the licentiates of a district and controlled the lands whose proceeds provided the stipends for those enrolled in state academies. In a sense, they were poised between the world of central government appointees like Provincial Education Commissioner Chu Yun and local students, sensitive to the wishes of both groups but the captives of neither. The court image of local educational officials as old and tired perhaps did not reflect demographic realities so much as central government concerns that local school officials could not be readily controlled, a concern which was certainly in the Yung-cheng Emperor's mind when he established the post of provincial education commissioner to oversee them. In the case of a project like the *Ssu-k'ü*

effort, local educational officials performed with moderate success. The search for anti-Manchu literature, a far more delicate task likely to involve an official in what must have been one of the most distasteful cans of historical worms in eighteenth-century China, was quite another matter, and it seems likely that many local educational officials were successful in avoiding the onerous burden placed upon them.

Several other procedures of book collection at the local level were also indicative of the problems and priorities of these early years. In only two provinces, Kwangtung and Chekiang, were mutual guarantee (*pao-chia*) units utilized to canvass the literati. This was not surprising in view of the fact that the gentry, who were most likely to be book owners, frequently evaded the mutual guarantee system. Furthermore, the tasks required in the literary inquisition were not those to which the mutual guarantee system, essentially a police and surveillance mechanism, was most suited. The emperor's orders were not directed at the population at large, but at a small segment of the elite, and required judgment and discretion to enforce. They could hardly be entrusted to the village headmen.<sup>28</sup> In fact, in several provinces, the governors relied not on officials but on unofficial "trustworthy and capable" literati to perform the tasks of notification and collection. In the book suppression campaign, as in the *Ssu-k'ü ch'üan-shu* project, it was important to inspect bookshops as well as private collections. This was particularly true in the prosperous provinces of Kiangsu, Kiangsi and the jurisdiction of Liang-chiang, where committees were formed to search for seditious books in bookshops. In fact, it was a consignment of purchased, rather than confiscated, books which triggered one of the major procedural innovations of the inquisition.<sup>29</sup>

In areas where book bureaus had existed prior to 1774, these organs probably continued to serve as censorship boards. The number of such groups grew as the campaign proceeded and governors discovered that areas which had not been able to contribute much to the *Ssu-k'ü* effort, might have more to do in the book suppression campaign. By 1778, a bureau had been established in Hunan; in 1779, one was formed in Shantung, and four were established in Szechwan. By 1781, bureaus were functioning in Shantung and Chihli.<sup>30</sup> In the *Ssu-k'ü* project, book bureaus had done reasonably well at the task of separating the bibliographical wheat from the chaff and forwarding the best books, or copies of them, to Peking.

They did not do so well in the book suppression campaign, for reasons that can best be described as structural. Few standards were laid down for these groups. The members of provincial bureaus had to extrapolate a definition of anti-Manchu literature from rare books for the Ssu-k'ü project from edicts condemning individual works which came from Peking. In part, the absence of a formal definition of sedition reflected the fact that origins of the literary inquisition lay in a generalized imperial concern over anti-Manchu references rather than an attack on any specific genre or idiom of protest. The emperor could not easily codify his aims, because he did not know what sort of anti-Manchu literature existed, or where it was located. The vague definition of sedition may also have reflected the character of Chinese law, which tended to be either very general or very specific in its prohibitions and prescriptions. Certainly, the functioning of book bureaus in the early years of the inquisition demonstrated how dependent the Manchu court was on Chinese literati of the realm, relying on them even to define anti-Manchu literature.

The leeway that bureaus had in determining the nature of sedition posed problems both for the people who staffed the bureaus, and for modern historians of the campaign. The fact that local gentry, in effect, censored themselves must have opened up infinite possibilities for manipulation by local magnates. Such manipulation, as well as difficulties of coordination, meant that the standards of provincial bureaus could vary widely, accounting for what many have seen as wild inconsistencies in the standards of proscription (see below).

After preliminary decisions by the local bureaus, books judged to deserve censorship were sent to Peking for final evaluations and disposition. In the capital, they were stored in the offices of the Military Archives Commission, which was subordinate to the Grand Council, and to which only employees of the council and the Commission had access. In theory, the volumes were then inspected by grand councillors for the purpose of making a recommendation to the emperor. Several sources suggest that the grand councillors delegated their authority to Ssu-k'ü editors Chi Hsiao-lan and Lu Hsi-hsiung.<sup>31</sup>

The first burnings seem to have occurred in 1778. In June of that year, the Grand Council reported to the emperor that so many condemned books and the woodblocks used for printing them had piled up in the Military Archives Commission that the councillors were afraid some volumes would be lost or misplaced. The imperial

rescript, dated 11 June, ordered the councillors to "cast the books to the flames."<sup>32</sup> That imperial orders were carried out is indicated by a report of 12 November 1781, that 52,480 woodblocks for printing seditious books, weighing 36,530 catties, had been broken up for firewood. "Since," the memorialist continued, "firewood costs 2 taels, 7 cash per thousand catties, 98 taels, 6 cash has been saved on palace expenses since 1774."<sup>33</sup> It should be noted, however, that when the premises of the Grand Council were examined in the twentieth century, copies of books banned in the inquisition, and marked for burning, were found intact.<sup>34</sup>

*The use of expectant educational officials as inquisitors.* These early procedures obviously had many loopholes. Many volumes escaped the inquisition through educational officials' negligence, inconsistencies in the standards of provincial boards, and the like. The effort to close these loopholes, however, necessarily involved a much larger segment of the population in the campaign. As more people became involved, not only were more seditious books discovered, but more private aims and interests came to fuel the search. The growth of the campaign reflected the character of the literate community as much as imperial interests. This growth began in 1776, when the duties of publicizing proscriptions and collecting banned volumes were turned over to expectant educational officials.

The reform had a complex history. In 1776, Governor Hai-ch'eng of Kiangsi hit upon the happy idea of paying book collectors and book sellers double the price of all suspect volumes, then ordering his subordinates to search through the purchases, delivering the seditious volumes to him personally. As a result, Hai-ch'eng presented over eight thousand volumes for destruction in December, 1776. The enormous consignment of books, and Hai-ch'eng's accompanying memorial, attracted the emperor's attention, suggesting the existence of a hitherto unsuspected amount of anti-Manchu material. On 21 January 1777, the emperor ordered copies of Hai-ch'eng's memorial sent to the governors of Chekiang and Kiangsu:

What [Hai-ch'eng] has done is very good. We find that Hai-ch'eng, in this search for books of former generations, has shown the greatest zeal and thoroughness. Therefore, from first to last, the collection he has made of prohibited books that ought to be burned exceeds those of Kiangsu and Chekiang. Now, the number of their literary productions, of private libraries and of bookshops is double that of other provinces.

These two provinces ought not collect fewer books than Kiangsi. . . . But the two provinces of Kiangsu and Chekiang, since the first few deliveries, have sent up no later consignments; and further, they have not truthfully informed me how they were proceeding in the search for and purchase of works, and whether or not they required more time for the satisfactory and thorough completion of the job.

Kao-chin and San-pao have been prosecuting this business for several years. Yang Kuei has also been in office for half a year. How can they treat this matter so superficially? This edict is issued as a severe reprimand to these officials.<sup>35</sup>

Yang-kuei, governor of Kiangsu, and San-pao of Chekiang both responded to this edict in February. San-pao professed himself "agitated, uneasy, and ashamed" on reading the imperial edict. He continued:

In Chekiang province, the book collectors are mostly concentrated in Hang-chou, Chia-hsing, Hu-chou, Ning-po, and Shao-hsing [districts]. Among the collectors in these areas, many are degree holders, and they are unwilling to buy or store books which are of a seditious or taboo nature. Booksellers seldom sell them. Furthermore, your edict has been widely proclaimed and its teaching made clear, so that all are aware of its admonitions. None would dare withhold sedition, thereby implicating himself. However, Chin-hua, Ch'ü-chou, Yen-chou and Ch'u-chou prefectures are rustic and far from the thoroughfares. Perhaps the heterodox works of the Ming dynasty which were once possessed by the ancestors [of families living in these regions] have now been passed to sons and grandsons who cannot read or write, and cannot inspect the books. For this reason, . . . I have frequently ordered my subordinates to search thoroughly so that no holding is neglected.<sup>36</sup>

Governor Yang-kuei wrote in the same vein:

The people of Kiangsu are book-loving and cultured. There are many who print histories, anthologies, literary collections, and collections of personal letters. But the type of work being sought does not circulate widely, and has probably been hidden away for a long time. Men today may not even know that it exists. Although we widely proclaim your edict and collect books, it is not possible to eliminate all such books at one time. . . .<sup>37</sup>

Under imperial pressure to bring seditious books to light, the two governors not only spoke with greater urgency, they directed their efforts at a new stratum of book collectors. They took aim, not at the big collectors who lived in cities and traded at the major book markets, but at those who lived "in rustic areas far from the major thoroughfares" and who might not even be able to read the books

they were holding. In order to reach such collectors, a more active policy had to be pursued. Governor Yang-kuei outlined the essentials of such a policy when he spoke of the need to "have the rural book collectors inform each other [of the search]" and "compete with each other to hand in" offensive volumes.

It was San-pao, however, who first proposed a specific procedure, in a memorial of April, 1777:

Your servant has observed that there are a great number of expectant educational officials at leisure in the province. I have selected the most able of them and dispatched them to their native districts, ordering them to reinforce in person the injunctions of your former edict, to search among their own friends and relatives from whom it should be easier to collect books, and to carry money for buying books and do all they can to purchase volumes. I can then judge their ability by the number of books they have submitted. When the time comes to submit names to the Board of Personnel to fill vacancies [among the educational officials], the candidates can be ranked according to the number of books they have submitted. . . . This procedure will cause little trouble and is bound to produce more books.<sup>38</sup>

In institutional terms, shifting the burden of the book search from educational officials in office to those awaiting appointment was a fairly minor change, but it produced a major shift in the character and motivation of the inquisitors. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a post as a local educational official was one of a very few positions in the government hierarchy to which a man who held a *chü-jen* degree but not *chin-shih* might reasonably aspire. Vacancies in the posts seldom arose, however. Although provincial governors and educational commissioners were required by law to examine an educational official's fitness for office once every six years, this task was often performed perfunctorily, with the result that educational officials tended to remain in office until they died or retired. Governor T'ien Wen-ching reported to the Yung-cheng Emperor in 1725 that some expectant educational officials had been on the waiting list for office for over fifty years. There was every reason to expect that the expectant educational officials would take advantage of the opportunity offered them in San-pao's procedure to increase their chances for appointment.<sup>39</sup>

The submissions of books to the capital over the next few years revealed vividly the efficacy of the procedure. Prior to April, 1777, only 315 books were submitted to Peking from Chekiang province. Between April 1777 when San-pao proposed the procedure and July

1779, 4,811 seditious volumes were forwarded to the capital.<sup>40</sup> In Kiangsu where the procedure was also utilized, the results were more striking. In 1776-1777, 644 volumes were sent to Peking, but in the ten months between March and October of 1777, over 10,640 volumes were forwarded.<sup>41</sup> San-pao was transferred to the governorship of Hupei in early 1778, and instituted the same procedures there as he had in Chekiang, with the result that, whereas 279 volumes had been submitted to the inquisition before March of 1778; 5,713 volumes were submitted between March of 1778 and December of 1779.<sup>42</sup> There could be little doubt about the reasons for this growth. Both Yang-kuei and his superior the Governor-general of Liang-chiang, Kao-chin, reported in separate memorials that the use of expectant educational officials as inquisitors was responsible for the new flow of books.<sup>43</sup>

It is possible that the expectant educational officials canvassed the countryside and, as San-pao had predicted, found seditious works sequestered in rural hiding places. It is also possible, and perhaps somewhat more likely, that the new inquisitors searched everywhere, in cities and in the countryside, and that their success was due more to the vigor they brought to the task than to the new sources they discovered. Whatever the source of the books, the new ferocity of the campaign must certainly be attributed to the energy and ambition of expectant educational officials.

*Manufacturing anti-Manchu literature: The case of Wang Hsi-hou and its aftermath.* The new flow of books changed the character of the censorship, for it made the emperor not only more aware of anti-Manchu literature, but more suspicious of those provincial governors who failed to find it. The new imperial attitudes, in turn, had an impact on provincial governors, who sought to allay the emperor's fears by every means possible. Since the definition of anti-Manchu literature was never clearly articulated by the court, it was possible for a governor, consciously or unconsciously, to "pad" his submissions to Peking with books whose seditiousness was questionable at best. This phenomenon was illustrated in the aftermath of one of the most famous cases in the day, that of Wang Hsi-hou, the hapless lexicographer.

Wang earned his *chü-jen* degree in 1750, but never qualified for any higher degree. By 1777, he had written ten books, including a volume of poetry, a local gazetteer, and his dictionary, *Tzu-kuan*

(Comprehensive dictionary). This last work was the cause of the trouble, being condemned on two counts: First, in defense of his own scholarly efforts, Wang criticized in his preface the organization of a dictionary commissioned by and named after the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's grandfather, the *K'ang-hsi tzu-tien* (Dictionary of the K'ang-hsi Emperor). Second, Wang wrote in full the temple names of the K'ang-hsi, Yung-cheng and Ch'ien-lung Emperors, which was considered treason. A third charge against Wang was that in his family genealogy, he traced his ancestry back to the mythical emperor Huang-ti.<sup>44</sup> The case was brought to the attention of the court by one Wang Lung-nan who, it developed, had been banished from Wang Hsi-hou's native Hsin-ch'ang county some years earlier for "fomenting litigation." When Lung-nan tried to return to the country in 1777, Wang Hsi-hou and others caught him and turned him in to the district magistrate; Lung-nan, in turn, accused Wang Hsi-hou of writing anti-Manchu literature. A copy of Wang Hsi-hou's dictionary was forwarded to Kiangsi Governor Hai-ch'eng who transmitted it to his book bureau for inspection. The personnel at the book bureau read it, marked the questionable passages, and returned it to Hai-ch'eng, who forwarded it to Peking with the recommendation that Wang Hsi-hou be deprived of his *chü-jen*.<sup>45</sup>

Wang was certainly not a Ming loyalist. But his book called into question the scholarly achievements of the Ch'ing in a way that was particularly offensive to the Ch'ien-lung Emperor. Since the beginning of his reign the emperor had emphasized, probably for reasons as much political as personal (see chapter 2), the contribution to Ch'ing intellectual life of K'ang-hsi era patronage. The *K'ang-hsi tzu-tien* was one of the shining examples of that patronage, a work which, in the words of the senior officials who reviewed the Wang case, was meant to "serve as a model for a thousand generations of scholars." For a private scholar to compare his own work to a book which was meant to be the last word in lexicography, let alone to do so favorably, was bound to be offensive to an emperor as exquisitely sensitive to the political implications of scholarship as Ch'ien-lung. Moreover, Wang had failed to accord to Ch'ing emperors the respect traditionally due Chinese rulers. And Wang had done this in spite of the fact that he held a *chü-jen* degree. Serious though his errors may have been, Wang Hsi-hou's crime hardly seemed to merit the punishments that were meted out to him and to his family. After due deliberation by the Board of Punishments, Wang himself was sentenced to

death, a sentence which was carried out on 22 December 1777, and twenty-one members of his family were made slaves.<sup>46</sup> More was at stake here than lexicographic hubris; most probably, the emperor was using the Wang case to make a statement to the literary community about his determination to preserve his dynasty's reputation. The singling out of one offender, repugnant though it may seem today, was not an uncommon means of communicating, in the eighteenth century, to a large and diffuse community uncertain of imperial directions. The imperial statement in the Wang case had at least the dubious merit of reaching a large audience; an empire-wide search for Wang's works was launched and over two thousand copies of his books were found, including 125 copies of his dictionary, some from provinces as far away as Yunnan.<sup>47</sup> The fate of Wang Hsi-hou and his relatives well illustrates the dangers of publishing in an empire where the ruler had almost unlimited power even over the world of knowledge, particularly when the ruler happened to be so insulated from the realities of life in his empire as Ch'ien-lung was.

Wang Hsi-hou's tragedy was compounded by the fact that, judging from the subsequent edicts in the case, the imperial verdict was directed not so much at the literary community as at the bureaucracy. In his pronouncements on the case, the emperor directed his ire not only at Wang but at the governor of Kiangsi, Hai-ch'eng who had, in the view of the court, conducted a lax investigation and recommended an overly lenient punishment. How could the governor have entrusted a matter as serious as the dignity of the dynasty to his subordinates at the book bureau, the emperor asked; why had he not personally reviewed the book himself? Most serious of all, the emperor discovered Hai-ch'eng's name among the list of those who had contributed funds for publication of the volume, a fact which the governor never explained. The possibility of collusion between Ch'ing officials and the authors was too much for the emperor to tolerate. In an edict of December 1777, Hai-ch'eng was described as "completely blind to heavenly [imperial] virtue, and ignorant of the Greater Duty." The emperor continued, "I cannot but express myself through strong punishment. This man has been appointed as a high provincial official; he has received our grace without any sense of conscience at all." The case against Hai-ch'eng was turned over to the Board of Personnel, which recommended that he be dismissed from office and handed over to the Board of Punishments. There is no record of the deliberations of that Board, or of Hai-ch'eng's

eventual fate, but in a rescript of January 1778, the emperor decreed that Hai-ch'eng's punishment should be lightened to imprisonment awaiting execution in the fall. Two other provincial officials were dismissed from their posts.<sup>48</sup>

The case was in its day and probably is today the most widely known of the literary inquisition cases. Two taboo character cases reported shortly after its conclusion suggested the impact the case had on the provincial bureaucracy. In May of 1778, the governor of Shansi reported the case of Wang Erh-yang, a *chü-jen*, originally from Liao-chou, who held office as a local educational official. A *sheng-yuan* of Shansi, Li Lun-yuan, asked Wang to write an epitaph for his father. Wang composed the epitaph using the expression *huang-k'ao* to refer to Li's father. Whereas the character *huang* meant 'emperor', the compound *huang-k'ao* had long been used in Chinese as an honorific expression for one's deceased father, and was defined as such in the classic Chinese treatise on rites, *Li-chi*. The governor judged, however, that Wang had committed sedition in using the character *huang* without elevating it as was required in all reference to the emperor. An investigation of the case was begun. Li's house was searched, and the governor requested that Wang's ancestral home in Liao-chou be searched as well.<sup>49</sup>

When the case came to the emperor's attention, however, he ordered that investigation cease, finding that the usage in question was not seditious. The emperor pointed out that the expression had been used throughout Chinese literature, as, for example, in *Li Sao*, and in Ou-yang Hsiu's essay in honor of his father, "Lung-ch'ien kang-piao." While there were instances in the history of Chinese literature of classical expressions being changed because one character in them was taboo, these cases involved characters in the personal names of emperors, not generic terms like *huang*.<sup>50</sup> Not only was *huang-k'ao* a perfectly valid classical locution, but the epitaph in which it was found had nothing to do with the dynasty or its ruler. The emperor declared that such a case must be distinguished from true sedition; "In our management of affairs, we have always tried to attain fairness. The case of Wang Hsi-hou was truly seditious, and we are unwilling to relent in the slightest. This case, however, is not rebellious, and we are unwilling that there should be no distinction made [between the cases]. The former case was punished severely. This matter need not be investigated further. Let this be widely proclaimed and known!"<sup>51</sup> The phrase "more like Wang Erh-yang than

Wang Hsi-hou" was used again and again by the emperor to mean that a case need not be further prosecuted.

A second case involving the misuse of taboo characters followed shortly. On 3 July 1778, the Governor of Hunan, Li Hu, reported the sedition of a student at the Imperial Academy, Li Ta-pen. Governor Li's attitude toward the literary inquisition was probably shaped by the recent history of the Hunan governorship. Li Hu had held the post for twelve days when he reported the case of Li Ta-pen. In June, a commoner had left an essay in front of the yamen of Li Hu's predecessor, Yen Hsi-shan. On reading it, Yen concluded not only that it was seditious but that it had been presented to a previous Hunan governor. Unfortunately, the man Yen sent to investigate the case was a distant relative of the former governor. This aroused the emperor's suspicions: were Yen and the new man trying to cover up for the former governor? Yen was ordered to turn over his duties to Li Hu and proceed to the capital for interrogation and punishment. Governor Li Hu was, understandably, a model of caution and vigor in his investigations.<sup>52</sup>

The case against Li Ta-pen involved a volume of poetry entitled *Tzu-hsiao chi* (Accumulated filial piety collection), containing poems written by various relatives in honor of Li's mother's eightieth birthday. The main charge against the volume was that in it Li's mother was compared to a number of famous Chinese ladies, including kinswomen of the legendary emperors Huang-ti and Shen-nung. This comparison was not without its seditious overtones. If one's mother was like the mother of an emperor, the implications for oneself were obvious; imperial pretensions were not welcomed in Ch'ing China. However, the governor cited no evidence that Li's intention in the book was other than flattery. A second charge was that in one of the poems, a character in the K'ang-hsi Emperor's temple name was written in full. There were strong echoes here of the Wang Hsi-hou case; Wang was charged both with writing the names of various Ch'ing emperors in full and with tracing his geneology back to Huang-ti. Despite these echoes, there was no evidence of any questioning of the Manchus' right to cultural and political leadership in the volume by Li Ta-pen. While the Emperor found it exaggerated, he did not find it treasonous. It was "more like Wang Erh-yang than Wang Hsi-hou."<sup>53</sup>

Several factors could have accounted for the governors' actions in these two cases. Perhaps, in the absence of precedent and standard,

the governors misunderstood the basic aims of the inquisition and generally misjudged the significance of the volumes they were submitting. It was also possible that the governors, under pressure from an impatient court, became distracted from the emperor's basic purposes and reported cases of marginal significance in order to maintain an image of vigor and effectiveness. The timing of the cases, and the nature of the accusations strongly suggested the latter possibility. Both cases involved the misuse of taboo characters, and followed closely one of the most famous taboo character cases in Chinese history. Furthermore, the governor who reported the case of Li Ta-pen had special reason for showing vigor and concern in his prosecution of cases. Whatever the reason for the phenomenon, the cases of Li Ta-pen and Wang Erh-yang were not isolated instances.<sup>54</sup> For the remainder of the inquisition, the emperor and his officials carefully sifted through the books submitted for proscription, weeding out many that they felt did not deserve official action.

*Gentry accusations.* The effort to collect all the seditious books in China would have made no headway at all if it had met with major resistance, active or passive, among the literati. On the other hand, literati participation could not be welcomed incautiously, for people could hand in books for a variety of reasons. Fear, as well as respect, could motivate an individual to hand in his own books; a desire for vengeance, as well as a sense of duty could lead one person to accuse another of possessing seditious books. As the number of proscriptions grew, and the penalties for holding seditious books became widely known, the number of gentry accusations grew as well. Separating true accusations from false, and useful information from that which merely involved the court in innumerable petty disputes unrelated to the inquisition was a task which came to preoccupy the emperor and bureaucrats alike in the later years of the campaign. When accusers had motives unrelated to the basic purpose of the inquisition, the fact was carefully recorded in memorials and edicts. A fairly clear picture of the significance and causes of the gentry accusations can, therefore, be reconstructed.

Approximately one-third of the cases documented in *Ch'ing-tai wen-tzu-yü tang* involved one member of the gentry accusing another. About sixty percent of these accusations led to convictions; while about forty percent were shown to be trivial or false. The accusations were a mirror of the tensions in eighteenth-century society. As land

was a major form of wealth, it was not surprising that disputes over land ownership and use were commonly found to lie behind accusations. The majority of these were disputes among relatives, and many centered around commonly-held, or corporate land. As might be expected, all the cases of this form came from the southeastern provinces of Fukien and Kiangsi, where such landholding was common. As one of these cases will be discussed as a case study below, no further examples will be considered here.<sup>55</sup> Land ownership was not, however, the only cause of accusations, nor were all gentry lineages the highly articulated communities focussed exclusively on landholding described in recent scholarship on China.<sup>56</sup> One need only to examine the biographies of Chang Hsueh-ch'eng or Yuan Mei to realize how important unofficial posts were in the lives of eighteenth-century literati, and to understand how critical a network of personal contacts was in obtaining these posts. Predictably, lost employment and scholarly jealousies were also frequent causes of accusations, as was the bitterness of arranged marriages gone awry.<sup>57</sup> Gentry conflicts in the eighteenth century took place, of course, against the background of a very significant population change. From a level of about 150 million at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Chinese population increased to about 275 million by the time of the censorship campaign, and about 313 million by the end of the century.<sup>58</sup> Undoubtedly, the silent pressure of population growth complicated all disputes in the century. But while the new competitive atmosphere probably exacerbated the conflicts behind accusations, the sources of conflict were common ones in late imperial Chinese history. Ultimately, book owners' actions in the censorship campaign were more the manifestation of long-standing tensions in China than the creation of new ones.

An interesting case involving several sources of tension was reported in 1778. Implicated in it were *sheng-yuan* Ch'en Hsi-sheng and a commoner, Teng Hui, both of whom made their living by teaching and fortune telling. Before 1778 they seem to have been good friends—their houses were quite close and they worked and read the *I ching* together. Ch'en had promised his daughter, when yet a minor, in marriage to Teng's son; consequently, the girl was raised in Teng's household. But in 1778, a falling out occurred. It seemed that Ch'en lured some of Teng's archery students away and proceeded to teach them himself. Teng was angry and the two men quarrelled. Ch'en wrote a document condemning Teng and wanted to break off

the marriage agreement between the two families. But a marriage promise, even one involving minors, was not to be broken off that easily. The groom's family claimed that they had already invested significant financial and emotional resources in raising the potential bride.<sup>59</sup> Teng wanted to accuse Ch'en at the district magistrate's office, but was restrained from doing so by his friends and relatives. Relations between the two families appear to have become so complex, and their quarrel so involved that the standard mechanisms of dispute resolution in Chinese society were inadequate to reconcile them. At this point, Ch'en realized that he had a copy of one of the books banned by the court and hit upon the idea of claiming, not only that Teng had sold it to him, but that Teng was in the business of selling proscribed books. As it happened, Teng did have in his possession some books that had been banned. As the magistrate investigated the case, the story narrated above emerged from villagers familiar with the situation and finally from the principals themselves. The magistrate decided to accept Teng's statement that he had not known the books were banned. Ch'en, on the other hand, was found guilty of making a false accusation, and it was recommended that he be beaten one hundred strokes and exiled to a distance of three thousand *li*.<sup>60</sup>

Inevitably, the court's attitude toward accusations was ambivalent. Accusers' information could be valuable but their motives were always questionable. Some of the largest cases of the inquisition, including those of Wang Hsi-hou and the Cho, Tai and Chu families, came to light through accusations. On the other hand, about forty percent of the accusations lodged proved false or trivial. In short, people should not be encouraged to make accusations but every accusation had to be carefully investigated. Such was the thrust of an important imperial statement on the problem of accusations in 1778:

If, in the future, there are men who accuse others of treason, the governor involved should make a careful investigation of the truth or falsehood of the charge. If false, then the accuser should be dealt with as if he had committed the crime he accused [others of committing.] True accusations should be completely reported by memorial.<sup>61</sup>

Regardless of court policy, accusations were probably unavoidable. The emperor went to the heart of the matter when he observed that: "those who murmur against a family and plot to harm it need

only submit one paper, and the accused family will be involved in a legal case, even though they are without guilt." The position of a member of the eighteenth-century Chinese gentry was determined by a delicate balance of a number of factors including his wealth, his position within a lineage, his circle of friends, his literary output, and his rank in the official hierarchy. With the inquisition, the court had, probably inadvertently, created a new way in which the social status of an individual, group, lineage or lineage branch could be temporarily or even permanently altered. In short, a new variable had been created in the network of interpersonal relations that was eighteenth-century Chinese gentry society.

Scholars have long been puzzled by the apparent quiescence of the intellectuals in the "literary inquisition." Actually, as the phenomenon of gentry accusations, the actions of provincial governors, and the role of expectant officials in the inquisition indicated, the intellectuals played an active role in the campaign. Literati in and out of office located, condemned, investigated and evaluated most of the books that were sent to Peking for proscription. In doing so, however, literati were not subservient to the emperor's will, nor did they resist it; they were simply pursuing their own interests. In the complex, multi-centered world of eighteenth-century China, interests could overlap without necessarily being identical or even congruent with each other. The campaign grew through the interaction of gentry, bureaucratic and imperial interests, shaped by all but dominated by none. In the following section, this interaction of interests will be examined in an individual case.

#### *A Case Study: The Proceedings Against the Chu Family of Kiangsi*

The proceedings against the Chu family of Te-hsing, Kiangsi have been selected for examination here not because they changed the character of the censorship campaign, but because they were typical of the investigations and litigations which took place all over China in the late 1770s. The Chu case took place in the fall of 1779, during the height of the censorship in Kiangsi, a province which had sent a disproportionate number of its books to the capital for banning. The Chus were a large, landholding lineage with a record of examination success stretching back to the seventeenth century. The Kiangsi bureaucracy, which had recently been shaken by the

dismissals of Hai-ch'eng and several subordinates in the Wang Hsi-hou case, was certainly well aware of the dangers and importance of literary litigations.

A gazetteer from the Chus' native county published in 1872 describes the area, and perhaps also the family. Crossed by shallow streams and broken by gently rolling hills, Te-hsing was one of seven counties which comprised Jao-chou prefecture in the red earth district of Kiangsi; the northeastern border of the district formed the boundary between Kiangsi and Chekiang. The names of the offenders did not appear in the nineteenth-century gazetteer, but enough evidence remained to suggest that the Chu family lived in the southeastern section of the district, near modern Nuan-shui. There were two *chin-shih*, one *chü-jen* and six *sheng-yuan* surnamed Chu from this area among the successful candidates on the examinations during the Ch'ing. One of the *chin-shih* and one of the *sheng-yuan* were identified in censorship documents as being members of the offending Chu family. According to the gazetteer there was a hall, the *Pi-chien tz'u*, in the area of Nuan-shui for persons surnamed Chu, and censorship documents recorded that the Chu family lived clustered around their ancestral hall. It cannot be conclusively proven that the Chus of Nuan-shui were the Chus of the case at hand, but both the government documents and the local history suggested that the Chus were a large, well established, land-holding and segmented gentry lineage.<sup>62</sup>

Little is known of Chu T'ing-cheng, a *sheng-yuan* who died in 1750, except that at some point he wrote a volume entitled *Hsu san-tzu-ching* (Supplement to the *Three Character Classic*) which he used to teach his grandson Chu Chieh how to read.<sup>63</sup> It was this writing which eventually brought the family to grief. The *San-tzu-ching*, originally written by Wang Po-hou of the Sung Dynasty, has been used as an elementary reading primer in China for over a thousand years. Composed in short, easily memorized, three character sentences, it was divided into sections entitled "Man's Original Nature," "Duty to Parents," "General Knowledge," and "Advice as to Learning and Diligence."<sup>64</sup> The section on general knowledge contained a brief sketch of Chinese history from legendary times to the founding of the Sung dynasty, and it was this sketch which Chu T'ing-cheng evidently supplemented by extending it to the middle of the Ch'ing. Subsequent criticism alleged that Chu not only listed the dynasties and emperors since Sung, but made moralistic comments on them

in the tradition of Chinese "praise and blame" historiography. It is not hard to guess who was being blamed. One line from the book recorded in the archives of the case was: "With hair loose and clothes folding to the left, even harder to bear is the fact that China is filled with monks." The first part of this line was an allusion to the *Analects* where Confucius remarked on how fortunate China's escape from barbarian control had been. The second half of the line referred to the fact that the Manchus shaved the front part of their heads, which made them look like monks. This practice, along with the custom of braiding the back part of the hair into a queue, was forced on the Chinese when the Manchus took power and had met with considerable resistance. Thus one theme of Chu T'ing-cheng's comments on Chinese history was very probably opposition to Manchu rule.<sup>65</sup>

The original copy of Chu T'ing-cheng's work was lost. Many years after Chu T'ing-cheng's death, when his grandson Chu Chieh, a *sheng-yuan* himself, came to teach his own son how to read, he had to write out a copy of the text from memory. In this copy, seized by local officials, the taboos on Ch'ing emperors' names were not properly observed. In one particularly blatant instance, after a mention of the famous early Ch'ing rebel Wu San-kuei (1612-1678), a reference to the Ch'ing government was not elevated the requisite number of spaces. In a subsequent interrogation, Chu Chieh claimed that in writing the text he had followed the model of the original *San-tzu-ching*, arranging the sentences parallel to each other for ease of reading and memorization and for this reason he had not observed the Ch'ing taboos properly. Another fault of Chu Chieh's text was that it confused the reign names of the rulers of the Yuan dynasty. Since the rulers of the Yuan were Mongols, and were the most recent non-Han rulers of China before the Ch'ing, the court was very sensitive to any infringement of their historical rights. It is difficult to tell whether these were inadvertent errors on the part of Chu Chieh or intentional acts of sedition; at the very least it was certain that the manuscript was not intended for publication.

Sometime in the mid-1770s, there seems to have been a dispute within the Chu family between Chu Chieh's brother, Chu Hui, and a distant relative of both, Chu P'ing-chang. In this squabble, Chu Hui accused Chu P'ing-chang of selling corporate land. The exact nature of the dispute was not specified, but Chu P'ing-chang's behavior was later officially characterized as "destroying the ancestral

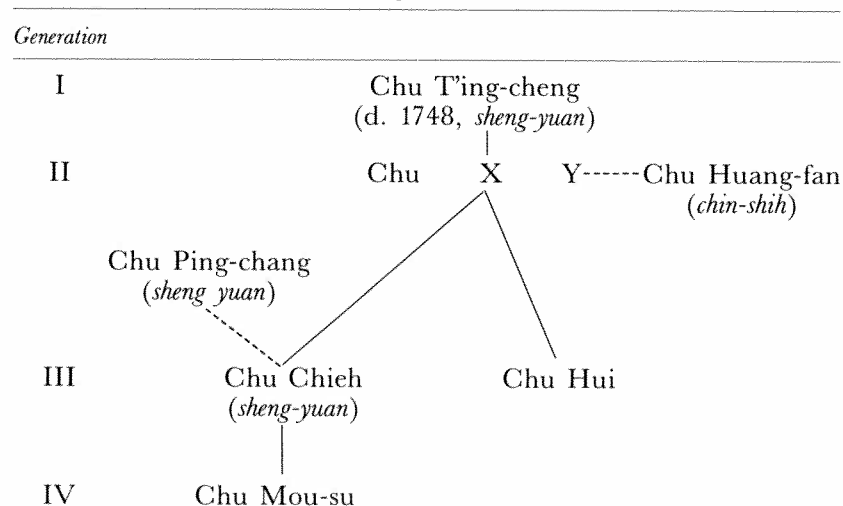
hall." Lineages in south China often used the proceeds of corporate lands to support their ancestral hall, or pay educational expenses; but conflicts over the resources from such lands could easily arise.<sup>66</sup> The two litigants were at first reluctant to take the case to court. They asked another member of the Chu family who had just earned his *chin-shih* degree, Chu Huang-fan, to arbitrate. Huang-fan evidently refused. The case went to court and Chu P'ing-chang lost, with the result that he was stripped of his *sheng-yuan* degree.

While this litigation was going on, Chu P'ing-chang had occasion to visit his kinsman Chu Chieh. A copy of the *Hsu-san-tzu-ching* was lying open on Chu Chieh's desk which P'ing-chang picked up and took home with him. In October, 1779 after Chu P'ing-chang had lost his degree, he sought a means of taking revenge on Chu Hsi and his brother. He decided to hand in the volume he had taken from Chu Chieh's house, and accuse the latter of sedition. P'ing-chang also wanted revenge against Chu Huang-fan. As it happened, Chu Huang-fan had written a volume of poetry and dedicated it to Chu Hui. P'ing-chang also obtained a copy of this volume and submitted it to the magistrate.

Thus on 13 November 1779, the magistrate of Te-hsing county received copies of the *Hsu-san-tzu-ching* and an untitled volume of poetry by Chu Huang-fan. After examining them, he forwarded them to the governor of the province with a report on how and why he had received them.

The governor who received the volumes was Hao-shuo, whose appointment in December 1777 followed the disgrace and execution of Hai-ch'eng for his role in the Wang Hsi-hou case. The Chu case was the first that Hao-shuo prosecuted as a provincial governor. On receipt of the magistrate's report, Hao-shuo ordered that the magistrate of Te-hsing and the prefect of Jao-chou to interrogate thoroughly all the principals, and search the Chu households; he then forwarded the books to Peking. Several weeks later the report of the magistrate and prefect arrived, containing the outlines of the story above. But the governor was not satisfied. He had learned through his own sources that Chu T'ing-cheng had written another book, entitled *Tz'u-t'ang pi-chi* (Desultory jottings from the ancestral hall) which was not mentioned in the report of the magistrate and prefect. The governor did not reveal the sources of his information on the second volume but, castigating the magistrate and the prefect

Figure 3. Members of the Chu Family Involved in Litigation Proceedings in 1779



NOTE: Solid line indicates direct descendants; dotted lines indicate uncertain relationships. Nothing is known of the relationship between Chu Huang-fan and Chu Hui, except that Huang-fan was of the same generation in the clan as Hui's father. Chu P'ing-chang was a grade 5 mourning relative (in Maurice Friedman's parlance) of Chu Chieh. The implications of this latter relationship will be discussed in the text.

for the "leaks" in their report, ordered a second investigation. This time, the investigation was to be conducted by the censor of circuit for northeastern Kiangsi, O-erh-teng-pu.

Two months later, O-erh-teng-pu reported back that he had found it too late. Word had spread that the governor was looking for the volume and there had been a scramble among the Chus to eradicate certain names and phrases from the book. No less than seven members of the family had made revisions. Each was interrogated and searched. On March 19, the governor reported all the circumstances of the case to the court in a long memorial, and recommended punishments for those he found guilty.

The first criminal discussed in the memorial was Chu T'ing-cheng himself, who had had the good fortune to die thirty years before his case was discovered. Chu had committed two crimes—harboring anti-Manchu sentiments and recording them in an historical text.

He was condemned as a "wild and reckless" man, "living in seclusion and deriding the dynasty." Even worse, he had received the bounty of the dynasty in the form of a *sheng-yuan* degree and still dared to speak against it. Chu was not only ungrateful for the benefits he had received but had in conduct and in writings scorned his benefactors. He was clearly a man of anti-social tendencies and immoral character. Or so he was pictured. There was no indication that his true feelings and intentions were investigated, nor can they be determined today.

Chu T'ing-cheng was also condemned for "praising and blaming former kings according to his own fancy" and "having the audacity to criticize previous emperors." The key phrase here was "praise and blame." Wm. Theodore de Bary has noted that while all men were free to study the past, "only a sage might dare actually to record moral judgments in his writing."<sup>67</sup> Chu T'ing-cheng was, therefore, condemned in terms thoroughly grounded in Chinese tradition, for usurping the prerogatives of a sage and expressing his opposition to the Manchu house. The governor recommended that, as punishment and as example to others, Chu's corpse be disinterred and beheaded. He also recommended that all the property Chu T'ing-cheng had bequeathed at his death be confiscated by the state, and that all of T'ing-cheng's descendants over 16 *sui* be executed.<sup>68</sup>

Punishments were also meted out to those who had resisted the Governor's will by hiding and altering the *Tz'u-lang pi-chi*. The individual who had altered the most was sentenced to a beating of one hundred strokes and exile to a distance of three thousand *li*. Another member of the family who had erased one name was deprived of his status as a licentiate. Others, who made only a few changes were sentenced to be beaten eight strokes, but were forgiven when they pled for mercy on New Year's Day 1780.

Only one member of the Chu family accused in the case escaped official condemnation. When the poetry of the *chin-shih* Chu Huang-fan was examined, no seditious wording was found. Huang-fan was not a descendant of Chu T'ing-cheng and thus bore no responsibility for the preservation of the *Hsu san-tzu-ching*. Officials accepted his word that he had never seen the volume. Probably Huang-fan's exalted rank helped to establish his credibility. In any case, neither his life nor his career was harmed; he went on to serve as magistrate in three counties before retiring to care for his aged mother and write his commentaries on the classics.<sup>69</sup>

The interests on the court, bureaucracy and gentry accusers were all served by the outcome of the Chu case. Although there were no imperial edicts in the case, several of the emperor's aims were obviously served. A book which, had it been published, would have been of considerable subversive potential was destroyed. The *San-tzu-ching* was more than a series of amusing jingles; it expressed the basic beliefs of Chinese high culture. Reading and memorizing it were the first steps in the socialization of the children of the Chinese elite; under no circumstances could a version of it which contained anti-Manchu language be allowed to circulate. Also, the practice of passing seditious volumes from generation to generation within a family was attacked forcefully, and it was made clear that any who engaged in the practice would lose not only their lives and writings, but also any property they might bequeath to their descendants.

The process of investigation in the Chu case illustrated the impact of the censorship on the provincial bureaucracy, and the crucial role of the bureaucracy in it. Not only did Hao-shuo send three sets of officials to investigate the Chus, he evidently sought information from private sources as well. In his final memorial, the governor recommended that the prefect and the magistrate, whose reports had not met his standards of completeness and accuracy, be dismissed from their posts. As a result of his diligence, an extra volume by Chu T'ing-cheng was discovered, several more people punished, and a minor panic created among the Chus. While the governor clearly felt a vigorous investigation of the case was necessary, it was not clear that the results of his search were worth the effort and disruption it entailed. Only one phrase, a standard classical allusion to the strenuous life of an emperor and his officials, was quoted from the volume, and it appears on none of the indices of works suppressed. It is an ironic comment on the difficulties of holding office during the Ch'ing that four years after his most thorough prosecution of the Chu case, Hao-shuo was summoned to Peking, cashiered and permitted to commit suicide for extorting money from his inferiors.<sup>70</sup>

The interests of the accuser in the case, Chu P'ing-chang, presented a slightly more complicated picture. Although P'ing-chang's quarrel was with Chu Hui, he accused Chu Chieh. While it was recommended that Chu Hui be executed for not restraining Chu Chieh, there were many other unfortunate consequences of the accusation. Why did P'ing-chang employ such a potentially disastrous means of revenge? He was not a sufficiently close relative of Chu

T'ing-cheng that he would have been held responsible had the book been discovered, nor did he give any moral or ideological reason for his act.

Anthropological literature on southeast China lineages provides some clue to the puzzle. In his early work on the subject, Maurice Freedman found that some segments or lineages seemed to have more power than others, and he hypothesized that the more powerful branches owned more land than the weaker ones.<sup>71</sup> Jack M. Potter, another student of southern China clans, tested this hypothesis and concluded that "the distribution of political power within Chinese lineages may be said to have been determined by ancestral property . . . wealth in the form of ancestral estates enabled wealthier branches to educate sons for the examinations, making it probable that wealthy branches would have more prestige and political connections."<sup>72</sup> There is evidence to suggest that the quarrel between Chu P'ing-chang and Chu Hui was not a quarrel between two individuals, but between two branches of the Chu lineage. The fight was over corporate land, the selling of which was regarded as "destruction of the ancestral hall." It was a fight of sufficient importance to go to the district magistrate's court. Chu P'ing-chang probably belonged to a different branch of the family than Chu Hui and Chu Chieh, for it was recorded that Chu P'ing-chang was a "coarse silk" mourning relative of Chu Chieh. This referred to an ancient Chinese system of classification of lineage members, wherein two people's relationship to one another was expressed in terms of the type of cloth they would have to wear at each other's funeral.<sup>73</sup> The terminology was not sufficiently precise that Chu P'ing-chang's relationship to Chu Hui and Chu Chieh can be pinpointed. However, Chu P'ing-chang could not have been a descendant of Chu T'ing-cheng, that is of the same lineage segment as Chu Hui and Chu Chieh, unless he were Chu T'ing-cheng's great-great-grandson. In view of the ages of the parties involved, this is unlikely.

If Chu P'ing-chang and the descendants of Chu T'ing-cheng were of different, feuding branches of the Chus, then the outcome of the case was clearly in P'ing-chang's interest. For, as a result of the finding of sedition, it was recommended that all of Chu T'ing-cheng's descendants over the age of 16 *sui* be executed, which would have eliminated the entire branch of the clan with which P'ing-chang was feuding. Whether or not Chu P'ing-chang anticipated this outcome when he lodged his accusation, he clearly had motives unrelated to

the censorship and knew enough of government precedent and procedure to be certain that his accusation would receive a prompt and thorough investigation. Such widespread knowledge of censors' aims and procedures, and the ability of local gentry to manipulate them were clearly major factors in the growth of the censorship.

### *The Systematization of Censorship (1780-1782)*

By 1780, the book banning had reached its zenith. All the provinces had instituted procedures for locating and collecting seditious books, and the consignments of books sent to the capital from the largest provinces averaged two thousand volumes annually, with some provinces sending as many as five thousand volumes per year. The potential for social disruption was becoming more and more evident, however. Litigations, like that of the Chu family, required more and more time to investigate and prosecute; book holders indicted each other regularly, with or without basis; and governors padded their submissions with books of marginal significance. In the face of mounting evidence of the disruptive side effects of the campaign, the Ch'ien-lung court seemed to shift its policies. For the first time, centralized censorship boards which could enforce consistent standards on various genres of literature were created; a master list of banned books and a statement of the criteria for determining sedition were promulgated at court and distributed to provincial officials; and governors were reprimanded, not for negligence, but for overzealousness in pursuing the goals of the campaign. The shift was a subtle one. The court neither retreated from its stated policy of finding and eliminating all anti-Manchu references in Chinese writings nor renounced any of the procedures of the early years of the campaign. The goals were rather to systematize and regularize the effort, and bring under central control forces previously left uncontrolled.

Contemporaneous with these developments was the rise of a new group of leaders in Peking. Many of this group, which coalesced under the leadership of Ho-shen, were ethnically Manchu or of imperial household origins. At least two of the changes in procedures during the early 1780s were directly associated with these new men: Ho-shen and others staffed the new censorship boards while Ying-lien, Ho-shen's uncle, prepared the banned book lists. The reprimands of governors were embodied in imperial edicts drafted by the Grand Council which was dominated by Ho-shen and his followers.

Ironically, it was Manchus who led the retreat from the excesses of the campaign against anti-Manchu literature. Considered more carefully, however, this development was not so paradoxical. The censorship put senior Chinese officials in a difficult position; they could not condemn its excesses without appearing to condone its objects. Only Manchus could confidently condemn the excesses of the campaign. Furthermore, in this respect as in many others, the early efforts of the new Manchu leadership appear to have constituted a genuine and needed reform of previous administrative procedures. The fact that these leaders' own activities became excessive and corrupt, and were so labelled by their successors, should not obscure the significance of their early actions.

*The origin and development of censorship boards.* Under the procedures of the early years, if a book contained even a few references offensive to the regime, local book collectors and provincial bureaus had no option but to submit it to Peking for destruction *in toto*. This meant that there was probably more destruction of literary texts than was necessary to achieve the court's goals and, with public knowledge of such destruction, a climate of fear and uncertainty was created which obfuscated the government's basic aims. These consequences could have been avoided if there had been a central censorship board with the power and confidence to censor selectively. Such a board was created for the censorship of drama in December 1780; shortly thereafter, similar boards were created for other genres. The central government's desire to minimize the potential for social disruption was stressed throughout the official documents creating these boards. That the first censorship board created had to do with drama may have reflected the calculation that, since the stories and language of plays were known to a larger segment of the population than other written texts, the dangers of public misunderstanding of drama censorship were greater than those of censorship of other sorts of texts.

On 6 December 1780, the emperor issued his first edict on drama:

Formerly, we ordered the officials of each province to seek energetically writings containing seditious words and phrases and send them to the capital. The successive submissions of the various governors have been numerous indeed. It has occurred to us that playscripts cannot be without seditious passages. For instance, among those which depict events at the end of the Ming dynasty, there must be some references to the

present dynasty which ought to be investigated thoroughly. As for poetic drama which concerns the Southern Sung and the rise of the Chin, there must be many scripts in which the roles [presumably of the Jurchen rulers, who were ancestors of the Manchus] are portrayed so excessively that the truth is lost. These have been in circulation so long that the uneducated masses take them for the truth when in fact they bear no relation at all to the truth. They also must be investigated thoroughly.<sup>74</sup>

Instead of charging provincial officials with the task of evaluating seditious drama, the emperor entrusted it to Ch'üan-te, a Manchu of the Plain Yellow banner who had distinguished himself in the campaigns against Burma and the Chin-ch'uan rebels.<sup>75</sup> It was essential, the emperor admonished, that Ch'üan-te carry out his tasks without arousing any noise or commotion, or making any display of force. The emperor probably felt that the Manchu military officer could be relied on to carry out his orders quietly and effectively; but as a drama censor Ch'üan-te had one liability, namely, that he could not read Chinese very well (*pu-t'ung-hsiao Han-wen*). Therefore, I-ling-a, an imperial household bondservant then serving as salt commissioner for the Liang-huai district, was ordered to assist him. Sometime in March of 1781, I-ling-a was relieved of his duties as assistant drama censor and replaced by T'u-ming-a, a Mongol of the Plain Yellow banner.

Ch'üan-te and T'u-ming-a worked out between themselves the following *modus operandi*.<sup>76</sup> Drama scripts collected by provincial governors were first sent to Ch'üan-te, who sorted them into three categories: Those that merited complete destruction he sent to the capital for review; those which required only a few emendations to be acceptable to the regime he forwarded to T'u-ming-a; and those which contained no sedition he returned to their owners. On receipt of scripts requiring emendation, T'u-ming-a rewrote the offending passages, and forwarded his handiwork to Peking for review. Both Ch'üan-te and T'u-ming-a regularly reported to the emperor on what they had accomplished, and regularly received imperial re-cripts on their reports urging them not to be too harsh or stir up trouble. In his last extant memorial on drama dated 20 June 1781, Ch'üan-te reported that he had collected 424 scripts of which he had evaluated 273. Unfortunately he did not say how many he had censored, but he did report that of the forty-two scripts he had evaluated since he had last memorialized, he had ordered six banned entirely, eighteen partially amended, and eighteen returned unchanged to

their owners. In a memorial dated 6 June 1781, T'u-ming-a reported that he had edited thirty-five scripts and had twenty more on hand for editing.<sup>77</sup>

Another board, of similar function, was also created in December 1780. Apparently in order to preserve texts which contained only a few anti-Manchu references, printers had begun to prepare special editions of works with the offensive passages excised. However, the blank spaces could be more suggestive than the actual excised wording. One of the volumes printed in this way, a text of *Ch'ing-hsia-chi* (Collected writings of the scholar of Ch'ing-hsia mountain), by Sung Lien (ca. 1600) somehow made its way into the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* itself. On the day of his appointment as director-general of the Ssu-k'u project, Ho-shen was given the task of investigating this text. The following day he memorialized, indicting Assistant Director-General Ts'ao Wen-chih and Chief Collator Tsang Sheng-yung for failing to report the blank spaces.<sup>78</sup> Five days later, an edict was issued on the subject of blank spaces:

We presume that besides this work there are shops in the provinces which have printed other books, leaving spaces blank, as in the case of *Ch'ing-hsia-chi*, to which thought ought to be given and additions made. But this will probably be a difficult task for the governors-general and governors to perform satisfactorily and in like fashion. So we command the high officials of all the provinces to discover those volumes which need not be destroyed but have been printed with spaces left blank, to mark them, and to send them to the capital. They will then be turned over to the commissioners to be deliberated upon, filled in, then returned. In case there are woodblocks, the high provincial officials should obediently compare them with the revised works and engrave [the proper parts] afresh, so that they may be precisely the same.<sup>79</sup>

On 15 December, Ho-shen and A-kuei were appointed to direct the work of filling in the blanks. The creation of a centralized board to correct works which had been, in effect, selectively censored by Chinese literati and printers must have facilitated such prior censorship and thus relieved some of the pressure on local officials to find and destroy all anti-Manchu references. Unfortunately, as in so many of Ho-shen's activities, no records of the functioning of the committee for filling in the blanks survive.

*The promulgation of indices and standards.* A second procedural reform, the preparation and printing of master lists of banned books, took place in the spring of 1782. The initiative for this reform came

from the group of Manchu officials surrounding the emperor, who had inherited in the late 1770s the task of supervising his various projects and campaigns, rather than from the emperor himself. Specifically, the reform was begun by Ying-lien, an uncle of Hoshen's who served in various mostly administrative capacities at the Ssu-k'u Commission. In May 1780, Ying-lien was ordered to supervise and expedite the return of the books collected for the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* to their owners in the provinces. In order to carry out this task, the Manchu official found it necessary to prepare a master list of all the books that had been banned to insure that no work containing seditious language would be returned to its owner by mistake.<sup>80</sup> In April 1782, he reported to the emperor that his work was complete. Some months later the Grand Council memorialized, noting with approval the work of Ying-lien and his subordinates and observing that "Nine-tenths of the works now being submitted have already been investigated. . . . The number of different books to be destroyed, both *in toto* and *in parte*, is 780." The memorial concluded:

We recommend that an *Index* be drawn up clearly stating title and author [or compiler of all seditious works], and that it be printed in book form for circulation among the provinces. Then even the ignorant villagers who have books hidden away will know what is against the law, and we who have the prohibition in hand will be better able to check volumes sent [to the capital]. So will provision for every book of past generations deserving suppression be made.

In such manner was the first and only known central index of books banned in the Ch'ien-lung years created.<sup>81</sup>

Apparently at the same time as they were preparing a master list of banned books, Ying-lien and his subordinates prepared a set of criteria for determining whether or not a book was to be judged seditious. This document consisted mostly of summaries of imperial edicts banning individual works; some of the provisions, however, were of a more general nature. The relatively limited definition of sedition adopted in the document and the repeated stress on the need for discretion and judgment were striking.<sup>82</sup>

Except for works with obviously rebellious wording, the commissioners assert in their preamble, in determining sedition "there will have to be a balance, which will need to be handled in various ways." Article one orders that books containing the names of military stations and outposts in Manchuria be forwarded to the capital, so that their terminology and transcriptions could be made consistent with

the *Man-chou yuan-liu k'ao* then being prepared in Peking. Articles two, three, four, and five summarize edicts on the works of Ch'ien Ch'ien-i, Lü Liu-liang, Chin Pao, Chu Ta-chun and Wu Wei-yeh, and works which used the reign names of certain Ming pretenders. Article six cautions that in the censorship of encyclopedias and books of historical notes it is not necessary to destroy an entire volume simply because of a few anti-Manchu references, and orders censors to "check carefully to see in what division and what biography the treasonable part occurs and eliminate that." Article seven deals with collections of memorials. Noting the emperor's command that memorials relevant to present conditions, like those in the *Ching-shih wen-pien* (Collection on statecraft), should be preserved, it urges censors to be cautious: "whichever have words and phrases that are treasonable should be censored of that part; the balance after deliberation ought to be conserved." The concluding article orders censors to deliberate and change as necessary writings by Sung and Ming authors dealing with the Yuan, Chin and Liao dynasties.<sup>83</sup>

*Reprimands of provincial governors for overzealousness.* The new emphasis on discretion and systematization evident in the standards and memorials of Ying-lien was also apparent in the comments made by the emperor on works sent to him to be banned. While the emperor had on many occasions found that books submitted for prohibition were not seditious, he had never before 1782 reprimanded the governors who had submitted them. In the spring of that year, however, one case involving the misuse of taboo characters and some rather extravagant and clumsy historical allusions was brought to his attention by Governor Li Shih-chieh of Hunan. The emperor commented: "If in all cases, we must blow back the fur and examine the faults, picking and plucking at falsehoods, will this not cause the people to be at a loss as to what to do? This matter has come about because Governor Li Shih-chieh is not familiar with the principles of literature." In a second edict on the case issued two days later, the emperor further fulminated: "If in managing local affairs, all were as hasty and unconcerned as this, how could they be worthy of reappointment?"<sup>84</sup>

Later in the same year, officials presented the emperor with some rather bitter poems written by a literatus who had studied all his life but never obtained more than the first degree. The emperor commented: "There are many of this type, disappointed men singing in

the wild grasses and marshlands. If we blow back the fur and examine the faults in order to punish them, then anyone expressing himself in poetry will be putting himself in danger, and the people will be at a loss as to what to do. . . . Let this edict be widely proclaimed and known."<sup>85</sup>

In statutory terms the censorship did not end in 1782. Provincial book bureaus continued to exist, submitting yearly consignments of books to Peking, until the end of the reign. There was even an imperial order in 1788 to provincial governors to "throw their whole energies into the execution of censorship that it may be cleaned up once and for all."<sup>86</sup> But there is an unmistakable decline after 1782 in the number of books submitted by the provinces to the court, in the number of litigations, and in the court's interest in the campaign. Probably, the systematization and reprimands of the early 1780s represented a signal to the literate community that the campaign had reached its conclusion, and that literati in the empire had little to gain from further censorship. The effort had grown, in large measure, because bureaucrats, expectant officials, and literati had been able to further their own interests through the pursuit of imperial goals; when this opportunity ceased to exist, the campaign declined as well.

The circumstances of these cases and the nature of imperial reprimands were widely known in the provincial bureaucracy. Four governors memorialized, acknowledging receipt of the edict reprimanding Li Shih-chieh. Governors Pa-san-t'ing of Kwangtung and T'an Shang-chung of Anhwei promised to avoid cases involving petty infractions like those of the tasteless Hunan poet;<sup>87</sup> Pa-san-t'ing remarked that he was particularly aware of the dangers of such cases since he had been responsible for the case of Wang Erh-yang. The governor of Kiangsi noted that the only circumstances in which an individual could be punished were ridiculing the dynasty and concealing seditious books; he agreed with the emperor that there was no need to bring to the attention of the court cases in which language had been misused, and further noted the importance of investigating all gentry accusations. In order to encourage his subordinates to act in accord with imperial wishes, the governor said, he widely publicized the outcome of all cases. Governor Li Shih himself submitted two memorials, one apologizing for his errors, and the other announcing that the imperial pardons had been conveyed to those condemned.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Eighteenth-Century Censorship in History and Historiography*

This picture of the growth and decline of censorship in the eighteenth century accords with what is known of the late Ch'ien-lung era. The last quarter of the eighteenth century in China was a time when, beneath a façade of harmony, peace and prosperity, an endless array of particular interests were in competition with each other, a competition perhaps exacerbated by the silent pressure of population growth. The phenomena observed in the censorship campaign—expectant officials vying with each other to collect banned books in competition for government posts, gentry avenging grievances by turning in their fellows, and provincial governors maneuvering and dissembling to avoid imperial reprimand—were as characteristic of the era as Chu Yun's attempt to turn the Ssu-k'u project to his own ends, or the competition between government and private book holders for the best editions. That the censorship campaign grew through such phenomena may be a new finding; it should not be a startling one.

Nor should it be surprising that the campaign was directed primarily against anti-Manchu references. The Ch'ien-lung Emperor's desire to regulate the thought of his subjects through literary controls has often been suggested but never attested. On the other hand, his "strange, guilty" sensitivity to any slight of his own rule or that of his ancestors has been demonstrated.<sup>89</sup> Anti-Manchu historical references not only offended this sensitivity but undermined sagging Manchu morale, and quite possibly upset the delicate Manchu/Chinese balance at court. In the atmosphere of self-glorification surrounding the emperor's sixtieth birthday and the compilation of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu*, a campaign to eradicate anti-Manchu references seemed to fit.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the views of the censorship here presented is precisely that they are new, that previous students have failed to offer such interpretations. Partly, as was suggested in the introduction, the problem has been one of source material. But two further explanations, one ideological and the other methodological, may be offered for the character of previous interpretations.

Twentieth-century historians have seen the "literary inquisition" as an instance, perhaps the classic instance, of a clumsy and inefficient Manchu despotism which robbed China of its intellectual

vigor and political vitality on the eve of its encounter with the West. Sun Yat-sen once wrote:

Under the Manchu autocracy, those who would preserve the Chinese national spirit could not do so in writing, [they] could do so only by word of mouth. [This was because] the writings which had been transmitted were completely destroyed in the time of the Ch'ien-lung emperor. . . . Because of the proscriptions of that era which involved many litigations and condemnations, the written thought of the Chinese people was completely destroyed.<sup>90</sup>

Such pronouncements, of course, were part of the ideology of revolution. But the ideas behind them have been remarkably long-lived. A Republic of China book company, offering for sale a series of reprints of books suppressed during the Ch'ing dynasty, wrote in its 1977 catalog:

Because the Chinese people have a spirit of "separating themselves from their enemies, distinguishing the Chinese from barbarians," they have long survived and prospered. After the Manchus conquered China, they came to understand this principle quite clearly, and so realized that if they were to maintain themselves in China, and cast out the Chinese, they must first destroy this element of the Chinese spirit.

We know that books are the most important medium for the transmission of traditional thought and spirit. Therefore, the Ch'ing government thoroughly investigated the books that our nation had long preserved. . . . We have made every effort to locate copies of these books preserved in the country, reprint and circulate them, in order to further this company's goal of reinvigorating Chinese culture.<sup>91</sup>

Writing from the other side of the Taiwan straits in 1959, Chang Shun-hui blamed the literary litigations for the willingness of eighteenth-century scholars to engage in tedious and unproductive research of textual verification, and by implication, for their failure to explore the revolutionary implications of their discoveries.<sup>92</sup>

L. Carrington Goodrich in his English study, *The Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-lung*, seems to have adopted his Chinese contemporaries' view of the censorship as an instance of imperial despotism, without incorporating into his work the anti-Manchu nationalist assumptions that buttressed their theories. Adding a Western legalistic metaphor to the condemnation of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor, Goodrich proclaimed that the "Ch'ien-lung Emperor stands accused at the bar of public opinion for his open interference with scholars of his day."<sup>93</sup>

Viewing the inquisition in this light, historians have sought to

assess the extent of damage done to China's intellectual heritage, rather than explore the procedures and mechanisms through which the inquisition grew. Studies have focused on the fragmentary indices of banned books which archivists have found in central government records and in the private papers of participants in the campaign. Since 1883 three book-length essays and numerous articles have been devoted to these documents.<sup>94</sup> While impressive lists of condemned books have been compiled, it is unlikely that any complete list of all the works totally or partially censored by all the local censorship boards will ever be found, or indeed, was ever compiled. Furthermore, while one may assume that every book on extant lists was in fact banned, one may not assume, given the lack of centralized standards and the haphazard procedures of governors and governors-general, that the lists completely exhaust or even accurately reflect imperial purposes in the campaign. It is both dangerous and methodologically unjustified to characterize the Ch'ien-lung Emperor's policies toward scholarship and literature only on the basis of these lists.

A number of historians writing in the People's Republic in late 1979 and early 1980, men who had seen in their own lives the destruction that could be wrought by a government bent on changing the political lexicon of its people, emphasized other aspects of the Ch'ien-lung book burnings. Some argued that a potential for intellectual persecution exists whenever those with supreme power were also regarded as having supreme wisdom and the duty to reform society; and that when political authority is unrestrained by law, the ruler's will can only be constrained by circumstance. Others attributed the accusations and jealousies of the censorship campaign to the Ch'ing government's policies of "literary entrapment," and regarded both as evidence of the "feudal" character of Chinese society in the eighteenth century, remnants of which they still sadly saw about them. Ultimately, of course, these articles were probably meant to demonstrate a will to overcome "feudal remnants," but the points they made were telling. The broad pattern of censorship in the Ch'ien-lung era—a vague central initiative, growing momentum fed by officials eager to please, and finally official retreat in the face of overwhelming popular response—was one repeated many times in Chinese history. The censorship campaign manifested some of the timeless characteristics of Chinese history, but also had its roots in specific eighteenth-century realities like the evolving relationship

between Chinese and their Manchu rulers, and the patterns of relations between scholars and the state. The effort to relate the campaign too closely to broader historical patterns has its truth, but inevitably oversimplifies.<sup>95</sup>

The analysis of this chapter has viewed the eighteenth-century censorship not solely as an instance of imperial despotism, but as an historical event, shaped by the interests and attitudes of all those who participated in it. The purpose has not been to apologize for the Ch'ien-lung Emperor; censorship of the written word is always odious, and when it involves the destruction of lives and property, it is particularly so. Without excusing the emperor in the slightest for his role in initiating the effort, one may observe that the human and literary tragedies of the campaign were not all of his making. The intellectual world of eighteenth-century China was simply too large, too complex, and too diverse to be dominated by one man. The ferocities and excesses of the era bear witness to this complexity.

The place of the censorship of the Ch'ien-lung reign in history and historiography is, therefore, doubly ironic. Not only has the campaign to secure the dynasty's virtuous name contributed to its reputation for despotism and paranoia; but the event so often cited as evidence of the Ch'ing dynasty's despotic power proves, on closer examination, to show just how tightly the exercise of imperial will in eighteenth-century China was constrained by the community of interests over which the emperor reigned.

# 7

## Conclusion

Censorship was certainly not the only phase of the literary activities of the Ch'ien-lung court in the 1770s and 80s which reflected a wide range of interests and motives; such diversity was apparent, albeit with far less disastrous consequences, in all phases of the Ssu-k'u effort. The imperial initiative in the project was one shaped by both traditional ideals and practical considerations. The scholars, for their part, responded to the initiative in a way that reflected the complex institutional environment in which they lived, and their deeply-held beliefs about the nature of truth and the best means of pursuing it. Perhaps the interests of the bureaucracy most influenced the form of the final *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* manuscript, and these were conditioned by ideological, factional and personal considerations. In its intellectual stance the *Annotated Catalog* primarily reflected the views of *k'ao-cheng* scholarship, but some of its formulations were undoubtedly constrained by Manchu ethnic sensitivities and imperial pride. Reflecting all of these interests, the Ssu-k'u project was dominated by none. The hypothesis of this research has been that the government sponsored literary activity of the late Ch'ien-lung years was the product of an interaction between scholars and the state. This conclusion will briefly explore some implications of this finding for eighteenth-century political and intellectual history.

The findings of this research together with those of other studies of eighteenth-century China suggest that government in China, like the government of most states, rested on the art of the possible. But if