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Who Was Responsible for the Weather? Moral Meteorology in Late Imperial China

By *Mark Elvin**

ONE VIEW IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA was that people were responsible for their weather. Rainfall and sunshine were thought to be seasonal or unseasonal, appropriate or excessive, according to whether human behavior was moral or immoral. The effects were statistical. Bad individuals in a community could benefit from the goodness of the majority; good individuals could suffer if the majority were evil. Some counted for more than others. The emperor's conduct was of preeminent importance; bureaucrats came in second place; and the common people ranked last. All or any of these could be decisive in a particular case. Further, since weather was mostly regional, there was a corresponding regionality of rewarded or sanctioned behavior; and the weather around the Capital was thought to have particular relevance to what Heaven thought of the emperor's conduct.

This was only one view, of course. It was linked to the ethical rationality of the Confucian miracles that rewarded filial sons and daughters and faithful widows. Other contemporary views denied that immoral human behavior was necessarily the cause of disasters, which might be attributed to some particular deity, such as the God of the Sea in the case of coastal floods, and explicitly not to Heaven.¹ At other times, the meteorological benevolence of Heaven might be called into question, but troubles with the weather could just as well be seen as caused by the God of the Soil or by inappropriate relations between the *yin* and the *yang*, the dark and the bright cosmic forces. Trying to divine the year's weather in advance—and hence predicting the harvest—was a common peasant practice, but would have made little sense had it not been seen as predetermined.² The tension between moral and material causation as explanations for meteorological, celestial, and other phenomena was well developed in late imperial China. Heaven was also subtle. In past times, at least, It

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I would like to pay affectionate tribute to Professor Wolfgang Kubin, of Bonn University, whose original idea for a conference on the feelings of "ease" and "unease" in Chinese culture inspired me to look at the topic treated in this essay, though the conference theme was later changed.

¹ See Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present*, Aug. 1984, 104:111–152, rpt. in *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective* (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1996), pp. 302–351, esp. pp. 311–313, 323–324; and, on the Yangzi delta floods of 1696, Elvin, "The Bell of Poesy: Thoughts on Poems as Information on Late-Imperial Environmental History," in *Studi in onore di Lionello Lanciotti*, ed. Sandra M. Carletti, Maurizia Sacchetti, and Paolo Santangelo (Naples: Istituto Univ. Orientale, 1996), Vol. 1, pp. 497–523, on pp. 510–511.

² See Mark Elvin, *Changing Stories in the Chinese World* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 59–60, 52.

was thought to have responded to the self-sacrifice of sincere officials who had offered themselves to be burnt to death to end a drought with an immediate downfall of rain that had extinguished the pyre; but It could not be counted on to be coerced in this way. Insincere exhibitionism was risky.³

This essay sketches the history, from the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, of the officially promulgated Chinese belief in human responsibility for the weather, mediated through the responses of Heaven to humankind's moral and immoral behavior. So far as I know, this way of thinking has not been studied before. For reasons of space and the limitations of my own knowledge, I do not attempt to relate it either to the full range of ideas in the late imperial period about the causes of the weather or to the subtle and often self-conscious way in which the imperial government manipulated ideology in this period. The belief among human beings—not just Chinese—during past times in a linkage between weather and the response of supernatural powers to human actions, typically prayers and similar rituals, has been common; it can be found, for example, in medieval Europe.⁴ The late imperial Chinese case seems to have been distinctive for its structured rationality, interwoven with rationalized political opportunism, its bureaucratized generality, and its at least intermittent efforts to discover an empirically observable correlation between morals and meteorology. At moments, in an odd way, it was on the edge of attempted science.

ORIGINS, SOURCES, AND ATTITUDES

The roots of moral meteorology in China were archaic. The ode *Yun Han* declared of a drought: “The king says, ‘Alas! what guilt rests on the present men? Heaven sends down death and disorder, famine comes repeatedly.’” The section called “The Various Confirmations” in the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Scripture of Documents* lists rain, fine weather, warmth, cold, winds, and their timeliness (or lack of it) as “confirmations” caused by the good (or bad) conduct of the ruler. Under the Later Han dynasty (25–220), a natural disaster like drought could also be explained in terms of a lack of *yin* and measures taken to increase the power of this principle, as by sacrificing to mountains and rivers and freeing innocent prisoners. **Xiang** Kai could write at this time of “repeated frosts and hail and . . . heavy rains and thunderstorms” as being “caused by subjects who flaunt their personal power, and by punishments that are excessively cruel.”⁵ Late imperial ideas differed in their more thor-

³ See Mark Elvin, “The Man Who Saw Dragons: Science and Styles of Thinking in Xie Zhaozhe’s *Fivefold Miscellany*,” *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, 1993–1994, 25–26:1–41, on pp. 14, 32–35, 24.

⁴ See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate since the Year 1000* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), pp. 23, 47, 58, 209, for some Western European examples. For an illustration of government manipulation of ideology see Elvin, “Female Virtue” (cit. n. 1), pp. 322–323.

⁵ Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), p. 224; **Ruan** Yuan, ed., *San-shi jing zhushu* (The thirteen scriptures with notes and explanations) (Kyoto: Chubun shuppansha, 1971), Vol. 1: *Shangshu* (The scripture of documents), pp. 406–407; B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents, and Place in Chinese Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), p. 163; and Rafe de Crespigny, *Portents of Protest in the Later Han Dynasty* (Canberra: Faculty of East Asian Studies, Australian National Univ., with the Australian National Univ. Press, 1976), p. 23.

Table 1. Emperors of the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty

Title	Reign-title	Western Dates
Qing kingdom		
Taizu (Nurhaci)	Tianming	1616–1627
Taizong (Abahai-Huangtaiji)	Tiande	1627–1636
	Chongde	1636–1644
Qing dynasty		
Shizu (Dorgon regency, 1644–1650)	Shunzhi	1644–1662
Shengzu	Kangxi	1662–1723
Shizong	Yongzheng	1723–1736
Gaozong	Qianlong	1736–1796
Renzong	Jiaqing	1796–1821
Xuanzong	Daoguang	1821–1851
Wenzong	Xianfeng	1851–1862
Muzong	Tongzhi	1862–1875
Dezong	Guangxu	1875–1909
Sundi*	Xuantong	1909–1912

NOTE.—Chinese reign-dating takes the year of accession indicated above as the initial year of the new reign.

*Indicates abdication.

oughgoing moralization of the meaning of events and their insistence on the importance of the correct psychological or spiritual attitudes.

The main sources used here are the chapters on “Reverence for Heaven” (*Jing Tian*) in the so-called *Sacred Instructions* of the Qing emperors (see Table 1) from Kangxi to Daoguang.⁶ These pose several problems. The compendium is a digest, and recent scholarship has shown that access to the fuller original materials in the Qing archives is often essential for understanding particular cases.⁷ Different rulers had different personalities, hence different preferences and practices. During a long reign there could also be important changes. An example is Qianlong’s sponsorship of public ceremonies for rain by Daoists and Buddhists in the 1780s and 1790s.⁸ Some emperors probably engaged in moral posturing. We have also to bear in mind the caveat formulated by Rafe de Crespigny for an earlier age: “portents recorded

⁶ The entire collection is called the *Shichao shengxun* (The sacred instructions of ten reigns [1616–1874]), 99 vols. The first preface is from 1666, the last from 1880. There are no publication details, but dates of first printing of reign-period sections, where known, are appended to the list of abbreviations below. Each of these reigns has a full title in the general form “Da Qing X zong . . . Y huangdi shengxun,” where the ellipses stand for the emperor’s full formal title; they will mostly be referred to hereafter by the initials of the emperor’s reign-period. These initials are XH (Kangxi), YZ (Yongzheng) [1741], QL (Qianlong) [1799], JQ (Jiaqing) [1829], and DG (Daoguang) [ca. 1856].

⁷ Helen Dunstan, *Conflicting Counsels to Confuse the Age: A Documentary Study of Political Economy in Qing China, 1644–1840* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, Univ. Michigan, 1996).

⁸ E.g., QL *juan* 29, 2a, 5a, 7a. (A *juan* is a fascicle or chapter in a traditional Chinese book. The numbering of pages starts over with each *juan*. Pages are folded double, as the paper is too thin to be printed on both sides; the first side of the folded page is labeled “a,” the second “b.” Hereafter, references of this sort will be shown as, e.g., QL 29: 2a, 5a, 7a.) Private imperial enthusiasm for Buddhism and Daoism was of course of long standing. On Yongzheng and Chan Buddhism see Arthur Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Dynasty* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 918.

in the histories do not reflect the disorders of nature so well as they do the discontents and political disagreements of man.”⁹ The hypermoralizing Yongzheng may have been uneasy at the continuing belief that his succession was not legitimate and might thus have sought to emphasize both the closeness of his relationship with Heaven and his trembling humility before It.¹⁰ The selection of the materials included is also presumably biased: occasions when rain resulted from an emperor’s prayers are probably overrepresented as compared to occasions when it did not.

All we can say with respect to these problems at the moment is that the publicly announced beliefs that the documents describe would not have been set forth in imperial decrees, where the prestige of the emperor was both the guarantor of their authenticity and a hostage to their plausibility, had they not commanded a substantial measure of assent. Even seemingly trivial violations of ritual could have unfortunate consequences. In 1747 an official sacrificing at the Altar of Heaven had a headache and squatted down; for this irreverence he was at once impeached.¹¹ These doctrines were an ideological exoskeleton that helped hold the political system in place.

The phenomenon of moral meteorology also calls for the perspective of an environmental historian. Perhaps only in an area such as northern China could such a belief maintain a hold on people’s convictions. The reason is that the weather here in late imperial times, if the modern record may be taken as an approximate guide, was very variable over the short term. Probably only high short-term variability can provide enough short-term coincidences—such as apparent responses to prayers—to sustain belief in the moral meteorological mechanism. The weather in central and south China was more stable.¹²

At least two Qing emperors, Kangxi and Yongzheng, adopted a quasi-scientific attitude to the verification by observation of moral meteorological causality. Kangxi declared in an edict of 1678 that “if human affairs go amiss down here below, then the response of Heaven Above will be as swift as [that of] a shadow or an echo. How can one say that this has not been checked by examination?” On another occasion, when there had been an earthquake, he said, “We pondered hard within the palace on the causes of the disaster, and strenuously sought some way to dispel it.”¹³

Two types of problem thus arose. First, how were the moral causes of meteorological phenomena to be identified, especially as some celestial phenomena, notably eclipses, were predictable in advance? Kangxi, for example, maintained that, as a result of the rapacity of the officials, “the grieved and resentful energy-vitality [*qi*]

⁹ De Crespigny, *Portents of Protest* (cit. n. 5), p. 11. De Crespigny also draws attention to the possible use of portents as a “means of conducting debate at one remove” in Court circles (p. 5). For a likely example of moral posturing see Yang Qiqiao, *Yongzheng-di ji qi mizhe zhidu yanjiu* (The Yongzheng Emperor and his system of secret memorials) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shuju, 1981), p. 26.

¹⁰ On the succession question see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese* (cit. n. 8), pp. 916–917; Harold Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor’s Eyes: Image and Reality in the Ch’ien-lung Reign* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 232, 239; and Yang, *Yongzheng*, pp. 37–70.

¹¹ QL 28: 1a.

¹² See Robert B. Marks, “‘It Never Used to Snow’: Climatic Variability and Harvest Yields in Late-Imperial South China, 1650–1850,” in *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History*, ed. Mark Elvin and Liu Ts’ui-jung (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). On the weather in the region today see B. B. Chapman, in John L. Buck, ed., *Land Utilization in China* (1937; rpt., New York: Paragon, 1964), p. 112: “percentage deviation about the annual mean precipitation [is] . . . about 30 per cent for the Wheat Region and become[s] higher as the mean annual precipitation decreases.”

¹³ KX 10: 2a, 2b. (Here and throughout, translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

of the humble folk rises up to Heaven, and thereby causes floods, droughts, changes in sun, moon, stars, and planets, and uncanny events such as earthquakes and springs running dry.”¹⁴

Second, how was religious or philosophical sense to be made of Heaven’s behavior? To us it would seem that obvious questions were usually avoided. Why, in the circumstances just described by Kangxi, should Heaven have responded to the people’s woes by making them worse? Sometimes, however, the questions were at least raised, if not answered. Qianlong wrote a prayer in which he declared, “The fault is not with the officials, or with the common people, but with your minister [the emperor himself being the ‘minister’ of Heaven], and grows worse daily.” He went on to ask—rhetorically, no doubt—“How can Heaven Above, on account of the person of this one minister [that is, himself] cause the multitudes of common people to be afflicted by disaster?”¹⁵

There was an important tension between the spiritual, or moral, approach to the world of suprahuman powers and what may be called “religious technology.” This is evident from a decree issued by the Yongzheng Emperor in 1725 regarding the worship of a proscribed deity, **Liu Meng**:

Li Weijun, the governor-general of Zhili, memorialized last year:

There have been disasters from locusts everywhere in the metropolitan area. The locals who have prayed devoutly in the temples of General **Liu Meng** have not suffered harm from them.¹⁶

We were acutely pained at this. The practice of all matters that are of benefit to the livelihood of the people should be widely disseminated. The [recognized] spirits who ward off disasters are, moreover, listed in the sacrificial rituals. . . . The people of old likewise did not refrain from making use of the powers of spirits to drive away disaster caused by locusts.¹⁷

Chabina, the governor-general of the Liang-Jiang, has now stated in a memorial:

Those localities in Jiangnan that have erected temples to General **Liu Meng** have no disasters due to locusts, whereas in places that have not yet erected such temples they are not able to be free of locusts.

This shows the warped narrowness of Chabina’s views. He suspects that We rely exclusively on prayers as a method of dispelling catastrophes. Many of the other governors-general and governors have also said in their memorials that they have established ways to pray for rain or sunshine.

Now . . . disasters arising from floods, droughts, or locusts are due either to a defect in the government at Court, . . . or the chief officials in the area being unable to serve the state in a fair and correct fashion, . . . or else again the low moral quality of customs in some particular prefecture or county, where people’s heart-minds [*xin*] are false and treacherous, thereby causing the Dark Force and Bright Force to be thrown into confusion, so that disasters are numerous and repeated. . . .

When We heard that . . . rain and fine weather were occurring out of season, We were obliged deeply to reform Ourselves and reflect on the correction of Our faults, being attentive and fearful morning and evening, in the hope of regaining Heaven’s [benevolent] attention. You senior provincial officials and local officials, as well as common folk, should in like fashion be fearful, and examine your moral character. . . . As for

¹⁴ KX 10: 2b.

¹⁵ QL 28: 4b.

¹⁶ **Liu Meng** was a real general—although stories about him differ—who became a god. See the *Cihai* encyclopedia, one-volume edition, ed. **Shu** Xincheng *et al.* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1947), p. 190; and E. T. C. Werner, *Dictionary of Chinese Mythology* (1932; rpt., New York: Julian, 1961), pp. 257–258. Kangxi had prohibited official sacrifices to **Liu Meng**.

¹⁷ This is an indirect reminder that **Liu Meng** was not an authorized deity.

praying to the daemonic beings¹⁸ and spirits, *this is only a means whereby one attains a single-mindedly devoted heart-mind*. If one relies exclusively on prayer as a method of dispelling disasters, and pays no attention to fearfulness and moral self-examination, this is inevitably like “dredging a watercourse but neglecting the spring.” . . . We are in no wise deluded by the vulgar custom of shamanistic prayers to daemonic beings and spirits.¹⁹

The emperor accepts religious technology at a vulgar level in principle, provided that it is within imperially prescribed bounds, but tries to give it a higher meaning. It is not currying favor with a lesser deity that brings results, but having a heart whose moral qualities find favor with Heaven.

METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATIONS

The earliest decrees of Nurhaci, the founder of the Qing, were designed to establish that he was the Son of Heaven and aided by Heaven in his “great enterprise.” In 1626, however, he outlined the tenets of moral meteorology:

Although the example-defining phenomena of Heaven and Earth are lofty and remote from us, as well as difficult to analyze completely, yet their patterns and laws are uniform in their firm rectitude. Thus they are able to cause the movements of the sun and moon, the harmonious character of winds and rainfall, the maintenance of the proper sequence of the four seasons, and the transformation and nourishing of the multitude of living things, so that they grow ceaselessly. We have reflected on the reasons why those who have gone before Us have succeeded or failed. . . . *Those who act in a morally good fashion succeed; those who do not, fail.*

Huangtaiji (Abahai), his successor, who was uneasy at the Sinification and softening of the Manchus, spoke about the weather and natural disasters only in practical terms. In 1637, faced with the possibility of more poor harvests owing to a second cold spring in succession, he simply told the Board of Finance to mobilize the base-level military leaders, since “if plowing and weeding are done in good time, the crops will not be harmed by disasters.” In 1644, inveighing against addiction to alcohol among lower-level officers, which had in turn led to poverty among the rank and file, he asked if the latter were not just as much the subjects of the dynasty as their commanders, adding, “Does Heaven send down the ill-omened disasters of frost, hail, drought, and floods only [literally, ‘lopsidedly’] on them?”²⁰

Doctrinal moral meteorology did not appear in Qing decrees until 1653, with the Shunzhi Emperor. Faced with floods in the Capital, where houses had been destroyed and food and firewood had become expensive for poor people, he declared that this “has been caused by Our lack of virtue” and promised to reform himself. In 1656 he issued a longer edict that skillfully combined ritual self-indulgence with self-exculpation, shifting the blame onto his regent predecessor:

Since We assumed personal rule, We have been chilled with apprehension day and night. We have not dared to be slothful or neglectful, and have earnestly sought to be of a

¹⁸ Note that “daemonic” does not carry the implication of “demonic” that these beings are evil.

¹⁹ YZ 8: 2a (emphasis added).

²⁰ *Da Qing Taizu . . . Gao-huangdi shengxun* (Sacred instructions of Taizu of the Great Qing) (first preface, 1686), 1: 1b (emphasis added); and *Da Qing Taizong . . . Wen-huangdi shengxun* (Sacred instructions of Taizong of the Great Qing), 4: 4ab, 1: 3b.

quality befitting the heart-mind of Heaven. . . . Recently, however, there has been thunder in winter, snow in the spring, meteorites, and rainfalls of earth. One can see such communication everywhere, for untoward events do not occur for no reason. *They have all been caused by Our lack of virtue.* . . . There have now been successive years of floods and droughts, and the common people are having difficulty in making a living. This is because We have failed the expectations of Heaven Above of one who acts as a ruler. . . .

When Prince Rui [Dorgon] was regent, those who surrendered were massacred, rewards were distributed without restraint, the loyal and the good were driven from office, the greedy and the treacherous employed, and the wealth of the State recklessly wasted, so causing the common people to sigh with resentment. Everyone looked forward to the day when We assumed personal rule and would swiftly afford them succor. Six years have now passed, and although We have made every effort to pursue a renovation . . . disasters and ill omens are frequently seen. In this case We have failed the common people's hopes for good government.²¹

By implication, the weather is solely a matter between Heaven and the ruler.

The formulation of a more explicit and also wider-ranging theory of causation occurred in the Kangxi reign that followed. There were—in broad terms—two somewhat distinct modes. According to the first, the sincerity of the spiritual attitude with which Heaven was approached was critical for “reaching upward, and by affect attaining the heart-mind of Heaven.” A bad attitude could “summon” disasters from on high. On the other hand, cruel, ill-judged, or ill-motivated actions by the government and its officials generated resentful energy-vitality among the ruled, and this acted as a material force that “upward did violence to the harmony of Heaven.” These two modes may be illustrated by passages from three decrees.

1678:

We consider the pattern-principle [*li*] whereby Heaven and human beings call forth [reactions from each other] by affect to be solidly established. *If human affairs go awry in this world below, there will be corresponding changes in Heaven above.* . . . How can anyone say that this is unfounded? It is now the height of summer; the weather is hot and dry; rain-fed moisture is not easy to come by. . . . The sprouts of grain are hanging down dried out. . . . We have on this account directed our efforts toward reflecting upon the reformation of Our character, practicing abstinence, and devoutly praying for sweet and prolonged rain, Our hope being that Our quintessential single-mindedness will reach upward, and affect the heart-mind of Heaven.

1679:

There has now occurred a large and sudden earthquake. *The general explanation for this is that We are lacking in virtue . . . and that many of those whom We have employed to administer the government are not sincere or helpful.* Central and provincial officials, you are unable to purify your heart-minds, . . . you deceive your superiors, act in your personal interests . . . or behave wantonly and oppress the people, turning right and wrong upside down, . . . disrupting the harmony of Heaven above, and calling down this disaster. If you do not cleanse your heart-minds and free your thoughts of anxieties, and get rid of your accumulated habits, you will have no means whereby to manifest your touching of the feelings [of Heaven], and so causing auspicious omens.

²¹ *Da Qing Shizu Zhang-huangdi shengxun* (Sacred instructions of Shizu), 1: 4b (emphasis added). On Dorgon see Adam Lui, *Two Rulers, One Reign: Dorgon and Shun-chih, 1644–1660* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National Univ., 1989).

1679:

The difficulties faced by the common people in making a living have become extreme. . . . Although their circumstances have not yet been made clearly known, that families without food or clothing have been coming into the Capital in uncountable numbers to sell their children at cheap prices is surely proof enough. *This is all because the local officials have toaded to the higher officials, and imposed unauthorized levies on the common people.* The governors-general, provincial governors, and intendants pass on [these pickings] in the form of presents to those in the Capital. The great officials thus transfer the limited material output to which Heaven can give birth, and the easily exhausted wealth of the people, into the private pockets of greedy bureaucrats. *The aggrieved and resentful energy-vitality of the people of modest means reaches up to Heaven, thereby causing the summoning forth of such untoward events as floods, droughts, changes in the heavenly bodies, earthquakes, and the drying up of springs.*

The precarious credibility of the first mode was well appreciated by the Kangxi Emperor. Thus in 1708 he said that he had formerly prayed to the Supreme God for relief from drought. On the day that he went to the Altar of Heaven “it was immediately apparent that Our feelings had touched Him, for timely rain fell copiously, and We then knew that Our deep and lonely single-minded sincerity had found its reflection in Heaven Above.” When later there was another drought, his officials pressed him to pray again for rain, but he refused, saying: “The empire is now prosperous. We fear that our single-minded sincerity is not what it was on the previous occasion. . . . One ought not to engage in prayer light-heartedly.”²²

The emperor could thus use moral meteorological fulminations to put pressure on his officials, with the implication that if natural disasters were to recur they would be to blame and would be held responsible by the people. On the other hand, the prestige of the emperor could also be at risk if he were seen to have prayed and received no answer.

Theories of moral causation conflicted with the tradition of fatalism that saw the energy-vitality and the numerical parameters that characterized particular situations as bringing about natural disasters, which thus appeared “accidental” relative to human conduct. Morality-based theories also lost plausibility when a phenomenon could be predicted by calculation, as was the case for eclipses of the sun and moon, as some Chinese thinkers had realized for at least a century.²³

For Kangxi it was axiomatic that “the Way of Heaven is related to human affairs.” In 1682 he observed that “if a comet is seen above, there are always deficiencies in political matters.” He was aware, though, of the problem regarding eclipses, since in 1697 he responded to a prediction from the Board of Astronomy as follows:

Although human beings can predict solar eclipses in advance, yet, from ancient times, sovereigns have all regarded them as warnings to be fearful. The general explanation for this is that reforming human affairs is how one shows reverence for portents from

²² KX 10: 2a, 2a, 2b, 4a (emphasis added). On Chinese hypatotheism (the belief in a supreme or dominant, but not a unique, God) see Mark Elvin, “Was There a Transcendental Breakthrough in China?” in *The Axial Age and Its Diversity*, ed. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Albany: State Univ. New York Press, 1986), pp. 325–359, rpt. in Elvin, *Another History* (cit. n. 1), pp. 261–301, on pp. 263–264.

²³ On the predictability of eclipses see Elvin, “Man Who Saw Dragons” (cit. n. 3), p. 34. The controversy over “aethers [rendered here as ‘energy-vitality’] and numbers” and related issues is discussed in Elvin, *Changing Stories* (cit. n. 2), pp. 13–20.

Heaven. Only commonplace rulers ascribe them to energy-vitality and numerical parameters. Last year there were floods and earthquakes. Now there is going to be an eclipse of the sun. The significance of this is undoubtedly that it will be caused by a preponderance of *yin*. How can it be maintained that it is not connected with the doings of humankind?²⁴

He later tried to consolidate his position by arguing that the historical record showed that rulers who had treated celestial phenomena as warnings had “long enjoyed Great Peace,” while those who had treated them as “accidental” had fallen into decline.

THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF DOCTRINE BY YONGZHENG

The Yongzheng Emperor reiterated the formulas promulgated by his father but refined the philosophy behind them. He also seems to have introduced two novelties. The first was the concept of the *statistical* nature of moral meteorological phenomena, the second a rough-and-ready decision procedure for determining whether their causation was at a local or a national level. I shall return to this second innovation later in the essay.

Yongzheng’s central position is expressed in his response to a 1724 report from the provincial authorities of Jiangsu and Zhejiang on eruptions by the sea at the mouth of the Yangzi River and in Hangzhou Bay:

It is Our opinion that within Heaven and Earth there are only the pattern-principles of the Five Phases [of matter]. It is by these means that human beings are born, and all beings grow and are nourished. The controllers of the Five Phases are none other than the Dark Force and the Bright Force. The “Dark Force” and “Bright Force” are other names for the daemonic beings and the spirits.²⁵

. . . How does the Way of the Spirits establish correct doctrine? The general explanation is that *the activities of daemonic beings and spirits are, precisely, the pattern-principles of Heaven and Earth*. It is not possible that they should act in arbitrary fashion. *Everything, be it as small as a hillock or a mound, or immense as a river or great mountain, contains a spirit in it, which is its master. All of them must therefore be reverently believed in and honored with service.*

The sea is the destination to which the four great rivers flow. If it is thought to be unworthy of reverence, why did the [ancient] sovereigns Yao and Shun sacrifice to mountains and streams? . . . The common people of today are, in their ignorance, unaware of this pattern-principle. They often believe in sacrifices for which there is no justification, and have no faith in the Spirits Bright. They lack respect and blaspheme, so provoking a reprimand from Heaven.

Now, if good people are numerous, and bad people few in number, then Heaven will send down good fortune upon them. Even if there are a certain number who are not good, they too will receive Its protection. If bad people are in the majority and good people in the minority, then Heaven will send down punishments upon them. Even those who are good will be affected by Its calamities.

The authorities in Jiangnan have recently reported that the sea has flooded in everywhere in Shanghai and Chongming. The Zhejiang authorities have also reported that . . . the sea has broken through the defensive dikes, damaging the crops in the fields. . . . Although disasters from water pertain to Heaven-determined parameters, some cases may result from people living close to the sea, and enjoying a peaceful prosperity,

²⁴ KX 10: 3b. The Board of Astronomy might perhaps be more appropriately called the “Board of Astrology.”

²⁵ Note again that “daemonic” is not the same as “demonic,” there being no implication of evil in this alternative form.

failing to remember the efforts of the Spirits Bright to protect them, and so being insolent and blasphemous.

Now, reverence for the spirits is appropriate in principle; and it is moreover the way in which good fortune is to be pursued and disaster avoided. . . .

The state of mind of human beings is the state of mind of the spirits. The moving effect of a single thought is enough in itself to bring about good fortune. How could it only be that a single rural district, or a single family, receives its benefit? If every member of the common people can maintain his or her heart-mind in a state of reverent fear, it is certain they will obtain perpetual good luck and peaceful waves [on their sea].²⁶

And he ordered that the coastal population be made acquainted with this decree.

This was a synthesis of elements of archaic animism, ancient protophysics, the medieval neo-Confucian concept of pattern-principle, and aspects of the Lu-Wang school's vision of the interaction of the individual human mind with some sort of universal mind. Human beings and spiritual beings were conceived of as interacting in a mind-field whose components determined the actions of the corresponding material components of every entity in the universe. The nonhuman part of this mind-field was constrained in certain ways by its own inherent character and obliged to react in a specific fashion to a specific stimulus. Human beings, though subordinate, and required to be reverent and fearful, were the independent variable, possessing a sort of free will. Thus in 1729 Yongzheng said that "the rewards and retributions for good and for evil are all to be seen in the choices that a person makes for him- or herself. It is like sowing seeds. If one sows panicled millet, panicled millet will grow. It is also like striking an instrument: if one hits metal, there will be a metallic sound, and if a stone, then a stony sound."²⁷

In a decree of 1731 the emperor touched on the other side of this position, namely, that there were some things that it was impossible for Heaven to do:

Since the middle of the summer of this year, the fertilizing rains have not come to the Capital at the right season, and We are now very conscious of the drought. . . . Heaven Above has a loving heart-mind. It is in no way the case that there is some pattern-principle whereby It sends down disasters on humankind [undeservedly]. *The people of the empire bring floods, droughts, and famines on themselves.* . . . If any of them should chance to develop feelings of resentment, their offense is greater still. . . . If they have the audacity to feel resentment and hatred against Heaven [for Its just punishments and warnings], then a perverse energy-vitality will take form from the outside. Even if Heaven Above wishes to be lenient, this will be impossible.²⁸

Conversely, if the common people were without sin, they would never be placed in circumstances from which they could not escape.

The statistical nature of moral meteorological effects, which affect only groups of people, becomes intelligible in terms of the collective nature of the mind-field. It also solves an ancient religious problem: why the virtuous often suffer and the wicked often prosper in a world thought to be ruled by a supernatural justice.²⁹

²⁶ YZ 8: 1ab (emphasis added).

²⁷ YZ 8: 4b. For another statement of this see YZ 8: 6b.

²⁸ YZ 8: 6b (emphasis added).

²⁹ Job, ed. Victor E. Reichert, bilingual English and Hebrew text (London/Jerusalem/New York: Soncino, 1946), Ch. 21. An exception to the "group" effect of moral meteorology is lightning. See Elvin, "Man Who Saw Dragons" (cit. n. 3), pp. 32–34.

The collectivity notwithstanding, the Yongzheng Emperor had no doubt but that he himself was special:

The Lord of Men receives from Heaven a mandate of especial affection and keeps his attention on this every day. The affective contact that he makes is especially swift. . . . From the disasters of floods and droughts sent down in punishment by Heaven Above, We take an especial warning. . . . We therefore receive the scrutiny of God. If We make a request, then there is an immediate response.

For example, on the sixteenth of the third month of this year [1725] We perused a memorial from **Yi Duli**, the governor of the province of Shandong, informing Us that there had been little rain during the three months of spring. . . . We reverently informed the Spirits Bright, then devoutly prayed with a purified heart. We subsequently received a memorial from **Yi Duli** reporting that on the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth they had received a sufficiency of moisture from rain.

Q.E.D. He then quoted another case of his effective intervention and told the provincial officials to be sure to memorialize him about local floods and droughts. Otherwise, he said, “We may have no means of using self-examination and abstinence to bring back the heart of Heaven, so allowing these droughts and floods to become disasters.” He then modestly added that “this decree of Ours is in no respect Our styling Ourselves skilled at awakening the understanding [of Heaven], or a wish to vaunt Ourselves before the masses.” He was, he insisted, trying to make the point that “between Heaven and humankind, affect and response working in unfailing fashion, and the inhalation and exhalation [of energy-vitality in the form of aethers or pneumata] form a channel of communication.”³⁰

THE VEXATIONS OF VALIDATION

The doctrine that the weather and portents constituted a celestial-terrestrial system of communications led to difficulties once a systematic attempt was made to relate them to human behavior actually observed. The category of “accident,” elsewhere denied, had to be invoked in order to sidestep the implicit contradictions. Early in 1730 the Yongzheng Emperor was told by the Board of Astronomy that on the first day of the sixth month there would be an eclipse of the sun lasting 9 minutes and 22 seconds. He reacted by saying that he was “deeply fearful,” that the “feelings of the people” were perhaps still discontented, and that this was probably a warning from Heaven. After the event had happened he issued the following decree:

Sui Hede, Superintendent of the Imperial Manufactories at Nanjing, has stated in a memorial:

At the time of the solar eclipse on the first of the sixth month of this year, the weather in the Jiangning region was at first overcast and rainy. By the afternoon the appearance of Heaven had become clear and bright. Everything was visible. *There was no blemish on the light of the sun. Everyone in the area took this to be an auspicious omen.* I have especially sent in this memorial as congratulations.

We especially censured **Sui Hede** at this time in a rescript, saying: “This is in no way a matter for one in your position to memorialize about. . . .” The governor of Shanxi, Jueluoshilin, has also memorialized: “In Taiyuan and other places there were dense

³⁰ YZ 8: 1b. See also YZ 8: 5a for another comparison with breathing.

clouds and heavy rain. *The solar eclipse was invisible.*" We have likewise sent down a decree issuing a sharp rebuke.

In the past the disasters and good fortune that were the portents sent by Heaven were caused by the failure or success of the affairs of humankind. If Heaven Above bestows auspicious assistance, showing this by favorable portents, it is because It wishes people to know that which they must always strive to maintain, causing the good to be without deterioration. If It gives blame, making this apparent by unlucky omens, this is because It desires people to know what they must fear, and to conduct a painful moral examination of themselves in the future.

It may happen that those whom Heaven assists in auspicious fashion are proud, boastful, reckless, or indolent, whereupon their previous moral self-cultivation turns good fortune into disaster. Those who have been censured by Heaven may happen to act with prudent apprehension, reflecting on and rectifying their previous transgressions, whereupon they will transform disaster into good fortune. This is the pattern-principle of mutual communication between Heaven and humankind, based on affect and response, like breathing in and out. . . .

The solar eclipse . . . of 1730 was a sign from Heaven, to warn us as to what was right, to feel forever respectful fear. . . . How can it be right, because it was accidentally not seen clearly, to engage in exaggerated talk in order to praise Us? That the Shanxi region accidentally met with overcast and rainy weather cannot be generalized over the whole empire. As to Sui Hede's statement that in Jiangnan there was no blemish on the light of the sun, We may infer the reason. This occurred because, when the sun shone out after midday, it had already gradually regained its circular shape. The portion missing was only 20 or 30 percent. It was for this reason that the portent of its incompleteness was not apparent.

In years gone by when We experienced a solar eclipse of 40 or 50 percent, the light was so bright that it was hard to look up at it. Our Late Father [the Emperor Kangxi] led Us and Our brothers to the Qianqing palace, where we used a telescope, with doubled paper on all sides to block out the sun's light. After this we were able to look out and examine the missing portion. This We experienced in person. If the eclipsed portion did not reach the proportion [forecast], then the Bureau of Astronomy made a mistake in its calculations. How is it possible on this account to disregard the warning from Heaven? . . .

In 1719 there was a solar eclipse on the first of the first month. Our Late Father maintained a state of reverence in the palace, while particularly ordering Us and the other princes to proceed to the offices of the Board of Rituals there to perform devout worship. On this day it was overcast and cloudy, with a light amount of snow. [The eclipse] never clearly appeared. Our Late Father said in a decree to the officials of the Court: "Although the Capital has not seen it, in cloud-free places in the other provinces there will certainly be some who have witnessed it. . . ." We now see that there are some officials in the provinces away from the Capital who, on account of this year's solar eclipse not being visible there, have become overjoyed and written memorials of congratulation. This is a gross violation of [proper] pattern-principle.³¹

The emperor's assumption of the intrinsic predictability of the eclipse, for all that the Board of Astronomy may have gotten the details slightly wrong on this occasion, even while he was still firmly asserting that it was a deliberate moral warning from Heaven and that any local invisibility was accidental, shows how the introduction of a modest protoscientific component into the system opened up contradictions that he could only wish away by the force of authority. Yongzheng's successors understandably kept clear of such issues.

³¹ YZ 8: 5a, 5ab.

THE LOGIC OF LOCALITY

If the weather and other celestial and terrestrial phenomena were a response by Heaven to the moral behavior of local officials and local populations, it followed that variations of an appropriate sort should be detectable at a local level. Thus in 1732 the Yongzheng Emperor commented that floods, droughts, and famines in a particular locality could have many causes: bad government at the center, errors by local officials, “vexatious commands by the authorities,” or “degenerate customs among the local population.” For this reason, whenever the weather had been unseasonable, he had made efforts to remedy his own defects and had exhorted his bureaucrats to be fearful of Heaven’s warnings. However, he went on,

We have to take into consideration that the population of the empire is numerous, and that some are good but others perverse. *There may even be some so stupid and ignorant that they feel grief and resentment at famine and hardship.* Now there is nothing worse than people turning their backs on Heaven and pattern-principle by having a false heart-mind in normal times, and perverse habits, and then—when Heaven sends them signs as a warning—forgetting why Heaven Above bestows such chastisement, and regarding themselves as guiltless recipients of a reprimand.

Even if We reform Ourselves and offer prayers, We will not always be able, though acting on their behalves, to avert calamity from them or to render their punishment lenient. This is something that is quite evident whenever *We see, in departments and counties that are not far distant from each other, that the quantities of moisture provided by the rainfall are different*, and that some have good harvests and others dearth. We are by no means transferring the blame to the officials and the people of the empire, since if the officials discharge their duties in a defective manner, and the people’s *mores* are not of good quality, all this is [even so, ultimately,] Our fault [for not instructing them].

In 1734 he reiterated these points: “When Heaven Above sends down disasters, *It often demarcates localities* and distinguishes boundaries, sometimes of wide extent and sometimes narrow. . . . There are cases when an entire province has a harvest, but a single prefecture, or a single county, or even a single rural district or a single canton is alone afflicted by disaster. How could Heaven Above be generous or stingy as between them? . . . There has always to be a reason for the calling down [of a disaster].”³²

Yongzheng was explicit about the local nature of the responsibilities of officials: “If governors-general and governors are actually able loyally to embody the dynasty-state, and love the people with a sincere heart, they will always be able to summon the response of Heavenly harmony which will bestow auspicious omens on the territories under their command.” Likewise, he declared with ferocious specificity: “With provincial governors like *you* [names listed later], We are aware of the pattern-principle that localities [you rule] will never have good harvests. Heaven has sent down icy hailstones only on the areas under **Mang** Guli, **Chen** Shixia, and **Wei** Tingzhen, which is most uncanny and fearful.”³³

As he saw it, “the level of the harvest will correspond to the level of the governor-general and the governor”; he noted that when **Mang** Guli first went to Hunan there were floods and when he was transferred to Jiangxi drought. When Bulantai ruled

³² YZ 8: 7a, 7b (emphasis added).

³³ Yang, *Yongzheng* (cit. n. 9), pp. 27, 28.

over Gansu there were repeated reports of icy hailstones. "Such have been the responses," he said. "Remarkable!" A once-good official could also fade with age:

Consider **Tian** Wenjing: when he was governor of Henan, the strength of his heart-mind was amply sufficient, . . . and no one in the empire could match him. When later he was ordered at the same time to be governor-general of Shandong in addition to these other duties, the effects of age and illness had caused his spiritual power to decline . . . and errors and disasters subsequently appeared with great frequency in both provinces. Was not this a relatively clear proof [of the link between a state of mind and actual events]?³⁴

Yongzheng seems to have been developing moral meteorology into a weapon of psychological terror against both local populations and officials.

The case of Xuanhua prefecture shows how the general population could be condemned for having an adverse effect on the weather through bad behavior. In 1729 Yongzheng issued this decree to the Grand Secretariat:

We have already determined that the differences between the various localities in seasonality, and in rainfall and sunshine, are due either to defects in the government at Court, or to local officials failing in their duties, or else to the customs of the people being corrupt, and their heart-minds false and ungenerous. All of these are sufficient to rise up and disrupt the harmony of Heaven.

There were abundant harvests everywhere last year throughout the province of Zhili. Only three administrative subdivisions, Xuanhua, Huailai, and Baoan, missed being fertilized by the rains. *We thereupon entertained suspicions toward the officials and commoners of these localities, fearing there might be causes for them to have called this down upon themselves.* In the autumn, **Wang** Tang, intendant of Koubei circuit, came to the Capital and We . . . have now received a memorial from him:

During the summer and autumn last year there was a drought in Xuanhua, Huailai, and Baoan. In spring this year *every other place received auspicious snow*, but there was uniquely little of it in these localities. I left my area on official business during the second month, and observed that between the Jiming relay station and Xin Baoan there runs the old Huimin Channel, which irrigates several hundred *qing* of farmland. The bannermen³⁵ and civilian-commoners have been engaged in a lawsuit over it for more than thirty years without it being settled. I examined in detail the route taken by the channel, and first of all made clear the rights and wrongs of the matter. I then repeatedly proclaimed the imperial decree that was received last year, and urged the parties to repent. In an instant the bannermen and the commoner-civilians lauded the imperial compassion, coming to their senses at once. They shared out the channel and used it for irrigation jointly, putting an end forever to the grounds for their dispute.

On the first and second days of the third month there were actually successive falls of auspicious snow, covering the land to the depth of more than a foot on the level. . . .

. . . If in some particular district the people are suspicious of one another, and quarrel and start lawsuits, *the disrupted energy-vitality in people's breasts will cut through the energy-vitality of Heaven and Earth.* It will also become blocked up in this particular place, unable to flow freely or be at ease, so how can there not be cases when rainfall and sunshine do not come at the proper time?

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁵ The "banner" was the largest permanent unit of Manchu sociomilitary organization. Ethnic Chinese and Mongols who had given their allegiance to the dynasty prior to the conquest were also grouped into banners.

Having empirically “validated” his theory, the emperor then insisted, as usual, that he was not trying to push the blame onto the officials and the common people, since “rulers and people, superiors and inferiors, are basically a single entity.”³⁶

Later in the same year, when the situation had deteriorated again, he was not so magnanimous:

Last year [1728] there was a good harvest throughout the province of Zhili. Only the boundary regions between three areas subject to Xuanhua prefecture, namely Xuanhua [county], Huailai [county], and Baoan [department], to a width of about 40 *li*, missed their seasonal moistening by rain, and experienced a significant drought. We now [in the fall of 1729] have to hand a memorial from Shuxi, farming censor for Zhili, in which he says:

In one hundred and forty departments and counties in the metropolitan area . . . the harvest indices are 80 percent, 90 percent, or 100 percent. Only in the three localities of Xuanhua, Xining, and Weixian in Xuanhua prefecture was there damage inflicted by icy hail in the sixth and seventh months, which significantly hurt the crops.

. . . In the last two years several counties and a department have had the disasters of either drought or icy hail. *This is certainly because local government is defective and the customs of the local people impure.*

He called for strenuous self-rectification by both the local officials and the populace. But the prefecture was still not off the hook of imperial displeasure. Early in the fall of 1734 Yongzheng recapitulated the weather history of the place and then continued: “In the winter months [of 1723] everywhere else had auspicious snow, but this area had uniquely little, which was certainly caused by either the local civilian and military officials being unable to cooperate with each other, or by ignorant commoners disrupting the harmony of the [local] energy-vitality.” He noted that there had now been a drought in Xuanhua followed by damage to the crops from icy hailstones, “the biggest of which were the size of a fist or a chicken’s egg.” This was followed by moral meteorological analysis:

We are of the opinion that although icy hail commonly occurs in the northern regions, yet the disasters suffered by the villages of Xuanhua seem *uniquely severe*, and rarely seen in recent times. *It is evident that Heaven Above has been sending signs again and again to warn Xuanhua.* If by any chance the local officials or common peoples regard these as *accidents due to natural causation* then they are inferior people who do not know how to tremble in fear and reflect on their transgressions.

He ordered copies of his decree to be issued far and wide, so that the officials and people of Xuanhua would “every one of them reflect on their misdoings” so as to enjoy reasonable weather and good harvests in the future.³⁷

Reasonably enough, Yongzheng was happy to give credit to locals for propitious events. In 1729 he welcomed the alleged appearance of “congratulatory clouds” in Yunnan as follows: “This is because the high provincial officials, the bureaucrats and military officers, and the soldiers and commoner-civilians have in some areas touched the feelings of Heaven Above.”³⁸

³⁶ YZ 8: 3b (emphasis added).

³⁷ YZ 8: 4a, 7b, 7ab (emphasis added).

³⁸ YZ 8: 4a. The *Ruiyintu* (Chart of auspicious responses) describes “congratulatory clouds” as “five-colored mists.” See *Cihai* encyclopedia, one-volume edition, ed. Shu *et al.* (cit. n. 16), pp. 543, 643, which also notes (p. 228) that the *Shiji* (Historical records) characterizes them as “elegant, of multiple sorts, sinuous, and twisted round upon themselves.”

The Qianlong Emperor may have had reservations about the attitudes among officials induced by these obsessions of his predecessor. In 1735, the year of his accession, he issued a decree noting that even certain of the sage-emperors of antiquity had not been able to avoid droughts and floods. He continued:

Governors-general and governors have the weighty charge of provincial government laid upon them, and report on the percentile levels of the harvest. This is related to the fate of the people of the region concerned. It must be accurate and without falsification, so that one may discuss tax remissions and relief measures. . . . We pay constant attention to this matter, and have observed that in the reports of the harvest percentiles from the various provinces it sometimes happens that *these are determined only on the basis of an abundant harvest in a single place*, or that *in areas with an excess of rainfall the harvest in high-lying places has been taken as the standard*, while *in years of drought the standard is what has been reaped in low-lying areas*. There is no analytical breakdown between places with good and bad harvests. The sole purpose is to paint a deceptively pretty picture, so as to attract the reputation of summoning forth harmonious energy-vitality. . . .

You governors-general and governors, . . . how can you, because the harvest has been abundant, greedily treat the achievements of Heaven as your own? If a bumper crop is to be adduced as your own achievement, then, necessarily, We fear, a dearth must be accounted your fault. To fabricate the report of a good harvest is [also] to lack pity for the people's difficulties.

Meteorological religion intensified existing statistical malpractice.³⁹

Qianlong maintained the assumption of local responsibility, asserting in 1738 that "if there are repeated disasters and famines in a particular area, then, since the heart-mind of Heaven is compassionate and loving, this will most certainly not be a case of punishment being sent down without cause." He was even willing to blame his own lack of virtue when all of the metropolitan province received spring rain, except for the area immediately around the Capital. Nonetheless it seems that, as his reign progressed, this question of localized responsibility only intermittently interested Qianlong. In 1740, when the governor of Shanxi reported at midyear that all of his province had received satisfactory rain except for the two prefectures where the provincial capital was located, he received the rebuke that "since only the areas in which your prefectoral capital lies have not been able to be sufficiently moistened, it is abundantly clear that this was caused by [your] slack government."⁴⁰

The topic regained a momentary importance in 1758 with the problem of prolonged drought in Gansu. The governor and other officials were told to go on offering their prayers and also to clear off the backlog of outstanding legal cases. They were to exercise discretion in this regard, however, for "if in all cases [criminals] are forgiven, this is, on the contrary, not the way to summon down omens of good fortune, and to look up for fertilizing rain." Additionally, "they are to pay attention to *searching out every manner of person who is well-versed in praying for rain*, and find means to set them praying." This augmentation of virtuous behavior by religious technology reappeared in 1784 when Weihui, a prefecture in Henan, remained rain-

³⁹ QL 27: 1a (emphasis added). One conventionally says of an emperor that "he issued" a decree; but this avoids the question of how strongly he was advised to do so by his senior Court officials, and why.

⁴⁰ QL 27: 4b (a similar case is listed in 28: 7b), 27: 5a. On harvest percentile reports see the detailed treatment in Marks, "It Never Used to Snow" (cit. n. 12), pp. 422–435.

less after the rest of the province had been rained on during the eighth month. The emperor sent officials to investigate why this place had repeatedly suffered from droughts. Winter was now beginning, and

We fear that setting up altars and chanting [Buddhist and Daoist] liturgies in other provinces outside [Henan] would be a futile response of no import, and that it would not be able to touch the harmony of Heaven Above. Officials of the Frontiers Office should at once be dispatched to escort *the established Moslem prayermaker for rain Nizaer Bukule* to ride via the relay service to Henan province where he will reverently offer prayers in the hope that this will swiftly spread about a sweet fertilization.⁴¹

These two cases contrast with earlier moralism and seem part of a trend in the Qianlong reign toward an empty ritualism.

Qianlong's successor Jiaqing only once became explicitly concerned with the question of localization; this was in 1817, near the end of his reign. Late in the summer of that year he decreed to the Grand Council:

Fertilization from rain has been deficient this year throughout Zhili, but *the areas under the jurisdiction of Shuntian [around the Capital] have been the most severely affected*. . . . We have now especially composed *Some Words on Our Hope for Rain and Reflections upon Our Transgressions to Recount Our Anxious Concern*. Let it be issued to [Governor-general] **Fang** Shouchou, Provincial Treasurer **Yao** Zutong, Provincial Judge Changbi, and the various intendants and prefects for them to read. Each of them ought to examine himself with his hand on his heart.

Heretofore the pattern-principle of [human] affect and [Heavenly] response has been unfailing time and again. If the said provincial officials had managed affairs diligently and in a completely public-spirited manner, all cooperating with each other, there would not have been a case such as this in which every neighboring province has a rich harvest, and only in this province is there drought as a portent of warning.⁴² The wheat harvest has already proved deficient. If the great fields are not sown broadcast in good time, there will be no supply of food for the humble folk.

He ordered them to take practical measures, such as destroying locust larvae, and observed that "whenever a locality suffers from disaster of dearth, worthless people harbor thoughts of taking advantage of this occasion to fan confusion," a prospect that required preventive measures. He concluded that it was to be hoped that diligent fulfillment of duty by all of the officials might "regain the [kindly] intentions of Heaven, but that if they continued to neglect the people's livelihood and disregard his instructions, "good conscience would be destroyed" and Heaven's help prove unattainable.⁴³

By the beginning of the winter he had found a different explanation that exonerated the provincial officials:

The quality of the harvest in the metropolitan area and the other provinces is of the acutest relevance to the people's livelihood. That across the width of the four seas [that is, in China] there can be immense disparities between harvests, and that rainfall and

⁴¹ QL 28: 4a, 29: 1b-2a (emphasis added).

⁴² It may be of interest that this sentence is contextually established as a counterfactual conditional, a grammatical form sometimes thought not to exist in Chinese. The structure here is "*Ruo . . . wei you . . . zhe*."

⁴³ JQ 14: 8a.

sunshine are not alike, is because *the pattern-principle of affect and response between human activities and the weather from Heaven is assuredly one that is manifestly unfailing*. Whenever one sees provincial officials putting government in good order, and the people's customs being of a good and pure nature, again and again the sunshine and the rain are seasonally appropriate, and the harvests full. But if it so happens that the officials are greedy and corrupt, and the temper of the people abrasive, then perverse energy-vitality will form itself into portents, which is enough to cause disasters. If one reflects and examines, this can be substantiated in case after case.

In the summer of this year the area near the Capital suffered from drought. After repeated prayers had been offered, there were still no copious rains. We gave this matter anxious thought from dawn till dusk, but were unable to determine the reason. Subsequently, in the seventh and eighth months, the serious treason of Haikang and Qingyao came to light, while **Xiao** Zhen's greedy and filthy pursuit of his own personal interests, which had given him an evil reputation, was destroyed by being discovered. All of these have been judged and punished. In the ninth month there were repeated downpours of sweet enrichment. The entire area around the Capital has had excellent moistening.

The explanation for this is that Haikang and Qingyao were using the descendants of the Imperial House to liaise with rebels, and that **Xiao** Zhen was using his position as an official in charge of morals to throw the legal framework into disorder. Both of these were cases of the major destruction of the constant pattern [of good government]. It may perhaps have been on this account that the Azure Above sent warnings. Now that subversion has been extirpated and harmonious sweetness been forthwith summoned down, one has a deep insight into the pattern-principle of affect and response between humankind and Heaven. Should we not all be warned and affrighted?!⁴⁴

Weather that had earlier seemed a rebuke to the established order could be dexterously reinterpreted to serve as a proof of its legitimacy.

The localized character of moral meteorological effects vanishes as a major theme after this time, though there were reappearances. In 1851 the Xianfeng Emperor told the governor of Zhejiang that the abundant rain in Hangzhou prefecture was "all due to you high officials managing affairs with heart-minds of single-minded sincerity, and by affect summoning the harmony of Heaven." He did the same the next year.⁴⁵ Otherwise his only "local" concern was with drought at the Capital.

During the Tongzhi reign that followed, the focus of moral meteorological decrees was on the political center: there was even an element of what might be called "anti-localism" in that the entire bureaucracy could be called on to use its combined resolve and self-renovation to remedy local problems. In 1862 the "Throne" (the new emperor being a baby) issued a decree to the Grand Secretariat:

The Nian rebels and the Moslem miasma are still not pacified. Huai'an, Yangzhou, Lushou, and Fengyang in Jiangnan, and Jiang-Han customs barrier, Qizhou, and Huangzhou in Hubei province are all suffering from floods. We ought to double the depth of Our apprehensive fear.⁴⁶ The Court has sought with diligence from dawn till dusk [for relief], not daring to take its ease to the slightest extent. Officials *at the Capital and in the provinces* should each of them strive to make plans and bestir themselves, cooperating in a spirit of fearfulness and moral self-examination.

Locality no longer had any significance. The same attitude is to be found in a decree of 1870:

⁴⁴ JQ 14: 8b.

⁴⁵ Wenzong . . . *Minxian-huangdi shengxun* (The sacred instructions of the Xianfeng Emperor), 12: 1a, 2a.

⁴⁶ This could also legitimately be read as "They ought . . . their apprehensive fear." I have preferred the reading given in the main text because of what follows.

The provinces of Zhili, Shandong, and Hunan and Hubei have had floods, droughts, and deficient harvests. The originating cause of all these disasters is the Azure On High sending warnings, which inspires the deepest dread. . . . Officials great and small, *both in the Capital and in the provinces*, ought likewise, each of them, to vow public-spirited loyalty, . . . vigorously break the habits of holding back for fear of giving offense, and of eagerness for position, . . . so that ruler and officials may mutually admonish each other, so as to receive the favor of Heaven.

Interestingly, in 1871 another decree, on the problems arising from prolonged rains, observed that Shuntian, Baoding, Tianjin, and Hejian had “a low-lying and swampy topography,” with the implication that *this*, rather than moral shortcomings, was why they were in difficulties. The underlying cause of the disasters was, however, still seen as “conflict between the *yin* and the *yang*,” which had primarily to be remedied by making sure, both at the Capital and in the provinces, that no innocent persons were lingering in jail.⁴⁷

The sense of local moral meteorological specificity thus seems to have evaporated by this date.

IMPERIAL THEORIZING AND ITS USES

It may be asked to what extent the emperors of the middle Qing period *believed* in the meteorological religion described here. In the case of the Yongzheng Emperor (Shizong), at least, extended affirmations of his convictions are to be found scattered through the *Sacred Instructions* in various contexts. They are not confined to the chapters on showing respect for Heaven. Thus they occur in decrees on “sagelike virtue,” “loving the people,” “giving instruction to officials,” “extending the avenues of communication [to the emperor],” “being cautious about punishments,” “emphasizing farming and sericulture,” “consolidating customs,” “tax exemptions and relief,” and so on. Certain comments hint at the depth of the emperor’s concern with the weather. “In the middle of the night,” he says, “We repeatedly get up to look out at the appearance of the clouds, so as to divine fine weather or rainfall.” In the first year of his reign he ordered several hundred people awaiting trial to be released and observed afterward that “in not more than three or four days there were heavy falls of welcome rain,” adding that “no one says that this was a contingent conjuncture of events, or that it happened as the result of accident.”⁴⁸

Underlying this was his doctrine of universal intersensitivity:

The emptiness that is before our faces is indeed August Heaven. That upon which we walk, and whose soil we shovel, is indeed the Great Earth. Just as for a human being’s body of seven [Chinese] feet, if one pulls on a single tiny hair, then the whole frame will feel pain and irritation, how can a person placed between Heaven and Earth give rise to a single thought, or effect a single action, without Heaven and Earth being in mutual contact with him or her, just as breath passes in and out of us?

Yongzheng wanted local officials to engage every year in ritual plowing, as he did, “so they know how hard husbandry is, and understand the bitter lot of farmers.”

⁴⁷ *Muzong . . . Yi-huangdi shengxun* (Sacred instructions of the Tongzhi Emperor), 11: 1b, 4a, 4b (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ *Shizong shengxun*, 22: 2a, 24: 1b. I have not been able to check in the same way on the reigns of the Kangxi, Qianlong, and Jiaqing emperors.

When the minor miracle occurred of rice *regrowing* shoots after being cut, it was because local officials and people had touched the sensibilities of Heaven. Everything was sensitive to everything else. Yet, often enough, obvious connections were not made. The customs of Fujian were notoriously violent, yet no mention was made of this in 1726 when the province had excessive rains and rice prices soared.⁴⁹

Virtue was, on exceptional occasions, rewarded. In 1729 the emperor decreed:

We have also received a memorial from the governor-general, governor, provincial treasurer, and provincial judge of Guangdong, in which they state that the rains this year have been well distributed, that the various kinds of grain are coming smoothly to maturity, and that they calculate that the price of rice throughout the province has come down from 8 *qian* to 5 or 6 *qian* [per picul], which is something that happens rarely in the province. We were delighted at this news. *This has come about because the people of the province concerned have heart-minds that are pure, good, loyal, and stripped of any levity.* This has caused Heaven Above to send down Its help, bestowing rich crops. For the year 1730 Shandong [discussed earlier in the decree] and Guangdong are to be excused 400,000 ounces of silver of land and capitation tax to reward the goodness of the local officials and people.⁵⁰

Imperial brownie points. This section of the decree is also interesting in that it is one of the few in which moral meteorology was applied to south China. Perhaps the weather was too equable there, and too reliable, apart from typhoons along the coasts, as well as too distant from the moral center of gravity in the Capital, for the theory to seem so persuasive as it did in the less predictable north.

The brownie-point approach could also bring difficulties. In 1729 the emperor noted how the able rule of Tian Wenjing in Henan province had for a number of years been attended by excellent harvests. Now, *per contra*, there had been a bad one. Concerned not to cast doubt on the qualities of one of his most capable officials, the best the emperor could do was to comment, "Now, [Our] excusing the people the payment of the principal tax on account of the dearth is to be taken in the sense of providing relief for the poor and showing of pity for those in difficulties."⁵¹ He felt obliged to sidestep the evident ideological trap as best he could.

The majority of the decrees in the *Sacred Instructions* are nonetheless practical. (Thus seawalls should be rebuilt in stone so as to prevent further worries.⁵²) What determined why, on any particular occasion, the emperor responded in the language of meteorological religion or in the language of straightforward administrative efficiency?

The same event could evoke both responses on different occasions. On 5 and 6 September 1724 a typhoon smashed the seawalls in a number of places along the coast of southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang. On 1 October (*jiashen*) the emperor issued the decree translated above at note 26, suggesting that the sufferers might have been in some measure responsible for their own misfortune because of their moral defects. Ten days later (*jiawu*) he noted that he had already ordered relief in a secret decree, as the matter was urgent.⁵³ A further twenty-seven days

⁴⁹ *Shizong shengxun*, 12: 5a; 25: 1b, 4a; 26: 5b–6a; 28: 3a.

⁵⁰ *Shizong shengxun*, 29: 1b (emphasis added).

⁵¹ *Shizong shengxun*, 29: 1a.

⁵² *Shizong shengxun*, 26: 4b.

⁵³ *Shizong shengxun*, 28: 2a.

later, on 6 November (*xinyou*), he promulgated an unideological decree on this event, followed by another the day after. The sequence seems surprising, but the contents of the 6 November document confirm that there had indeed been earlier decrees of a practical nature:

The fields and cottages of the common people have been inundated. Our thoughts are with them in the keenest compassion. *We have already issued decrees to the local officials of Jiangsu and Zhejiang to undertake relief measures* as a matter of urgency, and to comfort them, so that those smitten by disaster do not become displaced persons. If the breached seawalls are not quickly repaired, it is to be feared that the salt water will enter the inland waterways, which will make difficulties for farming. You governors-general and governors ought to inspect the damage in each place, estimate the cost of the labor and material for the dikes, mobilize the principal tax funds,⁵⁴ and quickly set the work in motion so that the coastal people who have lost their lands can survive these difficulties with food supplied by the daily wages from this task.

The decree issued the following day provided for the importation of rice from other provinces at official expense.⁵⁵ It is clear from the first of these two documents that the *Sacred Instructions* does not always contain the complete set of official responses on a given occasion, since the decrees to local officials referred to are not included in the compendium. The seemingly odd sequence—moralizing first, help afterward—was thus not necessarily what actually happened. But the basic point is that the two responses could exist in parallel, and on occasion in different documents, with respect to a single event.

It seems likely that recourse to moral meteorological language was more than usually common on two sorts of occasion of rather different natures. The first was a shortage of rain, since drought seems to have been felt to be Heaven's distinctive way of showing Its displeasure and rainfall the distinctive mark of Its response to sincerity. The second was when there was no easy direct way of sanctioning undesirable attitudes and behavior, especially if this behavior was diffuse and collective, hence in practice elusive, even though real enough.

Examples of the first type are too numerous to be worth listing, but a somewhat curious instance may be found combined with the second type in a decree of 22 July 1730, where the unhappy consequences of badly targeted imperial praying and an immodest collective psychological attitude are offered as complementary possibilities for the causes of flooding:

We have recently noticed that the various localities of the metropolitan area and the provinces have reported that fertilization by rain has to a substantial degree been well distributed. The wheat shoots are likewise in the category of a bumper harvest. Our heart-mind has been deeply relieved. We have heard, however, that in Jiangsu and Zhejiang the rains have been somewhat heavy, and that the grain in the fields has been inundated to a disastrous degree. We have bent Our thoughts to deducing the cause for this, and it has occurred to Us that as spring moved into summer this year the fertilization by rain in the Capital did not take place in the proper season. We offered prayers for the metropolitan area, and Our anxious solicitude reached out to the areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Once the Capital had received rain *Our heart-mind concentrated on*

⁵⁴ See E-tu Zen Sun, *Ch'ing Administrative Terms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), no. 417.

⁵⁵ *Shizong shengxun*, 15: 2a, 2b.

requests on behalf of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, causing the situation where the south had a large quantity of precipitation. We were not informed of this, but were [still] apprehensive that the rain there was but little. For this reason We issued repeated decrees to the officials of the outer provinces. Now, when you [officials] are aware of a certain degree of flooding or drought you must immediately submit a memorial to Us about it, precisely for this reason. The south had already had extensive rains at a time when Our heart-mind was still continuing to pray [for rain there]. *Might it have been that it was this attitude of mind of Ours that caused Heaven Above to bestow an excessive quantity of rain, and Zhejiang province to have places that were flooded?*

He then switched to a second hypothesis:

Examining the “Great Plan” [in the *Scripture of Documents*], it says that *arrogance is punished by continual rain*. Zhejiang province is commonly known as a place where civilization has reached an extreme degree. In the metropolitan examinations this year We bestowed Our favor on seventy candidates, but all three of those who attained the First Rank were scholars from Zhejiang. Perhaps the heart-minds of the scholars [of this province] have not avoided [producing] the energy-vitality of self-glorification. As the “Great Plan” says, arrogance causes the portent of continual rain. We cannot help but be suspicious when We fathom these signs of Heaven and the human actions now before our eyes.⁵⁶

The second characteristic use of moral meteorology—namely, to put some corrective pressure on a psychological attitude that the emperor felt to be undesirable—may be found in a decree of 1732. Yongzheng starts by observing that “the ancients used to say that harmonious energy-vitality caused good fortune whereas perverse energy-vitality caused untoward events. This is the ultimate pattern-principle of mutual influences between Heaven and humankind.” He then comes to the specific problem, quite transparently exploiting the meteorological opportunity once the actual problem had in fact passed:

In summer last year and in spring this year there was drought at the Capital. Slight earthquakes still continued. We were apprehensive and fearful, reflecting on Our faults and meditating on Our transgressions. Fortunately We appealed to the compassionate favor of Heaven Above, and prolonged rain was bestowed upon us. No great disaster has been occasioned but there must certainly have been a cause for the signs of warning.

We have concentrated Our thoughts on examining the bannermen. In one or two matters *there seems to be energy-vitality that has been repressed and is not comfortable, so in upward fashion causing Heaven to be angry*. We cannot be lenient with Ourselves, and each of the many concerned ought likewise to reflect upon him- or herself.

When armed force was used against the Zunghars,⁵⁷ generals and soldiers from the Eight Banners were sent on distant duty to an area outside [the empire]. Their fathers and mothers, wives and children, either looked at each other in grief within their families or else thought that the Court had no compassion for its service-men. Do they not realize that, as regards this unavoidable undertaking, the Zunghar bandit-barbarians are cunning and cruel, . . . that they molest the Mongols who have become our feudatories, and cast eyes on our northwestern frontiers? . . . In no way are We fighting to the bitter end or prolonging hostilities in the desire to expand Our territory, exhausting Our soldiers in the Gobi and the wastelands. . . .

The men of Our eight Manchu banners have constantly in the past had heart-minds that were loyal and public-spirited, and a heroic and daring energy-vitality. When your

⁵⁶ *Shizong shengxun*, 2: 3b (emphasis added).

⁵⁷ Often also written “Sungars”; see Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese* (cit. n. 8), e.g., pp. 9–10.

grandfathers and fathers followed the imperial founder in through the frontier passes, they all considered the sacrifice of their lives to be glorious, and death of old age beneath the window to be shameful. You now enjoy peace and have long become habituated to banquets and taking your ease, and merely on account of a few years of campaigning have given vent to grief and resentment. . . . Even [your] fathers and mothers, wives and children, ought to be conscious of great public obligation, suppress personal and selfish feelings, setting their minds on what is far-reaching and of major importance. Then will single-minded sincerity in loyalty to the ruler and repayment of favors to the dynasty-state certainly receive the regard of Heaven Above, and Its silent granting of good fortune and assistance.

It should be recalled that in 1731, the previous year, the imperial forces under Fudan had been severely defeated by the Zunghars. It is not surprising that banner morale was low. The second part of the decree continues in the same vein to inveigh against the financial malpractices and extortions of the bannermen's leaders. It is likely that the supernatural was felt to be a useful additional weapon in combating, in the first case, a diffuse disaffection (namely, arrogance) and, in the second case, deeply rooted bad attitudes as well as abuses that may have related to the power struggle between the Yongzheng Emperor and three of the banner leaders.⁵⁸

Other examples of moral pressure exerted through meteorological doctrine are the emperor's efforts to stop officials engaged in hydraulic works from squabbling with each other and to dissuade the inhabitants of Shandong from misbehaving in the wake of their suffering from floods:

[1] The works on the seawalls in Zhejiang and Jiangsu are of the greatest importance for the livelihood of the people. We . . . have not grudged to spend vast sums of money to plan for the long-lasting security of numerous living beings, . . . but We did not anticipate that the officials charged with the management would each of them harbor personal and selfish opinions, be at odds with each other, and so cause perverse energy-vitality to upward disturb the harmony of Heaven, and for there to be a storm surge in the sixth month that broke the dikes. Even if we now make every effort to effect repairs, it is still not certain whether or not it will be possible to keep out the autumn tides. The work of constructing a stone seawall is immense. If the officials do not change their degraded habits but carry on as before, on what can this great undertaking depend?

Accusing the officials of being of defective character thus also provided the emperor with a scapegoat when the engineering proved inadequate.

[2] [The people of Shandong] must not, on account of having lost their property and livelihood, act in a depraved fashion, nor must they, on account of their hardships, have heart-minds that cherish resentment. If they can reverently obey Our instructions, then *their energy-vitality, at ease and compliant, will of itself summon forth by affect the harmony of Heaven*, which will bestow on them the blessing of security.⁵⁹

The implied threat was that if the weather turned unfavorable again and caused damage, those with bad attitudes would be to blame.

⁵⁸ *Shizong shengxun*, 20: 4b (emphasis added). See also Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 264, 916–917. The Eleuths, Fudan's opponents, constituted the dominant tribes in Zungharia.

⁵⁹ *Shizong shengxun*, 27: 5b, 29: 3b. See also Mark Elvin and Su Ninghu, "Man against the Sea: Natural and Anthropogenic Factors in the Changing Morphology of Harngzhou Bay, circa 1000–1800," *Environment and History*, Feb. 1995, 1:3–54, esp. pp. 42–44.

CONCLUSION

In formulating a provisional assessment, we have to balance an evident opportunism in the use of moral meteorology on the part of the emperor with the acknowledgment that it would not have been a useful weapon in his armory of political tactics had it not appealed to a stratum of real belief both in the elite and in the populace. It is also hard to imagine that, with at least a part of his mind, he did not also give some credence to it. Yongzheng's officials were aware of his fascination with auspicious portents and served up a steady diet of reports of multiheaded stalks of corn, lucky mushrooms, and sightings of "phoenixes"—one of them allegedly seen by a thousand people—and "unicorns"—the last of which came complete with its own portrait.⁶⁰

He was also aware that they were aware, and so was generally skeptical of these reports. A Shandong "unicorn" was rejected because the northern weather had been too bad for it to be credible and because he had had to use the army in the northwest. An "auspicious" piece of silk woven directly by the silkworms themselves—or so it was said, the emperor remaining skeptical—was dismissed with the remark that the occasional favorable omen like this was not enough to protect people from hunger.⁶¹ The only omen that mattered for him, he declared regarding the unicorn with the portrait, was the well-being of the people, and that was caused by the quality of the polity attracting the harmonious accord of Heaven. One suspects he enjoyed the ideological luxury of both having these omens and then—with ostentatious virtue—rejecting most of them. As de la Rochefoucauld says somewhere, "Le refus de la louange n'est que le désir d'être loué deux fois."

The fascination is palpable in his reaction to a report in 1727 that the Yellow River had flowed clear. This was an omen he accepted, though stressing both that it owed much to the help of his late imperial father and that it must have been collectively merited.⁶² A stele was set up with an inscription on it to commemorate the event, every detail being listed:

[Various officials] memorialized that, following the breaking up of the ice, the *Yellow River ran clear* from Fugu county in Shaanxi province, passing through Shanxi, Henan, and Shandong provinces to Taoyuan in Jiangnan, being limpidly translucent.

It was first observed in Shaanxi and Shanxi on 30 December 1726 (*yichou*), and continued until 3 February 1727 (*gengzi*).⁶³ All in all it lasted thirty-six days.

In Henan and Shandong it first appeared on 31 December 1726 and lasted until 31 January in the following year, a total of thirty-one days [*sic*].

In Danxian in Shandong it was likewise clear from 1 January to 8 January,⁶⁴ and on 9 January it was so lucid that one could see the bottom.

On the twelfth day of this same month, however, it gradually returned to its old

⁶⁰ E.g., *Shizong shengxun*, 1: 3b, 6a (corn); 2: 4b–5a (mushrooms); 2: 2a ("phoenixes"); 2: 5a ("unicorns").

⁶¹ *Shizong shengxun*, 2: 4ab, 1a.

⁶² The report is noted in *Shizong shengxun*, 20: 1b, for 8 Jan. 1727.

⁶³ There is a mismatch of one day in these dates, according to the *Liangqian-nian Zhong-Xi li duizhao biao* (A Sino-Western calendar for two thousand years, 1–2000 A.D.) (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu-guan, 1961). The cyclical characters indicate 31 Dec. and 4 Feb. Note that here, exceptionally, I have converted the Chinese lunar-calendar dates into Western dates to make the pattern easier to follow.

⁶⁴ This is according to cyclical character dates, which may therefore be one day misaligned, as indicated above.

[muddy] condition. This was fourteen days [*sic*] in all. In Jiangnan it began on 7 January⁶⁵ and lasted until 14 January, seven days in all.

The general conclusion is that *the clarity came from above* [i.e., upstream] and moved down, and that *the return to its old former condition came from below* [i.e., downstream] and moved upward. This was the pattern in time and space.

The emperor's own comment on this flattering phenomenon (as indicated by the italicized phrases, which suggest his own primacy in the matter), apart from ordering the promotion of the officials concerned by one rank, was as follows:

Now, once Heaven has produced [rain-]water, the energy-vitality of Heaven and Earth flows through it. The Yellow River is moreover designated the ancestor of the four great rivers, and corresponds to the Milky Way above. For its clear and peaceful flow to constitute an auspicious portent, a cooperative reaction to the harmony of Heaven must come from somewhere. The *Scripture of Songs* says: "King Wen ascends and descends [in Heaven], assisting at the left and the right hand of God." What this says is that King Wen and Heaven shared the same virtue, and that his sons and grandsons received good fortune from him. *Our Late Imperial Father has accompanied the magical efficacy of Heaven in being manifest on high. His affectionate concern and guidance are deep and substantial.* We have received this auspicious omen with awe.⁶⁶

Decoded, the message is simple: the Yongzheng Emperor, still haunted by the accusation that he was a usurper, was seizing on this unusual behavior by the Yellow River to prove his legitimacy by maintaining that his late father, the Kangxi Emperor, was showing his approval from the other world. We are back with opportunism, but—as I have said already—Yongzheng must have believed that many people would be persuaded by this tortuous nonsense. Without an audience who can be convinced, there is no sense in making such pronouncements. Indeed, there is a risk of mockery.

His own real thoughts on the matter remain a mystery.

⁶⁵ The day cycle again indicates a day later.

⁶⁶ *Shizong shengxun*, 1: 5a–6a (emphasis added). For the quotation from the *Scripture of Songs* see Karlgren, *Book of Odes* (cit. n. 5), p. 185: "Wen Wang."