

Appendix A

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE EMPRESS WU

The following five examples, drawn from early in the career of the Empress Wu, are intended chiefly to demonstrate the process of historical selection operative in the three sources most influential in shaping subsequent historical opinion, the two dynastic histories and the *TCTC*. In each case, the difficulty of factual certainty is apparent and, with it, the basis of prejudice for the historian's choice of interpretation. Comparison of the three sources provides a gauge to the relative hostility of each and makes clear the overwhelming importance to each of Wu Ching's *shih-lu* as a primary source.

Example 1

CTS 6: 3075:3. 初則天年十四時.太宗聞其美.容止召入宮.

HTS 76: 3867:1. ^{立為才人}文德皇后崩.久之.太宗聞士彘女美.召為才人.^{方十四.}

TCTC 195, p. 6134. (貞觀 11, 637).故荊州都督武士彘女年十四.上聞其美.召入後宮.為才人.

The *TCTC* notice says: "The daughter of the former *tu-tu* of Ching-chou, Wu Shih-huo, was fourteen years old. The Emperor [T'ai-tsung] heard of her beauty and summoned her into his harem where she was given the rank of *ts'ai-jen*." The two earlier sources are similar to the *TCTC* in diction and detail, although the *HTS* adds the information that T'ai-tsung had been a widower "for a long time." His wife had died in mid-636, so that if Ssu-ma Kuang's dating is correct he waited a year-and-a-half at the most before adding to the harem!

The degree of similarity is explained in the *k'ao-i* notice: "The Annals of Tse-t'ien in the *CTS* say she died at the age of eighty-three but the *T'ang-li* 唐曆, the *T'ang-ch'ao nien-tai chi* 唐朝年代記 by Chiao Lu 焦璐, the *T'ung-chi* 統紀, the *T'ang-nien hsiao-lu* 唐年小錄 by Ma Tsung 馬總, the *Sheng-yün t'u* 聖運圖, and the *Hui-yao* 會要 all say she died at the age of eighty-one. The *T'ang-lu* 唐錄 and the *Hui-yao* say she entered the harem in the thirteenth [not the eleventh] year of *chen-kuan* [639-640]. [However] since she entered the harem at the age of fourteen, and because of the *shih-lu* of Wu Ching says she died at the age of eighty-two, I place her introduction into the harem in this [eleventh] year."

In this account two points are striking. First, Ssu-ma Kuang is willing to accept the authority of the *shih-lu* on the empress' age over contradictory sources which are far more numerous and, in the case of the *CTS*, equally authoritative since Wu Ching made a primary contribution to both. Second, it is clear that not a single one of the sources at Ssu-ma's disposal, including the *shih-lu*, makes reference to Wu's entry into T'ai-tsung's harem. This uncomfortable fact seems, therefore, to have been expunged successfully from contemporary and official history, probably through the empress' influence.

Her entry into the harem seems to have been dated only in two sources and both place it in *chen-kuan* 13, 638. Neither the *T'ang-li* nor Su Mien's *Hui-yao* (completed in 804) is extant, but the *T'ang hui-yao* is of course based upon the latter and contains the following passage (*chüan* 3, p. 23): 文德皇后崩·太宗聞武士彠女有才貌·召入宮·以為才人. Since the diction is very close to the notices in *CTS*, *HTS* and *TCTC*, the *Hui-yao* probably formed the basis for all three.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Empress Wu attempted deliberately not only to conceal her incest with T'ai-tsung but also her true age. The motives for the former are obvious but unless we attribute to her a certain vanity, the latter seems puzzling.

Example 2

CTS 51: 3279:3. [王]后懼不自安·密與母柳氏求巫祝厭勝。

HTS 76: 3866:4. 昭儀詭譎險即誣后與母挾媚道蠱·上帝信之。

TCTC 199, p. 6288. 武昭儀誣王后與母魏國夫人柳氏·為厭勝。

The disparity among sources here is marked. The *CTS* suggests that the Empress Wang and her mother actually engaged in sorcery and, therefore, angered Kao-tsung, while the other two sources regard them as innocent, seeing the sorcery charge as a calumny fabricated by Wu Chao-i. Ssu-ma Kuang explains in the *k'ao-i*: "The *CTS* biography of the Empress Wang says she was frightened and ill at ease so that she and her mother secretly sought out a witch and engaged in black magic. When this became known she was degraded. Now I accept what is written in the *shih-lu*."

The *CTS* view is clearly dependent upon a source other than the *shih-lu* and one more favorable to the Empress Wu since the charge of sorcery would be sufficient grounds for Kao-tsung to depose Empress Wang. Other extant sources offer no corroboration of either interpretation, although the frequent use of the *T'ang-li* by the *CTS* will be demonstrated later. The *TFYK* 333:5a records that Liu Shih, uncle of the Empress Wang, was demoted to the provinces when his sister, the empress' mother, was "punished by being forbidden entry to the palace," and his subsequent demotion was for "revealing palace secrets" (*chin chung-yü*). The reference here is almost certainly to the sorcery charge, and it is to be expected that Liu Shih told his side of the story. See *TCTC* 199, p. 6288.

On the other hand, it may be argued that in the relatively complete account of the debate surrounding the elevation of the Empress Wu, the above incident is unmentioned. Kao-tsung, even when challenged by Ch'u Sui-liang to show that the conduct of Empress Wang was anything but blameless, seems to have remained silent. I am not convinced that this is conclusive since Kao-tsung similarly forbears mention of the alleged murder of Wu Chao-i's daughter by the Empress Wang, and the whole debate may have been severely edited to show the latter in a favorable light. The *TCTC* 199, pp. 6286-7 does admit that the two rivals "exchanged slanders and accusations," so that Ssu-ma Kuang's decision here to rely on the *shih-lu* rather than the *CTS* is perhaps more a reflection of bias than of conviction.

In general, the machinations of the inner palace were never very clear to contemporary historians since there existed no mechanism for obtaining reliable information. For this reason, the *T'ang-li*, a work in forty *chüan* by Liu Fang

is particularly valuable. His biography, *CTS* 149: 3479:2 and *HTS* 132: 3975:3, records that much of the information therein was based on his conversations with the famous eunuch Kao Li-shih whose sources of information for events within the harem might be more accurate than those available to the official historians. In the example above, for instance, I suspect that the *CTS* notice follows the *T'ang-li* and is the proper interpretation. The Empress Wu, after all, is known to have had a network of palace spies charged with reporting on her rival and, given the prevalence of witchcraft at the time, almost certainly had grounds for her accusation. She herself had to answer the same charge in 664.

The varying versions of the incident also demonstrate a greater hostility to the Empress Wu on the part of the *HTS* and the *TCTC* than on the part of the *CTS*. This is a consistent tendency.

Example 3

CTS 6: 6075:3. 進號宸妃.
HTS 76: 3867:1. [高宗]欲進號宸妃. 侍中韓瑗, 中書令來濟言妃嬪有數. 今別立號不可.
TCTC 199, p. 6288. [六月]上欲特置宸妃. 以武昭儀為六. 韓瑗來濟諫以為故事無之. 乃止.

The source dispute here, although parallel to the second example, is different in that it concerns a public event about which the historian could be expected to have certain knowledge. The *HTS* and *TCTC* suggest that the remonstrance of Han Yüan and Lai Chi prevented Kao-tsung from creating a new category of concubine to be awarded to Wu Chao-i, while the *CTS* maintains that she was actually granted the title. The *k'ao-i* says: "The *T'ang-li* dates this event in the fourth month, but now I follow the *shih-lu*. Han Yüan and Lai Chi had not reached the posts of *shih-chung* and *chung-shu-ling* [respectively] by the fourth month [of 655]. The *T'ang-li* also says their remonstrance was unsuccessful, but the decree which established the [new] empress refers to her as [the] Chao-i [concubine]. If this is the case, she was never granted the title of *ch'en* concubine. I now follow the *Hui-yao*."

Ssu-ma Kuang is on firm ground here. The appointment of Han and Lai in the fifth month to the posts mentioned can be verified even in the *CTS* annals of Kao-tsung, and no other source mentions that the *ch'en-fei* title was ever awarded. It is of interest that the *Shih-lu* seems to have noted the event but not the outcome, since the *k'ao-i* cites the *Hui-yao* as its authority. Wu Chao-i's reception of the title must have been at least a tradition of the palace since the *CTS* is here clearly reproducing the *T'ang-li*. Several other examples could be drawn to show how highly the authors of the *CTS* regarded the *T'ang-li* as a source and how they often preferred it to the *shih-lu*. Ssu-ma Kuang's view is, of course, different. See Example 4.

My own reading of the *T'ang-li* notices concerned with the Empress Wu and preserved in the *k'ao-i* makes clear the vast difference between official and non-official history. A separate study would not be amiss.

Example 4

CTS 65: 3310:3 [biography of Wu-chi]. [上]曰: 武昭儀有令德. 朕欲立為如何. 無忌曰: 自貞觀二十三年後先朝付託遂良. 望陛下問其可否.
CTS 80: 3340:4 [biography of Sui-liang]. 高宗...再三顧. 無忌曰: 皇后無胤息. 昭儀有子. 今欲立為皇后. 公等以為如何. 遂良曰: 皇后出自名家...

- HTS 105: 3922:3 [biography of Wu-chi]. [上]言后無忌. 昭儀有子. 必欲立之者. 無忌已數諫. 郎曰: 先帝付託遂良. 願陛下訪之. 遂良極道不可.
- HTS 105: 3923:3 [biography of Sui-liang]. 帝曰... 皇后無子. 今欲立昭儀. 謂何. 遂良對曰: 皇后名家... 上顧謂無忌曰: 皇后無子, 武昭儀有子. 今欲立昭儀為后, 何如. 遂良對曰: 皇后名家...
- TCTC 199, pp. 6289-90. 上顧謂無忌曰: 皇后無子, 武昭儀有子. 今欲立昭儀為后, 何如. 遂良對曰: 皇后名家...

This episode, in which Kao-tsung solicits the support of the four most prestigious of his ministers for the plan to elevate Wu Chao-i to empress, is one of the best known of the century. It will be noted that the two dynastic histories are in perfect agreement while Ssu-ma Kuang glosses the salient point. His *k'ao-i* notice says: "The *T'ang-li* records that when Wu-chi and the others were about to enter [the audience hall] Sui-liang said that [Kao-tsung] was going to ask about the empress and asked whether he should remonstrate. Wu-chi told him that however strongly he did so, he would himself support him. When they went in, the emperor looked at Wu-chi and said, 'The greatest of all crimes is to be prevented from continuing one's line. Now, my empress is barren and I want to depose her and establish in her place the daughter of Wu Shih-huo. What is your opinion?' Wu-chi said, 'Ever since the twenty-third year of *chen-kuan* [649-650], your [late] father placed his trust in Sui-liang. I would rather you asked him.' If this story is true, then Wu-chi betrayed Sui-liang. I do not accept it."

This is one of the very few instances in the *k'ao-i* in which Ssu-ma Kuang relies solely on his own judgment and offers no supporting evidence. It may be that the *shih-lu* fails to mention the incident, but in view of its centrality to the crisis I find this hard to accept and reluctantly conclude that Ssu-ma Kuang suppressed it. Support for this view comes from the fact that the *CTS* passages above actually elaborate on the *T'ang-li* story and so must have had an additional source, and also from the fact of Ssu-ma Kuang's extraordinary fondness for Wu-chi. Note his remarks in *TCTC* 199, p. 6267, in connection with T'ai-tsung's dying words to Wu-chi and, more particularly, his treatment of Wu-chi's complicity in, or instigation of, the charges which brought death to the innocent Li K'o 吳王李恪. See *TCTC* 199, p. 6280.

The historical significance of the controversy lies in the fact that if Wu-chi is seen to be an opportunist, his opposition to the Empress Wu may have been less disinterested than is usually portrayed, and her later actions against him therefore justified. Even in the case of her so-called revenge, there is some room for doubt. See the next example.

Example 5

- CTS 65: 3310:3. 許敬宗遣人上封事. 稱監察御史李巢, 與無忌, 交通謀反.
- HTS 105: 3922:4. 敬宗揣后指, 陰使洛陽人李奉節上無忌變事.
- TCTC 200, p. 6312. 敬宗因誣奏[韋]季方欲與無忌構陷忠臣近戚, 使權歸無忌, 伺隙謀反, 今事覺, 故自殺.

Although the details differ in each account, the sources agree that Hsü Ching-tsung fabricated a charge of treason against Wu-chi by having someone send a secret denunciation to Kao-tsung. The *k'ao-i* notice is extremely long, quoting extensively from the *shih-lu*, mentioning contradictions with the *CTS*, and protesting Wu-chi's innocence. It then continues: "The *shih-lu* in recording the

incident is careless (*lu-mang* 鹵莽), and discrepancies are found from beginning to end so that the whole truth cannot be known. Thus I abbreviate, giving the general significance, and that is all. . . . The *shih-lu*, [however], compared to the *CTS* biography is earlier and more detailed, and since the biography is later and more brief, it is less worthy of reliance."

In this passage we see most clearly the reason for the *TCTC* tendency to rely, wherever possible, on the *shih-lu* and to favor its interpretation over that of the dynastic histories in spite of Ssu-ma Kuang's equation of the two in his *T'ung-chien shih-li*, 1:3-4a. Several additional examples of the process are adduced in Li Shu-t'ung, *T'ang-shih k'ao-pien*, pp. 238-9. In view of the hostile attitude of the *shih-lu*, especially when compared to the *T'ang-li*, and in view of the tremendous prestige of the *TCTC*, it is not surprising that the Empress Wu has fared badly in traditional historiography.

While in the example above the point of dispute is a matter of detail rather than interpretation, it should be noted that the *CTS* is supported by the *T'ang-li*, the *Shih-t'ung* and, in some areas, by the *shih-lu* itself! And the *CTS*, unlike the *HTS* and *TCTC*, nowhere mentions that Hsü Ching-tsung was acting directly under the orders of the Empress Wu. His reasons for the destruction of Wu-chi were easily as strong as her own, and it is entirely possible that he acted on his own initiative. Ssu-ma Kuang (*TCTC*, *loc. cit.*) as much as admits the speculative nature of his judgment with the unsupported statement, "The empress ordered Ching-tsung to await his chance and entrap him [Wu-chi]," and one wonders how he knew even this much. If the *k'ao-i* reproduces the full *shih-lu* report, there is no mention there of the influence of the Empress Wu.