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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 33-71

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179248>

Accessed: 16/02/2013 12:10

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Manchu Widows and Ethnicity in Qing China

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Like women in many parts of the world whose husbands predeceased them, widows in China were free electrons, unbound elements in the social chemistry. Economically vulnerable, ritually superfluous, and at the same time socially destabilizing and sexually threatening, they were archetypal liminal figures—marginalized, caricatured, and feared. This has made the widow a good subject for literary critics, anthropologists, and historians interested in the way that societies treat women and in the way that treatment of widows in particular is intended to ward off or contain potential disturbance to the status quo. For China, as pioneering work by Mark Elvin and Susan Mann has shown, examining changing attitudes toward widows can illuminate larger social, political, and economic shifts in the late imperial period, roughly the thirteenth through the early twentieth centuries.¹ By focusing on Manchu widows, the present essay attempts to improve our understanding of widowhood in late imperial China and at the same time shed light on the role of widows, and women generally, in the construction of ethnicity in the Qing period (1644–1911), when the alien Manchu dynasty ruled the country.

WIDOW CHASTITY AND MANCHU LEGITIMACY

One of the fundamental questions that attracted Elvin's and Mann's attention was the marked rise in the number of so-called "chaste wives" or "chaste widows," that is, widows who never remarried, during the Qing. Elvin noted that "during the eighteenth century the flow of candidates [for canonization as vir-

The research for this essay was supported by grants from the Joint Committee on Chinese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with China (CSCC), and the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Conversations with Ding Yizhuang, Associate Professor at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a 1996–97 Chinese Fellow of the CSCC, were fundamental in shaping many of the views expressed here. My gratitude also goes to Ms. Zhang Li and Ms. Shao Dan for research assistance. Special thanks to Francesca Bray and Norman Kutcher for their careful readings and critical suggestions.

¹ Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State," *Past and Present* 104, 111–52; and Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46:1 (February 1987), 37–56. Among newer work, see the excellent discussion in Bettine Birge, "Levirate Marriage and the Revival of Widow Chastity in Yüan China," *Asia Major*, 8:2 (Fall 1995), 107–46.

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tuous widows] steadily increased . . . [and] after 1845 . . . the system had become an assembly line.”² He characterized this change as the “democratization” of elite Confucian virtues and explained it as largely the result of the Qing court’s desire to publicize virtuous behavior among the poor and advance moral education among the general population.³

Elvin’s citation of Ming views on moral excellence, to the effect that a dynasty lacking them “will no longer be Chinese, but barbarian,” subtly suggested that this campaign stemmed from the Manchus’ ethnic insecurity, their fear of being thought *poseurs* by the Chinese and their desire to put up a good Confucian front.⁴ Mann, who likened the expanding concern for female chastity under the Qing to a “cult,”⁵ made this argument explicitly. Noting the emphasis placed by the early Qing emperors on widow chastity, she stressed the contemporary political value of this approach, through which the Qing could purchase legitimacy by appearing to “revitaliz[e] policies of the early Ming period that had fallen into abeyance.” Comparing the Manchus in China to the British in India, she wrote that “the Manchus as conquering outsiders sought to codify and enforce norms in traditional Chinese culture so that they could claim to represent, and indeed to restore, an indigenous moral and social system.”⁶

Another historian who has examined the subject makes a similar point, observing that, “the Manchu regime, being an alien conqueror . . . used [the traditional Confucian ethical code] to publicly demonstrate to their Han Chinese subjects their benignity and refinement.”⁷ Overall, the consensus is that the chaste widow cult sponsored by the Manchu conquerors represented a greater penetration of elite Confucian norms across social classes and that behind this hyper-orthodoxy lay political motives tied to Manchu insecurity. The Manchus wished to be seen as legitimate rulers who had won the Mandate of Heaven to rule China and not just as another pack of uncivilized barbarian interlopers.⁸ Exactly what Manchu attitudes were toward their own widows, however, has never been entirely clear. Yet it would seem that these attitudes might tell us something more about the Qing commitment to Chinese standards of ritual and propriety.

When we look at widowhood in the Eight Banners, the exclusive, caste-like socio-military organization that was the backbone of Manchu power and the virtual “home” of the Manchus and their original allies, it seems at first that a similar penetration of Confucian norms occurred there as well. From a respectable number of virtuous widows (mostly suicides) early in the dynasty, the

² Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 135. ³ *Ibid.*, 123, 133, 135.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 136. ⁵ Mann, “Widows in Qing China,” 38. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

⁷ Tien Ju-k’ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 126.

⁸ Mann elaborates upon this argument in her book, *Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), especially ch. 1. See also Ann Waltner, “Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China,” in Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen, eds., *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship* (Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981), 137.

TABLE 1.1
Chaste Widows in the Eight Banners by Reign, 1653–1795

| <i>Reign period</i> | <i>Number of widows who remained chaste (shoujie)</i> | <i>Percentage of total number of chaste widows, 1653–1795 [in percentages]</i> | <i>Average number of chaste widows per annum</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Shunzhi (1644–1661) ^a | 142 | .92 | 15.7 |
| Kangxi (1662–1722) | 1669 | 10.81 | 27.4 |
| Yongzheng (1723–1735) | 1223 | 7.92 | 94.1 |
| sub-total, 1653–1661 | 3034 | 19.65 | 37 |
| Qianlong (1736–1795) | 12402 | 80.35 | 206.7 |
| total, 1653–1795 | 15436 | 100 | 108.70 |

^aRecognition of faithful widows began in 1653, so calculations for the Shunzhi reign are made for the eight years, 1653–1661.

Source: *Baqi tongzhi (chuj)*, juan 240–50 and *Qinding baqi tongzhi*, juan 241–69.

number of chaste banner widows increased exponentially in the eighteenth century, especially during the Qianlong reign (1736–95). As Table 1 illustrates, while the total number of chaste widows for the first ninety-two years of Qing rule (1644–1735) was just over 3,000 during the 60 years of the Qianlong era 12,402 banner widows were commended for loyalty to their late husbands. In other words, from an earlier average of 37 widows annually, in the later 1700s the court was recognizing 207 widows annually, a six-fold increase, a fact that was true across the 3 ethnic divisions of the banner system, Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese.⁹ So it would seem that Confucian norms penetrated not only deeper into Qing society, but also more widely, moving across ethnic as well as class boundaries.

Looked at in one context, this conclusion fits nicely with long-accepted notions of how the minority Manchus (whom the Chinese outnumbered by at least 100 to 1) managed to rule China for so long. It confirms the general impression that in sponsoring Cheng-Zhu “neo-Confucianism,” the Qing ruling elite enforced a rigid orthodoxy, with the Manchus, like true converts everywhere, end-

⁹ The early Manchu state, like the states built by other nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of northern and central Asia, was organized primarily for conquest. The banner system, founded circa 1599, served this end by managing the levy of troops and looking after the welfare of warriors’ families when men were away fighting, which was most of the time. Thus, virtually the entire Manchu population (descendants of the Jurchen tribes who founded the Jin dynasty, 1115–1234) was registered under the banner organization. As the state grew, the banner system expanded to incorporate non-Manchu soldiers and their families who had joined the Qing cause. By 1642, this resulted in the creation of three ethnic divisions within the banners, corresponding to three types of Qing armies: a Manchu division; a Mongol division (drawn mainly from Chakhar, Kharachin, and other eastern Mongol groups allied with the Manchus); and a Chinese (*Hanjun*) division, made up of frontier-dwelling Han Chinese, many of whom were acculturated to Manchu warrior ways, who had joined the Qing in opposing the Chinese Ming dynasty.

ing up more “Chinese” than the Chinese themselves. This process of acculturation, or sinicization, as it is sometimes spoken of in the Chinese case, has frequently been pointed to by historians as the underlying reason for the success of Qing rule and continues today to be viewed by some as an essential ingredient in any recipe for alien rule. Since non-Han peoples ruled all or part of China for more than 700 of the last 1,000 years, the question is unavoidably tied up in questions of “Chineseness,” nationalism, and ethnic pride.¹⁰ The very large number of chaste banner widows in the eighteenth century would seem to furnish further evidence of wholesale Manchu acculturation. In this sense, women’s pursuit of a virtuous Chinese female ideal paralleled the loss of martial ability and Manchu language skills among banner males, who became preoccupied instead with pursuing, if not Chinese ideals of literary attainment, then the fine arts of drinking Chinese tea and wine, wearing Chinese clothes, and singing arias from Chinese operas.

Looked at differently, however, the chaste widow “boom” among bannerwomen, and among Manchu women in particular, is more problematic.¹¹ Recent research is coming to show that ethnic concerns figured in various aspects of Qing politics to a much greater degree than previously imagined, and we are learning more about the court’s long campaign against acculturation—at least, the acculturation of Manchu men. Newer interpretations of Qing history accordingly stress the degree to which maintaining a separate Manchu identity was key to long-term Qing success in ruling China.¹² But the Qing court’s promotion of Confucian norms of widow behavior among Manchu appears to fly in the face of arguments that the preservation of Manchu identity mattered greatly to the court or that the court viewed acculturation with suspicion. How can this apparent contradiction be reconciled?

This is no idle question, for it touches on the uneasy accommodation of the

¹⁰ For a recent comprehensive restatement of this position, see Ping-ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski’s ‘Reenvisioning the Qing,’” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57:1 (February 1998), 123–55.

¹¹ As it will become clear, I use “Manchu” in this essay as a shorthand for all banner populations, whether originally ethnically Manchu or not. I am fully aware of the differences between these populations (Manchus, Mongols, Chinese banner, bondservants). My reasons for resorting to the name “Manchu” are first, that in eighteenth-century Qing usage all were frequently conflated as “banner people” (in Chinese, *qiren*; in Manchu, *gūsai niyalma*) and that, by the twentieth century, banner people indeed formally become “Manchu”; and, second, it is a useful label to make broad distinctions between those in the banners (treated as Manchu) and those outside (treated as Han). When discussing contemporary differences between various banner groups, however, I use Manchu in the more narrow sense, referring only to those enrolled in the Manchu Eight Banners.

¹² See, for example, Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Orphan Warriors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); and James Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). A brief review of this trend in the scholarship is found in Evelyn Rawski, “Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55:4 (November 1996), 829–50.

“cosmopolitan” and the “ethnic” modes of rulership,¹³ the mutually exclusive principles of legitimacy that underwrote Qing power. One element addressed the need to espouse the centuries-old rhetoric of Confucian kingship, the other the need to preserve a separate sphere of interest and influence for the Manchus as an ethnically distinct conquest group. One is reminded of a similar balancing act performed by the Ottoman Turks. Like the Manchus, the Ottomans presided over a polyethnic “universal” empire and yet had to present themselves as protectors of the “faith”—for them, Islam, for the Manchus, Confucianism.¹⁴

The premise of this essay is that an examination of the history of widowhood among Manchu women can help us understand one aspect of the accommodation between Confucian universalism and ethnic special interest that has heretofore received very little attention, namely, the operation of gender in the logic of empire. When we trace the history of changing practices among Manchu widows, we find that what was sauce for the goose was definitely *not* sauce for the gander. The widow was at the center of a complex intersection of ethnicity, politics, and gender wherein behavior that looked Chinese actually was not at first, and wherein Chinese-style norms could be applied in female spheres while they were simultaneously resisted in male ones. The result was that in the Qing period, ethnicity—which, following recent anthropological scholarship, I interpret as a mode of consciousness arising from cultural interpretations of descent that produces a set of relations shaped by specific economic and political forces¹⁵—was quite unmistakably a gendered formation.

The study of Manchu women’s history has barely begun. My hope is that by filling in one corner of a larger, but mostly blank, picture, this essay will encourage further work.¹⁶ Drawing mainly on Manchu- and Chinese-language archival documents, as well as on Qing official publications, I start by examining the establishment of the cult of virtue among bannerwomen, particularly Manchu women. I investigate the significance of the rising numbers of widows who “preserved their chastity” (Ch., *shoujie*)¹⁷ as compared with the falling

¹³ These terms are Philip Kuhn’s. See *Soulstealers*, 60. I say more about this issue in my book, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ The difference was that for the Manchus the conflict arose between their own ethnic identity and the cosmopolitan ideals of Confucianism, whereas for the Turks the primary strain was between Islam and the cosmopolitan ideals of Ottomanism, or what Norman Itzkowitz called the “Ottoman Way.” There was relatively little tension between Turkish identity and Islam. Thus, in the early twentieth century, when Ottomanism was bankrupted by surging Islamic nationalism, the Turks still had their national identity, but when at the same time in China Confucianism as a state ideology was bankrupted by surging Han nationalism, the Manchus had nowhere to turn.

¹⁵ Paraphrasing John L. Comaroff, “Of Totemism and Ethnicity,” *Ethnos* 52:3–4 (1987). The literature on ethnicity is now vast. A good summary is Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 1993).

¹⁶ The only specialized studies of Manchu women’s history I am aware of are those by Lai Huimin and Ding Yizhuang, cited in the notes. I have not found any bibliography on this subject in Japanese or in European languages.

¹⁷ An effort has been made to provide original terminology where this is deemed useful. Chinese words are denoted by “Ch.,” Manchu words by “Ma.”

number of martyr widows who committed suicide (Ch., *xunsi, congxun*). A comparison of these two types of behavior reveals that widow suicide among Manchus, far from imitating Chinese practice, was in fact part of a wholly separate Altaic tradition. The eighteenth-century decline of widow-suicide and the popularization of Neo-Confucian chaste widow norms, on the other hand, appears to represent real acculturation among Manchu women. I then consider why this form of acculturation was not only permitted, but encouraged by the Manchu elite, when such a policy was sharply at odds with the court's distinctive ethnic ideal for Manchu men. In the conclusion I ask what this can tell us about women's place in the rhetoric of Manchu identity and about the importance of women in the construction of ethnicity historically.

THE CULT OF THE VIRTUOUS BANNERWOMAN

The sponsorship of Confucian-style virtue by the Chinese state was an institution nearly as old as the empire itself. From the Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE) through the Qing, governments rewarded exemplary moral behavior in men and women by issuing imperial patents and honorific tablets (Ch., *jingbiao*), excusing honorees from labor service, and, in the Qing, paying for the construction of memorial arches (Ch., *paifang*) in a widow's home town. The types of righteous behavior the state recognized in dispensing *jingbiao* changed over the centuries. From an early emphasis on the filiality (Ch., *xiao*) of sons and daughters, by the Ming period (1368–1644) attention focused above all on widows who remained faithful to their deceased husbands, either by committing suicide or by refusing to remarry, even if the couple had only been betrothed.¹⁸ Such widows were celebrated as “chaste wives” or “chaste widows” (Ch., *jiefu*).

A chaste widow in the family could bring considerable prestige to her clan and, indeed, the entire community. For this reason, local histories from the Ming and Qing are crammed with the stories of illustrious women from the county or district, evidence of the outstanding moral fiber of the populace.¹⁹ With the gradual cheapening of the *jingbiao* standard by the late eighteenth century (Elvin's “assembly line”), the social prestige of such recognition declined accordingly. Later in the Qing, the stories of upright women became more and more formulaic until in many instances they were reduced to mere lists of names.

The Manchus first adopted the *jingbiao* system for recognizing their own widows in 1651, just seven years after the first Qing emperor ascended the throne in Beijing. Approving *jingbiao* for Manchu and other banner women may well have been one more way (along with burying the Ming emperor, implementing the civil service examinations, and so forth) that the Qing used to underscore their commitment to Confucian virtues and shore up their legiti-

¹⁸ The details of the evolution of the *jingbiao* system are admirably set out in Elvin, “Female Virtue.”

¹⁹ Mann, “Widows in Qing China,” 42–43.

macy as masters of the Chinese empire. Given the politics of the day, however, this was a problematic strategy: To commend the sort of fidelity inherent in widow chastity, and especially widow suicide, was to champion a virtue bearing uncomfortably close associations with the still-active Ming resistance, carried on for decades by subjects of the former dynasty who refused to recognize or to serve the upstart Qing.²⁰ It therefore makes sense to think about the other benefits that arose from instituting the *jingbiao* for bannerwomen.

First, by providing an institutionalized means of recognizing the sacrifices that their women made during the conquest of China, the Qing may have hoped implicitly to demonstrate that Han women were not the only women deserving of praise and that there were virtuous women among the Manchus, too. Moreover, framing that worthiness in Confucian terms made it readily understandable to the Chinese. But it also hid discontinuities between the cultural contexts in which Chinese and Manchu women originally acted. I shall say more about these discontinuities below.

Second, by appearing to promote Confucian virtues among bannerwomen, the court could claim it was promoting ethnic harmony. The memorial announcing that Manchu women were to be considered for *jingbiao* honors appeared in a long list of rewards, amnesties, and promotions distributed in the announcement that a temple was named for the empress dowager.²¹ The announcement did not really dwell on female virtues at all, save those of the emperor's mother. Rather, its overall tone emphasized the establishment of ethnic parity and equality between Manchu and Han, promoting the idea of the Manchu emperor as a universal ruler, unbiased and equitable toward all his subjects.²² In other words, by unifying the standards of propriety for Manchu and Han women, the emperor underscored the Qing claim to impartial rule. In the process, he strengthened Qing legitimacy in a different way than a simple, straightforward espousal of Confucian virtues by sending the message that Manchu rule was not only in the best Confucian tradition but that Han Chinese had nothing to fear from Manchu special interests.

At least some Han officials understood the directive in just this spirit. In 1653, the first year that *jingbiao* distinctions were actually awarded to bannerwomen,²³ the censor for the southern province of Guangdong wrote that the

²⁰ Mann, *Precious Records*, 25.

²¹ *Da Qing Shizu zhang (Shunzhi) huangdi shilu* (Veritable Records of the emperor Shizu) (hereafter *Shizu shilu*) juan 53: 12b-15b.

²² On the Qing emperor as universal ruler, see David Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 38:1 (June 1978); Pamela Kyle Crossley, "The Rulerships of China," *American Historical Review* 97:5 (December 1992), 1468-83; and James Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), especially ch. 1.

²³ It took a few years for the court to establish nomination procedures: company captains were to recommend women for the *jingbiao* to banner commanders, who then passed the names on to the Board of Rites. *Da Qing Huidian shili* (Collected Institutes and Precedents of the Qing) (1899 ed.) (hereafter DQHDSL) 1145: 20a-b.

emperor's order to reward exemplary behavior among Manchu men and women as he did already among Han was evidence of his benevolence and "equal gaze upon Manchu and Han." Since that was the case, the official took the opportunity to ask, why not go further and eliminate the difference in mourning periods for Manchu and Han officials? If Chinese were required to take a 27-month leave of absence upon the death of a parent, Manchu officials should be required to do the same. Enforcing only a 1-month (later, 3-month) break for banner officials gave Manchus an unfair career advantage, since they did not have to resign their positions, while Han officials did.²⁴ But the court did not unify mourning requirements, proof that however much the rhetoric of "equal treatment of Manchu and Han" was trumpeted; and however much the court showed itself in the "cosmopolitan mode," Manchu privilege—an expression of the opposing "ethnic mode"—was a ubiquitous feature of Qing rule upon which Confucian norms could not be allowed to infringe excessively.

As the Guangdong censor's petition reveals, a double standard did exist, even if the court wished not to publicize the fact. The court neither viewed nor treated Han Chinese the same as it did Manchus and others in the banners.²⁵ Nor, as we shall see, did it treat men and women the same. Thus, while Manchu women might be singled out for their virtue, Manchu men rarely were. As we shall see, much more important for them were the values of "masculine virtue" and associated warrior ways. These gaps between Qing rhetoric and practice caution us to be suspicious of the Confucian overlay of the jingbiao project as it pertained to those in the Eight Banners.²⁶

Before going on to discuss the cult of the virtuous widow in the Eight Banners in more detail, let us first review a breakdown of the statistics concerning meritorious bannerwomen.

These tables help to illustrate three general points. First, when we look at the pattern in widow suicides (Table 2.1), we find a precipitous drop in numbers by the early eighteenth century. Whereas nearly 200 widows were commended for committing suicide in the seventeenth century (all but 3 of the suicides in the Kangxi reign [1662–1722] came before 1681), only 5 were recognized during the Yongzheng reign (1723–1735) and none thereafter.

Second, these statistics show a consistent preference for awarding jingbiao

²⁴ *Shizu shilu* 72: 4a–b; *Donghua lu* 4: 31b–32a; *Da Qing Shengzu ren (Kangxi) huangdi shilu* (Veritable Records of the emperor Shengzu) (hereafter *Shengzu shilu*) 43: 7b–8a; DQHDSL 138: 2a–3b. As Norman Kutcher has found, however, even for Han officials, the mourning standard was eventually compromised in some significant ways under the Qing. Norman A. Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁵ The illusion of equal treatment of Han and Manchu in officialdom is discussed in Raymond Chu and William Saywell, *Career Patterns in the Ch'ing Dynasty: The Office of Governor General* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1984), 47; see also Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 35; and Lawrence Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule, 1661–1664* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 117 ff.

²⁶ More on the political, legal, social, and economic inequalities that obtained between Han Chinese and banner populations is found in my book, *The Manchu Way*.

TABLE 2.1
Widow Suicides in the Eight Banners, 1653–1795

| Commendation | | (Widow suicide/"Following-in-death" (<i>xunsi</i>)) | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Reign period ↓ | → | Manchu | <i>bond-</i> <i>servants</i> | Mongol | Han- martial | EB Sub-total |
| Shunzhi | | 85 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 92 |
| | % | 92% | 8% | — | — | 100% |
| Kangxi | | 73 | 19 | 7 | 2 | 101 |
| | % | 72% | 19% | 7% | 2% | 100% |
| Yongzheng | | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| | % | 80% | — | — | 20% | 100% |
| Qianlong | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | % | — | — | — | — | — |
| Totals | | 162 | 26 | 7 | 3 | 198 |
| | % | 82% | 13% | 3.5% | 1.5% | 100% |

Source for Table 2.1: *Baqi tongzhi (chuj)*, *juan* 240–50 and *Qinding baqi tongzhi*, *juan* 241–69.

to Manchu bannerwomen over women of the Mongol and Han martial banners. In all reigns, Manchu women account for the majority of awards in both categories (widow suicide and chaste widowhood, Tables 2.1 and 2.2), and walked away with almost 60 percent of all *jingbiao* during the 143-year period we are talking about (Table 2.3). In fact, the percentage was actually slightly higher than this, since among women in bondservant and Imperial Household Department companies was a large number of ethnic Manchus. We lack precise numbers, but it would be fair to say that at least one-half of the 4 percent commended under the *booi* bondservant category in Table 2.3 were Manchu women. This raises the total of Manchu *jingbiao* to 62 percent of the total. Only about 17 percent of *jingbiao* went to Mongol bannerwomen, with the remainder going to women in the Chinese banners or female Han bondservants.

Third, we find an explosive increase in the number of virtuous widows in the Qianlong reign (Table 2.3). Nearly 80 percent of all bannerwomen cited for *jingbiao* recognition were cited during the 60 years between 1736 and 1795, and they were cited for refraining from remarriage, not for committing suicide. That the total number of women so honored by Qianlong was more than 10 times the number honored by his father is perhaps not so surprising, since Yongzheng ruled for only 13 years, and since the Qianlong era was a time of ballooning statistics of all sorts. But that the number should be 7 times greater than those honored by the Kangxi emperor, who ruled 1 year *longer* than Qianlong, suggests that larger changes were at work.

These three general observations—the decline in widow suicide, the statistical dominance of Manchu women, and the chaste widow “boom” in the sec-

TABLE 2.2
Chaste Widows in the Eight Banners, 1653–1795

| Commendation → Reign period ↓ | Chaste widow (<i>shoujie</i>) 201 years | | | | |
|--|---|-------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Manchu | bond- servants | Mongol | Han- martial | EB Sub-total |
| Shunzhi | 108 | 30 | 1 | 3 | 142 |
| % | 76% | 21% | 1% | 2% | 100% |
| Kangxi | 863 | 96 | 408 | 302 | 1,669 |
| % | 52% | 6% | 24% | 18% | 100% |
| Yongzheng | 538 | 205 | 161 | 319 | 1,223 |
| % | 44% | 17% | 13% | 26% | 100% |
| Qianlong | 7,636 | 238 | 2,028 | 2,500 | 12,402 |
| % | 62% | 2% | 16% | 20% | 100% |
| Totals | 9,145 | 569 | 2,598 | 3,124 | 15,436 |
| % | 59% | 4% | 17% | 20% | 100% |

Source for Table 2.2: *Baqi tongzhi (chujì)*, juan 240–50 and *Qinding baqi tongzhi*, juan 241–69.

ond two-thirds of the eighteenth century—are taken up in the sections that follow. Regarding the sudden decline of widow suicide, I suggest in the following section that, mainly for political reasons, official attitudes toward widow suicide changed dramatically in the early 1700s. For, as I demonstrate, Manchu widow suicide did not mimic Chinese practice at all but continued an Altaic custom that carried inconvenient reminders of the Manchus’ “barbarian” past. Indeed, the Manchu distaste for widow suicide generally may well have owed to its associations with a custom that, because of its own ethnic insecurities, the court was anxious to cover up. The preponderance of Manchu women in all *jingbiao* categories is addressed in the succeeding discussion on remarriage and the ideal of the “chaste widow.” In analyzing this and the Qianlong chaste widow “boom,” I suggest that ethnopolitical motives figured significantly in the selection of all virtuous bannerwomen but that the shift from an ambivalent position on widow remarriage to a position opposing it reflected not just political, but institutional and cultural changes as well. I will take up these questions in order.

The Manchus and Widow Suicide

Widow suicide, what the Manchus called “following-in-death” (Ma., *dahame bucembi*; literally, “to die following”), was common enough in the early Qing period. The deaths of the first two Qing khans, Nurhaci (r. 1616–25) and Hong Taiji (r. 1626–43), were each marked by the suicides of 2 lesser consorts. Nurhaci’s death was also the occasion for the apparently reluctant suicide of his

TABLE 2.3
All virtuous widows in the Eight Banners, 1653–1795

| Reign period ↓ | Both types of commendation | | | | TOTALS (all reigns, both types of commendation) |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------|--------|-----------------|--|
| | Manchu | bond- servants | Mongol | Han- martial | |
| Shunzhi | 193 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 234 |
| | % 82.5% | 16% | .5% | 1% | 15.0% |
| Kangxi | 936 | 115 | 415 | 304 | 1,770 |
| | % 53% | 6.5% | 23.5% | 17% | 11.3% |
| Yongzheng | 542 | 205 | 161 | 320 | 1,228 |
| | % 44% | 17% | 13% | 26% | 7.9% |
| Qianlong | 7,636 | 238 | 2,028 | 2,500 | 12,402 |
| | % 61.5% | 2% | 16.5% | 20% | 79.3% |
| TOTALS (all reigns, both types of commendation) | 9,307 | 595 | 2,605 | 3,127 | 15,634 |
| | % 59.5% | 4% | 16.5% | 20% | 100% |

Source for Table 2.3: *Baqi tongzhi (chuj)*, juan 240–50 and *Qinding baqi tongzhi*, juan 241–69.

main wife, the empress Xiaolie.²⁷ When Manggultai, a son of Nurhaci, died in 1633, his wife “followed” him, too, while the death in battle of Prince Yoto in 1638 served as the occasion for his wife’s suicide soon thereafter. This practice persisted after the conquest, as shown by the 1649 suicide of a secondary wife of Dodo, a leading general. The death of another general, Jirgalang, in 1655 occasioned the deaths of 5 of his wives, 1 of whom was only 14 years old at the time; and when the distinguished general Nikan died in 1660, 2 wives committed suicide.²⁸ Furthermore, statistics for the Qing imperial household show an unusually high incidence of widows dying in the same year as their husbands.²⁹ As these examples indicate, “following-in-death,” while not restricted to the élite, was, like Han widow suicide, probably more common in prominent households, though this may only reflect the incompleteness of our sources.

The Manchu rulers were deeply ambivalent about the moral value of widow

²⁷ Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943–44): 303–4.

²⁸ These examples are all drawn from *Baqi tongzhi (chuj)* (General History of the Eight Banners, first edition) (hereafter BQTZ) (Changchun: Dongbei shifan xueyuan chubanshe, 1985), 239: 5366.

²⁹ Liu Sufen, “Qingdai huangzu hunyin” (“Marriage in the Qing imperial lineage”), in Li Zhongqing [James Lee] and Guo Songyi, eds., *Qingdai huangzu renkou xingwei he shehui huanjing* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1994), 108. Liu’s explanation is that this is the result of “wartime chaos” in the early Qing and does not reflect a high incidence of widow suicide. But she does not seem to be aware of the existence of the Altaic tradition of “following-in-death.”

suicide. Hesitancy on this score can be traced as far back as 1634, when the second Qing khan, Hong Taiji, tried to limit its frequency.³⁰ After the 1644 conquest of China, the official position on widow suicide for Han women changed more than once, moving from initial (cautious) approval to disapproval after 1688 and back again to approval in 1851.³¹ The dislike of the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors for the practice was well known at the time. The introduction to the section on virtuous women in the *General History of the Eight Banners*, published in 1736, mentions the view that widows who committed suicide exhibited a light regard for life, reflecting the content of separate edicts of 1688, 1728, and 1735.³² At the same time, however, the editors of the *General History* stressed the role of women in the “civilizing process” (Ch., *wanghua*), noting with pride that

At the end of every year [the cases of] virtuous women are collected and reported to the throne. At the ceremonies [awarding] the *jingbiao* tablets, none surpass the Eight Banners. Those who follow in death are particularly numerous.³³

It is not hard to find the contradictions in the position taken by the *General History* editors. On the one hand, they proclaimed that widow suicide was evidence of outstanding virtue in women and that in this type of lofty expression no one outshone women in the Eight Banners. (The statistics above show, of course, that they really meant Manchu women.) On the other hand, by including imperial edicts frowning on the practice, they acknowledged the view that widow suicide was abhorrent and displayed a lack of respect for life. These contradictions help explain the sudden drop in *jingbiao* suicides (from 92 and 101 in the Shunzhi and Kangxi reigns, respectively, to 5 in the Yongzheng reign and zero in the Qianlong reign), while at the same time Manchu widow suicides continued to be reported in the 1730s and even the 1750s, even if they were technically no longer deemed worthy of the *jingbiao* testimonial and were not recorded in the *General History*.³⁴

³⁰ Ding Yizhuang, “Qingdai Manzu funü ‘xunjie’ qianxi” (Brief analysis of Manchu ‘widow suicide’ in the Qing), in *Shang Hongkui jiaoshou shishi shizhounian jinian lunwenji* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 184, citing *Qingchu neiguoshiyuan Manwen dang’an yibian* (Translated Compilation of Manchu Archives of the Early Qing Historical Office) [hereafter QNMDY], (Beijing: Guangming chubanshe, 1989), vol. 1, 61 (item dated 1634). See also BQTZ 239: 5366. Following-in-death by servants was formally outlawed in 1673. Zheng Tianting, “Manzhou ruguan qianhou jizhong lisu zhi bianqian” (Changes in various Manchu customs before and after the conquest), *Tanweiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980 [1945]), 77. Evelyn Rawski, however, notes that this custom continued, at least for imperial funerals. Rawski, “The Imperial Way of Death,” in James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 242. This would seem to be supported by the unconfirmed story that the Qianlong emperor was buried together with a Han woman, presumably a palace servant. Gao Hongxing, *Chanzu shi* (A History of Footbinding) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995), 27.

³¹ Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 127–9.

³² These are cited in Ding, “Qingdai Manzu funü,” 186–7; Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 128–29, quotes from the 1728 edict at some length.

³³ BQTZ 239: 5365.

³⁴ I note Manchu widow suicides at least as late as 1753. *Da Qing chun (Qianlong) gaozong huangdi shilu* (Veritable Records of the emperor Gaozong) [hereafter *Gaozong shilu*] 429: 33b.

Ambivalence toward widow suicide was nothing new in the eighteenth century. Mark Elvin demonstrated a “conflict between fidelity and filiality” in Chinese attitudes at least by the Ming, and Mann detailed it further for the early Qing.³⁵ But the source of this ambivalence was different for the Manchus. When it came to suicide among Han widows, the issue had mainly to do with the uneasy place suicide occupied within a Confucian order in which filiality imposed a duty to preserve and respect one’s body as a gift from one’s parents. “Treating life lightly” (Ch., *qingsheng*) was a serious ritual transgression. The suicides of Manchu widows, on the other hand, sent a message of another nature, for the reason that their suicides represented the continuation of an older Inner Asian custom, unrelated to Confucian practice. Once this point is grasped, we can see that the posthumous awarding of *jingbiao* distinctions to Manchu women in the early Qing amounted to little more than a Confucian whitewash of “barbarian” Manchu ways and that, more than anything, discouraging a “barbarian” practice like following-in-death represented a politically wise choice for the court.

There are a number of ways to get beneath this Confucian whitewash. One is to go back to the tabulation of widow suicides in Table 2.1. It was mentioned earlier that Manchu women accounted for over 60 percent of all *jingbiao* awards in the first century and a half of Qing rule. But in the category of widow suicide the predominance of Manchu women was even more overwhelming—almost 90 percent, if one assigns a portion of the bondservant figures to the Manchu column. The minuscule number of *jingbiao* awards to Chinese bannerwomen in this category is especially striking. Within ten years of the conquest, the Chinese banners had become the most populous of the three ethnic divisions of the Eight Banner system and, for most of the period between 1650 and 1750, represented approximately one-half of the entire banner population (excluding the bondservant companies), while Manchus comprised about one-third of the total, and Mongols roughly one-sixth.³⁶ Yet Chinese banner women accounted for just 1.5 percent of the awards for widow suicide.

Given the subordination of the Chinese to the Manchu and Mongol divisions in the Eight Banner hierarchy, it is not surprising to find that here, as elsewhere, the Chinese banners got the short end of the stick.³⁷ But that the proportions should be so lopsided hints that more than the usual intra-banner ethnic politics was at work here, especially since the Chinese banners were still relatively less removed from the cultural norms of mainstream Han society. One might logi-

³⁵ Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 138–146, and Mann, *Precious Records*, 24–25.

³⁶ An Shuangcheng, “Shunzhi chao baqi nanding manwen dang’an xuanyi” (Selected translations from Manchu archives of the Shunzhi reign on the number of able-bodied males), *Manxue yanjiu* 1 (1992), 415–21.

³⁷ Still, when compared to Han women, Han martial women received preferential treatment. In honor of his mother, the Qianlong emperor in 1750 ordered imperial honors for longevity bestowed on all the women in the empire. Civilian Chinese women had to be over 80 to qualify, while bannerwomen (Manchu, Mongol, and Han martial alike) only had to be over 70 to be recognized (*Gaoshilou shilu* 370: 10a–b).

cally expect them to have accepted widow suicide more readily. The total dominance of Manchu and bondservant women, to the virtual exclusion of all other groups, in the widow suicide category is evidence that the behavior being rewarded here almost certainly did not result from the overnight embrace by Manchu women of a practice that even diehard Confucians were less than enthusiastic about. Far more likely, Manchu widow suicide was the continuation of an Inner Asian custom unrelated to Confucian practice.

A second way to get beneath the Confucian whitewash on widow suicide is to look closely at who committed suicide and when. Here we see that where Chinese tended to limit the commission of suicide to widows, the Manchus did not. For instance, the death of the master (or mistress) of a Manchu household might mean that not only wives, but servants, too, would follow him (or her) into the next world. Hence, when his secondary consort died in 1603, Nurhaci ordered 4 female servants to commit suicide to accompany her.³⁸ The death of Prince Dudu in 1642 resulted in one of his servant women hanging herself³⁹; and, when the regent Dorgon died in 1651, he was followed in death by a female servant. A very famous case involved the Shunzhi emperor's beloved consort, surnamed Donggo, who died in 1660. The broken-hearted monarch, only 23 at the time, is said to have ordered a number of palace maids and eunuchs to kill themselves when she died.⁴⁰ Interestingly, his own death less than 5 months later was reportedly marked by the voluntary suicide of a member of the imperial vanguard. As this incident and the suicides of 2 male adjutants upon Hong Taiji's demise indicate, the Manchu custom was more inclusive than contemporary widow suicide among the Chinese, since not only female, but even male followers formally outside the household might also opt to end their lives with the death of their patron, despite the formal limitation of following-in-death to wives and servants.⁴¹ One might interpret the suicide of the servant Gem following her mistress' death in Chapter 13 of the eighteenth-century novel, *Story of the Stone*, as evidence of the survival of this old banner practice into the eighteenth century.⁴²

That servants and others regularly participated in Manchu "following-in-death" is another indicator that suicide upon the death of another person occurred in a cultural and social context that carried different meanings for the Manchus than ostensibly a similar practice did among the Chinese.⁴³ Even

³⁸ The daughter of the Yehe chieftain Yangginu, she was canonized by her son, Hong Taiji, as Empress Xiaoci. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 1, 303, 598.

³⁹ QNMDY vol. 1: 477.

⁴⁰ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*: 302; Rawski, "The Imperial Way of Death," 250.

⁴¹ QNMDY vol. 1: 61.

⁴² "News was suddenly brought that Qin-shi's little maid Gem, on hearing that her mistress was dead, had taken her own life by dashing her head against a pillar. Such rare devotion excited the admiration of the entire clan" (Cao Xueqin, *Story of the Stone*, David Hawkes, trans. [Penguin, 1973], 261).

⁴³ It is perhaps worth recalling here that the physical destruction of widows is observed in many

when Chinese servants killed themselves on the death of their master or mistress, as sometimes happened, it was the principle of filiality that was seen to be served, if by a surrogate.⁴⁴ This was not the case when the emperor's guardsman followed his master to the grave: Manchu following-in-death here fit not Confucian ideas of filiality but Altaic notions of loyalty and death.

A MARTYR'S DEATH?

A third way to penetrate beneath the Confucianizing veneer applied to Manchu widow suicide is to compare the terms for the practice in the two languages. Doing so puts Manchu following-in-death in the separate context of Inner Asian practices that were quite distinct in their origins from Chinese norms.

What I have been calling up to now "following-in-death" is normally called *xunsi* or *xunzang* in Chinese-language sources such as the *General History of the Eight Banners* or the *Veritable Records of the Qing*. Because the great majority of the business touching on the Eight Banners (and much else besides) was originally transacted in Manchu—an Altaic language wholly unrelated to Chinese—we can be sure that many passages in these and other historical materials for the early Qing period, including the descriptions of virtuous widows, were translated into Chinese from Manchu. If one were to assume that the Chinese terms *xunsi* and *xunzang* meant exactly the same thing as the Manchu term *dahame bucembi*, then translation between the two languages would be straightforward enough. But the terms are not the same. *Xun* can mean several things, most commonly "to die for a cause" or "to martyr oneself."⁴⁵ These meanings are not found in *dahame bucembi*.

Actually, early occurrences of *xun* in Chinese texts indicate a meaning for the word that is close to *dahame bucembi*.⁴⁶ The pre-Qin (that is, before the late third century BCE) *Li ji*, *Zuo zhuan*, and *Zhanguo ce* all contain examples of *xun* in the sense of "following-in-death." Significantly, it is not always the wife

different cultures throughout history and that there is no inherent reason to assume any organic connection between Chinese practices and the practices of other Asian peoples. Again, if one compares Chinese widow suicide with suttee, one can find numerous similarities (isolation and marginalization of the widow, pressure from the husband's family concerned with economic gain and social prestige) but a completely different religious context. When the Indian widow who was considered polluting committed herself to the flames of her husband's funeral pyre, she was transformed, becoming *sati* (pure) and capable of assuring her husband's spiritual well-being and passage into paradise. See V. N. Datta, *Sati: A Historical, Social, and Philosophical Inquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), 209. This is obviously far removed from the Confucian view, which, though it lauded widow suicide, generally preferred widows to remain alive to care for their children and serve as examples of public morality. See Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State," 127–8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁵ See the entries in the *Kangxi zidian* and *Dai Kan-Wa jiten*; also *Hanyu da cidian*.

⁴⁶ My search for occurrences of *xun* in Chinese historical texts has been immeasurably facilitated by the enormous computerized database of Chinese classics established and maintained by the Academia Sinica, Taiwan. This incredible resource is available gratis to the scholarly community at <http://www.sinica.edu.tw>. I owe everyone involved in that project an enormous debt of thanks.

who is mentioned as “following,” nor is it clear that those who “follow” commit suicide. Archaeological evidence from the Neolithic era indicates that accompanying-in-death as an aspect of Chinese royal funerals seems to have had more to do with the practice of human sacrifice in the Shang imperial cult than with any voluntary “following” of the deceased.⁴⁷ Second-century CE commentators on the *Li ji* understood *xun* to mean killing someone in order to protect the deceased in the afterlife. The sixth-century *Yu pian* also spoke of *xun* as “using people to send off the dead,” a meaning still provided in the seventeenth-century *Peiwen yunfu* dictionary. This sense of *xun* is manifestly quite close to the sense of the Manchu *dahame bucembi*. But this *xun* is not what we mean when we talk about the heroic widow.

The other meaning of *xun*, that is, *xun* as martyr, is nearly as old. Basing itself on the pre-Qin *Zhuangzi*, the same sixth-century *Yu pian* gives another definition of *xun* as “giving up one’s life on behalf of another,” and the *Han shu* (first century CE) contains the expression *xun guo*, meaning “to die for one’s country.”⁴⁸ By at least the third century CE the phrase *xunjie* emerged, the suffix *jie* implying that dying on behalf of someone or something was a moral act deserving of admiration (and emulation).⁴⁹ It is this sense of *xun* as “noble sacrifice” that eventually predominated in the language, particularly after the eleventh century, when Song Neo-Confucianists got hold of the notion of fidelity. By the fourteenth century, a woman’s loyalty to her husband, though strictly speaking a form of filiality, was indissolubly paired with a man’s loyalty to his ruler and official honors for faithful widows began to be routinized through the *jingbiao* system of rewarding merit.⁵⁰

By the seventeenth century, when the *Ming History* was written, the connotations of martyrdom had been firmly fixed in the word for at least 500 years. Wherever *xun* appears in that text (and it appears often), it refers to the heroic death of either a man or a woman in the name of upright fidelity, frequently to the doomed Ming cause. We find there terms such as righteous martyrdom (Ch., *xunyi*), faithful martyrdom (Ch., *xunzhong*), martyrdom for the dynasty (Ch., *xunguo*, *xunnan*), martyr’s death (Ch., *xunsi*), or just plain martyrdom (Ch., *xun*). Indeed, so much had *xun* come to be identified with the sense of self-sacrifice for a greater cause that the other, plainer sense of “to follow in death,” “to be buried with the dead,” was virtually lost, at least in talking about the Han Chinese.⁵¹ For this reason, when the state wished to recognize and en-

⁴⁷ David N. Keightley, “Early Civilization in China: Reflections on How it Became Chinese,” in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 28–31.

⁴⁸ *Han shu*, *liezhuan*, *juan* 54.

⁴⁹ *Sanguo zhi*, “Wei shu,” *juan* 10.

⁵⁰ Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 112, 121–3; Birge, “Levirate Marriage,” 109, 145–6; Katherine Carlitz, “Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56:3 (August 1997), 613.

⁵¹ It is no accident that, between the Tang and the Qing, it is primarily in accounts of non-Han

noble widow suicide as an act embodying the highest Confucian convictions, *xun* by itself was no longer serviceable. Instead the official Chinese phrase came to be the pleonastic *cong-xun*, meaning literally “to follow follow-in-death,” but more likely understood at the time as meaning something like “to follow-die as a martyr.”⁵²

In rendering the histories of early Qing women from Manchu into Chinese, it was only natural for translators schooled in the appropriate language for virtuous widows to resort to *xun* to describe their suicides. But when we look at the way that Manchu widow suicides are spoken of in the Manchu language, we can easily see the problem in thinking of them as *xun*-suicides in the Confucian sense. Instead of the heroic *xun*, Manchu texts use the simple phrase, *dahame bucembi*.⁵³ This expression, as noted, was closer to the older sense of *xun*, meaning “to follow in death,” but lacked the implication of martyrdom so important in the neologism, *cong-xun*. The unadorned Manchu phraseology is the best indication that these suicides belonged to a different cultural milieu and were not the acts of martyrs obeying Confucian notions of loyalty.

THE ALTAIC WAY OF DEATH

By now we have stripped away most of the Confucian veneer that was applied to Manchu widow suicide. The different factors we have been considering—the Manchu monopoly on widow suicide commendations, the greater inclusiv-

peoples that we see *xun* used in Chinese texts with the alternate, un-Confucian meaning of “to be buried with the dead.” Confucian teaching had never been very comfortable with the idea of suicide, even for as noble a cause as fidelity to a deceased husband. By the time of the *New Tang History*, or even the early ninth-century *Tongdian*, where in *juan* 86 we find the comment that “to be buried with the dead is not proper,” a reaction against widow suicide among the Han had set in; after this time, about the only occurrences of *xun* in the histories are in descriptions of “barbarian” customs. Only with the *Ming History* does the term enjoy a comeback, when it is used to describe the defenders of Yangzhou and other martyrs of the Ming cause.

⁵² I would hypothesize that this word, which we might translate as “following-in-death martyrdom,” is a Qing neologism; I cannot find it attested before the Qing period. It does not appear in the *Peiwen yunfu*.

⁵³ It is difficult to trace very many examples of the occurrence of this term. The sole attestation I have been able to find comes from the Manchu original of the *Nei guoshiyuan Manwen dang'an*, records that cover the years 1627–43. The term appears in the entry for the seventh year of Chongde, ninth month, second day (September 25, 1642) in a case prosecuting the widow of the deceased *beile* Dudu, suspected of having forced a servant girl to commit suicide in her place. The text reads, in part, “*doroi elehun beilei sula hehe. beile akū ofi emu biya oho manggi wasime bucehebi. ere turgunde fujin be si hafirahai bucehebi. unenggi dahame buceci beilei sasa bucembidere.*” (One month after the prince died, a female servant of the *doroi elehun beile* [that is, Prince Dudu], killed herself by hanging. For this reason, the wife [was interrogated], “You pressured her into dying. If she had really [wanted to] follow-die the *beile*, she would have died with [him]” [that is, not have waited one month before doing so]). Though the death penalty could be ordered for this crime, the guilty wife was sentenced to three days’ confinement without food. The Chinese translation of this passage may be found in QNMDY, vol. 1, 477. My thanks to Nakami Tatsuo for making photocopies of the original Manchu documents available to me. The appearance of the Chinese word *cong-si* (follow, die), and not any *xun* compound in the very first mentions of widow suicide in the *General History* strongly implies that *dahame bucembi* was the Manchu phrase being translated here. See BQTZ 240: 5383, 5386.

ity of Manchu following-in-death, and the nuances of the Manchu term for the practice—come together when we put following-in-death and the widow's fate in the larger context of Altaic funeral practice, to which it properly belonged.

Though there are similarities between them, the existence of an Inner Asian funerary culture independent of the Chinese tradition is not in dispute by scholars. Moreover, the place of following-in-death in the Inner Asian tradition is well documented not just in Chinese sources but in European and Persian sources as well, which provides some reassurance that the Chinese descriptions we have are not overly distorted by the contemptuous prejudice so often displayed by the Han for the inferior Other.⁵⁴ Ethnographic reports in the *History of the Later Han* claimed that among the inhabitants of ancient Manchuria, the death of one individual could result in the killing of as many as 100 people, who would be buried together with him.⁵⁵ The eleventh-century *New Tang History* tells that when a Turkish chief died, two of his closest associates killed themselves to follow him.⁵⁶ Records of the Jin-dynasty Jurchen indicate that when a man died, his most favored slaves might be chosen to accompany him.⁵⁷ Perhaps the best-known example of following-in-death involves one that never happened. When A-bao-ji (r. 907–926), the founder of the alien Liao dynasty (916–1122) died, pressure was put on his empress, Yingtian (d. 953), to obey Khitan custom and follow him to his tomb. She refused on the grounds that she needed to remain alive to care for her young sons. Instead, she cut off her right hand and placed it in her husband's coffin.⁵⁸

Apart from providing company for the deceased by burying him with people who had been close to him in life, it was a frequent custom among Altaic peoples to send the dead off with a number of familiar possessions. Thus, the *Liao History* relates that upon the death of the emperor Shengzong (r. 983–1030), his bows and arrows, saddles, and bridles were all burned, and his falcons set free.⁵⁹ When a Jurchen male died, apart from food offerings, his horse might also be killed, and his saddle and other personal possessions buried with him.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ For a detailed survey of Altaic funeral practices based primarily on European and Persian sources, see Jean-Paul Roux, *La mort chez les peuples altaïques anciens et médiévaux d'après les documents écrits* (Paris, 1963).

⁵⁵ *Hou Han shu*, *juan* 85. The same report makes note of the levirate.

⁵⁶ *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 195–197.

⁵⁷ Song Dejin, "Jindai Nüzhen zusu shulun" (A description of the customs of the Jin Jurchen), in *Liao-Jin shilun wenji* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1985), 482; Zhao Zhan, *Manzu wenhua yu zongjiao yanjiu* (Manchu Culture and Religion) (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 1993), 323–4.

⁵⁸ This anecdote is related in the *Liao History* and in other contemporary records, along with accounts of attendants buried with later Liao emperors. See Karl Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907–1125* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1949), 200, 254, 258; also Denis Twitchett and Herbert Franke, eds., *Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368*, vol. 7 of *The Cambridge History of China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 68.

⁵⁹ Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, 262–3.

⁶⁰ Song, "Jindai Nüzhen zusu shulun," 482; Zhao, *Manzu wenhua yu zongjiao yanjiu*, 323–4.

Similar practices are remarked for the Mongols, who believed that the spirit of the deceased, rode his horse up to heaven.⁶¹ As for the Manchus, an early seventeenth-century Jesuit wrote that they “burned the women, servants, horses, and arms of the deceased,” to ensure that familiar company and belongings accompanied the deceased for his journey to “heaven” (Ma., *abka*).⁶² In 1627 Hong Taiji made an effort to outlaw incineration of the possessions of the deceased and burial with a horse—probably for economic reasons.⁶³ (As we have seen, he sometimes sought to dissuade widows from suiciding, but did not prohibit them from doing so.)

It is safe to say that the funerary practices the Manchus brought with them when they conquered China, including but not limited to following-in-death, represented an extension of practices shared with other non-Han peoples of Inner Asia like the Khitan, Jurchen, and Mongols.⁶⁴ These customs suggest that sacrifices were intended to furnish the dead with the provisions they would need in the next world. According to notions of the afterlife that dominated across the Altaic world, this was a world identical to the world of the living,⁶⁵ except

⁶¹ Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer, *Mongolia's Culture and Society* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), 106. Note the testimony of one thirteenth-century traveler: “And they bury with him a mare and her foal and a horse with bridle and saddle, and another horse they eat and fill its skin with straw, and this they stick up on two or four poles, so that in the next world he may have a dwelling in which to make his abode and a mare to provide him with milk, and that he may be able to increase his horses and have horses on which to ride” (John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, in Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955], 12–13). Excavations of Tuvan graves from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries show that horse and saddle were buried together with the deceased, along with various other objects (axes, knives, pipes) (V. P. Diakonova, *Pogrebal'nyi obriad Tuvintsev kak istoriko-etnograficheskii istochnik* [Leningrad: Nauka, 1975], 19–20). Among the Daur Mongols even today, killing a horse, “one of the deceased much-used animals,” still forms part of funerary practice. The idea is that the animal is “the soul’s mount on its journey to the other world.” Some of the horse’s meat is buried with the coffin. In addition, objects of practical use as well as the departed’s favorite possessions are also buried with him, and his clothes burned. See Caroline Humphrey, with Urgunge Onon, *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Daur Mongols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 194–5.

⁶² Evidence that the dead were thought to rise to heaven is taken from an undated Manchu memorial of the Yongzheng reign in which the writer (Necin, a member of the imperial clan) expresses his grief at hearing that the empress had “ascended to heaven” (Ma., *abka de wesike*). *Yongzheng Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 258, memorial of Necin, n.d. This and all unpublished Manchu and Chinese palace memorials cited in the notes are from the holdings of the First Historical Archives, Beijing. Published Chinese palace memorials are noted by volume number and either document or page number.

⁶³ *Da Qing Taizong wen huangdi shilu* (Veritable Records of the emperor Taizong) 4: 2a–b, cited in Zhao, *Manzu wenhua yu zongjiao yanjiu*, 328.

⁶⁴ Thus I am in agreement with the assertions found in Zheng Tianting, “Manzhou ruguan qianhou,” 76–77; and Mo Dongyin, *Manzushi luncong* (Collected essays on Manchu history) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1958): 143–4. I recognize that some of these practices and beliefs share similarities with “Chinese” traditions. By placing them in an Altaic continuum, I do not mean to categorically exclude the possibility of cross-cultural influence and borrowing, only to suggest that, like Manchu shamanism, it is historically more appropriate to view these practices in an Inner Asian framework.

⁶⁵ John Andrew Boyle, “The Thirteenth-Century Mongols’ Conception of the After Life: The Evidence of their Funerary Practices,” in his *The Mongol World Empire* (London: Variorum

that it was usually spoken of as existing in the sky, in contrast with Chinese expressions to “follow someone into the ground.”⁶⁶ The following-in-death of the principal wife, while not universally observed among Altaic peoples,⁶⁷ was linked to the belief that death was only the temporary separation of a couple and that a woman always belonged to her first husband and his family. Since she would eventually be reunited with him in the afterlife, following-in-death simply speeded up the inevitable reunion.⁶⁸

Joseph Fletcher made the case that persistent signs of tribal organization in the empires built by the nomadic Mongols and Turks could be read in patterns of succession and modes of rulership, exemplified by “bloody tanistry” (that is, life-and-death competition between brothers for the throne) and “personalized monarchy.”⁶⁹ The tradition outlined above suggests that a specific body of funeral customs, including, but not limited to, following-in-death, might also have been part of a larger Turco-Mongolian imperial pattern, an Altaic way of death.⁷⁰ Like “bloody tanistry” and “personalized monarchy,” which were usually significantly modified, once a tribal organization took control of an agrarian empire, one would expect to find that the Altaic “way of death” eventually conformed to the more bureaucratic practices of the sedentary groups they governed.

Reprints, 1977), ch. 23: 6. Note also the line from the seventh-century Orkhon inscriptions, “In heaven, you will be as among the living.” Cited in Jean-Paul Roux, “La veuve dans les sociétés turques et mongoles de l’Asie centrale,” *L’Homme* 9:4 (October–December 1969), 58.

⁶⁶ Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 127.

⁶⁷ Whether the Mongols practiced following-in-death is questioned by some (Jagchid and Hyer, *Mongolia’s Society and Culture*, 106), but evidence to support the contention that they did is substantial. According to the Persian chroniclers Juwayni and Vassaf, human companions were buried together with Chinggis, Ögödei, and Hülegü. See V.V. Barthold, “The Burial Rites of the Turks and the Mongols,” J. M. Rogers, trans., *Central Asiatic Journal*, 14 (1970), 207–8. Armenian chronicles of the Mongol conquests also note that “if it was one of their great men, they laid some of his men-servants and maid-servants with him in the tomb, because, they said, they might wait on him, and also a horse, because, they said, there would be fierce fighting there.” Another Persian historian, Juzjani (1193–1260), wrote about the funeral of Batu that “they buried him in conformity with Mughal custom . . . they place [in the tomb] vessels and numerous effects together with his arms and weapons, and whatever may have been his own private property, and some of his wives, and slaves, male or female, and the person he loved most above all others.” See John Andrew Boyle, “The Thirteenth-Century Mongols’ Conception of the After Life” and “Kirakos of Ganjak on the Mongols,” both collected in *The Mongol World Empire*, ch. 23:7–8 and ch. 19:203–4. Even as late as the sixteenth century, before their conversion to Buddhism, Mongols reportedly still killed the slaves and favorite concubines of the deceased, along with his horse. Roux (citing Serruys), “La veuve,” 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

⁶⁹ Joseph Fletcher, “Turco-Mongolian Monarchic Tradition in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Studies on Chinese and Islamic Inner Asia* (Variorum, 1995), ch. 7.

⁷⁰ I say “might” because I have not found any evidence of following-in-death among Ottoman funeral practices, which one would expect if the tradition were truly Turco-Mongolian in the sense in which Fletcher spoke of it. However, scholars have remarked on the presence of horses at the funerals of Ottoman rulers, which, though they were not buried together with the deceased, connoted a direct tie to Altaic customs. See Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, “Les obsèques des sultans Ottomans,” in Gilles Veinstein, ed., *Les Ottomans et la mort* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 211. See also J.-P. Roux, *La mort chez les peuples altaïques*.

Indeed, following-in-death among the Manchus did undergo such a transformation, which came with the use of widow suicide as a common platform upon which a widow's virtues could be celebrated in the Qing, regardless of her ethnicity. Ignoring the different cultural traditions underlying Manchu following-in-death and Chinese widow suicide, the celebration of Manchu widows' suicides by Manchu rulers who put *xun-suicides* into a Confucian context when they were written down in the *Veritable Records* and the *General History* shows that, in Chinese anyway, the transvaluation of Manchu widow suicide was well underway when the practice of widow suicide began to be more strenuously discouraged in the Kangxi reign. The transformation was complete by the second century of Qing rule, when it seems to have disappeared altogether, supplanted by the new cult of widow chastity.

What we are left with, then, is a two-part process by which Manchu widow suicide was first masked as Confucian practice and later abandoned completely. But the process may actually have been slightly more complex. If we acknowledge that ethnic politics figured importantly in the treatment of Manchu and Han widows alike, then dressing "uncivilized" practices like following-in-death in Confucian garb, while a step in the right direction, did not go far enough. From the Manchu point of view, it was better to discourage the practice altogether rather than risk unfavorable associations with the sordid side of an earlier practice. A few Chinese writers in the Qing were, in fact, aware of the Altaic origins of the following-in-death suicides.⁷¹ By discouraging widow suicide for Han widows at the same time—on Confucian grounds, no less—the Manchu court made it almost impossible to determine whether the real target was Manchu following-in-death or Chinese widow suicide. Nonetheless, it seems that the discouragement of suicide for all widows in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was linked not just to objections on philosophical grounds or changing sensibilities toward death in the eighteenth century but to Manchu ethnic concerns, too.⁷²

If this is true, it would not be the first time that non-Han practices directly affected existing Chinese norms. Research by Bettine Birge shows that in spite of their hard-line reputations, even the leading Song neo-Confucianist philosophers adopted a fairly flexible position on the issue of widow remarriage and that the real change in Chinese practices came only in the early 1300s under the Yuan dynasty (1215–1368). At that time, the Mongols, used to thinking of women and their dowries as household property, rewrote laws to make it virtually impossible for a woman to leave the household of her first marriage, thereby creating a strong disincentive for her to remarry. From this, Birge concludes

⁷¹ Wang Shizhen, *Chibei outan* (Random Chats by the North of the Pond) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980 [ca. 1689]: 1:24; Chen Kangqi, *Langqian jiwen chubi erbi sanbi* (Notes of Things Heard by a Retired Official) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984 [1880]): 3:2, 674.

⁷² On the subject of death and mourning in the Qing, see Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China*.

that the consequent rise in widow chastity, long assumed to be simply the result of imposing neo-Confucian norms, in fact was tied directly to the “confusing encounter between Chinese and Mongol culture.”⁷³ The decline of widow suicide and concomitant rise of widow fidelity may, I think, very well owe something to another “confusing encounter,” this one between Chinese and Manchu culture.

REMARRIAGE AMONG BANNER WIDOWS

The preceding discussion of Manchu attitudes toward widow suicide has addressed two of the three general points raised earlier, that is, the reasons for the apparent sharp decrease in the frequency of widow suicide and the true nature and origins of the practice among Manchu women, who dominated the jingbiao awards in this category. In this and the following section, I shall take up the third point, the question of the chaste widow “boom” in the Qianlong era, raised in connection with the figures in Table 2.2.

As explained above, the vigorous promotion of the principle of loyalty by Song neo-Confucianists, abetted by the rewriting of property laws under the Mongol Yuan dynasty, meant that by the fourteenth century, remarriage, common enough still in the Song, was increasingly rare.⁷⁴ Fidelity to one’s departed husband came to be regarded as the only proper choice for the Han widow. Under the succeeding Ming dynasty the cult of widow fidelity underwent a noticeable jump in visibility, with the total number of chaste widows recognized in the Ming History (274) exceeding the number cited in the previous 1,000 years’ worth of dynastic histories.⁷⁵ This trend gained even more momentum under the Qing, by which time a virtual ban on widow remarriage extended high and low throughout society⁷⁶—except among Manchus. Even in the early eighteenth century, Manchu widows, and all widows in the Eight Banners, were free to remarry if they wished. The clearest statement of court attitudes toward the remarriage of banner widows dates from 1724: “Henceforth the widows of all [banner] officers and soldiers who wish to remarry shall be free to do so. Those who wish to come back to the capital shall be allowed to return to the banner.”⁷⁷

The same policy was repeated in 1727, with some elaboration:

It would seem an unkind thing to force young, childless widows in the banners with no kin to rely on to observe the chastity rule. When [banner] officials and soldiers pass away, their wives are all to receive salary [pensions], regardless of age. Those who are younger who wish to remarry, however, find themselves caught between two difficult

⁷³ Birge, “Levirate Marriage.”

⁷⁴ See Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 188–216 ff. Paying special attention to property laws, Birge also confirms that “marriage and property law from Han through Sung tended to encourage widow remarriage.” “Levirate Marriage,” 107–8.

⁷⁵ T’ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 39.

⁷⁶ Mann, “Widows in Qing China,” 50–51.

⁷⁷ *Da Qing huidian* (Collected Institutes of the Qing) [hereafter DQHD] (1732 ed.), 114: 28a.

[choices]. To make [this situation] last the rest of their lives would greatly affect the honor of the Manchus. Reason dictates that only those above a certain age should be allowed to observe the chastity rule. If some [younger women] insist [on remaining faithful widows], let people from their clan and company jointly and publicly guarantee it.⁷⁸

Under original rules, to encourage the younger widow (defined as a woman under forty) to remarry, payment of her husband's pension would be stopped after one year. But after 1727, the incentive for the childless widow under forty to remarry was deliberately raised—she was to receive no pension at all. This was to end the bad habit of some young widows who deliberately chose to “guard their chastity” out of greed.⁷⁹ The court's clear preference was that banner widows, especially childless young banner widows, remarry. The contrast with standard practice for Han widows could hardly be more stark.

I find two principal reasons for this different standard. First, the idea of a widow remaining faithful to the memory of her deceased husband was essentially foreign to the Manchus before the conquest. This is apparent from the term itself. The Manchu phrase for preserving one's chastity, *jalangga be tuwakiyambi*, is quite transparently a literal translation from the Chinese expression *shoujie* (to guard chastity). In other words, it was a borrowed term for a borrowed custom. In this it is unlike the expression *dahame bucembi*, which marked an indigenous practice. Moreover, the native Manchu word, *anggasilambi*, to be a widow (from *anggasi*, widow) does not have the same connotations found in either *shoujie* or *shou gua*, to preserve widow[hood], which emphasized the importance of guarding (Ch., *shou*) one's moral purity. So it is not surprising that we find widow remarriage, like following-in-death, was nearly universal in Inner Asian societies. The Turks, Mongols, Khitan, and Jurchen all encouraged widow remarriage, frequently via the levirate, whereby a man's widow was taken as a spouse by his younger brother.⁸⁰ Though they did not practice the levirate, the Manchus permitted widow remarriage, and among less acculturated Manchu groups in the Northeast widow remarriage remained the rule into the early twentieth century.⁸¹ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century population registers for ban-

⁷⁸ BQTZ 69: 1338; the same edict is in *Shangyu qiwu yifu* (Discussions in Memorials on Banner Affairs), YZ5.7.27. It is not found in the *Veritable Records*. The Manchu version of the edict is quoted in document 26 of *Jôkôkitô* (The Bordered Red Banner Archives), Kanda Nobuo et al., eds. (Tokyo: Tôyô Bunko, 1972), p. 32. The middle section literally reads: “If among them there are young [widows] who want to go out [that is, remarry], and [we] on the other hand prolong their being trapped in difficulty, the consequences for Manchu face (Ma., *dere*) are also many.”

⁷⁹ BQTZ 69: 1338. Court policy on young widows was notably unstable. In 1738, eleven years after eliminating all pensions for childless widows below forty, the court reversed itself and once again approved financial assistance for this group. DQHDSL 1140: 3a–b.

⁸⁰ Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, 200–1; Roux, “La veuve,” 63–77. The latter comments that the practice was probably less frequent among the aristocracy, explaining why it is so frequently commented on by outsiders but so rarely observed in indigenous records. This would also explain why we find examples of widow suicide, but not widow remarriage, among the early Manchu elite.

⁸¹ This was providing the woman had no son older than twelve years of age. S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Social Organization of the Manchus* (Shanghai: North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1924), 71.

ner communities in Manchuria show that about 10 percent of widows remarried, a tentative confirmation that widow remarriage was not too uncommon.⁸²

Second, it was in the court's interest to recycle banner widows into the marriage pool. For one thing, the number of marriageable bannerwomen, particularly Manchu women, was always limited.⁸³ Since it was preferred (though apparently not mandated) that Manchu males marry Manchu females, forbidding Manchu widows to remarry would have made it more difficult for Manchu bannermen to find partners and raise families.⁸⁴ This, in turn, was detrimental to Manchu interests, since as a minority group they could not afford to let their numbers dwindle. Keeping fertile young women from reproducing, especially in the first century or so of Qing rule, simply did not make demographic sense.⁸⁵

⁸² James Lee and Cameron Campbell, *Fate and Fortune in Rural China: Social organization and population behavior in Liaoning, 1774–1873* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 86–87. However, these statistics must be compared with the available data on premodern Han populations, which show that remarriage depended heavily on the onset age of widowhood. For instance, in late Qing Tiawan, only 5.2 percent of women widowed between the ages of 40 to 44 remarried, while 30.3 percent of those between 30 to 34 and 58.9 percent of those ages under 24 remarried. Note that this is also a frontier population (Arthur P. Wolf, “Women, Widowhood, and Fertility in Pre-Modern China,” in Jacques Dupaguier et al., eds. *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past* [New York: Academic Press, 1981], 139–47). My thanks to William Skinner for this reference.

⁸³ As the research of James Lee and Wang Feng has shown, concubinage was far more common among Manchu males than among the general Han population, resulting in a much-reduced marriage pool for Manchu and other banner males. See Lee and Wang, “Nuptiality Among the Qing Nobility, 1600–1900” (paper presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago).

⁸⁴ The history of Manchu-Han intermarriage is still poorly understood. On the one hand, it does not appear that Manchu males were by law explicitly limited to selecting Manchu females as wives. Recent research shows, however, that this was usually the case. Manchu females, on the other hand, were strictly forbidden to marry any man outside the banner system, and it seems that by and large this proscription was obeyed. See Ding Yizhuang, “Banner-Commoner Intermarriage in the Qing” (paper presented at the 1997 meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Chicago) and “Shilun Qing-dai de Man-Han tonghun” (Manchu-Han intermarriage in the Qing), an unpublished paper. Though her evidence is largely anecdotal, it confirms my own findings, such as the 1727 report from a banner garrison commander to the effect that “a small number” of marriages had taken place between bannermen and Han women. In response, he ordered a halt to such matches, only permitting marriages between those in the banners at the garrison. *Yongzheng chao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe* (Beijing: First Historical Archives and Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1988–89), 9:127, Cai-lang, YZ5.2.27. That bannermen preferred Manchu or other bannerwomen as partners is also attested by a story from the Canton garrison. The son of the Manchu commander wished to marry a Manchu woman but could not find a match because he lived in the south where Manchus were few and the soldiers at the garrison were drawn from the Chinese, not the Manchu banners. Finally, a suitable prospect turned up when another Manchu official was posted to Canton who had a daughter of marriageable age. Before a match could be arranged, the court had to approve an exception to the rule barring marriage alliances between officials in the same province. *Gongzhong dang Qianlong chao zouzhe* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1982), vol. 4, p. 32, memorial of Sucang, QL11.9.29. As these cases show, there was a shortage of marriageable Manchu females; this was true even in Beijing, partly because of a very high rate of Manchu polygyny. Thus Manchu males often took Han Chinese women as wives, usually as secondary wives. See Ding Yizhuang, “Tan Manzu de yingqie zhidu” (On concubinage among the Manchus), an unpublished paper, and James Lee and Wang Feng, “Nuptiality Among the Qing Nobility.” Interestingly, some officials even tried to make these secondary wives eligible for *jingbiao* status. *Yongzheng chao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe* vol. 26, no. 734, Liu-bao, YZ12.8.25.

⁸⁵ Liu Sufen, “Qingdai huangzu hunyin,” 108, makes a similar point.

One can see in the original Manchu standard for widow remarriage itself a kind of dual standard. Whereas women with children or women over forty were free to remarry if they chose, until the 1740s, the court used economic measures to pressure women under forty to remarry. The court's expectations of bannerwomen, so different from those it set for Han women, remind us of the very different status of bannerwomen in Qing society. This point is especially apparent when we consider the economics of widowhood. All widows were "free elections," to be sure; and all widows faced financial insecurity. But these truths were best applied to the Han woman, who usually remained dependent on her husband's family, frequently with unhappy results.⁸⁶ Few Chinese widows were independent, since state support only came with jingbiao recognition, by which point a woman had already had to survive twenty or thirty years on her own.⁸⁷

The bannerwoman, in contrast, was very much the dynasty's ward. The original organization of the Qing state as a warrior society around the Eight Banners imposed upon the dynasty a permanent obligation to provide for the welfare of its soldiers' families. A bannerman lived to serve the khan all his life; when he died, his widow did not face the same sort of terrible uncertainty faced by the members of a Han family, since their needs were addressed in a practical and timely way through the banner system. This obligation was even stronger when it concerned the families of soldiers who had fallen in the field. Depending on the specific circumstances of her husband's death, a Manchu widow could thus count on a one-time cash payment, plus a pension, to be paid for one year, regardless of her age or whether she had children. All told, the wife of an ordinary mounted soldier stood to receive the not-inconsiderable sum of 186 ounces of silver upon his death—roughly fifteen times the average annual wages of a laboring Han Chinese male—or perhaps more, depending on the circumstances of his death.⁸⁸ If a widow had children to raise, she continued to receive her husband's pension (one-half his last salary) until they were grown.

Though it never said so openly, in allowing remarriage, the court was merely being practical. It was more economical to have widows dependent on second husbands earning a salary and serving the dynasty than to support "idle" widows' families with monthly stipends for which it got nothing in return. By the same token, widows had to be practical, too. The amount provided by a pension was barely enough to live on. Here again, the Manchu widow had options available to her that were not available to the Han woman. One, as discussed, was remarriage; and records show that women cited a wish to escape poverty as their reason for remarriage.⁸⁹ Another option not open to Han women was to move a son into the post formerly held by her husband. A banner widow who

⁸⁶ Mann, "Widows in Qing China," 44–45. ⁸⁷ Birge, "Levirate Marriage," 136.

⁸⁸ BQTZ 33: 609; BQTZ 69: 1338. This does not take into account a grain supplement, also paid for one year.

⁸⁹ *Neiwufu laiwen*, packet 2145, QL48.4/fth–8/fth month. The woman in question was approximately 45 years of age when her second husband, a Manchu, died. After "preserving her chastity" for 2 years, she married again, this time to a man 70 years old, because she said she could no longer support herself.

could do this found that her family's livelihood would be assured. If she had no son, she could try to get another male in the household into the slot, even if he was not strictly entitled to it.⁹⁰ Or she could follow proper procedures to adopt a son, who would then be able legally to assume the position of his late stepfather (whom he may never have met) and receive the silver and grain payments that were his due as a salaried bannerman. Any of these actions improved her financial situation and brightened her future and the prospects for the entire household.

It is not surprising, then, that such irregular appointments became commonplace during the early eighteenth century. The court even went along with these practices to an extent. In 1736 it relaxed the rules requiring new soldiers to be at least big enough to handle a bow and permitted young boys to take their father's jobs, even if they were only ten years old.⁹¹ Nor is it surprising that adoption was frequently resorted to in order to assure a household income. Indeed, while it is known that adoption was (and is) more common in China than in most places in the world, adoption rates among Manchus exceeded Chinese adoption rates on average, sometimes even doubling them, reaching 8 percent between 1750 and 1850 and 10 percent between 1780 and 1810. Only with the 1817 proclamation raising subsidies for Manchu widows without salaried children to support them did adoption rates begin to decline.⁹²

State resources devoted to the welfare of banner widows thus went far beyond processing *jingbiao* commendations and the extras that those commendations carried in the banners (gifts of silver, sacrificial items such as wine and mutton, a tablet, and a subsidy for construction of a *paifang* memorial arch—Han widows received only the tablet and the subsidy).⁹³ Through the banner system, the state also supported families by paying pensions and allowing children to receive paying posts. Another particular feature of court policy toward widows was that recently bereaved bannerwomen resident in the provinces

⁹⁰ See the case of a certain Merge, a Manchu bannerman from the Xi'an garrison, who died circa 1720 on campaign in Tibet. With no son to take her late husband's post, Merge's wife was able to place the son of a family bondservant, Barsai, into the post. But when this arrangement was discovered by a greedy officer in the garrison, he stripped Barsai of the post and put his own underage grandson in the slot. The wife then complained to the officer's superior, whose sympathetic report to the emperor appears to have restored the position to Merge's family. *Yongzheng Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 434, memorial of Ilibu, YZ3.7.21.

⁹¹ *Qianlong Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 49, memorial of Fupeng, QL1.2.8.

⁹² The generally accepted figure for adoption among the Han population is estimated at about 5 percent. See James Lee and Wang Feng, "Adoption Among the Qing Nobility and its Implications for Chinese Demographic Behavior" (unpublished paper); Lai Huimin, *Tianhuang guizhou* (Imperial nobles) (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1997), 43–47. Widows made 95 percent of adoptions (James Lee, personal communication). Despite rules limiting adoption to other banner children, many of these adoptions were of Han children. Wang Zhonghan, "Qingdai baqizhong de Man-Han minzu chengfen wenti" (On the Manchu-Han ethnic make-up of the Qing Eight Banners), *Minzu yanjiu* (1990) 3:36–46.

⁹³ This subsidy came to thirty taels. DQHDSL 1145: 20b; *Qianlong Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 52, memorial of Alu, QL1.5.17.

were supposed to return to Beijing in obedience to the standing repatriation policy (literally, return to the banner: Ch., *guiqi*; Ma., *gûsa de bederembi*). Though an exception to the repatriation policy was made as early as 1687 to allow grown sons to fill their fathers' positions automatically in the provincial garrisons,⁹⁴ it remained in effect for another seventy years. The banners covered a widow's relocation costs, including the transport of her husband's remains for burial in Beijing. Back in the capital, the true home for everyone in the banners, a widow and her children were expected to find support from relatives if they lacked other means⁹⁵; but company captains were supposed to ensure their well-being in the last resort.⁹⁶

Eight Banner officials frequently complained about the burdens entailed by the repatriation policy. Some saw it as expensive and a pointless waste of money, since many long-term residents in the provinces found it impossible to get by in the capital and secretly stole back to family in the garrison.⁹⁷ Officials began questioning the need to take bodies back to the capital at all, since sons were taking over the jobs anyway. They pointed out the inconsistency of burying bannermen in the capital when bannerwomen who predeceased their husbands were buried in the garrisons,⁹⁸ noting that repatriation of corpses made it difficult for the family to tend the graves of the departed.⁹⁹ Under this steady stream of protest, the court gradually relented, first relieving Chinese banners of the need to return to the capital and allowing them to establish local cemeteries in 1742. Over the next fourteen years, it backed down on various other parts of the repatriation policy until finally the entire program was abandoned in 1756.

Maintenance of the repatriation policy on the grounds that Beijing was the native home of bannermen reflected the court's deeper political agenda and its concern over acculturation, while objections and changes to the repatriation policy were predicated on ritual, humanitarian, economic, and practical grounds. These competing pressures disclose the ambivalence of Qing attitudes toward banner widow chastity during the first ninety years of Manchu rule. The collapse of the repatriation policy signified the ascendancy of practical concerns and coincided with a major shift in court policy toward banner widows, whereby the earlier dual standard for younger versus older widows was resolved in favor of an unambiguous promotion of widow fidelity for all women in the banner system.

⁹⁴ BQTZ 38: 715.

⁹⁵ Shirokogoroff notes that, among the Manchus he observed, "the late husband's younger brother is always obliged to take care of the widow and his brother's children" (*Social Organization of the Manchus*, 70).

⁹⁶ DQHD114: 28a.

⁹⁷ *Yongzheng Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 11, memorial of Cangšeo, YZ1.9.29.

⁹⁸ *Qianlong Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 52, memorial of Arigûn, QL1.5.2.

⁹⁹ *Yongzheng Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 11, memorial of Cangdzai, YZ1.11.9.

THE QIANLONG CHASTE WIDOW BOOM

As the edicts cited earlier suggest, in the 1720s the court was lukewarm about promoting chaste widowhood among bannerwomen in the early Qing. The relatively low numbers of banner chaste widows in Table 2.2 for the first three reign periods bears this out. But not long after the Qianlong emperor succeeded to the throne, large numbers of virtuous widows—chaste widows, not widow suicides—begin to appear in the *jingbiao* lists. The average number of chaste widows commended annually during the Yongzheng reign was just 41; the average for the Qianlong reign was 127 per year. Nor does this figure represent an increase just in the later part of the reign. The average for the first 10 years of the Qianlong reign (1736–1745) is already 109 *jingbiao* annually. For banner society, as for Chinese society generally, the eighteenth century was the heyday of the chaste widow.¹⁰⁰

Three explanations come to mind for this abrupt increase in the number of chaste widows. The first is cultural. Looking again at the figures in Table 2.2, the enormous jump in *jingbiao* statistics suggests either bannerwomen in the middle and later eighteenth century were suddenly much more virtuous than they had been a generation or two before—admittedly unlikely—or that the chaste widow ideal, once unknown among the Manchus, had taken root throughout the banner system. The numbers are just too great to have all been distorted. Indeed, we do seem here to be witnessing the effects of a process of acculturation through which the more proper norms of the chaste Han widow were adopted by women in the Eight Banners. All around them, Han mothers and widows were keeping vows of chastity and earning reputations and awards for their virtue, which then reflected favorably on their sons.¹⁰¹ As widow chastity became more and more common in the eighteenth century and as the Manchu occupation of China dragged on, Manchus were in effect being “left behind” by a prestigious social norm widely respected by the rest of society. It is easy to imagine that people in the banners—like the non-elite members of Qing society generally—began to feel it unseemly that the widows among them could still remarry so easily. Furthermore, given that acculturation was widespread among banner populations, who enthusiastically welcomed Chinese language, literature, art, religion, and food (and often combined them with pre-

¹⁰⁰ Consider that in 1749 some 200 virtuous widows were reported for all of Jiangsu province, an important coastal region with a contemporary population of roughly 20 million, while in the same year 275 virtuous widows were reported for the Eight Banners, with a total population of perhaps 2 million. Taking the banners as the Manchu “home province,” this means that a banner widow was more than 10 times as likely to receive a *jingbiao* commendation than a Han woman (Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State,” 135, and *Qinding baqi tongzhi* [Imperially-commissioned [Revised] Generally History of the Eight Banners] [hereafter QDBQTZ], *juan* 259). In absolute numbers, of course, Han women dominated. Figures for just four counties in Jiangsu province list over 15,000 chaste widows during the Qing period (T’ien, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 142).

¹⁰¹ Mann, “Widows in Qing China,” 47–48.

existing practices to create a Sino-Manchu hybrid), the migration by Manchu women to Chinese ways is not especially surprising.

What *is* surprising is that the Qianlong emperor, well known as a champion of Manchu identity, himself appears to have adopted a more “Chinese” attitude toward widow chastity than either his father or his grandfather. An edict of 1762 makes this clear:

Even if they have not met the number of years required, unmarried maidens in the Eight Banners who die of sickness in the homes of their betrothed while preserving their chastity demonstrate a pure and sympathetic will; [they] shall, regardless of their age, have their cases investigated by the banner and reported to the board for *jingbiao* nomination in order to console their loyal spirits. The standards for Manchu and Han *jingbiao* are thereby made entirely uniform.¹⁰²

This edict embodies precisely the sort of extreme emphasis of the virtues of chaste widowhood fostered among Han women during the Ming and high Qing, except that now the emperor was preaching them to Manchu women. While this paralleled the “ethnic harmony” trope of earlier reigns, the ideal espoused by the Qianlong emperor was far removed from the more “humane” considerations voiced by the Yongzheng emperor just a generation before. I will say more on this in a moment.

The other remarkable thing in this 1762 declaration is the emperor’s offhand reference to the “consolation” of the widow’s “loyal spirit.” Here is an entirely Chinese conceit. So far as we know, the Manchu world was not originally troubled by “hungry ghosts” and other sorts of unrequited spirits who restlessly roamed the earth, creating misfortune for the living. Clearly, by the mid-1700’s the Manchu élite had absorbed Chinese ideas not just on widow chastity but also on the afterlife.

Acculturation, however, still leaves some questions unanswered. If the rise in banner *jingbiao* citations were the result of acculturation alone, one would expect a slow, steady increase in the number of widows refusing to remarry, rather than a 300-percent jump within the space of a decade. It is hard to resist the conclusion that a second factor—institutional change—had a direct effect on the ballooning number of chaste widows in the Eight Banners. For one thing, policy shifts, such as the 1738 decision to grant greater assistance to young widows, may have lowered the incentive to remarry. Additionally, the court was not applying as much pressure on childless young widows to remarry. It was less concerned about Manchu reproduction, since by this time the demographic situation in the banners had shifted dramatically, and over-, not under-, population was becoming a problem. Also, as just mentioned, the early Qianlong reign saw repeated criticism of the court’s repatriation policy. Easing this policy may have helped promote widow chastity. At least one source notes that only after the first banner cemetery was allowed in 1752 did widow chastity be-

¹⁰² DQHDSL 403: 7, cited in Ding, “Qingdai Manzu funü,” 188, n. 7.

gin to be reported. One cannot but wonder whether widows felt more compunction over remarrying now that their first husbands were buried close by, rather in Beijing.¹⁰³

Yet it is hard to believe that cultural, or even institutional, changes can fully explain the tripling in the number of virtuous Manchu widows. A third factor to be considered is the influence of imperial taste. It is quite possible—though at the same time almost impossible to prove—that the Qianlong “boom” represented increased reporting and not only an absolute increase in the number of chaste widows. The potential influence of the emperor in such things should not be underestimated, particularly if the cachet of widow chastity was felt to enhance the image of Manchu women. However, until we have found more edicts encouraging the reporting of chaste banner widows, it will be hard to say to what degree court tastes were responsible for the higher numbers in Table 2.2. We can say with certainty, however, that under the Qianlong emperor widow chastity in the Eight Banners received far greater attention than it had 100, 50, or even 10 years, earlier.

A MANCHU “WOMAN’S WAY”?

The preceding sections have traced the modification of Manchu norms for widows, noting the decline of following-in-death that accompanied the shedding of Altaic funerary practices and the acceptance of Chinese notions frowning on widow remarriage. As best we can tell, by the second half of the eighteenth century, widow suicide was no longer as common as it had been in the early seventeenth century—for Manchu and Han widows alike—and Manchu widows no longer enjoyed the same freedom to remarry they once had. It is possible, of course, that remnants of the original practices of following-in-death and widow remarriage survived the court’s standardizing efforts, but the overall conclusion must be that these changes reflect real shifts in cultural norms and social practice among the banner populations.¹⁰⁴

This leads to a curious paradox. Comparing the Qianlong emperor’s attitude toward bannerwomen with his attitude toward bannermen, we find that his enthusiastic promotion of the virtuous widow cult is diametrically opposed to his vigorous championing of a specific ethnic ideal for Manchu (and Mongol) men. Manchu ethnicity, it would seem, was subject to a gendered bifurcation, whereby the acculturation of Manchu women (who, it will be recalled, accounted for over 60 percent of jingbiao totals) was deemed acceptable, but the acculturation of Manchu men was not. That is, while the emperor was busy defending the cultural boundaries of male ethnicity, he was simultaneously breaking down

¹⁰³ *Hangzhou baqi zhufangying zhilue* (Outline history of the Hangzhou Eight Banner Garrison) [hereafter HBZZ], Zhang Dachang, ed. (preface dated 1894), 20: 2a.

¹⁰⁴ Knowing whether the remarriage rates for Manchu widows remained higher than for Han widows would help settle this question, but it is unlikely that we will ever have the necessary statistics.

at least some of the cultural boundaries of female ethnicity. He sought to ensure the persistence of a caste of tough Manchu warriors and at the same time foster the image of broadening Confucian-style widow chastity among Manchu bannerwomen.

Why this gendered duality? Given the present state of our knowledge of Manchu women's history, answers to this question can only be tentative. I think that an explanation for the apparent inconsistency in views of male and female "Manchuness" needs to begin by recognizing two things: first, that the emperor was not bound by any need to be consistent, only by a need to further Qing political interests; and, second, that it is not unusual for women to occupy a different place than men in defining ethnicity generally.

Concerning the first of these, the conclusion seems inescapable that the emperor hoped to reap political capital by pursuing this bifurcated ethnic strategy. No less than the Yongzheng emperor, the Qianlong emperor cared greatly about Manchu "face." By proclaiming so-called virtuous behavior among Manchu women and creating the image of a flowering cult of chaste widows in the Eight Banners, the emperor could exploit that image for political ends. If, as Mann and others have persuasively argued, having Han women obey the dictates of a strict neo-Confucian loyalty was important for the dynastic image, the expansion of the same sort of values among bannerwomen themselves was even better evidence of how far from their uncivilized roots the Manchus had progressed. The emperor's obsession on this score, which corresponded neatly to the "conspicuous filiality" observed by Harold Kahn in his landmark study of the Qianlong emperor,¹⁰⁵ suggests that by the middle of the eighteenth century the chaste widow cult had broken the ethnic boundaries that separated Han and Manchu. The reference in the notes preceding the "Virtuous Women" sections of both the *General History* and the *Revised General History* to the Eight Banners as the "Two Southernns" (Ch., *ernan*)—an allusion to the preface of the "Airs of the States" section of the ancient *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing*) and the praises sung there of the proper deportment of aristocratic women—was nothing less than a Manchu claim on the Olympus of Chinese female virtue.¹⁰⁶

However, this does not completely resolve the riddle of why female acculturation was acceptable, even desirable, if male acculturation was not. After all, one never finds the emperor encouraging bannermen to embrace the ideals of literary accomplishment so prized among the Chinese male elite. On the contrary, the emphasis was on the impossibility of a Manchu ever attaining the same level of erudition and expression as a Han. In this regard we see a definite difference between the court's treatment of men and its treatment of women.

There are occasional edicts by the Kangxi emperor to "encourage morality"

¹⁰⁵ Harold Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor's Eyes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

¹⁰⁶ BQTZ 239: 5365; QDBQTZ 241: 1a.

and “spread civilization” among both bannermen and bannerwomen,¹⁰⁷ but generally speaking, Confucian filiality was not for them. Faithful widowers in the Eight Banners were never awarded jingbiao, and filial sons only very rarely.¹⁰⁸ The court found other ways to reward their virtue, such as bestowing rank, endowing the family with an inheritable title,¹⁰⁹ or honoring them as a group. In 1724, the Yongzheng emperor established four shrines in Beijing, two for men and two for women, to commemorate virtuous banner folk (in the provincial garrisons, the only shrines were those dedicated to local bannermen who died in battle). The names of the honorees were all engraved on one arch and each had an individual tablet placed within the shrine, where sacrifices were held in spring and fall. None of these people was awarded jingbiao insignia, and their names were not collected in the *General History*. In 1767 the Qianlong emperor ended all such recognition for banner males and limited jingbiao solely to chaste widows. “The old ways of the Eight Banner Manchus are plain and simple,” he wrote. “Filial behavior is wholly within their regular duties. Let investigation [of filial exemplars] henceforth cease.”¹¹⁰ As this edict makes clear, Manchu men were instead to maintain the Old Manchu Way (Ma., *Manjusai fe doro*), the noble and austere path of their forefathers. Calls to preserve the Manchu Way stressed not filiality or scholarly excellence but riding, shooting with a bow and arrow, speaking Manchu, living a simple and unpretentious life (though as the emperor reminded them, this included service to their parents), and maintaining their “manly virtue” (Ma., *hahai erdemu*), as proper Manchu pursuits.¹¹¹

The inclusion of “manly virtue” in the repertoire made the masculine orientation of the Manchu Way as explicit as it could be, but it did not guarantee the effectiveness of imperial appeals. Since the late 1600s the court had been watching anxiously as the unmistakable signs of “softening” crept among the once-feared Manchu warrior class, ever susceptible to the “theft of their virtue” by Han decadence.¹¹² Significantly, excessive concern for female virtue was

¹⁰⁷ DQHDSL 1145: 20b–21a.

¹⁰⁸ I have turned up only nine bannermen in the “Filial-Righteous” (Ch., *xiaoyi*) section of the *Qingshi gao* (Draft History of the Qing) (out of a total 212 men mentioned there), all of whom were praised for devotion to parents, as were the 18 men listed in the same section of the 1796 *Revised General History of the Eight Banners* (5 of these also appear in the *Draft History*). Only a few actually received a jingbiao commendation. The section for filial sons in the 1736 version of the *General History* contains all but 4 of these 18 names, suggesting that there was not much interest in promoting this set of Confucian values among banner males during the Qianlong reign.

¹⁰⁹ QDBQTZ 240: 3a–27b.

¹¹⁰ DQHDSL 1145: 21a–21b. The Beijing shrines were called *zhongyi xiaodi ci* (for male filiality) and *jiexiaoci* (for wifely fidelity). One of each was in the west and east halves of the city. The provincial shrines were called *zhaozhong ci* (for loyalty to the dynasty).

¹¹¹ On the tension between literary and martial ideals and its implication for Manchu identity, see Pamela Kyle Crossley, “Manchu Education,” in Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside, eds., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 340–78, especially 359 ff.

¹¹² The phrase is from Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers*, 226.

sometimes blamed for this trend. In 1729, the Xi'an garrison general and his staff were upbraided by the Yongzheng emperor for placing too much emphasis on the encouragement of womanly virtues and not enough emphasis on manly ones. To the general's report of a virtuous Han-martial woman at the garrison, the emperor retorted:

There are regular procedures for this sort of thing. Why did you have to report on this specially? You can't train soldiers, so you take this one Xi'an woman and turn her into a virtuous woman and righteous wife. What's the good of this? Are you saying this is the result of your own effort? You should be ashamed of yourselves.¹¹³

The Qianlong emperor's frequent return to this theme indicates that his message on the importance of the Manchu Way was getting through but poorly. Acculturation continued to take its toll. Martial skills among city-dwelling bannermen hit new lows; ability in the Manchu language withered; horses were slaughtered for soup meat. From a cultural perspective, the differences between conqueror and conquered were fading fast, even as other institutional differences remained.¹¹⁴

Given this bleak picture for bannermen, it is all the more surprising that acculturation among bannerwomen was not only not resisted but welcomed. There was no "Manchu Woman's Way," not the neat divide between civil and military (Ch., *wen* and *wu*) that the court could rely on to separate Han and Manchu men. We see a few signs of court concern over the erosion of cultural differences between Manchu and Han women, limited mainly to the widening of the traditionally narrow sleeves of Manchu clothing. However, neither this nor the embrace of the chaste widow ideal posed a threat to Manchu legitimacy in the same way that acculturation among men did, since women did not fight and so were not involved in maintaining the dynasty's martial image, not to speak of the security of its borders and its defenses against internal rebellion. Much more important was the protection of Manchu fertility. Here Manchu women were in a much safer place than men, since they were not marrying Han men, at least not in significant numbers.¹¹⁵ Again, the banner system saw to that.

In fact, we find that even if there was no explicit "Manchu Woman's Way," there were still important differences between Manchu and Han women. Bannerwomen in Beijing thirteen years and older were required to present themselves for the triennial *xiunü* selection for palace maids. Girls who had not been through that process were technically forbidden from marrying—a rule sug-

¹¹³ *Yongzheng Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 819, memorial of Cangseli, YZ7.5.15. Although stored with Manchu-language memorials, this item is in Chinese. Cangseli's chastened reply is found in *Yongzhengchao Hanwen zhupi zouzhe*, vol. 15, no. 635. Despite Cangseli's promise to redouble efforts in drilling the men, the emperor was not mollified: "It can truly be said that you people have no judgment at all."

¹¹⁴ The place of the "Manchu Way" and the role of the banners in sustaining the institutional elements of Manchu distinctiveness is explored more fully in Elliott, *The Manchu Way*.

¹¹⁵ Ding Yizhuang, "Banner-Commoner Inter-marriage in the Qing."

gesting the persistence of a much older custom according to which the Manchu khan and nobles had “feudal” rights over young Manchu women.¹¹⁶ Moreover, while neither Manchu nor Han women were free to marry without permission, when the Han woman normally turned to her parents or clan to arrange a match, the bannerwoman was confined within the system of “directed marriage” (Ch., *zhìhūn*). According to directed marriage (which applied to men as well), every match in the banners required the approval of superiors in the Eight Banner hierarchy before it could take place.¹¹⁷ Thus even as their status as members of the banner system imposed limitations on them, these very restrictions and requirements (such as the obligation to offer service in the palace) in and of themselves distinguished Manchu from Han womanhood.

Culturally, the most obvious difference between Manchu and Han women was that Manchu women did not bind their feet. Apart from this, they wore their hair in a distinctive style and could also be distinguished by the three earrings they wore on each ear, in contrast to the single earring of the Han woman.¹¹⁸ The clothing of Manchu women, moreover, differed from that of Han women, at least until very late in the dynasty.¹¹⁹ Other differences, which have not yet been well studied, strongly suggest that in Manchu society, as in Altaic societies generally, married women enjoyed higher status and greater freedom than women in Chinese society.¹²⁰ This is particularly true of their rights over property, where Manchu women, especially young women, had a range of legal rights (including inheritance) that were generally denied to Han women.¹²¹

From the court’s point of view, then, in distinction to Manchu men, Manchu women were not in imminent danger of losing their Manchuness. Promoting the virtuous widow cult among them posed little risk of eliminating the differences between them and Han women, even if they adopted it genuinely. It seems that the emperor’s desire for the political prestige to be gained by the appearance of so many faithful Manchu widows overrode other considerations and

¹¹⁶ *Gaozong shilu* 120: 39a–b; 146: 15b–16b

¹¹⁷ On this question, see Ding Yizhuang, “Directed Marriage (*zhì-hūn*) and the Eight-Banner Household Registration System among the Manchus,” *Saksaha* 1 (1996), 25–30.

¹¹⁸ See DQHDSL 1114 for edicts on earrings and other elements of proper dress for bannerwomen. My thanks to Evelyn Rawski for this reference.

¹¹⁹ Valery M. Garrett, *Chinese Clothing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47, 58–61, 84.

¹²⁰ See the comments by Zhang Juling, *Qingdai Manzu zuojia wenxue gailun* (A sketch of Manchu authors and literature in the Qing) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, 1990), 110–6, suggesting that unmarried Manchu girls enjoyed superior standing and educational opportunities compared to their Han peers. A particularly colorful depiction of an unfettered Manchu woman is found in the eighteenth-century *zidishu* chantefable, “Eating Crabs” (*Pangxie duan/Katurì be jetere bithe*). Though the comparatively “liberated” social and economic status of women in Inner Asia historically is well known, more work might enable us to say to what degree the differences she notes are those of class or ethnicity. See Wittfogel and Feng, *Liao*, 17, 199–202; and Jagchid and Hyer, *Mongolia’s Culture and Society*, 94–95.

¹²¹ Lai Huimin and Xu Siling, “Qingdai qiren funü caichanquan zhi qianxi” (A brief analysis of bannerwomen’s property rights in the Qing), *Jindai Zhongguo funüshi yanjiu*, 4 (August 1996).

provided a compelling justification for court-sponsored acculturation. We see the culmination of this process in the nineteenth century, when bannerwomen, such as those at the Hangzhou garrison, who perished at the hands of the Taiping rebels in 1860–61, were canonized *en masse*. Instead of ennobling Han women who went down for the sake of the Ming dynasty, the word *xun* was now applied to Manchu women who “died martyr’s deaths” for the Qing.¹²²

Still, there are a few signs suggesting persistent court ambivalence with respect to chaste widowhood in the banners later in the Qianlong reign. The same 1767 edict ending *jingbiao* for filial Manchu sons also ended it for women of the Solon, Barga, and Daur tribal groups in Manchuria and the Xinjiang garrisons.¹²³ Documents from 1767 and 1774 indicate that because they lived in Xinjiang and because those procedures were established only for “China proper” (Ch., *neidi*), women of the Solon and Sibe tribes were not recommended for *jingbiao* honors. Furthermore, the settlement of Mongol soldiers from the Chakhar banners on the far western frontier in the 1760s resulted in a very large bachelor population in the new garrisons established around Ili. The court took it upon itself to find wives for these men and in 1764 began sending hundreds of Chakhar widows and young girls out to the frontier, where they were to marry and settle down. It obviously made no difference to anyone that these widows might remarry.¹²⁴

CONCLUSION: CHASTE WIDOWS, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER

In examining changing attitudes toward widows and their connections with social and political issues in late imperial China, this essay has followed a well-worn path. But it has extended that path to include an examination of widows in the very different ethnic context of the Eight Banners and the role Manchu women played in Qing ethnic politics. In the case of the banner widow, we have seen how the Manchus’ own traditions were first given a Confucian window dressing and later modified substantially, as the conquest of China and the position of the Manchus as a ruling elite forced a number of compromises with their Altaic practices. We have also seen that the notion of appropriate womanly behavior changed significantly between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, whereas for men the dictates of the Manchu Way demanded a resistance to any change at all and a preservation of a (partially imagined) “old tradition.”

By the high Qing period, the major dissonances in the treatment of Manchu and Han widows had been harmonized, and the widow’s position stabilized

¹²² HBZZ 20: 13a–36b.

¹²³ DQHDSL 1145: 21b–22a. The Jiaqing emperor partially restored this privilege in 1799.

¹²⁴ *Zongrenfu laiwen, renshi/jingbiao*, packet 454; *Qingdai xiqian Xinjiang Cha-ha-er Meng-gu Manwen dang’an yibian* (Collected translations of Manchu documents on the transfer to Xinjiang of the Chakhar Mongols) (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 1994), docs. 9, 14, 72, 73, and 79.

across society. The Manchu widow may have found her options more limited than before, but she still had a comparative advantage over the Han widow, since the banner supplied her material needs and she enjoyed more freedoms, including (probably) a greater freedom to remarry. The price paid by the court for this harmonization was the partial acculturation of Manchu women — a process which may very well have taken place even without court sponsorship. In the ubiquitous calculus of Qing ethnic politics, wherein the ethnic particular had constantly to be balanced against the Confucian universal, this was evidently deemed a fair deal, particularly since Manchu women were otherwise not succumbing to the flagrant temptations of urban Chinese life. But it is impossible to say whether the loneliness and hardship the widow suffered in the bargain was “fair” or not. There may not have been much open consideration of this problem. As one son wrote to the emperor when his mother was awarded a *jingbiao*: “Your servant was orphaned from youth. The bitterness of my mother’s having guarded her chastity was an unavoidable thing.”¹²⁵ Though there is no room to address it here, this raises the question of the emotional aspect of widow chastity and the discourse considered acceptable for its expression.¹²⁶

I would like to conclude with some thoughts on what the transformation of Manchu widowhood can tell us about the role of gender in the construction of ethnicity generally. Relatively little has been written about gender in the historical literature on ethnic identity. This is odd, because ethnicity, like class and gender, is a particular expression of social organization and power relations—a type of identity, in other words—that is more or less generalizable across time and space, at least, it seems, in the early modern and modern periods of world history. If, as is widely accepted, class and gender intersect in many ways, sometimes reinforcing each other and sometimes conflicting with each other,¹²⁷ then we should also expect the same sort of interaction between class and ethnicity and between gender and ethnicity. Yet the latter usually emerges only in rather politicized formulations emphasizing the “double oppression” experienced by non-European women at the hands of Western male colonialism, imperialism, or racism.¹²⁸ Given the range of settings in which gender no doubt informed ethnicity (and vice versa), it would seem there is much more work to be done by historians in this area. One scholar has commented that “the relationship between gender and ethnicity varies to such an extent, and can be so complex” that an entire book would be required to sort matters out properly.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Qianlong Manwen zhupi zouzhe*, packet 52, memorial of Alu, QL1.5.17.

¹²⁶ Interested readers are referred to the discussion of this problem with relation to mourning in Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China*.

¹²⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) is perhaps the standard work on this subject.

¹²⁸ See, for example, the introduction to Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹²⁹ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 154–5.

There is obviously no room here to deal with the problem in more than a cursory way. The following observations, based on the Manchu case, should therefore be seen as tentative first steps in this direction, more as points of departure than points of conclusion.

Based on the historical transformation of Manchu widowhood detailed above and the contrasting ways in which Manchu masculinity and femininity relate to Manchu ethnicity, we may posit that women mark ethnicity differently than men. Or, put another way, that ethnicity is inscribed differently on women than on men. This seems to be especially true when it comes to ethnicity in imperial or colonial settings, where defining boundaries (always a key element of ethnicity) acquires extra importance. In such situations we find that the boundaries for women are often not the same as those for men. Perhaps this is to be expected, since, after all, it is usually the men who are setting the boundaries. But I believe that more than simply gender categories are at work here.

In a 1989 discussion of the “tensions of empire,” historian Frederick Cooper and anthropologist Ann Stoler comment that a major problem faced by the colonial regimes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was maintenance of the boundaries between colonizer and colonized, particularly when it came to the sexual relationships formed between colonial and indigenous populations. Among other reasons, this was a problem because colonial regimes, like governing regimes everywhere, had not only to reproduce people but also “ways of life and forms of power,” and the two forms of reproduction were inextricably linked.¹³⁰ I do not wish to make the argument here that the situation of the Manchus in China was a colonial situation. If the Manchus colonized China—and I am not sure we can say that they did—they did so only in a limited and anomalous sense, since by and large they did not impose their own system of ordering the world upon the Chinese.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the Qing regime did share one crucial similarity with European colonial regimes in that both ruled populations many times larger than themselves. In these settings, ethnic ambiguity was a source of political and social anxiety. For the sake of reproducing their power, both types of regimes therefore required that the ethnic boundaries dividing them from the people they governed be very clearly drawn. This meant, in turn, that sexuality and nuptiality of the ruling ethnic elite (“elite” from a political, not social, standpoint) had to be carefully monitored.

In the case of European colonial powers, this could result in curiosity about the sexual life of the local populace and in new definitions of Europeanness, particularly European womanhood, in terms of sexual practice and gender roles.¹³² We do not find the same sort of curiosity among the Manchus, to be

¹³⁰ Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, “Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule,” *American Ethnologist*, 16:4 (November 1989).

¹³¹ Several essays addressing the question of Manchu colonialism have appeared in a recent issue of *The International History Review*, 20:2 (June 1998).

¹³² Ann Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-century Colonial Cultures,” *American Ethnologist*, 16:4 (November 1989).

sure, but we do find similar rules governing marriage practices. Concern for the preservation and reproduction of power gave rise to prohibitions on the marriage of European (Dutch, English, French) men to colonized women, but colonial men were free to take colonized women as concubines, or “companions.” Since European women were not at first allowed in the colonies, by 1900 concubinage became the “most prevalent living arrangement for European colonials.”¹³³ In the Manchu case, though Manchu men were able to marry Han women, as discussed earlier, they were usually taken as secondary wives. First wives were usually drawn from clans within the Manchu banners. Manchu-Han commoner intermarriage was therefore “concubinage,” too, albeit with a different set of social and legal implications, since the children of such unions were considered unambiguously Manchu, whereas the children of mixed European-Asian unions were not considered European and formed an increasingly important (and, from the colonizers’ point of view, worrisome) social group.

The ethnic picture looked very different from a woman’s perspective, however. When European women were permitted to enter the site of colonization, the result was an increased vigilance of ethnic and racial boundaries between dominant and dominated groups (along with an embourgeoisement of culture and other notable changes). Lines of difference once muted by the fact of widespread cohabitation between European men and indigenous women sharpened as the presence of European women raised concerns about their “protection” from the sexuality of indigenous men. Cohabitation between, say, Dutch women and Javanese men, was out of the question, not to speak of marriage. The sexual double standard thus revealed, colonial concubinage declined, but surveillance of women’s behavior remained very strict.¹³⁴ Like these European women, Manchu women in China faced considerable restrictions on their sexuality and nuptiality. As we have already remarked, they could not marry without the permission of the banner organization and, when they did marry, were prohibited from marrying Han Chinese men, unless they were Chinese bannermen, which made them quasi-Manchus, at least legally.

On the basis of this evidence, one is led to conclude that ethnic identity is not usually threatened by male exogamy (formal or informal), only by female exogamy.¹³⁵ If this is true, then controlling women’s reproduction was indeed a way to secure ethnic boundaries and resolve a major “tension of empire.” We can say, therefore, that where the political and economic requirements of empire depend on maintaining ethnic boundaries, different definitions of nuptiality will apply within and between both gender groups and ethnic groups. As in

¹³³ Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable,” 637.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 640–2. It is interesting to note that despite the existence of such restrictions, literary depictions of colonial Indonesia show a very wide range of sexual and marital arrangements between “Europeans,” “Mixed Bloods,” and “Natives,” including the marriage of European females and Native males. See the “Buru Quartet” novels of Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

¹³⁵ The Jewish case is an immediate and obvious exception.

the Manchu case, this will sometimes produce asymmetric definitions of gender and ethnicity.

Turning back for a final look at the Manchu widow, it is plain that few other groups in Qing society were subject to as close and comprehensive regulation as Manchu women. The triennial registers compiled under Eight Banner auspices provided the court with the sort of household information it needed to monitor and manage the marital behavior of all banner populations, the Manchus, as *primus inter pares*, mattering most. And while this information covered both men and women, it was women's behavior in this regard that was most closely restricted and scrutinized. In part this owed to the growing acceptance of Confucian norms which placed a high value on women's virtue, particularly widow chastity. But, as we have established, Qing imperial interests also insisted that Manchu women's sexuality and nuptiality be closely guarded. This suggests that the Qianlong boom in widow chastity was more than just an effort to acquire Confucian legitimacy, and more, even, than just a leap in the pace of acculturation. Promoting widow chastity affirmed the control of Manchu males over the nuptiality and fertility of Manchu females, giving them further control over the reproduction of banner people and Qing power.