

Communications to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

I write in reference to Professor Norman Kutcher's article, "The Death of the Xiaoxian Empress," in *JAS* 56.3:708–25. I was on leave and away in Asia when this essay appeared and saw it only on my return this autumn.

My concern is the mischaracterization of one of the central theses of my book, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, paperback 1994) near the beginning of Kutcher's article. Kutcher refers to a statement on my page 7 and states that in describing the Grand Council I say that it "was neither fully autonomous nor completely dominated by the emperor, but could seize 'the opportunities provided by both worlds'" (Kutcher quoting me, his p. 709). Kutcher then further summarizes my views: the "Grand Council's acquisition of the power to supervise document traffic and nearly all the myriad concerns of the highest and innermost levels of government tended to reduce the monarch's independence and, ultimately, his power" (Kutcher p. 709). So far so good. These statements are correct—with one exception I did say these things approximately as Kutcher renders them. The only difficulty with this description is that it omits my other points relevant to the issues he raises.

Kutcher goes on to contrast my book with Philip Kuhn's *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), his desire being to prepare the ground for his own theory-confirming study of the emperor's use of arbitrary power to intervene in the bureaucracy at will. Kutcher finds Kuhn's understanding of imperial power more useful for his purposes: "By injecting his arbitrary power into the management of events, [the emperor] could undermine stodgy bureaucratic routine and thereby increase the level of personal control he exercised over his top officials," using "political campaigns to assert power" (Kutcher summarizing Kuhn, p. 709).

But if Kutcher reads *Monarchs and Ministers* with care, he will find my expanded views about mid-Qing power that go far beyond what he has cited. On my page 7, for instance, in the very paragraph from which Kutcher quotes, I do allude to the possibility of autocratic imperial action, explaining that in spite of Grand Council growth, "the framework for autocracy continued in place." Again in the epilogue I make allowance for arbitrary imperial intervention, pointing out that the Qianlong emperor approved nearly all high-level policy deliberation memorials but nevertheless could intervene with independent action: "Occasionally [a rescript] was amended, but although outright rejection [of the ministers' recommendation] was always possible, this imperial action was rare . . . [The emperor] retained the power to intervene but rarely did so" (p. 276). In other words, my analysis did not rule out the use of arbitrary imperial power—to the contrary it embraced it—but at the same time my purpose was to describe government operations broadly, envisioning full imperial autonomy as a seldom-used but possible device. Kutcher simply ignores this part of my argument. Political campaigns did not happen all the time. Kutcher's and Kuhn's campaigns took place in 1748 and 1768, each lasting less than one year. But the government had to run continuously and take care of other matters as well. My book

is really not about the issue of political campaigns, which is what interests Kutcher. Instead I focused on how the Grand Council grew to manage a wide range of matters during the eighteenth century.

Thus, far from what Kutcher would have us believe, on this particular point there is little conflict between Kuhn's and my analyses, because my summary of central government decision-making encompasses the possibility of his. (Incidentally, I had not seen Kuhn's manuscript before I wrote and published my own.) But Kuhn and I were not writing about the same aspects of government. Kuhn focussed on one unusual event—a political campaign that took place within a relatively short period of time—while I was discussing the increasing reach of Grand Council activities over the course of the entire century of its growth. The more I studied the eighteenth century Qing government, the more I came to admire it as a responsible and reasonable government. Much of the time (but not always) it operated on the basis of a consensus developed by many parties. As I wrote in the book: "Although ministers were dependent on imperial authorization of their objectives, ministerial cooperation was also essential to most imperial plans. Each side checked and balanced the other. Emperors might dash officials' hopes, but the less-studied fact is that the ministers could likewise limit the imperial autonomy" (p. 270).

What makes Kutcher's misreading particularly puzzling is that prior to publication Kutcher corresponded with me about his interpretation. In reply I furnished him with several statements such as the preceding to illustrate his incomplete depiction of my position. Why he then chose to ignore my counsel, even though he had asked for it, and publish only the lopsided explanation provided on page 709 is a mystery. Kutcher must understand that no matter how fascinating one finds one's own cause, it cannot properly be grounded in misrepresentations.

BEATRICE S. BARTLETT
Yale University

TO THE EDITOR:

In such high esteem do I hold my friend and teacher Professor Beatrice Bartlett that when I read her criticism of my article, "The Death of the Xiaoxian Empress: Bureaucratic Betrayals and the Crises of Eighteenth-Century Chinese Rule," I immediately assumed it to be correct, and searched out my offprints to draft an apology and revision. But after re-reading my article, I realized that she had misread it and that I would be forced to stand my ground.

In "The Death of the Xiaoxian Empress" I do indeed "contrast" the works of Bartlett and Kuhn, by explaining that her *Monarchs and Ministers* is an "institutional study" while *Soulstealers* "focuses on a series of events that occurred in 1768" (p. 709). I did not wish to go much further than that. Given the complexity of both books and their different approaches, it would take a review essay to contrast them, and that was not my purpose. I mentioned these books, as I wrote, to show that

An analysis of the scandal following the death of the Xiaoxian empress intersects neatly with the interpretations of Bartlett and Kuhn. Those events reveal the empowered central government described by Bartlett, but they also show Qianlong beginning to experiment—perhaps forced to experiment—with the kind of political campaign that Kuhn finds in a more developed form twenty years later.

(p. 710)

I meant exactly what I wrote. The year 1748 shows both Bartlett's empowered central government and Kuhn's political campaign. I did not say that Bartlett's analysis precluded the arbitrary exercise of imperial power, or for that matter that Kuhn's precluded a view of the central government as increasingly empowered. So when Bartlett writes, above, that "Kutcher finds Kuhn's understanding of imperial power more useful for his purposes," she draws a conclusion that is not supported by the text of my article. And when she writes, also above, that "far from what Kutcher would have us believe, on this particular point there is little conflict between Kuhn's and my analyses," she again misstates my position. My article simply does not say that there is such a conflict. Again, I never wrote that *Monarchs and Ministers* ruled out the use of arbitrary imperial power.

It is worth mentioning that the initial draft of "The Death of the Xiaoxian Empress: Bureaucratic Betrayals and the Crises of Eighteenth-Century Chinese Rule" I submitted to *JAS* had no mention of either *Soulstealers* or *Monarchs and Ministers*. I reluctantly added discussion of them only at the insistence of an outside reader. At the time, I wrote in response to this reader's report that given the complexity of these books they should probably be left to speak for themselves.

I did indeed seek Professor Bartlett's counsel in revising my article, and did incorporate her initial suggestions. It was only after I sensed that my article was becoming a review essay of her book that I politely recoiled. I owe Professor Bartlett, who taught me to use the Qing archives, a tremendous debt. Regretfully, I must write that her reading of my article is incorrect.

NORMAN KUTCHER
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TO THE EDITOR:

I thank Professor Norman Kutcher for the graciousness of his reply, but I am sorry to write that this cannot mask the fact that his reading of my book, *Monarchs and Ministers* [hereafter *MM*], and now of my criticism of his reading, creates and sustains a false issue. In spite of what he says in his letter, the thrust of his original description of *MM* was that on the question of central government decision-making and the imperial role, Philip Kuhn's and my books are in conflict (Note his "In contrast . . .", p. 709). Professor Kutcher's article pits the arbitrary imperial action (the "political campaign") described in *Soulstealers* against the "empowered central government" he finds in *MM* (p. 710). (Actually, it would be better to speak of an empowered Grand Council—I did not argue empowerment for the entire central government.) My objection to Professor Kutcher's exposition is that the two works are contrasted in a way that makes my work sound as if I thought the Grand Council expansion led to the Council being continuously and overwhelmingly in charge with the emperor incapable of acting independently, which as Kutcher wrote, thereby "tended to reduce the monarch's independence and, ultimately, his power" (p. 709). But my book, albeit about the rise of the Grand Council, made allowance for alternative imperial responses to the Council's expansion. Furthermore, when Professor Kutcher asked for my views comparing the two works, I made this point several times in correspondence with him.

I am therefore now sorry to have to call Professor Kutcher's defense into question. Of course he "did not say that Bartlett's analysis precluded the arbitrary exercise of imperial power," and of course he "never wrote that [*MM*] ruled out the use of arbitrary imperial power" as he asserts in his letter above. He didn't have to, for his

article achieved the same object by omission. In fact my work does allow for the alternative that Professor Kutcher did omit.

Finally, I wish to point out that whatever a peer reviewer's suggestions may be (and I did not previously know that Professor Kutcher's discussion had been mandated by a reviewer), an author has to take responsibility for what he includes and excludes. I am sorry if the peer review led Professor Kutcher to overdramatize a point which, in the case of MM, should have had a fuller exposition. It seems fair to ask that if a work is going to be described, the description be accurate.

Professor Kuhn's book and now Professor Kutcher's article shed interesting and important light on the historic roots of the political campaign. We can all be grateful for that.

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