Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor,
Bondservant and Master

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Preface

This book deals with the life of the Ch‘ing official Ts‘ao Yin (1658–1712), but it is not a biography. It attempts to relate his life to the institutions of his time, and to give equal recognition to those institutions. Thus what is of importance to me is not so much where Ts‘ao Yin was on a certain day, or what he felt at a certain time, but what it means when we read in the official Chinese histories that he was a bondservant, a textile commissioner, a salt censor. The problem of what he did is of course considered; but so are the problems of what he might have done—or more exactly what the state officials did do, and what his contemporaries in the same offices did do.

The span covered is greater than Ts‘ao Yin’s life alone. The story starts with his great-grandfather in the days of Manchu consolidation, and ends with his grandson in the reign of the Ch‘ien-lung Emperor (r. 1736–96). Not surprisingly, since the Ts‘ao family were bondservants of the Manchu rulers, their story is a sharp reflection of the changing faces of the Ch‘ing Emperors and their modes of expression. The background to the study is the Ch‘ing dynasty itself. Though there is no hope in a work of this compass of capturing all the change and vitality of the first century of Manchu rule, enough should emerge to show at least the variety.

Ts‘ao Yin’s great-grandfather was captured in the time of Nurhaci (1559–1626), and the new bondservant companies in which he was enrolled were one of the organizational forms developed by that tough and wily ruler, who had first consolidated his own power and then, in 1616, declared himself Emperor T‘ien-ming of the Ch‘in dynasty, staking his claim as the leading contender for the mandate still held by the Ming. Ts‘ao Yin’s grandfather started his career under Ahsai (1592–1643), self-proclaimed Emperor Ch‘ang-te of the Ch‘ing dynasty (1644), while the Manchus, still held north of the Great Wall by the Ming, were studying and practicing Chinese bureaucratic techniques. But the Manchus conquered China in 1644 very much as Manchus, and used many of their own control devices. This we can see
heaven and should do all things in accordance with the right. How can I shelter a Manchu alone? \(^{143}\)

And he had attempted to forestall criticism by preaching unity:

Manchu officials shall not say that I am partial to the Chinese. My heart is directed to public, not selfish, considerations.\(^{144}\)

At this level the K'ang-hsi Emperor had to speak as one beyond all law, as one who simply knew, by virtue of his office:

I have reigned for over fifty years and am well versed in all matters; never have I made any distinctions between the Mandchus, the Mongols, the Chinese bannermen, and the Chinese people. . . . In what has been discussed, right and wrong have been confounded.\(^{145}\)

But in ordinary affairs, the Emperor played his hand carefully. To get the information he needed, he used a T'ao Yin and may even, after reflection, have based his decisions on T'ao Yin's memorials. He picked his informants cautiously and repaid them for their information with his confidence.

In T'ao Yin's curios career, these short years as secret informant may have been the most rewarding to him; he was in direct and surprisingly personal contact with the Son of Heaven. The K'ang-hsi Emperor had a knack of getting frank responses to his casually put questions, of stripping some of the awe and distance from the relationship between Emperor and subject. If this was policy rather than knavish, then he was a highly intelligent ruler. T'ao Yin could feel that he was acceding to a request rather than yielding to coercion, and the result was a more sincere response and a more genuine loyalty.

\(^{142}\) SHH-k, ch. 917, pp. 110-26.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., p. 111.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 113.

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CHAPTER 7

The Fall of the House of T'ao

The fall of the T'ao family, in 1728, was a long time in coming. The sudden death of T'ao Yin in 1712 led to no immediate deterioration of the family's fortunes. On the contrary, though T'ao Yin was heavily in debt and had been rebuked over the deficits in the salt administration, his death was the signal for the Emperor to bestow exceptional favors upon the family. It was not easy to prove anything as simple as the existence of affection between Emperor and subject; but the K'ang-hsi Emperor's behavior to T'ao Yin, his friendly advice and gifts of the rare medicine quinine which he sent by special messenger to treat T'ao Yin's malaria, his solicitude for T'ao Yin's son, all point to the fact that there was a strong bond between the two men.

T'ao Yin's Illness and Death

During the year 1709 T'ao Yin grew increasingly weak and rundown. He tried to bolster his strength by taking restoratives, especially ginseng of which he ate dangerously large quantities.\(^{1}\) The ginseng root was widely regarded as being a life-prolonging medicine, and even the Jesuits found it beneficial; so Father Jarréaux wrote at this time after taking some: "I felt my pulse fuller and brisker, I had a good appetite, found myself more spryly, and was much more disposed to endure any toil than I had been before."\(^{2}\) The best ginseng, which grew wild in Manchuria, was reserved for the Emperor's use,

1. Cf. the K'ang-hsi Emperor's endorsement to Li Hsiu Memorial, p. 53b, and 51b/44.
2. The Travels of Certain Learned Missionaries of the Society of Jesus into China, Parts of Asia, India, China, and America (London, 1714), p. 294, letter dated Peking, April 12, 1714. Ibid., p. 262, has a letter from Father d'Entrecolles saying that Brother Hidas had further built up the Emperor's strength by giving him Canary wine, which the missionaries had sent on from Seville for their women. This may explain the considerable traffic in wine mentioned on p. 120 above.
and if it came on the market cost several thousand tael per piece. It was possible that Ts'ao Yin asked the Emperor for some of this ginseng when he came to Peking in the winter of 1709, to report on his third tour of duty at salt cense. Certainly the state of his health and his penchant for doing himself with restoratives was a matter of concern to the Emperor, as is shown by the memorials and endorsements they exchanged in the following year.

In the spring of 1710, after returning to Kiangan, Ts'ao Yin contracted a disease of the eyes. He reported to the Emperor on May 2, assuring him that his eyes were now getting better, and that he was able to write memorials in his own handwriting. To this memorial, written with rather thick strokes in the blackest of ink, the Emperor added a concerned endorsement:

You have been living a long time in the south, and have grown emaciated and weak. Now on top of this you have had an eye disease. It is absolutely imperative that you stop taking restoratives. The best thing for you to drink is a soup with six parts of li-huang (Rehmannia glutinosa); these proportions should not be changed. If you take plenty of this it will certainly be efficacious.

The Kang-hsi Emperor clearly had a practical approach to medicine, preferring the wholly li-huang to the expensive and coveted ginseng.

A month later the Emperor sent Ts'ao Yin a cheerful endorsement concerning the good prospects for the coming year, adding that he "made a special point of telling you this so that you won't go on worrying." 1

Before the Emperor's warning and advice had arrived, however, Ts'ao Yin fell sick again and once more tried to cure himself with ginseng. Only at the end of June, after he had taken li-huang as the Emperor recommended, did he write that he was recovering. During the summer and autumn Ts'ao Yin grew steadily stronger, but the Emperor continued to be solicitous, and Ts'ao Yin took his anxious enquiries at their face value. As he wrote in a memorial on December 24, 1710:

When my household slave returned to the south with my memorial, I found this imperial endorsement: 'Noted. How is your illness now, compared with before?' When I knelt and read this, I could not overcome my feelings and weep. . . . This year I accidentally caught a chill, and because I made the mistake of taking ginseng, I later contracted a painful skin disease (chih), and I was ill in bed for over two months. I was fortunate to receive the Emperor's favor, ordering me to take li-huang in soup. After taking it I recovered completely. Now I am taking li-huang pills, and compared with before am in excellent health.

The Emperor's endorsement was equally clinical:

Noted. But for this kind of skin disease, you shouldn't take drugs. If the poison entered the system, I fear that it might afterward become leprosy. Apart from cleansing with salt water, no other prescription will help you. Take care, take care. You can substitute fu-ju-ling (Smilax sinensis) for tea. Drinking this often is beneficial.

The Emperor's straightforward advice may have had the effect of keeping Ts'ao Yin away from dangerous restoratives. At least through the following year of 1712 he was in good health, and was able to supervise the salt administration. That winter Ts'ao Yin went to Peking as usual to report on his term of office. He wrote poems de-

1. Ts'ao Yin Memorial, p. 246, dated 4/11/11, shows that he left Yunchow to see the Emperor in December 1709.
3. Ts'ao Yin Archives, no. 1816, dated 4/12/7 and endorsement.
4. Ibid., no. 4671, endorsement to memorial dated 4/17/7.
5. Ts'ao Yin Memorial, p. 51, dated 4/7/7, shows this was the third month, when he returned to Yunchow from Peking.
6. Ts'ao Yin Archives, no. 1850, dated 4/9/7.
7. Ts'ao Yin Memori, p. 35, dated 4/11/7 and endorsement.
scribing his short trip in the imperial retinue to the Shih-ju Palace, and noted the Old prince riding by to pay homage to the Emperor; he also pointed out with pride that he was received in audience on one occasion with four Manchu military governors and generals (ch’êng-chên). Leaving Peking on March 16, 1712, he spent sixteen days on the journey to Yangchow, writing poems busily along the way; a stormy crossing of the Yellow River reminded him that once he had hunted in those areas. In Yangchow, he discussed problems in the printing of the Pei-wen yün-fu with the two other textile commissioners Li Hsi and Sun Wen-ch’êng. He had also received orders to confer with the director-general of grain transport Hsio-shou, who was one of the judges examining the examination-half case, but reported that it had “not proved convenient for us to meet face to face.”

Preumably they needed to meet in private.

During April, May, and June, Ts’ao Yin was busy reporting on the examination-half case, which he did in a number of detailed and heartfelt memorials,13 and in pressing on with the Pei-wen yün-fu. He selected over one hundred craftsmen but found that “it’s hard to get men as good as they used to be”—that is, in the days when the Complete T’ang Poems were compiled. There was also a plague of locusts, he noted, which the acting governor-general had well in hand. In any case, since this was the rainy season the locusts would not grow large, and there was no need to worry.14

Leaving Yangchow, Ts’ao Yin returned to Nanking to check on affairs at the textile commissioner’s yamen. While there he received a present of calligraphy written by the Emperor, and his last memorial, written on July 6, 1712, to thank the Emperor for this gift. He wrote that news of the gift had spread abroad, and degree holders, the local elite, and the scholar-commoners clamored to be allowed to see it. So he had had the calligraphy printed from wooden blocks and circ-

12. Ts’ao Yin Memoirs, ch. 3, pp. 2a-2b for Peking visit, pp. 3a-b for the journey. The Manchu ch’êng-chên were from Chakumon, Hoshizumi, Sun, and Iwakawa (the translation of ‘ch’êng-chên’ varies according to locality, Hsi 744, 801).
13. Ts’ao Yin Archives, no. 2929, dated 17/8/2. This date is an error for 17/12/6. Ts’ao Yin mentioned that he left Peking on 17/12/6, but that he was sending the weather reports for the first and second months. This, then, was the third month. Arrived in Yangchow on 17/12/6 is contemporaneous with Ts’ao Yin Memoirs, ch. 9, p. 6, dated 17/12/6.
14. Cf. chapter 8 above; Ts’ao Yin Memoirs, 50-4.
15. Ibid., p. 11a, dated 17/12/6.
16. Ts’ao Yin Archives, no. 2927, dated 21/5/12.

Ts’ao Yin’s illness and death

cured, since otherwise “rumors might spread far and near.” But now the people wanted a more permanent record of the occasion, so they had gone to select a fitting stone on which to have the Emperor’s words engraved. The Emperor’s endorsement was practical: “I am well. Noted. There’s no need to get it carved on stone.”

On July 15, Ts’ao Yin returned to Yangchow, and spent a few happy days with scholars visiting the printing office there. But on August 2 he caught a chill and retired to bed. He dismissed this as a slight illness, and wrote in a poem how a slight sickness could bring its consolations of rest and solitude:

Just as I drew back the long curtains the dew began to sparkle on the eaves,
Starting to take off my linen shirt I felt a light chill in the air.
Happily I thought over the clear night when no one had much to say
And I listened peacefully to the sounds of footsteps on the wet porch.10

The chill did not pass; instead, while Ts’ao Yin was in a weakened state, it developed into a bout of malaria. In his last poem, he seems to have realized that this time he was seriously ill; though grateful for the visits of the young members of the family who sought to cheer him up, his thoughts turned somberly to the unknown future facing them all.11

When Li Hsi, who was in Ch-chen checking salt quotas, heard the news of Ts’ao Yin’s serious illness, he hurried to Yangchow to be with him, arriving on August 16. Ts’ao Yin was by now too ill to write, so Li Hsi relayed the following message to the Emperor for him:

Ts’ao Yin said to me: “My sickness comes and goes. The medicine used by my doctors is of no use; I must get the Emperor’s own medicine if I am to be cured. But my son is young, and if I now send him off to ask the Emperor, there will be no one at my side to look after me. Please send a memorial for me, so I would do myself. If I am given the medicine, then I may still evade
death and return to life; I will really have received the Emperor's favor, and be born again."

I am now in Yangchow, to watch his treatment, but his illness has now grown extremely serious. I dare not report anything but the truth.

The Emperor's endorsement was concurred, but also offered practical advice and help:

You memorialized well. Now I wish to make a present of the medicine to cure malarial fever, but I fear it might be delayed, so I am allowing the use of horses from the couriers' office so your servant can rush on, day and night. If the malarial fever has not been complicated by diarrhea, there is no harm in taking the medicine, but if complications have occurred you should not use it. In the south there are so many doctors who all offer some "special tonic" that one can't count them all; you must be careful. Ty'ao Yin was very eager to eat ginseng and now he has caught this disease; it was caused by ginseng.

Quinine alone cures malarial fever. Use two-tenths of an ounce, powdered, mix with wine and swallow. If the fever abates, take one more dose, and then you must stop. Afterward change to doses of one-tenth of an ounce, or eight fen [0.08 oza.], and repeat this twice; this will remove the root of the illness. If he does not have malaria, this medicine must not be used. You must be very thorough, I urge you, I urge you, I urge you.69

Ty'ao Yin's request and the Emperor's answer show how completely the positive sides of Western medicine could be accepted in China, and how openly the Chinese could adopt a new technique. The K'ang-hsi Emperor had been offered quinine by the Jesuits Vialloz and de Fontaney, when he was seriously ill with malaria in 1659. The Jesuits themselves had only just been sent the quinine by a fellow Jesuit in Pondicherry, and ran some risks in offering it to the Emperor. The medicine was initially tried out on three men with malarial fever, all of whom recovered. Then four members of the imperial family took small doses of a mixture of quinine and wine prepared by the heir ap-

26. Li Hsi Memoirs, p. 13, dated 7/7/18, and endorsement on p. 75b.

parent. None of them suffered any ill effects. Finally the Emperor himself took some, and was cured.68 The K'ang-hsi Emperor had mentioned this cure in the endorsement he added to the first memorial that Li Hsi ever sent him,68 and this providential intervention by the missionaries was the main reason why they were given a large house near one of the Emperor's inner palaces, to use as a church.68

Ty'ao Yin himself had been present on one occasion when the Emperor made a present of quinine. This was during the Fifth Southern Tour, in 1705, when the Emperor was being entertained by the brigade general Chang Yün-i. Noting that Chang Yün-i was much thinner than he had been, the Emperor asked the reason, and learned that Chang had been ill nine times with malarial fever. The Emperor then made a present of quinine to Chang, the gift being accompanied by this edict: "This quinine has cured the Emperor himself, and is excellent. These ten ounces are given to Chang."68 But it is required considerable courage to ask the Emperor for a gift of his own medicine, and Ty'ao Yin did not have the nerve to do so until his illness was well advanced. This hesitancy cost him his life. Five days after he had relented Ty'ao Yin's appeal, Li Hsi sent this memorial:

On August 2, Ty'ao Yin caught a chill, which developed into malarial fever. Finally it became an incurable illness, and on August 24, at 7 A.M., he died. Lying back on his pillow he sighed with remorse that this sudden departure from the world would mean that he would be unable to repay the Emperor for his favors. He said to me: "As the Nanking textile commission's yamen revenue deficits have accumulated over the years and are more than 90,000 taels; and in accordance with the edict received last year that the deficit accumulated by the Liang-hsi salt merchants should be paid off by officials and merchants together, I should have paid off 350,000 taels. Yet I have no posses-

21. Letters to Canton, p. 37, no. 11.
tion I can sell, no resources that I can convert. Though my body may die, my eyes shall remain open." So T'ao Yin spoke to me near the end.

T'ao Yin's widow and orphans could never pay such sums, Li Hui continued. It was for this reason that he risked death to ask that he be made salt censor for the 1713 term that would have been T'ao Yin's had he not died; with this money Li Hui would pay off the T'ao family debts, and thus at the moment of his death T'ao Yin would receive one last imperial favor.

It was a businesslike memorial, but the financial details were rather hazy; the K'ang-hsi Emperor showed his suspicions, though he granted the favor:

T'ao Yin and you were as one person working at the same business, so what you memorialize here is definitely to the point. My only fear is that, at the days past, you might change, and be concerned only about yourself. If so, you will be even less than my dog or horse.29

About three weeks after Li Hui had written this memorial, his household slave returned with the first memorial warning of T'ao Yin's illness, which bore the Emperor's kindly endorsement and advice. The courier with the medicine had arrived some days before, but T'ao Yin of course was dead.30

More generous, and less concerned with mundane matters of finance, was the epitaph written by T'ao Yin's friend Chang Po-hsing. This man, a famous Confucian scholar and governor of Kiangsu, was fighting for survival against the Manchu governor-general Goll in the protracted examination-hall case,31 but his affection for T'ao Yin was clearly not marred by any considerations that T'ao Yin as a bondservant was tied to Manchu causes; rather he wrote of T'ao Yin in the classical terms of deep affection between Chinese scholars.

Alas! Who would have thought that his end would come at this time? His collection of the Classics and Histories filled ten thousand ch'ih, whose hand will open them now, whose heart delight in them? And the great officials and talented gentlemen with whom he met each day and delighted in writing and copying verses, whom will they follow, who could possibly have the sprightliness of his character?

In the old days when I held the judge's seal [1706], we were close friends and helped each other; he would talk without any reserve and with absolute sincerity though I was then more superficial. Later I was rushed off to the mountains of Fukien [in 1707] and regretted each day of separation. At night, when the crows crowded in the rainy wind, it served as a connecting thread for both our thoughts. Little did I expect to return as governor of Kiangsu and sit once more at his table. For three years we were together and I drew from his vast resources; we were one heart as if united, with all the potential strength of a close and inseparable friendship.

Oh what unhappiness! How long it is already since his voice and face were with us; there is no one to take his place. Opposite me the stringed instruments and wine jars are mourning too, the very writing shows honesty and weeps. As these writings are offered all stained with wine, may my heartfelt sincerity be accepted by him.32

Chang Po-hsing's tasteful eulogy may serve as the public expression of regret at T'ao Yin's death; that regret was deep enough to win T'ao Yin a place in the NanKing temple of famous officials.33 But behind the public presentation of T'ao Yin's virtues as friend and scholar lay the private reality of confusion and debts. It was this less attractive matter that Li Hui had to handle.

T'ao Yin's Son T'ao Yung

When T'ao Yin died on August 24, 1711, his family were left in a desperate situation. They were hundreds of thousands of taels in debt, and without official positions of any kind. T'ao Yin's mother, née Sun, who was a favored former nurse of the K'ang-hsi Emperor, had died in 1706, aged seventy-four.34 T'ao Yin's only son T'ao Lien-

25. Li Hui Memorials, pp. 57b-58b, 60a-b 57/1/12, and endnotes.
26. Ibid., p. 8a, Annal 57/5/1.
27. Ibid., chapter 6 above.
29. Ibid., p. 142.
sheng (his name was later changed to Tsao Yung) was about nineteen years old; he had worked for a short time as a bondervan in Peking and then been granted permission by the Emperor to return to Nanking and live with his father. But he had no administrative experience and his prospects must have seemed dim.

Li Hui had acted fast, sending the memorial in which he requested to be made a special censor and pay Tsao Yung's debts on the very day that Tsao Yung died. The Emperor's acceptance of this request meant that the Tsao family could clear themselves of debt; but it still did nothing to assure the family's future.

Help for the family came from an apparently unlikely source—the official Lang Ting-chi. Lang Ting-chi was the governor of Kiangsi, who was at the time also acting governor-general of Liang-chiang. He and Tsao Yung had become friends in 1712, and Tsao Yung wrote a postscript to a short collection of Lang Ting-chi's poems. Though they seem only to have known each other for a few months, on September 27, 1712, Lang Ting-chi sent a memorial that was to have great importance to the family. He wrote that there had been many people around his yamen, all begging him to send a memorial requesting that Tsao Yung's son Tsao Yung be appointed to the office of Nanking textile commissioner, since Tsao Yung's administration had been so excellent. Lang Ting-chi gave the names and occupations of many of the petitioners. It was not a list of names collected for the purposes of prestige, but must have made the point that those requesting Tsao Yung's appointment were sound men who knew the silk business. The petitioners were factory managers, transport supervisors, artisans, weavers, and silk merchants. After forwarding their request, Lang Ting-chi added the generous comments:

31. Tsao Yung Memorial, pp. 130-131, dated 4/11/13, adding his name to the memorial to Tsao Yung, Tsao Yung Memorial, p. 17, dated 3/3/13. Mentioning the Emperor's special favor is allowing him to return to his father, Liang-ching, p. 205, estimates that Tsao Yung's death was in 1697, making him two when he was called to the Emperor on the 1703 Southern Tour (cf. p. 123 above), and fourteen when his two sons were sent off to work in the Imperial Household. I would place his birth in 1685; he had probably married in 1703, about a year before his death.


33. Governor-general Cai at this time being under trial for corruption, cf. chapter 4 above.

There is a biography of Lang Ting-chi in Biographical Gazette, pp. 641-64. See a letter written in 1711 by Lang Ting-chi, dated 4/11/13, and cited p. 205 above.

34. Tsao Yung Writings, p. 17.

Because I was in the area I was able personally to observe these popular feelings, and can verify adequately the fact that while he was alive Tsao Yung managed affairs with all sincerity, both for the Emperor above and the common people below.

Tsao Yung must have known that these demonstrations were going on, but he was not rash enough to request the Emperor to give him his late father's office. His first memorial, written on October 3, was one of thanks to the Emperor on three counts. First, the Emperor had given him presents of money that had enabled Tsao Yung to get a suitable coffin and take care of all the funeral arrangements. Secondly, the Emperor had responded generously to Tsao Yung's plea, and sent him his own special medicine; it had been an unlucky chance that 'my father died unexpectedly before the medicine arrived, negating the Emperor's favor.' Thirdly, Tsao Yung's eldest cousin Tsau Ch'i had just arrived from the Capital bearing an edict that he had received from the eunuch Liang Chi-hung; the edict directed that Li Hui be made salt censor for a further year in order to pay off Tsao Yung's debts, and that Tsao Yung was to send a memorial if Li Hui acted in an unauthorized fashion—in other words, tried to cheat him. Tsao Yung praised the Emperor for saving his father's name and allowing the family to live, but ended with a justification of his own behavior which shows clearly the insecurity of the position he was still in:

I am a worthless bondervan, and I ask myself who am I that dare to act without authority and send a palace memorial? The reason is that I have received the Emperor's edict, which was an unusual benediction of favor; an insect's feelings of private gratitude cannot be made known in any other way, so I respectfully risk death in writing out this memorial, to thank the Emperor humbly for his favor. 35

Tsao Yung had started off this memorial with these words: "Tsao Yung is my son Lien-sheng humbly memorializes." He had no title and no office, and could merely claim to be his father's son. But his second
memorial written on January 28, 1715, led off with the words "The Nanking textile commissioner and secretary (ché-chia) in the Imperial Household Ts'ao Yung humbly memorializes" and proceeded to relate how the change had come about:

I am your slave and worthless boundervant, I am young and ignorant, and have gratefully received everlasting and boundless special favors, having by special order been made Nanking textile commissioner, to continue my father's office. I have also received the imperial favor by being given the rank of a secretary in the Imperial Household. And yet again I received a special edict giving me the adult name of Ts'ao Yung. All these various and great favors, repeated without end, are totally without precedent. 15

As the Emperor had responded to Lang T'ing-chi's request that Ts'ao Yung be given the office of textile commissioner, so he responded to Li Hui's plan to save the Ts'ao family from its crippling load of debts. The 530,000-tael debt that Ts'ao Yin on his deathbed had confessed he owed and was quite unable to pay, consisted of a 300,000-tael deficit on the Nanking textiles and a 230,000-tael deficit from the salt administration. So, at least, Li Hui had reported, and on the basis of this report the Emperor granted him permission to be salt censor of Liang-huai for one more year, in order that he might pay off Ts'ao Yin's debts. 17

At the end of this extra year as salt censor, in December 1715, Li Hui reported that he had collected a total surplus of 366,000 taels. This sum had been brought to Ts'ao Yung by Li Hui and the Liang-huai salt merchants together, to avoid any suspicions of dishonesty. 19

To a memorial of thanks sent to the Emperor on December 30, Ts'ao Yung appended a financial statement showing exactly how this money had been used: 210,000 taels had gone for the basic annual expenses at the textile commissioners' yamens in Nanking and Soochow; 112,620 had gone to pay for sacrificial silks, official patents, and artisans' wages.

15. Ibid., pp. 515-18, dated 31/12/15. With the receipt of funds in Nanking on 15/1, this should be 1/2 (January 15). Lang T'ing-chi used, in his 71/17 report, the name Ts'ao Yung. Yet Ts'ao Yung signed himself "Ts'ao Un-ch'ing" in his 51/14 memorial. This suggests that though his adult name was generally known, he himself did not feel free to use it until specially permitted to.


18. Ibid., pp. 416-19, dated 31/12/15.

19. Ts'ao Yung Memorials, pp. 58-62, dated 31/12/15. These figures show that Ts'ao Yin's declared debts at this time totaled 330,000 taels. The remaining 336,000 taels were spent on the normal annual expenses of the salt-line officials. That Ts'ao Yin's debts were not 530,000 taels is mentioned in Document 60, p. 741, although the final run of his debt was probably in excess of this figure.

20. Ts'ao Yung Memorials, p. 29, dated 52/2/15, and endorsement.

21. Ts'ao Yung Memorials, p. 19, dated 52/2/15. Of course it is more than probable that these private debts had been contracted while carrying out the Emperor's commissions, as Ts'ao Yin suggested.
during his short career did he mention textile matters, except to say that the money received from Li Hsü had been used to pay off the Nanking deficits and to meet current expenses. His memorials were nearly all brief, listing the rice prices in his locality and endorsing weather reports. What had been an occasional matter for Ts'ao Yin was now apparently a routine for his son. On nearly every occasion he received the simple endorsement "Noted." When the Emperor wrote something extra, as he did to an August 1774 memorial reporting on prices after a drought—"When this memorial returns to you at Nanking, memorize speedily on the rain situation."—Ts'ao Yin responded immediately by sending a special memorial, although he had just sent one nine days previously reporting that all was well. He acted in a similar spirit when he sent back to the Emperor all of the 36,000 tusas remaining when the deficit left by his father was paid off. So even from the straightforward administrative reports which are all that survive from Ts'ao Yin's life, a picture of the man emerges: he took his slightest duties very seriously, was extremely cautious, and desperately anxious to please his Emperor.

It is unlikely, therefore, that he knew that Li Hsü had taken the amazing step of trying to get him appointed salt censor in the autumn of 1774. Even Li Hsü did not have the nerve to request outright that Ts'ao Yin, twenty-one years old, be made the new salt censor, with eighteen months of experience as a textile commissioner, be given this important and complex post. Instead, he sent a report to the Censorate, presenting them with the facts regarding Ts'ao Yin's name and rank; since the information came from the incumbent salt censor of Liang-huai, its intention was plain, and on September 20, 1774, the Censorate in turn memorialized that it had received this information from Li Hsü. It is clear enough what Li Hsü was trying to do. He and Ts'ao Yin had alternated in Liang-huai salt censers over a ten-year period, from 1704 to 1714. Now if Ts'ao Yin, the new textile commissioner of Nanking, were made salt censor, there was a chance that he and Li Hsü might alternate in the profitable office for a further long period.

43. Ts'ao Yin Archives, no. 197, dated 11/15/14.
44. Ibid., no. 215, dated 12/15/14, and no. 220, dated 12/15/14.
45. Ts'ao Yin Memorials, p. 56, dated 12/15/14.
47. Ts'ao Yin Memorials, p. 19, dated 12/15/14, and no. 54, dated 5/19/15.
48. Ts'ao Yin Memorials, p. 2, dated 3/19/15, given an incorrect homophone for the name of Ts'ao Yin's name. The name is correct in MBD, ch. 20a, p. 2.

Ts'ao Yin's Son Ts'ao Yung

Li Hsü's suggestion was not followed up. In his edict responding to the memorial, the Emperor pointed out that there had been a deficit of 3,800,000 tusas which had been cleared up by the salt controller Li Ch'ên-ch'ang; since this was a clear proof of his ability, Li Ch'ên-ch'ang should be the new salt censor and a man of his caliber be recommended to succeed him as salt controller.

This decision was a relief to Li Hsü, but it did not affect the Ts'ao family's newly regained prosperity. Ts'ao Yung continued to work as textile commissioner in Nanking, and in the winter of 1774 he traveled to Peking, probably to escort a shipment of silk for the Emperor. There can have been nothing to prepare the family for the next blow: the sudden death in Peking of the twenty-one-year-old Ts'ao Yung. He had been Ts'ao Yin's only surviving son. Now Ts'ao Yin's widow was truly helpless, and the family line threatened with extinction.

Once again, the family was saved by the personal intervention of the K'ang-hsi Emperor. In February 1775 he ordered that Ts'ao Yin's nephew Ts'ao Fu be posthumously adopted as Ts'ao Yin's son, and also inherit his new father's office. Thus Ts'ao Fu became the fourth successive member of the Ts'ao family to hold the post of Nanking textile commissioner, and the family line had new hope of survival.

Li Hsü's memorial of thanks caught some of the pathos of Ts'ao Yung's early death, as well as the way the new son Ts'ao Fu was taking over under his tutelage:

I am humbly suggesting that Ts'ao Fu should pick a day in this month to take Ts'ao Yung's coffin out of the city, and place it in a temporary shelter at the ancestral tomb; and when he has done this, he should memorialize for permission to take up his Nanking appointment. Because Ts'ao Fu's mother (Ts'ao Yin's widow) is nearly sixty, and has been all alone in the south attending to her husband's coffin, when she learns also that her son has

42. Evidence for Ts'ao Yin's death in Peking seen some time during 1715/16 is in Li Hsü Memorials, p. 56, dated 12/15/15, and Ts'ao Fu Memorials, p. 29, dated 6/15/17. HPMGC, p. 294, suggests 12/15/15 is more likely.
43. Chen Jo-ch'ang thinks Ts'ao Yin may have had a son in his old age who died young (HPMG, p. 15).
44. Li Hsü Memorial, p. 6, dated 12/15/15. This edict cannot have been issued in 12/15 (March 1773) as stated in HPMGC, p. 294, since Li Hsü acknowledged it on 14/1/15 (February 15, 1774).
died young. I fear that she will grieve terribly. Furthermore the costs of boat and carriage here and back will be hard for her to meet. The best thing that can be done is to order Ts'ao Fu to go on ahead and console her day and night. When the cold weather is over, then he and his mother can accompany Ts'ao Yin's coffin to its place of burial.\footnote{48}

Before Ts'ao Yin had been finally buried he had lost his only son and been granted a new one by imperial favor.

Ts'ao Yin's Adopted Son Ts'ao Fu

Ts'ao Fu left Peking on March 14, 1715, traveling south to Nanking with Li Hsi. While they were still on the road, Ts'ao Yin's widow learned of the Emperor's renewed favors to her family, and insisted on making the long journey to Peking so that she might thank the Emperor in person. Hearing of the old lady's journey, Ts'ao Fu and Li Hsi hurried to intercept her; the two parties met at Ch'a-chou in Anhwei province, and returned to Nanking together. She was dissuaded from traveling to Peking by being told that the Emperor had said she need not make the journey. By April 2 a family were assembled in the Ts'ao house in Nanking; three days later Li Hsi officially read them the Emperor's edict, which stated that Ts'ao Fu was henceforth to be regarded as Ts'ao Yin's son, that he was to succeed his father as textile commissioner, and that they should wait for fair weather before escorting Ts'ao Yin's coffin to the northern burial grounds. After this edict had been read (the family of course had known its contents for some weeks), Ts'ao Yin's widow led out the whole family to give ritual thanks to the Emperor; all faced toward the Emperor in Peking and prostrated themselves while she beat her head on the ground and wept, as incense burned on specially erected altars.\footnote{49} Four days later Ts'ao Fu collected his seals of office and began work as textile commissioner.

\footnote{47} Li Hsi Memoirs, p. 60; dated 14/1/14, with endorsement "in 1715" (chih).\footnote{48} Compare statement drawn from Ts'ao Fu Memoirs, p. 296, dated 14/1/14, and Add., p. 79, same date. Also from Li Hsi Memoirs, p. 61, dated 14/1/14. In his memoirs, Ts'ao Fu also maintained that the widow of his brother Ts'ao Yang, 86a Ma, was in her seventeenth month of pregnancy at this time, and that there was thus a hope of Ts'ao Yang having a posthumous son, and Yin's direct male line being preserved. There is no later mention of the birth of this child, which might have been a girl, or else a boy who died in infancy. It is also possible that the son was born, survived, was adopted automatically by Ts'ao Fu, and was
The duty of Ts'ao Yin and his colleagues was to see that they continued to do so.

It must have been for this reason that when (only one year after the Emperor had made over the whole annual surplus from Liang-hsiang to clearing the Ts'ao family debts) Li Hsi admitted in a memorial that there were still serious unrecorded deficits in the Nanking textile commission's yamens, the Emperor ordered the new salt censor Lü Ch'en-ch'ing to take care of them from the 1751 surplus.64 Li Hsi relayed this news of continuing imperial favor to the grateful Ts'ao family in Nanking, but only one year later he received a communication from the Board of Revenue that led him to send a flowered and apologetic memorial to the Emperor begging for further favor.

From Li Hsi's memorial, written on February 21, 1716, it is clear that officials from the Board of Revenue had been going through the various accounts submitted by the Liang-hsiang salt authorities—with incredible slowness, it is true, but also thoroughly enough to bring to light some of the grosser irregularities. What they had found was that Li Hsi had deliberately concealed a further debt of 110,000 taels: this was a sum that Ts'ao Yin should have furnished to pay off the merchant deficit. Li Hsi, acting as salt censor in Ts'ao Yin's place, had not paid this money into the treasury, but had used it to pay off further undeclared debts at the Nanking textile commissioner's yamens. It is not surprising that the unraveling of such complicated financial juggling had taken the Board a long time. They held that the Ts'ao family should furnish the additional money, since Ts'ao Yin had been theoretically responsible for the payment. The fact that Ts'ao Yin had been dead at the time does not seem to have worried them, any more than the fact that Li Hsi had falsified the accounts. The Ts'ao family were ordered to make good the sum of 110,000 taels, which of course they could not possibly afford to pay. Accordingly Li Hsi, with a dazzling example of evasive action, wrote that he had died in begging the Emperor to extend his mercy to the Ts'ao family.65

In the same memorial Li Hsi added that though he had previously written that Ts'ao Yin's salt administration debts had been 265,000 taels, this figure must now be amended to 373,000 taels. This final assessment of salt administration debts makes it possible for the full extent of Ts'ao Yin's liability to be calculated. For there were in addition the textile commissioner's debts of 93,000 taels that had been declared in 1713, and the further debt of 110,000 that had been covered up by means of the misappropriated salt funds. There were also the private debts that the Emperor was aware of, and to pay off which he returned the 30,000 taels offered by Ts'ao Yin's son. It is therefore reasonable to assess Ts'ao Yin's debts at his death at about 660,000 taels.

The K'ang-hsi Emperor took care of the whole of this amount by allowing the surplus salt revenues for successive years to be used in paying them off. The debts were finally cleared in August 1717, five years after Ts'ao Yin's death, when Li Hsi had been made salt censor for an eighth term.66 Though the Emperor seems to have been casual enough about the whole question of public debts, he showed a surprising interest in the exact state of the Ts'ao family finances, and to one of Ts'ao Fu's short memorials sending rice prices and weather reports he added this endorsement: "Why don't you send a report about the state of affairs in your family?" 67 Ts'ao Fu clearly took this to be an order to report on their current resources, and did so as follows:

Since my appointment I have made a detailed examination of the resources remaining. There are only two dwelling houses in the Inner City of Peking, and at Hien-yü-k'ou in the Outer City there is one empty house. At Tung-chou we have the mortgage on 600 mou of land. At Chiang-chin-wan we have one partnership with a capital of 7,000 taels. In Chiang-nan at Hsiang-hsi we have over 200 mou of rice fields, and at Wu-hsien over 100 mou of rice fields. In Yangchow we have one old house. Besides these there are no businesses or savings.

I asked my mother, and the stewards in the house, and they all said: ‘When you father was alive his expenses were extremely large and he was not able to look after the house. Concerning these properties, and our accounts, your elder brother Ts'ao Yang reported to the Emperor in person, and received everlasting favor

64. Li Hsi Memoranda, p. 60, dated 3/27/17, Chou Ts'ao-ch'ing, in Hsin Hsih, p. 401, points out that it is impossible to tell if this debt was still Ts'ao Yin's at a time of Ts'ao Yin's.
66. Ibid., p. 934, dated 9/17/17. The figure of 265,000 shows that the earlier estimate of 55,000 was too low, and explains Li Hsi's unusual caution with figures.
67. Ts'ao Fu Archives, no. 1872, dated 4/6/17.
from the Emperor who granted Ts'ao Yung 30,000 taels. Only then was he able to pay off court debts.

After I was appointed I sent memorials where fitting, but because there were so many other details, I did not dare introduce such trifling matters.10

Judging from later accounts of the Ts'ao family resources, this report was a considerable understatement. It gives, for example, no mention at all of the Ts'ao family mansions in Nanking and their valuable contents. These were probably taken for granted, since the Emperor had visited the family in Nanking on four occasions. But even if it underestimates, the report gives an over-all impression of the geographical spread of the Ts'ao family's commercial and agricultural operations—from Tung-chou, east of Peking, to Wu-hu and Hanyin in southern Anhwei, and to Yangchow on the Grand Canal. Ts'ao Fu clearly thought it advisable to make some token offering to the Emperor in gratitude for favors received; accordingly, one month after the dispatch of his memorial on the family situation he sent the Emperor a present of 6,000 taels, to be used for the purchase of camels needed in the Western campaigns. The gift was accepted and handed over to the Board.11

As textile commissioner, Ts'ao Fu's basic duty was managing the Nanking manufactories and dispatching the silk quotas to Peking. Like his brother Ts'ao Yung before him, he sent regular short memorials on rice prices and harvest prospects—this had become a routine task for the textile commission.12 In addition to these regular duties he also, like Ts'ao Yin before him, performed various commissions for the Emperor. The first of these on record, in early 1716, was to look after the children of the former grand secretary Hsing Ts'ao-li. This was the statesman whose death Ts'ao Yin had reported in such detail seven years before. Ts'ao Fu rationalized that there were three surviving male children: the eldest was seriously ill; the two younger ones, aged nine and eight, had worked away at their studies behind

10. Ts'ao Fu Memorials, p. 31. See also 51/×/16.
11. Ibid., p. 110, dated 14/6/16.
12. He sent such brief price records in the fourth, sixth, seventh, ninth, tenth, and eleventh months of 1716, his first year in office. Cf. Ts'ao Fu Archives, vol. 89, 1713, 1717, 1746, 1747, 1746, and 1746.

Ts'ao Yin's Adopted Son Ts'ao Fu

closed doors and did not go out. "The household makes a bare living. I have sent them 200 taels to take care of their household expenses," Ts'ao Fu wrote, earning the brief endorsement: "Good. Noted."13

Another time he and Li Hui jointly brought a tablet, presented by the Emperor, to be hung in the Fu-chi hall. Both men recorded the reception of the present and the people's reactions in the effusive memorials customary upon such occasions. The K'ang-hsi Emperor was apparently bored enough by the repetitiveness of their language to depart from the normal endorsement "Noted." Instead he wrote: "There shouldn't be such a rumpus about this tablet."14

The two men also worked together on a project to restore the great Tien-ning temple near Yangchow. The Emperor ordered them to furnish estimates of the work involved, and this they did in an enormous report which listed all expenses under fifteen heads. For each building they estimated the costs for bricks and tiles, stone and timber, paint and nails, as well as the wages of the carpenters and stonemasons. They concluded that the total cost would come to 14,243 taels and added that the salt merchants of Yangchow had offered to donate all the money. Should they accept the offer? The Emperor's lengthy answer shows that when Ts'ao Fu sent such reports, they were definitely read; and also that the K'ang-hsi Emperor, never averse to accepting a donation to his eschequer, was still well aware of the value of making nominal official contributions to charitable works. He wrote:

I have examined your palace memorial on materials and wages. The total is not large. Although the merchants are willing to make a general contribution it is also proper that some money from the treasury be used. Draw 500 taels from each of the textile commissioner's treasuries at Soochow, Nanking, and Hangchow. The rest can be paid for by the merchants, or by others

13. Ts'ao Fu Memorials, p. 31, dated 51/5/16 and endorsement. In 1713 the K'ang-hsi Emperor issued a general appeal for support of the family of Hsing Ts'ao-li, a man who had died some thirty years before (and whose family lived in poverty). Wang Hung-k'ai and others gave a sum of 3,000 taels, which was handed over to Ts'ao Fu. He was ordered to use the interest from this sum to pay for the family's expenses. (Cf. Hong Ts'ao-li, section 47, pp. 61-62. Other references in BLMCRG, p. 427.)
who want to make contributions. You must emphatically not take a penny more than what is needed for materials and wages.

In addition to carrying out his duties as textile commissioner, and performing various extraneous tasks for the Emperor, Ts'ao Fu also began to edge into the role of secret informant. The way that he did has close parallels in the careers of Li Hai and Ts'ao Yin; he made initial reports on his own initiative, received at first vague and then specific imperial encouragement, and then sent detailed secret memorials. Ts'ao Fu sent his first report of this kind in November 1714, at the end of his first year in office. The whole memorial was only eighty-eight characters in length:

The mother of the Chiang-nan governor-general Ho-shou was eighty-one this year, and on November 20 she died in his yamen. All the townspeople, fearing that he would leave his post to observe the mourning period, closed the markets and would not let the governor-general hand over his seal; they imprisoned him to remain. The Tartar general and others made repeated appeals and at last got the markets opened. As is fitting I send a palace memorial on the local situation, and beg the Emperor to examine it.

Like the best of Ts'ao Yin's memorials in the past, this was a concise statement that covered most of the main issues and people involved; once he had read it, the Emperor would be well prepared to handle any excited reports of outbreaks of violence in Nanking, or laxity by the governor-general. The Emperor did not comment on this particular memorial, but the following summer he sent specific orders for Ts'ao Fu to make an investigation on his own: "I hear that in Chekiang there has been heavy rain and that the people's life is difficult. I do not know whether this is so or not. You must make detailed inquiries and memorialize." Ts'ao Fu replied that he had sent someone to make inquiries in Hangchow, and that they had found nothing wrong. But Ts'ao Fu decided that this answer was inadequate, and he followed it up the next week with another memorial, in which he gave details of conditions and rice prices in six major Chekiang prefectures. Ts'ao Yin and Li Hsiu had never been instructed to memorialize on matters so far afield; the Emperor must have had his suspicions of the honesty of Chekiang local officials, and wanted an impartial report from an outsider.

In September 1716, however, Ts'ao Fu apparently lost whatever credit he might have gained by the thoroughness of his Chekiang report. For a greetings memorial in which he reported that the harvests were excellent and that the salt censor Li Chen-chang had died in office, was returned with this angry endorsement:

Noted. Prices of rice are still high; how could you say there was a hundred percent harvest? Also, writing about sickness and death in a greetings memorial to the Emperor is greatly improper.

Ts'ao Fu had made a serious blunder, both reporting too hastily and offending the Emperor. For almost two years he stuck to his normal duties and received no special orders. Then suddenly, in July 1718, one of his short memorials on rice prices was returned with this cordial endorsement:

I am well. Although you are an ignorant child, yet the things you manage are not simple ones. I remember that your father served me with all his strength for many years, and for this reason you have received special favors. Although you are not a local official, you also can send secret memorials about major or minor matters which you hear about, as your father used to do. I myself will make judgments as to their validity. If something turns out to be a joke that's O.K. Let your old Emperor have a good laugh and it will be all right.

65. Ts'ao Fu Archiv., no. 1841, dated 10/4/1714, with endorsement and endnote. Ts'ao Fu's other memorials were sometimes paid for with surplus money received from Li Hsiu, as the case of 1706 tax paid over in 1717 (Li Hsiu Memorial, p. 87, dated 17/9/1706, and 17/7 tax paid by the two men in 1716 (ibid., p. 28, dated 17/6/1716).
66. Ibid., p. 100, dated 10/4/1714, with endorsement, "Noted."
68. Ibid., no. 1921, dated 10/8/1716, with endorsement.
69. Ibid., no. 1921, dated 10/8/1716, with endorsement.
Presumably the Emperor meant that even matters that Tsao Fu might consider frivolous should be reported, and that if he made errors through youthful enthusiasm he would be forgiven. Stranger enough, the only lengthy memorial that Tsao Fu sent in answer to these orders was indeed calculated to make the Emperor laugh. The memorial described the machinations of two confidence men. One, a doctor named Hua Shu-wen, cured the other, named Ho Ts'ou-kung, of a serious illness. The two became friends, and Dr. Hua confided that he was planning a commercial venture beyond the seas. He produced forged seals and documents, and promised Ho Ts'ou-kung a return of 50 taels if he would subscribe two taels now. Ho Ts'ou-kung produced one and a half taels and two bolts of cloth; these he gave to the doctor, who promptly disappeared. Instead of brooding about his loss, Ho Ts'ou-kung thought the ruse over and found it rather a good idea. He accordingly printed dozens of forged papers, which he sold to the gullible country folk at two taels each. The case was now being investigated by the senior provincial officials, Tsao Fu concluded, but it was obvious that only poor and ignorant people were involved, and that there was nothing to worry about.18

There may have been something of importance in the background of this case, or perhaps rumors had reached the Emperor that greatly exaggerated it, but it seems to have been a trivial affair. The only other case on which Tsao Fu memorialized, one in which an assistant district magistrate who was heavily in debt falsely accused the Andrew judicial commissioner Nien Hsia-yau, involved more important people but was again a minor matter.19 For whatever reasons, Tsao Fu did not use the license to report on local affairs that the Emperor had given him, and it cannot be claimed that he performed any outstanding services as a secret informant.

The most interesting project on which the Kang-hi Emperor employed Tsao Fu was the introduction of new rice types to Kiangsu. This called for a certain amount of agricultural knowledge, which Tsao Fu clearly did not possess, but after the first unfortunate year he acquitted himself fairly creditably. In the spring of 1715 the Kang-hi Emperor sent Li Hsü one picul (lidh) of a new type of rice that grew fast enough to allow two sowings and harvestings each year. It was of a new type and would have profound effects on rice, since previously early-ripening or late-ripening rice had been used largely in areas where natural conditions made normal rice planting impractical, or where rice was rotated with another crop such as wheat.22 Now there was a chance of almost doubling rice production in an already prosperous rice-producing area. Li Hsü, as ordered, distributed the new rice to senior officials, to Tsao Fu, and to three members of the Soochow local elite. Tsao Fu received one peck (ton, 1/10 of picul) both he and Li Hsü planted their samples in the fourth month, and harvested them in the seventh. Tsao Fu's crop yielded the ratio of one unit of seed to seventy units of harvested rice, making 4.2 piculs per mou; Li Hsü's crop, sown on high ground, yielded one to sixty, 3 piculs per mou.23 Both men reported that the local elite and peasants alike were amazed, and clamoring for samples of their own.

The experiment, which had started so well, ended in failure this first year. Tsao Fu, "unable to overcome my fear," had to report that his second crop had not yielded full grain; Li Hsü was more specific: the sprouts were tall but poorly grown, yielding under one picul per mou, a ratio of about one to twenty.24 The Emperor calmed both men by pointing out that they had merely sown both crops far too late. Li Hsü, who happened to be in Peking after bringing back a batch of dragon roots from the south, was sent off to consult with rice expert Li Ying-huei.25

18. Ho Ying-huei, Studies on the Reproduction of China, 1645-1935 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 169-74, discusses the speed of late- and early-ripening rice. The rice used distributed by the Kang-hi Emperor was apparently one that would vary. The rice used distributed by the Kang-hi Emperor was apparently one that would vary. This rice was different from the Chinese variety of ancient rice, which were shown at the late-ripening variety. Cf. Kung Shih-ching, Early History of Rice (New York, New York University Press, 1941).
19. 22. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. "I profess to believe that the young Tsao Fu was a minor matter. 22. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. "I profess to believe that the young Tsao Fu was a minor matter. 23. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. If Li Hsü was able to yield 4.2 piculs per mou, Tsao Fu was able to yield 1.5 piculs per mou. 23. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. If Li Hsü was able to yield 4.2 piculs per mou, Tsao Fu was able to yield 1.5 piculs per mou. 24. Nin Hsia-yau, the chief brother of the famous Nien Kang-yao, cf. Eminent Chinese, pp. 692 and 693. 24. Nin Hsia-yau, the chief brother of the famous Nien Kang-yao, cf. Eminent Chinese, pp. 692 and 693. 25. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. If Li Hsü was able to yield 4.2 piculs per mou, Tsao Fu was able to yield 1.5 piculs per mou. 25. Tsao Fu, Arc., no. 1449, dated 2/14, inter se, 4/3. If Li Hsü was able to yield 4.2 piculs per mou, Tsao Fu was able to yield 1.5 piculs per mou.
Li Hsi yielded 4.4 piculs per mou on the first harvest, and 2.5 on the second. Not surprisingly, there was a rising demand for sample seeds. These figures may have been exaggerated to please the Emperor, but the regular lists of the yields of various rice types, including the new samples, furnished by Li Hsi over the next four years, show an average yield of about four piculs per mou on the first harvest, and two piculs on the second. Ts'ao Fu, after a shaky start, had played a considerable part in a minor agricultural revolution in the Yangtze valley region. To put it mildly, in his own words of November 1716, "now that the common people can add one more crop a year, they will receive very great profit." 80

This was the most successful episode in Ts'ao Fu's career, which on the whole was an undistinguished one. He had been overcautious as an informer; he was rash as a financier. In the summer of 1719 he sent a complex memorial to the Emperor in which he requested that he be given the monopoly for the purchase of copper. Ts'ao Fu's plan was that by saving on transport he would cut costs by 30,000 taels—or if starting next year I am permitted to manage it for ten years, I will save in all 300,000 taels. At the present time, Ts'ao Fu continued, copper purchase was in the hands of eight governors-general and governors; every year forty foreign ships brought 40,000 piculs of red copper, and the officials drove up prices by competing against each other for its purchase. Ts'ao Fu would take advantage of a recent decision by the Board that in times of dearth 30 percent of the copper quota might be provided in the form of old copper utensils; then, needing only 31,000 piculs of copper, he would confront the incoming foreign merchants with his monopoly. The merchants would bring 40,000 piculs as before. Ts'ao Fu would only want 31,000 piculs. Prices would tumble, and the government would save large sums of money. Perhaps the governors-general, Ts'ao Fu added, should still be allowed to provide the 30 percent of old copper utensils; he would handle everything else, with money drawn from the provincial treasury. If the money were given to him one year in advance, that would be even better. Ts'ao Fu did not neglect to mention that his...
father Ts'ao Yin had managed copper purchases for eight years, and that there had been no deficits or delays.

The Emperor's endorsement was unambiguous:

It's absolutely out of the question to go ahead with this matter. In those days, if Ts'ao Yin had no deficit it was because he took money from Liang-huai. How could this commission be handed on to you? In later days you would have the deepest regrets.

One of the Emperor's last endorsements, written in 1720, was equally discouraging on another topic. Ts'ao Fu had apparently been carrying out certain commissions for the Emperor that involved the dispatch of porcelain ware to Peking, and the application of censure to such ware. The porcelain had been disappearing, and Ts'ao Fu received this endorsement:

Now I do not know how many pieces of porcelain have been dishonestly removed, I really have no idea. From now on, if you get orders from anyone except me, you must make it known to me in a secret memorial, and memorialize their names. If you conceal such cases and fail to memorialize, when the matter is brought out into the open, I fear that you will be unable to bear the responsibility. And when you are punished with the others, you may regret it but it will be too late. If you receive the imperial commission on any other matters, the same applies.

There is little doubt that at the end of his reign the K'ang-hsi Emperor's tolerance of the Ts'ao family was wearing thin.

The fall of the Ts'ao Family

The K'ang-hsi Emperor died in December 1722, and almost immediately afterward Li Hiü was dismissed from his post as Soochow textile commissioner. It was for the Ts'ao family, an insidious blow.

51. Ibid., No. 211, dated 58/6/13, and endorsement.
52. Ts'ao Fu Memorials, p. 54b, endorsement to memorial dated 58/6/15.
53. CNTC, ch. 107, p. 10, note Li Hiü was 68th in line and K'ang-hsi sixty-first year, but successor to Yang-hsi taking office in Yang-hsi sixty-first year. Secretarial appointments were usually made rapidly, and CNTC does not surmise taking place the same year, it may be presumed that Li Hiü left office in 69/11 or 64/11 (late December 1722 or January 1723). Evidence that he was dismissed is from Ts'ao Fu, p. 614, where it is described as "Li Hiü the degraded official." (Mandarin).
of the Yung-cheng reign are a good example of the way the new Emperor investigated and destroyed those whom he found wanting. Li Hsiu's successor as Soochow textile commissioner, Hu Peng-hui, was in fact the first to go. Hu Peng-hui, a former district magistrate and department director in the Imperial Household, owed his position to the fact that his wife was the sister of one of the Yung-cheng Emperor's favored concubines. He was thus appointed by court favor, exactly as his displaced predecessor Li Hsiu had been. His first task was to check up on Li Hsiu's various debts, and he did this competently, even disinterring one deficit that dated from 1659. His second report was good enough for him to be told to work with the Kiangsu governor. But when he turned to sending secret reports about fellow officials, the results were disastrous. Next to his first adverse comment about another official, the Yung-cheng Emperor wrote: "Most incantations. Look out for your head." And when Hu Peng-hui added that he had seen the erring official A-erh-fa and was teaching him the truth, he received the chilling endorsement: "Teaching A-erh-fa is second-rate. It is teaching Hu Peng-hui that is the important thing." Things went from bad to worse. Further endorsements accused him of sending muddled memorials, of being careless, of being disobedient; at the same time local officials kept an eye on him, and brought him further warnings from the Emperor. Finally on March 15, 1726, the governor of Kiangsu and an Imperial Household official named Kao Pin called on Hu Peng-hui at his office to inform him that he had been relieved of his duties. At the end of March, Hu Peng-hui, his wife (née Nien), and his concubine Lü, all committed suicide.153

154. TCCFC, 67:45, p. 197, memorial dated Yung-cheng 1/5/32.
156. Ibid., p. 192, endorsement on memorial dated Yung-cheng 1/5/30. A-erh-fa was a Buddhist who was charged with incantations and lost his name. PCCF, ch. 18, p. 318, and PCCF, ch. 17, p. 98.
161. Ibid., 67:42, p. 34, dated 1/5/30, dated 1/5/31.

The Ts'ao family held out a little longer. In the interim, Li Hsiu was the victim again. Though he had been out of office since 1725, he must have remained under official surveillance, and in late March, 1727, he was arrested on the charge that he had been sending gifts to Anhui's serving maid. The word "Acta's means "cult" in Manchu, and was the humiliating name that the Yung-cheng Emperor had forced his brother Yin-su to adopt. Li Hsiu was apparently involved with others in a clique, but it is not known what the specific charges against him were, nor what became of him.

In the meantime, the other two textile commissioners were not going unwatched. Sun Wen-ch'eng, Ts'ao Yin's old friend who had been commissioner at Hangchow since 1706, had come under suspicion.

152. The subject is briefly covered by Yung Chao-yü in his three biographies of the brothers in Eunice Chen, 30, 267-91, p. 267-268, p. 268-269.
cision in the first year of the Yung-cheng reign. The Emperor thought that he had been taking forced exactions in order to pay for the repairs to a temple, and had been guilty of other irregularities. He ordered the governor of Chekiang to investigate and send a secret memorial on Sun Wen-ch'eng's conduct; but no definite evidence of misconduct was forthcoming, and Sun Wen-ch'eng was left at his post. 106 He spent the next few years at his administrative duties without rebuke, but in 1726 he began to receive fresh imperial criticisms, especially with regard to the fact that he was not reporting commodity prices accurately, and was trying to please the Emperor by falsifying reports. In May 1727 he received a warning that, coming from the Yung-cheng Emperor, must have been read as a condemnation. It ran:

In every hundred memorials, should there be even a slight inaccuracy, I fear you will suffer a punishment you will not recover from. You must know that I am not a ruler who was born and grew up deep in the palace. I had forty years experience of worldly affairs as Yung Ch'ing-wang. 107

No more of Sun Wen-ch'eng's memorials are on record, nor did the Yung-cheng Emperor make any further comment. But eight months later, in January 1728, Sun Wen-ch'eng was found guilty of unspecified charges and dismissed. 108 His fate is unknown.

Ts'ao Fu had managed not to cross the Yung-cheng Emperor in the first years of his reign. There had been an awkward moment in December 1727, when the Board of Revenue had decided to cancel the system by which the Liang-huai salt censei paid for the expenses of the Kangtu textile commissioners. The incumbent salt censei had already dispatched some money to Ts'ao Fu when he received the Board's instructions; he accordingly wrote to Ts'ao Fu several times requesting that the money be returned, but got no reply. Finally he memorialized that Ts'ao Fu should be ordered to pay back the money to the Board of Revenue. The Emperor gave the order, but Ts'ao Fu was not punished for his recalcitrance. 109 He continued to make routine journeys to Peking to escort the silk transports, and was received in audience by the Emperor; on these occasions he conveyed greetings from the other commissioners. True, he was censured together with the others for extravagance in the preparation of objects for the palaces, but such rebukes were not usually taken very seriously. 110

The immediate cause of Ts'ao Fu's fall was almost certainly a highly unfavorable report of his conduct which was sent to the Emperor. Such reports on others had been sent in by the Ts'ao family to the Kang-hsi Emperor in their palace memorials. Now, ironically, the instrument was turned on them. Often the Yung-cheng Emperor merely noted such reports and kept them for future reference; it was unfortunate for Ts'ao Fu that he was reported on by an official who was riding high in the Emperor's favor. This man was K'ao-erh-t'ai, who had been appointed Liang-huai salt censei in 1724 and was to hold the same post until 1729. 111 A serious and conscientious official, his memorials had received endorsements of a kind that Ts'ao Fu and his friends would never know: "Your good points are so much that I cannot list them all. Best wishes (miin-chih). Best wishes." Or "All men can make a start, but few can bring things to completion. You must persevere in your fine ambitions, and never waiver. Best wishes." 112

On February 8, 1727, K'ao-erh-t'ai sent a memorial reporting on the abilities of various local officials—his subjects ranging from salt merchants' sons, through the prefects of Nanking and Yangchow, to the financial and judicial commissioners of the province. Third on the list was Ts'ao Fu, of whom K'ao-erh-t'ai wrote as follows:

106. YCFTP, H. 4' 40. p. 95, Emperor's ordering to Sun Wen-ch'eng to ensure supply of military granules. Yung-cheng's 1716. Instruction to Chekiang governor to investigate, ibid., H. 3, p. 89. No opposing memorial is preserved in YCFTP, but presumably Sun was cleared. His name was thus last sighted in the general confusion in Chekiang in 1726, when five different men held office as governor (CS, p. 191).

107. YCFTP, H. 47, p. 89-91, 1727-28, endorsement to memorial dated Yung-cheng 4/4't, Ch'ing-chien shih, to memorial dated Yung-cheng 3/2't. Quoted endorsement, ibid., p. 178, to memorial dated 3/1't. The Yung-cheng Emperor was using more poetic license here, he had in fact been made Yung Ch'ing-wang in 1726, only eighteen years previously.

On inquiry I found that Ts'ao Fu is young in years and without ability, and timorous in conducting his business. He has handed over the management of the textile commissioner's affairs to his household steward Ting Hsun-ch'en. I have seen him several times in Peking. He is of average ability.

Against this passage the Yung-cheng Emperor wrote two interlinear vermilion endorsements; next to Ts'ao Fu's name he wrote: "This man is really no good," and opposite the statement "He is of average ability" the Emperor wrote: "Why do you just say 'average' and leave it at that?" When such a report was sent, and the Emperor read it with care and agreed with the informer's verdict, there can be little doubt that the career of the official involved must be in jeopardy.

When this memorial was sent, Ts'ao Fu was in Peking. He returned to the south on March 19 and visited Ka-eh-t'ai at his salt censor's yamen in I-ching (I-ch'en) to relay to him one of the Emperor's often repeated prohibitions of extravagance. It is strange to think of the two men going through the public ritual attendant upon the transmission of the Emperor's edicts, while one of them knew that he had just damned his colleague in secret, and the other perhaps harbored after that same salt censor's post that his father and uncle had held for so long.

Ts'ao Fu was dismissed in January 1728, at the same time as the Hangchow textile commissioner Su Wen-ch'eng. The official reason for the dismissal of Ts'ao Fu was that he had been in arrears. Whether these arrears were still the dragging remains of Ts'ao Yin's past deficits, or the result of Ts'ao Fu's own tardiness in sending money to the Board of Revenue, or even in furnishing silk quotas to the court, is not specified. To these charges must be added the general attacks on his efficiency made by Ka-eh-t'ai and the Emperor's agreement with these endorsements. The Emperor's references to the word 'average' (P'ing-ch'eng) could mean that he considered Ts'ao Fu below average, or it could be a reference to the fact that Ka-eh-t'ai had used the same phrase to describe another official two days before. The K'ang-hsi Emperor had similarly expressed his agreement with secret communiqués, as in "I have long known that the man's reputation was not good." (In Wang Heng-hai Memorials, p. 19).

The only source for this is Yung-cheng hsü, p. 399, though the fact that Ts'ao Fu left office in 1728 is corroborated by local historians. Cf.CNTC, ch. 103, p. 58.

To the left of the Nanking textile commissioner's yamen in the Wan-shou temple, were stored a pair of gilt lions, their bodies and attached bases being five feet six inches high. I made careful inquiries into their origin, and found that in 1710 Sehe had sent his guards officer Ch'ang T'ie to Nanking, to get them cast. Afterward, because the casting was poor, he handed them over to Ts'ao Fu, to be deposited in the temple. So much I have discovered; I do not know the original purpose of the casting, nor dare I conceal it. I humbly memorialize to ask for the emperor's instructions as to whether I should send the lions to Peking to be examined, or have them destroyed on the spot.

All this memorial really shows is that Su Ho-te was frightened by his own discovery; there need have been no close contact between Yin-t'ang and the Ts'ao over this business, nor is it likely that their ownership of the lions was public knowledge before Su Ho-te's investigation. But it is quite possible that the Ts'ao family, like Li Hsiü, were enough in contact with members of the Yin-t'ang and Yin-shu factions to make their dismissal justifiable to the Emperor.

No more is known of the Ts'ao family fall. A likely source of further information, the novel the Dream of the Red Chamber, gives no direct descriptions of the family's fall, since Ts'ao Chao died before he could write those closing sections of his story. There are merely hints that members of the family were charged with certain grave offenses, and had been guilty either of some gross miscarriage of justice or were involved with a group of local wealthy families that all fell together.
Certainly they were wealthy. After his investigation, Sui Ho-te reported the family resources as being:

Living quarters and servants' dwellings numbering thirteen buildings, containing in all four hundred and eighty-three units (chien). Eight estates, totaling 1,957 mou [approx. 500 acres]. Household servants of all ages, male and female, numbering in all one hundred and fourteen people.

These were the basic units of the Ts'ao family wealth, but before the house was searched they had managed to remove much of the other items of great value that they must have owned; continuing his inventory, Sui Ho-te noted no mention of their silks, their books and art objects, their Western curios and presents received from the Emperor. At some time during 1732 these must have been sent away for safety; Sui Ho-te listed merely "cables, chairs, beds, stools, old clothes, odds and ends, about a hundred pawnshop tickets, and nothing else." Household servants testified that Ts'ao Fu owed about 32,000 taels in local debts, and Sui Ho-te was taking care of these.

By imperial order, all the landed property, dwelling houses, and slaves that had belonged to Ts'ao Fu were given to his successor as Nanking textile commissioner, that same Sui Ho-te. By a special imperial dispensation, the Ts'ao family were allowed to keep some of their houses and slaves in Peking.199

With this disastrous episode, Ts'ao Fu disappears from history. But in the beginning of the K'ien-lung reign his family were apparently pardoned, and Ts'ao I, the youngest brother of Ts'ao Yin, who was still alive and serving as a bond-servant captain commandant and concurrently colonel in the Guards Brigade, was granted posthumous honors for his ancestors. An imperial decree dated 1733 gave the founder of the family fortunes, Ts'ao Yin's grandfather Ts'ao Chen-yan, the

We Shih-hsing's new chapter that the immediate cause of Ts'ao Po's dismissal was a great fire at the chih-tao yamen (p. 494 note 47). Such a fire would almost certainly have been mentioned by Sui Ho-te or the governor in their reports.

198. Sui Ho-te, 1728 manuscript. The important note is cited in HEMC, p. 430, without date or page, but seems probably from the Palace Museum Archives. Problems arising from the unreliability are discussed by Wu Shih-hsing, pp. 219-22, and by Chou Fu-ch'ang in HEMC, pp. 413-41. In 1814, pp. 424-43, Chou Fu-ch'ang advances the theory that Sui Ho-te might have given the Ts'ao family some of his own dwellings in Peking, to make up for the vast wealth he earned in Nanking at their expense. This would have been a family gesture, of which there is no proof. It is more likely that the Ts'ao retired to their existing Peking houses, taking their Nanking movable property with them.

PALL OF THE HOUSE OF TS'AO

second-rank title of tsu-cheng ts'e-fu; and Ts'ao Chen-yan's two wives were given the comparable second-rank titles of fu-jun.200 At this time also Ts'ao Fu was probably given the minor office of an assistant department director in the Imperial Household.201 The family, however, made no permanent recovery and got no further offices. Their fortunes continued to decline, and by 1745 Ts'ao Chan, grandson of Ts'ao Yin, was living in booby poverty in the western suburbs outside Peking,202 and had started writing a novel.

In the thirteenth chapter of the Dream of the Red Chamber Ts'ao Chan puts these words into the mouth of a dying woman, who had married into the Chia family:

Our family has lived in splendid style for nearly a century, but what if one day at the height of good fortune disaster strikes, or if the proverb that "when the tree falls the monkeys shall be scattered" should be fulfilled? Will not all our background of culture and the age of our clan prove vain?203

Next to the proverb in this passage, Ts'ao Chan's uncle, who was commenting on the manuscript, wrote these words:

The remark that "when the tree falls the monkeys shall be scattered" is still ringing in my ears. Yet, counting up on my fingers, it is now thirty-five years since it was made. Alas, alas! How can one help grieving to death?204

Since this comment can be dated to about 1764, the writer must have heard the words around 1729, perhaps from the month of Ts'ao Fu, and they retained their poignancy for him because they were intimately connected with the happier times before the family's fall. Ts'ao Fu had not discovered this proverb for himself. It had been well known to his adopted father, who was pleased to produce it in

199. HEMC, pp. 445-46, 487-93. The honorary titles were IH 231, Ts'ao Fu's later ranks were IH 239 and 324.
200. tsu-cheng ts'e-fu. He is listed as holding this office in FOCT, ch. 14, p. 9. However, on the same page Ts'ao Yang is listed as having been a tsu-cheng, department director, and there is an error from Ts'ao Yang's nombril that he was ever anything higher than a chih-shih, secretary. In both his and Ts'ao Po's case the titles may have been honorary, or honorary.
201. HEMC, p. 415.
203. Chih-ying chih hsiang-yao chih-ch'ing, p. 101, translation adapted from Wu Shih-
company. As Ts'ao Yin's friend Shih Li wrote at the end of one of his poems:

Ts'ao Yin once selected these Buddhist words and declaimed them to his seated guests: "When the tree falls the monkeys shall be scattered." Now when I recall these words I am wracked with grief; for they show me the real depth of his understanding. It is a mournful proverb to echo through a family history, and Ts'ao Yin's adoption of it was doubly sardonic. For in the best-known story in which it occurs, a poem named from this proverb was sent to one Ts'ao Yung, who had been banished after the master in whose shadow he flourished had died. Ts'ao Yin obviously felt for this other Ts'ao, whose name was so like his own.

The tree in whose encompassing branches the Ts'ao family flourished for some seventy years was a massive one, compounded of many elements: office, wealth, ability, astuteness, and not least the ambiguous bondervant status that was both servile and privileged, an amalgam of the Manchu and Chinese worlds. But the tree was never firmly rooted, and it stood only so long as the Emperor chose. Without its support, the tree must fall and the monkeys be scattered.

There is nothing pejorative in the metaphor—after all it was Ts'ao Yin himself who quoted it, and his family that repeated it after him. When the tree fell the monkeys would be scattered, and that was that. But for Ts'ao Yin's grandson then to write one of the greatest works in Chinese literature, the Dream of the Red Chamber, is the most curious twist of the whole family history. It also modifies the tragic nature of that history, since it adds an element of chance to the inevitability implicit in the family situation. It should therefore be legitimate to drive the metaphor to its logical conclusion, and take leave of the Ts'ao family with words from the mouth of the most engaging character in Chinese fiction:

"We have promised to take on this job, and we have got to see it through. We've got to do the thing properly," said Monkey. "In any case we must wait till the king comes to eat us, or we shall spoil a good start by a poor finish." 188

122. HUANG, p. 199.
130. Ts'e-hou (1947), see vol. ed., p. 72, under phrase "Shu tuo. Ju-ren sun."