

5.4 AND 5.5 HESHEN: ACCUSATION AND INVENTORY

Within days of the death of Qianlong emperor in 1799, his favorite Heshen (1750–1799) was arrested and charged with twenty “great crimes” by Qianlong’s successor Jiaqing. In a gesture of deference to Qianlong, the erstwhile bannerman was not executed but was granted the favor of taking his own life. His estates and property were confiscated and his relatives deprived of the high titles awarded him in Qianlong’s senile last years.

During the more than twenty years that Heshen enjoyed imperial favor, he exercised great power in the Qing court. As an intimate of the emperor, he was immune from impeachment or criticism and was able to amass a huge fortune that made him an object of envy and hostility for

many contemporaries. Alone among Qianlong's retainers, Heshen rode his horse in the precincts of the Forbidden City and was able to appoint or cashier high officials in the state bureaucracy. But once deprived of the protection of his imperial patron, Heshen's fall was predictably precipitous.

The Heshen scandal is often cited as a symptom of the decline of the Qing state system and a symbol of the sort of abuse of power that had become possible by the end of the eighteenth century. Relying solely on his tie to the emperor, Heshen, as the following documents show, was able to manipulate affairs of state, place his cronies in important positions, and build a regal and lavishly furnished estate for himself, his family, and his retainers. The following edict and the accompanying list of confiscated household goods reveal Heshen's offenses against the state and suggest the magnitude of his raids on the government treasury.

5.4 *The Twenty Crimes of Heshen*

Here we list the twenty crimes of Heshen and issue this special Edict to make this known to all.

1. I was specially selected as the Crown Prince by my father, the late Emperor, on the third day of the ninth month of 1795. On the day before the Imperial Edict was promulgated, Heshen presented me with a *ruyi* [an S-shaped ornamental object symbolizing good luck]. He thus revealed this great secret [the secret of the succession] and attempted to gain merit from his support of me. This was his first great crime.
2. In the first month of last year [1798], when my departed father the Emperor summoned Heshen to the Yuanmingyuan Palace, he dared to ride a horse past the Hall of Justice and Honor [a main reception hall near the entrance of the Summer Palace] and made his way to the entrance of Longevity Hill. He had no respect for his master and no crime is greater than this one. This was his second great crime.³
3. Owing to a sickness affecting his leg, Heshen was carried in a sedan chair directly into the Forbidden City. He entered and departed through the Shenwu Gate [the north gate] and this was witnessed by all. He never dreaded the prohibition of such behavior. This was his third great crime.
4. He took a former palace concubine as his own concubine. This was utterly shameless. This was his fourth great crime.⁴

3. Only the emperor was permitted to ride horseback or to be carried in a sedan chair on the grounds of the imperial palaces. There were no exceptions; commoners walked.

4. Imperial concubines were occasionally permitted to leave the Forbidden City but were forbidden from remarrying after their departure from the emperor's service.

5. From the time of the campaign against the White Lotus Bandits in the Sichuan and Hubei region, my late father the Emperor was so overburdened with military dispatches that he was unable even to sleep. But Heshen deliberately delayed consideration of military memorials from the various army commands and prolonged the campaign a great deal. This was his fifth great crime.
6. At the time when the holy, sagely body of my late father the Emperor was ailing, Heshen showed no sorrow. When he entered or departed from his visits with the Emperor, he talked and joked as in normal times with other court officials. This was heartless and deranged behavior! This was his sixth great crime.
7. Last winter, my late father the Emperor struggled against his illness to write comments on memorials and on the drafts of edicts. His brush sometimes wavered and Heshen dared to suggest that these documents should be torn up. His intention was to draw up different edicts. This was his seventh great crime.
8. My late father the Emperor originally appointed Heshen to take charge of the affairs of both the Board of Personnel and the Board of Punishments. Later because there were immediate needs for expenditures in military affairs and because Heshen was experienced in this regard he was further charged with responsibility for submitting receipts to the Board of Revenue. He then usurped all the functions of the Board, changed its set rules and regulations, and refused to allow other officials of the Board to interfere. This was his eighth great crime.
9. In the twelfth month of 1798, Kuei Shu reported in a memorial that an army of more than a thousand bandits had joined together in Xunhua and Guide [two areas in Qinghai]. They were robbing lamas and merchants of their oxen and had murdered two people. Heshen turned the memorial and hid these events. He did not take border affairs seriously. This was his ninth great crime.
10. After my later father the Emperor passed away, I ordered that those Mongol princes who had not suffered from smallpox might be exempted from coming to the capital. But Heshen disobeyed my Edict and ordered all Mongol princes to come and thereby disregard our country's special consideration for border feudatories [*wai fan*]. His real intentions were unknown. This was his tenth crime.
11. Grand Secretary Su-ling-a had serious hearing problems with both ears and was utterly weak and feeble. He should have been retired but simply because he was Heshen's brother He Lin's relative through marriage, the facts were hidden and not reported. Because Vice-Ministers Wu Xinglan and Li Huang and Li Guangyun, Chief of the Court of the Imperial Stud, had all tutored Heshen's family members, they were all recommended for the rank of Minister and to head educational commissioners. This was his eleventh great crime.

12. Heshen dismissed at will those who worked in the Grand Council. His abuses of power were innumerable. This was his twelfth great crime.
13. Just yesterday we confiscated and took inventory of Heshen's family property. The buildings were all built of *nanmu* [a precious wood] and were extravagant and illegally mimicked the imperial style. The patterns and designs of the buildings followed those of the Ningsou Palace [in the Forbidden City] and the pattern of the gardens and kiosks did not differ from those of the Summer Palace. It is impossible to know what was in his heart. This was his thirteenth great crime.
14. Heshen's ancestral tombs at Jinzhou [in Hebei] were equipped with a sacrificial hall and underground tunnels. The local residents called them the He imperial tombs. This was his fourteenth great crime.
15. In his home, Heshen amassed more than two hundred pearl bracelets. This was several times more than the number of such bracelets in the palace collection. He also had giant pearls that were larger than those used in the Emperor's crown. This was his fifteenth great crime.
16. Although he was not permitted to wear a precious stone on the peak of his cap, dozens of such jewels were found hidden in his home. Moreover, he had an incalculable number of gigantic jewels unlike any found in the imperial treasury. This was his sixteenth great crime.
17. The quantities of silver, clothing, and other objects found in his home were uncountable. This was his seventeenth great crime.
18. In false double walls in his home, tens of thousands of ounces of gold were hidden. Buried in his cellars were millions of ounces of silver. In the rear chambers were huge pearls, giant gold and silver ingots, gold pagodas, and other objects. This was his eighteenth great crime.
19. In the vicinity of the capital, in Tongzhou and Jinzhou, he set up pawnshops and banks. A chief minister was competing with mean people for profit. This was his nineteenth great crime.
20. The Liu and Ma families were low-ranking slaves of the He family but after their family properties were confiscated and inventoried it was found that the property of each family was worth more than two million ounces of silver. They also had huge pearls and pearl bracelets. If this was not permitted, how could they grasp so much? This was his twentieth great crime.

5.5 *An Inventory of the Household Property Confiscated from the Home of Heshen*

[1. HOUSES AND LAND]

One garden bestowed by the Emperor
 Twenty original pavilions and kiosks
 Sixteen newly added pavilions

One main residence with thirteen sections and seven hundred and thirty rooms.

One eastern residential wing with seven sections and three hundred and sixty rooms

One western residential wing with seven sections and three hundred and fifty rooms

One Huizhou style new residence with seven sections and six hundred and twenty rooms

One counting house with seven hundred and thirty rooms

One garden with sixty-four pavilions and kiosks

Eight hundred thousand *mou* [6.6 *mou* = 1 acre] of farmland

Ten banks with capital of six hundred thousand ounces of silver

Ten pawnshops with capital of eight hundred thousand ounces of silver . . .

[2. GOLD, SILVER, AND COPPER CASH]

Fifty-eight thousand ounces of pure gold

Fifty-five thousand six hundred silver ingots

Five million eight hundred and thirty thousand capital-type silver ingots

Three million one hundred and fifty thousand Suzhou ingots

Fifty-eight thousand foreign silver dollars

One million five hundred thousand strings of copper cash

The value of the above was more than fifty-four million ounces of silver.

[3. GINSENG AND JADE]

Ginseng storehouse:

Individual pieces of ginseng were not counted but the total weight was six hundred catties

Jade storehouse:

Thirteen jade tripods two and a half feet high

Twenty sets of jade chimes

One hundred and thirty jade *ruyi*

One thousand one hundred and six *ruyi* decorated with jade

Forty-eight jade snuff bottles

One hundred and thirty jade buckles

Two jade screens with twenty-four panels

Thirteen settings of jade bowls

Thirty jade vases

Eighteen jade basins

Ninety-three cases of jade utensils; individual pieces not counted

Converted to silver the value of the above would be seven million ounces of silver.

In addition there were three other jade pieces not evaluated: a jade longevity Buddha three feet six inches tall, one jade Guanyin statue three feet eight inches

tall, both incised with characters reading: "Presented by Governor General of Yunnan and Guizhou, and one jade horse four feet three inches long and two feet eight inches high.

[4. JEWELRY]

Pearl storehouse:

Ten giant longan shaped Eastern pearls

Two hundred and thirty pearl bracelets

Ten huge rubies weighing two hundred and eighty catties

Eighty small rubies (not weighed)

Forty blue precious stones (not weighed)

Ninety ruby cap top decorations

Eighty coral cap top decorations

Ten screens with precious stones and gold

Silver jewelry storehouse:

Seventy-two settings of silver bowls

Two hundred pairs of gold-incised chopsticks

Five hundred pairs of silver-incised chopsticks

Sixty gold teaspoons

Three hundred and eighty silver teaspoons

One hundred and eight silver mouthwashing bowls

Forty gold cloisonné mouthwashing bowls

Eighty silver cloisonné mouthwashing bowls

Antiques:

Twenty antique bronze vessels

Twenty-one antique tripods

Thirty-three bronze flat vessels

Two antique swords

Ten Song inkstones

Seven hundred and six *duan* inkstones

The total value of the above converted to silver is eight million ounces of silver.

In addition, there were three kinds of objects not evaluated in silver: Seven coral trees, three feet six inches high; four coral trees, three feet four inches high; and one gold incised jade decorated clock. . . . [The inventory next lists the furs, furniture, household furnishings, and miscellaneous other items taken from Heshen. It ends with a count of his serving men and women. The document also mentions the twenty-six thousand ounces of gold hidden behind a false wall in Heshen's residence and the one million ounces of silver buried in his cellar.]