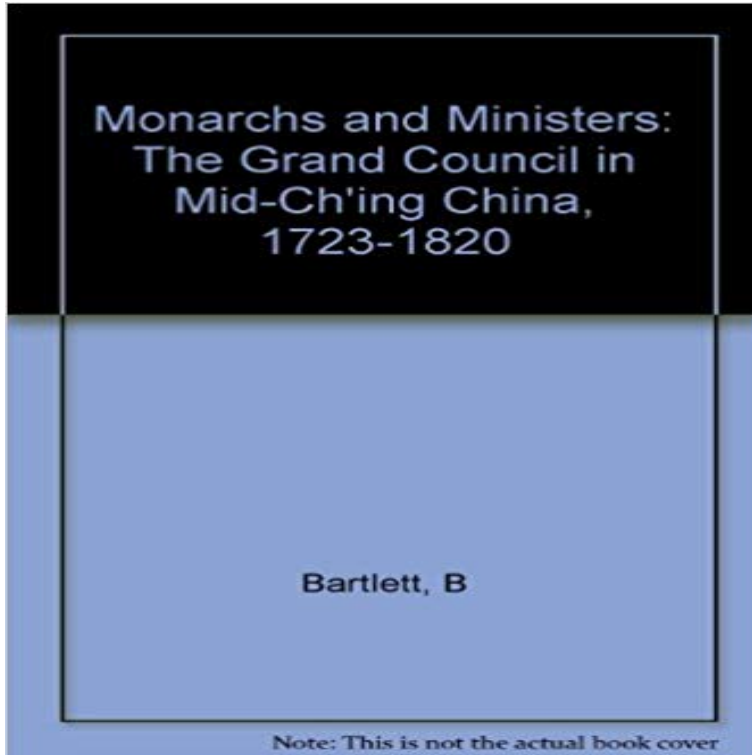


Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ching China, 1723-1820



This book describes the transformation of Ching governance from monarchical rule to ministerial administration, presenting a wholly new account of the Grand Councils founding and rise to dominance. This period has been viewed as an era of intensified government centralization and increasing autocracy, but Bartlett persuasively demonstrates that this characterization must be modified in the light of her findings. Bartlett identifies the inner-outer court dichotomy often studied in earlier dynasties but never before in the Ching as the key framework for understanding Grand Council development. She conclusively shows how the council arose from the Yung-cheng Emperors attempt to enhance his own power by establishing several small subordinate (and not at all grand) inner-court staffs to bypass the outer-court bureaucracy. A single centralizing and managing body worthy of the title grand came into being only after Yung-cheng's death. As a result of the council's first century of growth, imperial power was subtly undermined even though it continued in force. Bartlett argues that it was the council's consolidated power as much as the strength of the monarchy that enabled the Ching dynasty to achieve greatness in its middle years, defeating the Mongols and enlarging its territories, and at the end prolonged its life in spite of foreign incursions, internal rebellions, and infant emperors. The Grand Council is the only high privy council of imperial China for which substantial documentation survives. For this book Bartlett traveled to both Taipei and Beijing to consult the newly available archival sources in both Chinese and Manchu necessary for her research. Her feat of archival reconstruction is a tremendous service to the entire field. Her findings on the Grand Council's patterns of growth, particularly such factors as inner-court informality and secrecy, the far-flung eighteenth-century military

campaigns, the tripling of paperwork, and the manipulation of communications, will be useful to scholars studying similar phenomena in other periods and contexts, as Bartlett suggests in connection with the rise of the Ming grand secretaries. *Monarchs and Ministers* offers a lively and fresh account of eighteenth-century Chinese political history that will engage the general reader as well as China specialists in many fields.

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