COURT DIVINATION AND CHRISTIANITY
IN THE K’ANG-HSI ERA

by

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Abstract

It has been said that "astrological interpretations are neither mumbo jumbo nor unsuccessful science. They are best understood, like modern economic indicators, as a technical framework for policy debates, resolved, as often as not, on other grounds. Faith in the validity of astrological categories, like confidence in extensively manipulated statistics today, persists despite their repeated failure to deliver accurate predictions." The same might be remarked of divination as an element in the formation of imperial Chinese policy. This study aims to demonstrate that astrology, siting, and hemerology, because they provided a form for resolving opposed interests, played focal roles in great events. Their neglect by historians of science is unwarranted. Conversely, it is impossible without considering the involvement of divination to understand many changes in government policy.

Yang Kuang-hsien's 楊光先 celebrated anti-Christian movement in the K’ang-hsi era deeply influenced the scientific and cultural interchange between China and the West. Most previous studies of these movements have been focused on the calendar controversy between Yang and the Jesuits Johann Adam Schall von Bell (T’ang Jo-wang 湯若望) and Ferdinand Verbiest (Nan Huai-jen 南懷仁). The inquiry summarized in this paper, however, indicates that deliberations in 1658 on the time of burial for Prince Jung 榮親, the fourth son of the Shih-tsu, the Shun-chih emperor, were pivotal for the fortunes of Christianity in the late seventeenth century.

Hemerology, the choice of lucky days, an art tied to (among other activities) the siting of tombs, has been since the Han one of the most important responsibilities of the court astrologer, who was expected to propose dates

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for state ceremonies. Two groups of people, led by Yang and Schall respectively, used different traditions of hemerology in their attempts to control the Imperial Board of Astronomy. Both sides used sudden shifts in the political situation to attack their opponents. The controversy prompted the royal astronomers to involve themselves in what had been a long-standing dispute over siting among astrologers serving the common people. This case, previously seldom discussed, was in many ways the most important of the incidents that triggered the anti-missionary agitation in the early K'ang-hsi period. This seemingly trivial polemic over the time of an infant’s burial, in view of its fateful consequences for the introduction of Western thought into China, will serve as an excellent example of the political significance of astrology, siting, and hemerology. A second example, discussions of the Dalai Lama’s visit to Peking in 1652, in which traditional astrology played a larger role, demonstrates that its uses in political debate were part of a set of roles shared by the divinatory arts.

Siting and Hemerology in Ancient Chinese Astronomy

Astrology and siting were as important aspects of astronomical practice in ancient China as preparing the calendar, reporting the time within the palace, and observing celestial phenomena. As in ancient Babylonia, the purpose of astrology was to infer from changes in the sky irregularities on earth that affected the fortunes of the state. In the Hellenistic world of the last three centuries B.C., a new horoscopic astrology emphasized the fortunes of the individual. Despite a short-lived vogue in the T’ang after it had made its way across Central Asia, the horoscopic art never replaced judicial astrology in the Chinese court or numerological fate-forecasting among the populace.

There were two prevalent schools of popular day divination in the early Ch’ing, the so-called “orthodox Five Phases” (chêng wu hsíng 正五行), and the “Hung fan Five Phases” (Hung fan wu hsíng 洪范五行) method, named after the lost Hung fan wu hsíng chüan 洪范五行傳, attributed to Liu Hsiang 劉向 (ca. 10 B.C.E.). The difference most pertinent to this study lay in their technical Five Phases correspondences. There is no reason to think that Liu’s book was a precursor of the Ch’ing hemerological tradition, which had even less to do with the questionable “Hung fan” chapter of the Canon of Documents.

Siting (ti-li 地理, k’ăn-yü 場域, or later feng-shui 風水, for which the old English word “geomancy” is sometimes inappropriately used) has remained popular to the present day for planning the locations of houses and tombs. Divining time as well as place was, in late imperial

3. E.g., Hou Han shu, 25: 3572; Sung shih, 165: 3923. I cite the Chung Hwa Book Co., punctuated ed. for all Standard Histories.
4. On the contention between the two schools see the Appendix, p. 18.
China, a normal part of the sitting expert’s duties. Although most technical historians ignore sitting on the ground that it is a pseudoscience, anthropologists have demonstrated its extensive social influence. Although some orthodox thinkers looked down upon its practitioners, it was used at every level of society. Ts’ai Fa-shan (1089-1152), father of the polymath philosopher Ts’ai Yuan-ting (1135-1198), once remarked that “it is essential that every son should know medicine and sitting,” since among the requisites of filial piety were caring for ill parents and burying them properly. That unwitting font of orthodoxy, Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130-1200), who was involved in sitting the tomb of emperor Hsiao-tsung 皓極, detailed the importance of proper sitting to all bereaved survivors:

By the word “bury” (tsung 丧) we mean “safely storing away” (ts’ang藏); that is how one safely stores away the bodily remains of ancestors. When descendants wish to store away safely the bodily remains of ancestors, they must find a way to fully express their solemn and sincere feelings, in order to attain abiding peace and security. If the corpse remains intact and the spirit finds peace, the descendants will be prosperous and ceremonial offerings will be uninterrupted; this is a natural principle. . . . But if by chance the divination is not expert and the place not auspicious, then there are bound to be underground streams, winds, or insects, to disturb it underground. The spirit thus moved will not be peaceful, and the descendants’ line will be wiped out—a matter greatly to be feared. And it may be that, even if a fortunate location is chosen, but the funeral is not a generous one and [the body is] not stored deep, in the chaos of war it will be abnormally dug up and exposed. This is also an important matter for reflection.

At least since the Sung (the period in which the court officially accepted and patronized popular religion and other popular usages on a large scale), sitting in the broad sense—determining the time and place of burial—has been closely associated with cosmology and astrology. As the teacher of the great sitting specialist Li Po-shao 廖伯韶 (beginning of the Sung) taught him, “the mountain contours of the realm are bound to the constellations, and all the stars in the sky make obeisance to the North Star. Thus the North Star is the commander of the twenty-eight lunar lodges. The circulation system of the celestial and terrestrial configurations (t’ien-
"wen ti-li chih mai-lo 天文地理之脈絡" runs through every part, and is never interrupted. Descriptions and diagrams from astrological books such as Pu t'ien ko 步天歌 are often reproduced in sitting manuals. Siting techniques for choosing auspicious days were adopted in the Directorate of Astronomy.

Generally speaking, the imperial astronomical functions were integrated, but the specialization of technical expertise divided them into three categories: mathematical astronomy (li or li suan 畫算), astrology (t'ieh-wen 天文), and time service (lou-k'o 漏刻). In the Sung and Yuan the third category for purposes of training court astronomers was not time service but the Three Methods of Divination (san shih 三式), namely T'ai-i 太乙, liu-jen 六壬, and sun-chia 逐一, which predate the emergence of sitting as a separate discipline. But by the early Ch'ing, sitting and the choice of days for such ceremonies as imperial marriages, the suburban sacrifices, and the launching of military expeditions were among the duties of the Department of Time Service.

At the same time, it was common for sitting experts to be appointed to astronomical posts. For instance, the 1873 gazetteer of Kan 當 prefecture, Kiangsi, lists four such appointments of local specialists to be Erudites in the Directorate of Astronomy in the Ming, and two in the Ch'ing, mostly in recognition of their services in planning imperial tombs. From the Yuan to the Ch'ing, the government established prefectural and district schools of divination (Yin-yang hsueh 陰陽學) to train functionaries who could "divine auspicious days, and related matters of topography and orientation."

In order to demonstrate that sitting played too important a part in historical events to ignore, I shall explore a controversy over funerary rites in 1657 that had weighty consequences for the authority of Jesuit missionaries in the imperial court.

The Quarrel over the Burial of Prince Jung

Shih-tsung in 1653 set aside his empress on the grounds that she was spoiled, jealous, and contumacious. He was not satisfied with her succes-

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7. Ti-li t'ien chi hui yuan 地理天文會元 (Taipei reprint of 1615 ed.), 31: 1013. For quotations from Pu t'ien ko (8th or 9th century) see, for instance, Ti-li jen-tsu hsueh chih, 7: no pagination.


sor, preferring the concubine Tung-eh, daughter of his Grand Minister of the Imperial Household Department. She was promoted in 1656 to Imperial Honored Consort. The emperor praised her management of palace affairs, adding (according to an apocryphal source) that “although she was never given the title of empress, the duties she carried out were those of empress. It was only because the empress was still alive that she never was able to attain that rank.”

Tung-eh gave birth to the emperor’s fourth son, Prince Jung, on 12 November 1657. This infant died three months later, before it was old enough to name. Although the emperor, in an audience on the day of the child’s death, denied that he was grief-stricken and asserted that his main concern was for the feelings of the Empress Dowager, he soon had the dead infant ennobled posthumously as Imperial Prince Jung, and had a burial park prepared at Mt. Huang-hua, Chi county, in present Hopei province.

According to standard procedure, the Directorate of Astronomy was ordered to divine an auspicious time for the burial and report it to the Bureau of Sacrifices in the Ministry of Rites. The divination was the responsibility of officials in the Water Clock Section. Yang Hung-liang, Supervisor of Water Clocks for the Five Offices, carried out the divination. He based it on siting; that is, instead of choosing a time concordant with the Prince’s moment of birth, he first found an ideal location for the tomb and then chose a time concordant with its site and orientation.

According to the “twenty-four peak” (erb-shib-ssu shan = 十四山) division of the sitting compass circle into 24 directions, Yang set the site at “peak H, orientation C,” in which H and C are the tenth and third celestial stems, equivalent to an azimuth of 345° and an orientation of 165°. Then, using the Hung fan Five Phases method, he determined the time: the fifth double-hour (ch’en shib 夕時, 7 - 9 A.M.) of 24 September 1658. This year, month, day, and hour of interment were auspicious because they belonged respectively to the phases Wood, Wood, Water, and Fire, none of which overcomes Water.

The Board of Rites was then responsible for translating the time into Manchu and reporting it to the emperor. The designated officials, the Director Lü Ch’ao-yun and the Clerk E-le-mu mistranslated ch’en shib into the Manchu equivalent of the seventh double-hour (11 A.M. - 1 P.M.).

When their report came to the attention of Yang Hung-liang, an expert in siting and other kinds of divination, he vigorously protested the mistake.

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Since the date in Manchu had already been forwarded to the throne, the Ministry of Rites refused to acknowledge the mistake—knowledge of which would have aroused imperial ire. The Prince was buried at the incorrect time.

Despite the many divergent schools of divination, the disagreement was not due to different approaches in the Directorate and Ministry, but was simply an error. But the hour of interment as erroneously reported in Manchu by the Ministry of Rites, when evaluated by the sitting technique, was highly inauspicious. Yang was aware of this, and as an experienced sitting specialist must have considered it a disaster for the imperial house. Whether Schall encouraged him to accuse the Ministry for political reasons is not known, but no such pressure would have been required for Yang to expose the error. At the end of 1658 Lü and E-le-mu were brought to trial. Both were initially sentenced to beheading, but an amnesty saved their lives. They were finally dismissed from office, and the latter's property was confiscated. One other official was fined and four were dismissed, among them the Manchu Minister of Rites Enggeder. The other three of the four, lower in rank, were also flogged.

Schall and Divination

The use of divination to choose the time of burial, despite great differences in Chinese and Occidental funerary customs, would not have surprised any contemporary European, since astrology was still regularly employed to schedule momentous affairs. In fact, a recent study has shown that in England the popularity of astrology peaked in 1640-1660.

The Jesuits, however, as agents of the Counter-Reformation, did not approve of astrology and other popular forms of divination. Schall claimed that he remained ignorant of the Chinese prognosticatory art, although its use was among the duties of the Directorate of Astronomy. He was nevertheless attacked by fellow missionaries for allowing its practice in the Directorate (a matter over which he had no control). His own ambiguity emerges in his apologia for state sponsorship of astrology, in a tractate he wrote for the purpose:

... the common people everywhere insist upon divining a date and time for events great and small. This custom has been passed down in previous ages for so


long that it is now conventional. For all this time those who rule the state, in
their educational activities, have avoided interfering with popular customs, and,
in instituting a uniform administration, have avoided interfering with what is
locally appropriate. This precedent is surely not to be gainsaid. Nevertheless,
since divinatory methods are so diverse, and everyone has a different theory,
there is no end of bickering, which is bound to damage the public interest. It is
thus best to set a clear standard in a book based on an impartial choice of
methods. Calculating an ephemeris of the ‘‘season-granting sort,’’ turning it
over to the calendrical officials to add [hemerological] annotations, and having it
disseminated in popular almanacs makes it possible for everyone everywhere to
adhere to the [same hemerological] indications. Only that can provide a climate
in which ‘‘the same breeze blows everywhere.’’

The Political Background of the Anti-Missionary Movement

Schall was able to have an essentially European astronomical system offi-
cially adopted by the time Shih-tsu took the throne in 1644, and completely
controlled the Directorate of Astronomy by the end of 1645. He was able to
bring the fury of the law down upon the Ministry of Rites in 1661. Why, then,
was an ex-criminal able to have him imprisoned in 1664? To understand
this shift, we must examine Schall’s connections in officialdom, a matter in
which astrology stood him well. A single case, the debate over the Dalai Lama’s
visit to the capital in 1652, will throw light on the general situation.

At the outset of the Manchu occupation, the regent Dorgon
took great pains to recruit prominent Han men to take high official
posts, generally sharing them with Manchus, one Han and one Manchu per
post. Shih-tsu, after he began exerting personal rule in 1651 at the age of 14
sui, pursued with alacrity this search for pliable talent. But neither could
persuade Manchu and Han officials to work in concord. Shih-tsu once
admonished his high officials to this effect: ‘‘When you meet to deliberate
on affairs of state, it would be sensible to do so in unity. Why must Man-
chu and Han differ? And, although there may be some matter on which all
of you should deliberate, why is it that no Han official is involved in the
deliberation of the Manchurian officials, and no Manchurian official is
involved in the deliberation of the Han officials? This is because in your
hearts and wills you have not learned to get along with each other.’’

14. From Schall, Min li p’u chu chu huo 舊地鋪註解, cited in Hsu
Tsung-tse 徐宗澤, Ming Ch’ing chien Yeh-su-hsi-shih i-chu l’i yao 明清間耶穌會
士譯者提要 (Taipei, 1958), p. 284. ‘‘Breeze’’ is a euphemism for local usages, so the
last line clearly refers to their standardization as an aim of government.

15. For an explanation of how he did so, see Huang I-nung, ‘‘Tsang Jo-wang yu Ch’ing
465-491.

This dissension was apparent, for instance, in attempts that began before 1644 to invite the Dalai Lama to the capital. In the court's effort to establish relations with non-Han peoples, the Dalai Lama was particularly important because of the many Lamaist Mongols, including Shih-tsu's mother, in the ruling group. After the Dalai Lama's acceptance, the Manchu officials argued unanimously that the emperor should travel to the border to welcome him, a position that the Han officials opposed. On 12 October 1652, the young emperor announced that he would go to the border. On 30 October the Grand Academicians Hung Ch'eng-ch'ou 洪承畴 and Ch'en Chih-lin 陳之遴 appealed to astrological reasoning in advising that the journey be cancelled:

We have reviewed a memorial from the Directorate of Astronomy, which says that yesterday the planet Venus rivalled the brightness of the sun, and that a streaming star entered the Palace of Purple Tenuity [i.e., Venus was visible during daylight, and a meteor was sighted in the region of the Pole Star, which corresponds astrologically to the imperial court]. We venture to observe that the Sun is the counterpart of the Lord of Men, but Venus competes with it in brightness; the Palace of Purple Tenuity is the precinct of the Lord of Men, but meteors have penetrated it deeply. When heaven above sends down such signs, truly we would do well to be alarmed by them. . . . When the Dalai Lama comes from far away, to send a great official to welcome him is a perfectly adequate way to show that he is to be given special treatment. Doing so will win the hearts of the Mongols. Why should the emperor be troubled to go himself? The Way of Heaven runs deep and far, and is beyond our capacity to measure. But when you have entered the carriage and are ready to go, and the changes in the stars are so manifest, this truly expresses the love of blue heaven above for your Majesty; it is essential that it prompt deep thought and self-discipline. 17

Let us compare this memorial with the official record of these events: "In the fifth double-hour [7-9 A.M.] on 28 October 1652, Venus was visible in daylight in the third tu of the lunar lodge Wings (卯卯). In the tenth double-hour [7-9 P.M.] on 29 October, a streaming star appeared in the central part of the sky, large as a small cup (chan 飃), red in color and with a bright trace of a tail; it entered the Palace of Purple Tenuity." 18

Since shortly after the beginning of the Shun-chih reign, the Directorate of Astronomy reported observations daily, and based its interpretations on the T'ang manual Kuan hsiang wan chan 乾隆天文算法, attributed to Li Ch'un-feng 李淳風. This book listed a variety of vaguely phrased interpretations for each phenomenon. For instance, a red star entering the Purple Tenuity Enclosure impeded "disorder, armies entering the capital.

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18. Ch'ing chiao wen-hsien t'ang kiao 清朝天文書考 (Commercial Press ed.), 267: 7251. Meteors were often said to have tails. On this point and their astrology generally, see Edward H. Schaller, Facing the Void. T'ang Approaches to the Stars (Berkeley, 1977), p. 90. A tu is one day's mean travel of the sun along the ecliptic, or slightly less than one degree.
of the Son of Heaven, many grandees among those who perish”; meteors in general entering the Palace of Purple Tenuity portended “a vassal trespassing against his lord, many dead in the realm . . . an emissary arriving from the nobles . . . the Hsiung-nu taking up arms, also an imbalance between water and drought.”¹⁹ Many of these interpretations could be applied to a wide variety of occasions; for instance, Hung and Ch’en in their memorial connected the last phrase with “the south suffering from drought and the north suffering from incessant rains.”

This astrological argument was effective; the emperor’s response was “This memorial is quite correct. My journey is canceled forthwith.” A prince of the imperial house and high officials of the imperial household were sent to the border to represent him.²⁰

But how significant were these omens? Let us begin with a rule of thumb that Hans Bielenstein demonstrated statistically for the Former Han period: although imperial astronomers did not generally fabricate observations, how many phenomena they reported depended on political motivations.²¹

According to my calculations, Venus was rather bright at the time, and would have been visible in the southeast shortly after sunrise. But a month earlier its magnitude would have been roughly as great, and it would also have been visible in daylight. The variation in brightness over the period was minor (M = -4.5 ± 0.1). The only obvious astronomical reason for reporting it so late would have been bad weather earlier. A whole month of bad seeing is unlikely, however, for Peking in October. One cannot ignore an alternative, non-astronomical explanation, namely that the Directorate at this time was looking for omens to oblige Hung and Ch’en. To test this second hypothesis, we will consider the report of the meteor.

On the average, in a given hour at night the trained but unaided eye can see roughly ten meteors. Opportunities to see one in the Palace of Purple Tenuity, an area of roughly 15” radius, would not be rare. But phenomena that could be called large as a small cup are not common. I have made an estimate by surveying the Ming Veritable Records (Ming shih lu 明實錄), which are more comprehensive for astronomical observations than those of the Ch’ing. Of the 352 “streaming stars” recorded for the twenty-two years of the Yung-lo era (1403-1424), two hundred are described as the size of a small cup. The description was, at least in the Ming, very generously applied. In other words, a meteor of the apparent size recorded for 29 October could be observed an average of once a month. An object that

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¹⁹. K'ai-ch'eng Kuan hsiang wan chan (Ch’ing ed. of Chou Mao-ch’i 周濬). ¹⁰ ; Central Library, Taipei, Rare Book Collection, no. 6437), ch. 2-3.


large might be seen entering the Palace of Purple Tenuity at least every year or two.

But a meteor and an observation of a meteor are two different matters. Unlike most events recorded at the observatory, meteors are very short-lived phenomena, and occur in a very small portion of the sky. Even with a group of naked-eye observers, the odds that more than one would see a falling star are very small. More to the point, if one observer claimed to have seen a meteor that none of the others had glimpsed, there would be no reason for them to suspect his report. To sum up, although neither daytime apparitions of Venus nor meteors are rare phenomena, it is remarkable that the much rarer combination of the two within a day of each other should have been reported just at the time an omen turned out to be so politically useful.

What can be said about Schall’s involvement in this political application of astrology? He too was turning events into portents and putting them to political use. Even before the Dalai Lama arrived in the capital, the Jesuit sent in a memorial claiming that sunspots (another long-lived phenomenon easily produced on a given date) had appeared to alert the court that the Tibetan was obscuring the emperor’s radiance. During the Dalai Lama’s visit, Schall asserted that contemporary military reverses and an epidemic were warnings not to show excessive favor to the guest (note that defeats and epidemics could be omens as well as what omens forewarned about). It is not surprising that Schall, as chief supplier of omens by imperial appointment, should have learned from his fellow officials to use them in a good cause—in this instance, lowering esteem for Lamaism in order to promote his mission to spread Christianity. But his willingness to do so opens the question of whether he fabricated the meteor omen to serve at the same time the interests of the Society of Jesus and those of his Han colleagues. Since Schall seems to have claimed that his own astrological memorial was responsible for the emperor’s cancelling his trip, 22 collusion is by no means out of the question.

Despite the favor shown him by Dorgon, who needed reliable astronomical computations at the outset of the new regime, Schall’s close associates in the highest political circles were Han rather than Manchu. An impressive roster of Ministers, Vice-ministers, and Grand Secretaries, all Han, wrote prefaces for his books, attended drinking parties with him, or used the forms of fictive discipleship when signing birthday messages. Among them were Hu Shih-an 胡世安 and Wang Ch’ung-chien 王崇簡, successive Han heads of the Ministry of Rites who served in tandem with the Manchu Minister Enggeder. Enggeder had been deeply involved in the

preparations for the Dalai Lama’s visit, which put him on the side that opposed Schall and his Chinese friends. Whether Enggeder and Schall thus became enemies the evidence does not say. But it was hardly coincidence that, while Enggeder was dismissed in the wake of the Prince Jung affair (which was unconnected with that of the Dalai Lama), Hu and Wang were untouched by the investigation.23

Despite Shih-tsu’s predilection for Buddhism from the age of twelve sui on, he was friendly toward Schall. Early in 1655, to recognize Schall’s eleven years of service, the emperor gave him the title “Preceptor Conversant with Mysteries, Honorable Commissioner of the Office of Transmission, Entitled to Wear the Button and Belt of the Second Rank, Further Advanced One Class, in Charge of Correspondence in the Directorate of Astronomy.” Although Schall was not formally Supervisor, his rank, 2a, was identical to those of the Ministers of Rites (one Chinese and one Manchu) to whom he reported on auspicious times. In 1658 the emperor made him a Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (Kuang-lu ta-fu 光祿大夫), a prestige title generally awarded only to rank 1a officials in the Ch’ing, and posthumously awarded honorific rank 1a status to his ancestors for three generations.24

The Effect of Political Change on Schall’s Prestige

Schall in the late 1650’s was, then, an official in an essential post, with far-flung bureaucratic connections, substantial standing in the eyes of the emperor, and a network of powerful friends, virtually none of them Manchu. It is not surprising that when the commoner Yang Kuang-hsien submitted two memorials attacking Schall in 1660, the Office of Transmission, of which we have seen Schall was honorific commissioner, should have refused to forward them. Yang claims, in fact, that when he was unwilling to accept the return of the first memorial, the clerk flung it down the steps toward him and threatened to attack him.25

Schall’s fortunes and those of his Han associates changed abruptly when the emperor died from smallpox early in 1661. Shih-tsu’s Mongol mother, who had strongly disapproved of his taste for things Chinese, arranged for a group of Manchu high officials to issue a collection of fourteen statements—all, they claimed, excerpted from his own edicts—in which the emperor regretted his “malfaeances.” According to one of these, “giving authority to Han officials, even putting them in charge of the seals of mini-

authority to Han officials, even putting them in charge of the seals of ministries and agencies, to the point that Manchu vassals lost enthusiasm for their work and slackened in the vigor [with which they pursued it], was one of my malfeasances."

When Sheng-tsu ascended the throne at the age of eight sui to begin the K’ang-hsi era (1662-1722), his regents announced in his name that his rule would follow not the pro-Han policies of Shih-tsu but the traditional ways of Nurhachi and Abahai, the Manchu “emperors” prior to the 1644 conquest.26 Under what became in effect the single-handed regency of Oboi 鄂拜, Han officials were isolated from the center of power. A number of Schall’s prominent friends, among them Hu Shih-an and Wang Ch’ung-chien, then Minister of Rites, retired. Schall’s influence gradually decreased. Within a year after Shih-tsu’s death Schall’s friends lavishly celebrated the priest’s birthday, and his adopted son was given the status of a student in the School for the Sons of the State. But before long the changed environment made it feasible for Yang to renew his anti-missionary campaign.

Yang Kuang-hsien’s Attack on the Directorate

The facts relating to Yang Kuang-hsien’s attempt to drive out Christianity are widely known. Yang (1597-1669), who never took the civil service examinations, pursued a private dream of political decontamination that led to his flogging and banishment in the final years of the Ming and, despite his humiliation by the Office of Transmission in 1660, brought him back in the K’ang-hsi era to become the scourge of the Christian missionaries and their adherents.27 This account will focus on the astrological and hemerological issues that Yang raised, the affair of Prince Jung’s burial central among them.

In 1559 Yang published, among several anti-missionary tractates, his “Deliberations on Hemerology” (Hsuan-te i 選時議). It charged that, of the year, month, day, and hour that Schall chose to bury Prince Jung, none was auspicious. Yang argued, first, that the astronomers should have based the divination on the time of the infant’s birth, in which case they would have learned that the time proposed for the funeral was inauspicious. But even if a time based on the site were accepted, he went on, they erred in

27. For an impartial and relatively full account in a Western language, see the biography of Yang in Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period (1644-1912) (2 vols.; Washington, DC, 1942-1944), 889-892. A more up-to-date and detailed account of Yang’s life is my “Yang Kuang-hsien chia-shih yü sheng-p’ing k’ao” 楊光先家世與生平考, Kuo-li Pen-i-kuan kuan-k’an 國立編譯館館刊, 19, 2: 15-28. On Yang’s writings see my essay cited above.
nique. If they had correctly used the latter, again they would have discovered that the time was disastrous. In making this accusation, Yang brought to bear on palace practice a dispute between unoffcial diviners that had gone on quietly for centuries.\textsuperscript{28} He concluded sarcastically, “fortunately this divination was used to bury a prince only a few months old. Had it been used for an official household, there would be no way to express the harm done!”\textsuperscript{29}

In 1559 the young prince had not long been interred, and the matter was just being officially investigated. Yang’s critique had no immediate effect.

The new offensive that Yang launched in 1664 quickly attracted Manchu support. He began with a secret report to the Ministry of Rites aimed not directly against Schall but against his Chinese disciple Li Tsu-pai 李祖石. Yang charged among other things that Li’s short history of Christianity in China, \textit{T’ien-hsueh ch’uan kai} 天學傳概 (1663), was part of a missionary plot intended to foment an uprising. The regent Suk-saha 蘇克薩哈 and the former Manchu Minister of Rites Enggeder, who by this time was a definite enemy of Schall, supported Yang. A few days later Schall, Lodovico Buglio, Gabriel de Magalhães, and Verbiest, along with a number of Chinese officials of the Directorate of Astronomy and converts, were arrested, as were missionaries in the provinces. Schall, who had had a stroke, was unable to speak and defend himself. Not long afterward Yang amplified his charges that Schall had deliberately selected an inauspicious time for the burial of Prince Jung. In doing so, he continued, Schall had caused the early death of Prince Jung’s mother, Shih-tsu’s mother, the sixth son of Shih-tsu, and Shih-tsu himself!

Yang’s discussion of the Prince Jung affair showed his characteristic carelessness and hypocrisy. In discussing the siting of the tomb, the location and orientation that he charged the Jesuits with proposing (peak A, orientation G) are not the ones they proposed (peak H, orientation C).\textsuperscript{30} Despite the scorn he expressed for the \textit{Hung fan} Five Phases method, he himself had previously used it in the divination manual \textit{l chien t’ung-shu 易見通書} (written before July 1669). It is ironic that, as a direct result of his agitation, the Ministry of Rites in June 1665 ordered this book collected and destroyed, precisely because it depended on the \textit{Hung fan} Five Phases method.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} See the Appendix, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{29} Yang’s charges are detailed in \textit{Hsuan-tse i}, reproduced in \textit{Pu-te-i 不得已} (Taipei, 1966 reprint in \textit{T’ien-chu-chiao tung ch’uan wen-hsien hsu pien 天主教來華獻績續編}); Huang, “Yang Kuang-hsien chu-shu lun luch,” pp. 6, 8. The quotation refers to the fact that Prince Jung died without progeny.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Hsi ch’ao ting an}, p. 60, and \textit{Pu-te-i}, p. 1165.

In the spring of 1665, in the aftermath of a comet that appeared twice and an earthquake in the capital, both potent admonitions, the emperor declared an amnesty. Buglio, de Magalhães, Verbiest, and the Christian eunuch Hsu Ch’ien were released after nearly six months, and the provincial missionaries were ordered to be collected in Kuang-tung province. Schall and the other Chinese were excluded from the scope of the amnesty.

The report of the commission of inquiry was issued on 11 April. Because the Manchu officials on the commission were unprepared in most instances to decide between Schall’s and Yang’s conflicting astronomical claims, the charges in that field were too vague and insubstantial to support a heavy penalty. The most concrete charge was in fact that Schall “did not use the Orthodox Five Phases technique, but instead the Hung fan Five Phases method. The location, orientation, and date all fell into forbidden and even lethal categories, with very serious results.” The commissioners accepted Yang’s charge that the “serious results” included the death of the emperor, a prince, and two empresses.

The commission recommended that Schall, Yang Hung-liang, Yang’s immediate supervisor Tu Ju-yü, head of the Water Clock Section, the directors of the Five Offices within the Directorate, and other officials be sentenced to lingering deaths by small cuts, and their sons (who might inherit what were largely hereditary positions) to beheading. But, they added, “Schall is an official in charge of a seal. He failed to take care in this matter of choosing a date, and allowed [his subordinates] to proceed. It would be appropriate to execute him, but we have considered the fact that he is a specialist in astrology (t’ien-wen), and that hemerology is not an art he has mastered. Furthermore, he has given many years of effective service, and is now old and weak. The death penalty is to be remitted. It would also be appropriate to execute Tu Ju-yü and Yang Hung-liang, but we have considered the fact that they were responsible for siting the Eternal Tumulus, the Fortunate Tumulus, and the Resplendent Tumulus, all successfully. Their death penalties are also to be remitted.” They were to be flogged and exiled instead.

On 17 May, when the formal judgment was issued, the punishments recommended for Schall and others were entirely remitted. Yang and Tu, the non-Christian officials directly responsible for selecting the time for the burial of Prince Jung, were among those freed. Only Li Tsu-pai and four other Chinese astronomers, all Christian converts whose duty was calendar

32. Shib lu, 14: 27-28, and Hsi-ch’ao t’ung an, p. 60. The tumuli are the tombs of Sheng-tsu’s three predecessors. Note that this order uses the word “t’ien-wen” in a broad sense that includes mathematical astronomy, observation, and astrological interpretation. The sense of “astrology” current in Europe at the time was equally broad. Schall was just short of 73 years old.
making and who had nothing to do with hemerology, were executed on the charge of having selected the inauspicious time. It is obvious that the underlying purpose of this legal action was to break the power of Christian converts—and thus, it was no doubt thought, Schall’s personal authority—in the Directorate of Astronomy.

The Directorate of Astronomy’s Counter-attack

Yang Kuang-hsien, whose “expertise” had made possible this assertion of Manchu hegemony, was put in charge of the Directorate of Astronomy. He repeatedly protested that “I know the principles of astronomy, but not its mathematics,” but was not permitted to refuse the post. Since he had decimated the Directorate’s best-trained computational personnel, errors quickly began to appear. The Jesuits and their allies were waiting to turn the tables.

On 29 December 1668 the emperor sent the ephemeris prepared by Yang’s Associate Supervisor, Wu Ming-hsuan, to Verbiest for evaluation. Verbiest promptly showed that it contained many errors. Following two commissions of inquiry, on 8 March 1669 an imperial edict cashiered Yang. A month later Verbiest was made Associate Supervisor under a nominal Manchu Supervisor, and was given authority to determine procedures for divination as well as astronomy. At the beginning of June Verbiest completed and published three pamphlets documenting Yang’s astronomical errors and debunking Chinese astral divination, sining, and hemerology. Although the Jesuit missionaries continued to control official astronomical practice, they did not have undivided authority over the Directorate of Astronomy. Despite their essential positions, they were given the formal title of Supervisor only from 1725 on.

A few days later Sheng-tsu arrested his uncle, the dictatorial regent Oboi, and purged his supporters; once again a young and open-minded emperor was personally ruling the country. Those harmed by Yang Kuang-hsien sent up a flurry of charges against him, noting pointedly that he was “an adherent of Oboi.” Wu Chou-pin, now Supervisor of Water Clocks for the Five Offices, and others brought up the Prince Jung divination and proved the irrationality of Yang’s claim that the Hung fan Five Phases method was heterodox. The Directorate of Astronomy once more

33. Pu-te-i, pp. 1264, 1300-1; Shib lu, 26: 16-17, 25-26, 27: 18.
35. The belief that the Hung fan system was composed for anti-foreign purposes had little to do with the Manchus. It was described as a “scripture to exterminate barbarians” mien man ching at least as early as the Sung Ti-li nan chun chi (n. d.; annotated Ming ed. under the title Ti-li nan chun chi chu, printed 1488/1505, in National Central Library Rare Book Collection, no. 1520), preface. Nor did the attacks on the Hung fan Five Phases method end with the vindication of the Jesuit astronomers. We can find such an attack as late as 1692 by the Buddhist monk Ch’e-ying in Ti-li yuan-chen (punctuated reprint, Taipei, 1988), p. 324.
relied on this method. "The Hung fan Five Phases technique is employed in the initial stages of analyzing tomb locations; if it is not to be consulted, there is no other book to consult!" 36

The first charge brought against Yang on 5 September, the one to which the remainder were traced, was that "he had called the Hung fan Five Phases method, which has been used by one dynasty after another, a scripture to exterminate barbarians." On account of Yang’s age, Sheng-tsu did not have him executed, but Yang died two months later on the way home.

**The Aftermath**

The resolution of the Yang Kuang-hsien affair did not end political controversies over divination. In mediating a dispute in November 1681 between two Directorate officials concerning divination for a tomb, the K’ang-hsi emperor made his position clear: "As for the Directorate of Astronomy’s choice of dates and assessment of the site, actually I do not believe in it (chen yuan pu hsin 联原不信). Siting experts have a great deal to say, not from books about how the great sages and worthies of ancient times made their selections, but rather from books fabricated by people later on to suit themselves. What this book says is lucky, that book says is unlucky. There is no such thing as a definitive opinion. It is true, however, that such techniques cannot be completely dispensed with.” Sheng-tsu refused to settle the dispute, partly to discourage further argument over these contentious issues and partly because “the affairs of the Directorate of Astronomy should not be known to any save specialists.” 37

Continued repercussions of the siting incident irritated the emperor to the point that he dealt harshly with disagreements that came to his attention. In order to end them once and for all, he ordered government offices to cooperate in compiling an imperial manual of hemerology to be reconciled with the official perpetual calendar and adopted as a single standard. This Ch’ in-ting hsuan-tse li shu was completed and printed in 1685, but a number of technical divergences were not resolved in it. Sheng-tsu eventually commissioned a new work for the purpose, Yü ting hsing li k’ao yuan 御定星曆考原, completed in 1715.

The Ch’ien-lung emperor and his successors did not share the skepticism of Sheng-tsu about divination. In 1741 Ch’ien-lung ordered the outstanding astronomers Mei Ku-ch’eng 梅彀成, Ho Kuo-tsung 何國宗, and others to produce new standard guides, one of which was the famous

36. *Hsi ch’ao ting an*, pp. 60-65; *Ch’in-ting hsuan-tse li shu* 钦定選墳喪書 (MS copy of the 1685 palace ed., National Central Library, Rare Book Collection, no. 7586), prefatory memorials.
37. *K’ang-hsi chi-ch’u chu* 康熙起居注 (for 27 November 1681; in First Historical Archive), 1, 765. For a similar remark to his chief ministers see *Ch’ing ch’ao wen-hsien t’ung k’ao*, 256: 7159.
and others to produce new standard guides, one of which was the famous "Ch' in ting hsieh chi pien fang shu" (欽定協紀辨方書). In this work the Hung fan Five Phases method, which had been used officially for two generations under Sheng-tsu, was once again discarded in favor of the Orthodox Five Phases technique. 38

The popular Chinese faith in astrology was not diminished by the end of the Ch'ing period. The seventeenth-century imperial manual, "Ch' in ting hsieh chi pien fang shu," remains the basis of Taiwanese popular almanacs to this day. 39

Conclusion

This contextual study of the battle between Yang Kuang-hsien and the Jesuit missionaries has shown that, although it is often referred to in Chinese as the "astronomy case" (li yu 历狱), the focus of dispute was not astronomy or even astrology, but divination. This was true not only of Yang's attack but also to a large extent of the missionaries' counterattack. The influence of larger political issues was too great for this series of incidents to be studied from the viewpoint of technical history alone.

It is also clear that, despite many positivist interpretations in the past, the issue was not science versus superstition. The Jesuits in the late seventeenth century did not represent emerging modern science, but the Counter-Reformation defense against it. 40 Their opposition to divination was not a defense of rationalism for its own sake but a matter of Church policy meant to exert authority over popular culture. Their control of the

38. On punishments for divinatory disputes, Ch' in ting hsieh chi pien fang shu (in Shu k'u ch' ian shu; Commercial Press reprint, vol. 811, memorial), and K'ang-hsi chi-chü chu, 2: 1113. On the Ch' in ting hsuan-je li shu, later called t'ung shu (通書), to avoid a taboo on Kao-tsung's personal name, see note 36, p. 16. This book is extremely rare. Additional information on Hsueh chi pien fang shu is given in Ch' ing ch'ao wen-hsien t'ung k'ao, 256: 7160. On the change of techniques, refer to I hsin ting ch'ung ch'eng p'i miau t'ung shu 新訂崇正開通録 (reprint of 1771 ed., Taipei, 1988), 6: 127.


Directorate of Astronomy did not drive divination out. The Chinese emperor who stood alone in opposing it had no abiding influence so long as it remained deeply rooted in governmental rituals and popular values.

APPENDIX

Factions in Traditional Divination

The origins of divination in general and hemerology in particular are obscure, but it is clear from the bibliographies of the Standard Histories that treatises on date selection go back to the Han and were plentiful from the Eastern Han on. Most of today’s fortune-tellers, no matter to what sect they belong, trace their lineages to Wu Ching-luan 吳景彎 in the Northern Sung period. Such claims to antique traditions seldom have any historical value, but they attest to the ideal of a common origin. According to the prevalent legend, when Jen-tsung in 1041 ordered that experts in divination be recruited from the prefectorates, Wu appeared, and was made Director of Astronomy. In reply to the sovereign’s inquiries, he produced a Yin-yang t’ien chi shu piao 雲陽天機書表, which set out what it asserted was the orthodox lineage of siting.41

Wu’s account, clearly legendary, traced the combination of siting and hemerology back to the early 650’s, when an immortal (shen jen 神人) revealed its secrets to one Ch’iu Yen-han 丘延翰, who became a great expert. In the early eighth century, when the Grand Astrologer announced that a “ch’i of the Son of Heaven” (a portent of a rival for the throne) had appeared, the court sent an emissary to cut off the circulation of the “mountain dragon”—that is, to ruin the site of the apparition with earthworks, and to apprehend Ch’iu, who evidently was considered responsible. He could not be found, and was eventually pardoned and given an official appointment. At that point he presented to emperor Hsuan-tsung the scriptures he had been taught. The emperor regarded them as national treasures and stored them in the palace storehouse. Concerned lest someone equally knowledgeable threaten his dynasty, he commanded the famed priest-astronomer I-hsing 一行 to write a Canon to be Stored in a Bronze Casket (Tung han ching 銅函經) for dissemination. He had I-hsing purposely confuse the procedures in it. But in the late 880’s, when the Huang Ch’ao rebels took the capital, Yang I 楊益 (better known as Yang Yun-sung 楊松) and Tseng Ch’iu-chi 曾求己 found Ch’iu’s

41. Reproduced in Ti-lijen t’ien kung pao 地理人天共寳 (1633; Fu-h reprint under the title Chen ts’ang ku-pen k’un-yü pi chi ch’i shu 珍藏古本堪樂神及奇書). On Wu see Te-hsing hsien chib 德衡縣志 (1872; Ch’eng-wen reprint). 8: 12ff.
book public by having it cut in stone, but he mixed it with material on
siting from the book of the Han dynasty Black Crow Master (Ch’ing-wu-
tzu 青烏子 ), confounding most of those who came later and giving
rise to a multitude of theories. Wu Ching-luan claimed that his knowledge
was transmitted from Yang I, who had access to Ch’iu’s unadulterated
 teachings.\footnote{42}

The various schools of siting differed in many respects, but all consid-
ered theirs the authentic teachings of Wu Ching-luan transmitted from the
Northern Sung. The chief divisions were the Hung fan Five Phases and
Orthodox Five Phases schemata. By the Ming it was believed, as Wang Wei
explained in his Assembled Records of the Blue Cliff (Ch’ing yen
ts’ung lu 青巖叢錄 ), that the former was originally used for siting
ancestral shrines, and came from Fukien; the latter was the Kiangsi method
of Yang and Tseng. All of the factions considered their own variant to be
the orthodox one, but at the same time all drew from multiple traditions.\footnote{43}

It is difficult to be sure whether a statement at a given time refers to
more than the personal preference and the local situation of the author, but
for the past thousand years the relative popularity of the two systems seems
to have varied. The choice between them has been a main point of conten-
tion in siting. The General Records of Tomb Siting Principles (Ying yuan
tsung lu 明原總錄 ), attributed to Yang Wei-\textsuperscript{2} 楊惟德, an astro-
nomical official in the reign of Jen-tsung (1023-1063), writes of the Hung
fan Five Phases method as the “great Five Phases.” We can be reasonably
sure it was then employed in the Directorate. But at the end of the Sung,
Ch’u Yung 倪泳, in his Ch’ü i shuo 疑說, a book that critically
evaluates many aspects of contemporary divination, speaks of both systems
as still in use, but is cautious about the Hung fan approach on the ground
that its underlying rationale is no longer understood.

By the early Ming, Wang Wei says of it that “its study is still carried on
in Chekiang, but these days there are few who apply it,” while the study of

\footnote{42. On l-hsing, around whom many legends gathered, see Ang Tian-se, “l-hsing (683-
727 A.D.): His Life and Scientific Work,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of
Chinese, University of Malaya, 1979. The bibliographical chapter of the Sung History
(206: 5261) records a T’ung han ching, but with no indication of author. For information
on Yang, whom legend calls a sitting expert in the T’ang Imperial Observatory, see Ti-\textsuperscript{2} ien
t’ien kung pao, preface of Hsu Chieh 虢捷, p. 1, Kan hsien chih 賢縣志 (1872;
Ch’eng-wen reprint), 41: 1, and Te-hsing hsin chih, 8: 1, on Tseng, Kan-chau fu chih, 58: 1.
A scripture named for Ch’ing-wu-tzu is listed in Hsin T’ung shu 新唐書, 59: 1556.

43. Ch’ing yen ts’ung lu (Ch’in-hua shu’ung shu 金華叢書 ), ban 10, no. 22, in Pai-pu
t’ung-shu chi ch’eng 皕部叢書集成 , coll. 95. For claims of original orthodoxy
from proponents of both the Orthodox and Hung fan systems, see Liu shih chia is’ang er-
shi-shu shen tsao tsang ch’üan shu 劉氏家藏二十四史選萃全書 (1684 ed., Taipei
Wu-luling reprint under the title Liu shih chia ts’ang ch’üan wei t’ung shu 劉氏家藏
選萃通書 ), 1: 28, 45.
the Orthodox Five Phases “now flourishes; north and south of the Yangtse everyone employs it.” What Everyone Should Know about Siting (Ti-li jen-tzu hsu chih), a best seller ca. 1570, adhered firmly to the Orthodox system.

By the end of the Ming Lo Ch’ing-hsiao 羅青霄 noted prominent treatises on both systems. Liu Chieh’s 劉杰 very popular Complete Family Tradition for Planning Burials Using the Twenty-four Peaks (Liu shih chia ts’ang erb-shi-ssu shan tsao tsang ch’üan shu) contains a section in which experts over the ages give their interpretations of the Hung fan Five Phases method—another indication that at the Ming-Ch’ing transition, although it was important, there was no consensus about its underlying principles. Liu Chieh lists six “schools” of Five Phases correspondences in siting, including these two, and says that “none of these six Five Phases arrays can be dispensed with; if the best features of each be used together, felicity will be created as a sound creates an echo.” In this eclecticism he was typical of his time.44

We have seen that during the Shun-chih era only the Hung fan system was used in the Directorate of Astronomy, and that after its prohibition for a short period it was again adopted from 1669 to 1741. According to a critical work on divination published in 1771, at that time it was the only system used among “the uninitiated” (shih jen 世人).45

44. Ying yuan tsung lu (Yuan ed. in National Central Library, Rare Book Collection, no. 4566), 1: 1; Ch’ü i shuo (in Pai ch’uan hsueh hai, Kyoto reprint of Sung ed.), collection 7, 21-22; Wang Wei, Ch’ing yen ts’ung lu, pp. 24-25; Ti-li jen-tzu hsu chih, 7A: 3 and, quoting Lo, 7B: 14; Liu shih chia ts’ang erb-shi-ssu shan tsao tsang ch’üan shu, preface, 1: 45, 2: 2.
45. Hsin ting ch’ung cheng p’i min t’ung shu, 5: 115.