THE WAY OF THE IDLE MEN:
LEISURE AND DAILY LIFE OF BANNERMEN IN QING BEIJING,
1750-1900

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Abstract

The Eight Banners of the Manchus was once a formidable military force that conquered China and created one of the greatest empires in Asian history. By the nineteenth century, however, many bannermen were no longer recognized for their prowess on the battlefield, and instead became notorious for their obsession with poetry and theater. This dissertation investigates this transformation from the bannermen’s own perspective, seeking to understand why these people made the lifestyle choices that led them to be labeled as “idle” and “lazy” in late Qing political discourse and modern scholarship. Through this study, I reexamine the role of the bannermen in latter half of the Qing Dynasty, arguing that they should not just be considered as political symbols of the failures of the Manchu regime, but as individuals who were driven by sociopolitical circumstances to forge new paths in their lives.

According to the view of the Qing court, the bannermen were born and raised to serve the state, and they should observe a way of life that would contribute to fulfilling that purpose. Starting from the middle of the eighteenth century, however, a growing number of bannermen could not find steady employment in the military or the civil bureaucracy. Given that they could not depend on state stipends to support their livelihoods, these bannermen had to look for alternative sources of income. As this dissertation will show, many of them used their leisure activities to find new ways of life away from the influence of the Qing state. Some even turned their hobbies into full-time careers, much to the chagrin of the Qing rulers. Through their leisure pursuits, the bannermen also found new outlets for creative expression that led to great achievements and innovations in the areas of literature, music, and art.
Focusing on the capital of the Qing Empire, Beijing, this dissertation utilizes a diverse set of sources produced in both Manchu and Chinese languages, including state documents, diaries, pedagogical texts, novels, poems, and ballads. I will begin by explicating the Qing state’s conception of the term “idle,” and its futile efforts to control a growing population of “idle” bannermen. Then I will explore how the bannermen sought to solve their financial problems without the state’s assistance through establishing social networks that offered mutual support. After that, I will study the literary production of the bannermen and show how they sought to find self-fulfillment outside of the state framework through their creative pursuits. Lastly, I will investigate the bannermen’s immersion into the world of popular entertainment in the capital, showing how they were able to achieve fame and fortune through the invention and public performance of their own musical genres.
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Introduction

From Soldiers to Bird Aficionados and Opera Enthusiasts

When he was a child living in Beijing at the beginning of the twentieth century, in
the twilight years of the Qing Dynasty, She Qingchun 舒慶春, a Manchu bannerman
belonging to the Plain Red Banner, loved to play with his sister’s father-in-law.
Whenever this man would come and visit, he would always bring with him his birds or
his grasshoppers and play with Qingchun. He possessed a wealth of knowledge in
aviculture, and would not stop talking about the best way to construct a birdcage or the
best type of shovel to use to clean a birdcage once you got him started. He was also an
enthusiastic singer who loved performing genres such as drum songs (guci 鼓詞), “split
songs” (chaqu 峽曲), and “fast songs” (kuaishu 快書), even though he was not very
talented in this area.\(^1\) His intense devotion to these hobbies was shared by his son, who
owned numerous pigeons that each cost him a couple thousand taels of silver, and would
spend several days doing nothing but making lanterns and kites.\(^2\) While reminiscing
about his childhood days spent with these two relatives around half a century later,
Qingchun (much better known by his pen name Lao She 老舍) mused that to both of

\(^1\) Lao She 老舍 [She Qingchun 舒慶春], Zheng hongqi xia 正紅旗下 (Under the Plain
Red Banner) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1980), 9-10. Lao She began writing
this autobiographical novel in 1961, but only finished eleven chapters before he passed
away during the Cultural Revolution in 1966. The extant drafts were first serialized
posthumously in 1979 by Renmin wenxue 人民文學 (People’s literature) from the March
to the May editions, and then published together in a single text in 1980.

\(^2\) Lao She, Zheng hongqi xia, 14-15.
them, “the meaning of life is to play every day, pursuing their hobbies exquisitely and indulgently.”

Even though Qingchun enjoyed playing with his sister’s father-in-law, he was confused as to how someone who served as a company captain in the Eight Banners (niru-i janggin/zuoling 佐領) could have so much free time studying how to rear birds. Whenever Qingchun tried to ask this man whether he knew how to ride a horse or fire an arrow, he would always cough a bit and change the subject back to his favorite pastimes. Qingchun was similarly confused about the lifestyle of his deceased uncle by marriage, who also loved singing opera and was rumored to have performed professionally. If his uncle had done so, he would be violating the law and risked being expelled from the Eight Banners, a fact that led Qingchun to wonder if he was even a bannerman at all. Yet after he died, his wife, Qingchun’s aunt continued to collect his stipend as pension every month from the state, earning as much income as Qingchun’s father, who diligently served as an Eight Banner soldier in active duty. This situation made Qingchun think that the emperor or someone else in the government must have made some kind of mistake.

For all his misgivings, Qingchun still remembered these male relatives fondly, describing his sister’s father-in-law as an “adorable” person who “had no faults whatsoever besides spending too much money.” Many contemporaries of Qingchun’s uncles, however, did not have such an innocent impression of these idle bannermen. By the end of the nineteenth century, China faced the threat of subjugation under imperialist

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3 Lao She, Zheng hongqi xia, 14.
4 Lao She, Zheng hongqi xia, 10.
5 Lao She, Zheng hongqi xia, 6-7.
6 Lao She, Zheng hongqi xia, 8.
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powers. Chinese intellectuals became increasingly disillusioned and angered by the Eight Banners’ incompetence on the battlefield, and by their Manchu overlords’ stridently conservative attitude towards radical institutional reforms. In *The Revolutionary Army*, published in 1903, the young revolutionary Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885-1905) decries the fact that the bannermen could take up official positions and earn salaries without having to dedicate their efforts to studying the classics, like the Han Chinese would have had to do to enter officialdom.\(^7\) Emphasizing that the Manchu leadership was filled with “princes and ministers that are illiterate, and commanders and marshals who were only interested in performing Beijing opera,” Zou argued that they had neither the legitimacy nor the competency to rule and protect China.\(^8\) Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1923), writing in 1898 prior to the Hundred Days’ Reforms that he led, was much more moderate in his assessment of the bannermen, but he nevertheless pointed out that they “never farmed the food they ate, nor weaved the clothes they wore.” He questions how this population of five million, none of whom fit within the traditional four social classes of scholars, peasants, artisans, and merchants, could survive if China was to be partitioned by the foreign powers. He believed that if they persisted in their way of life, they would have “chose to pave their own road to destruction, as if they were to drink poison to quench their thirst.”\(^9\) In the eyes of people like Zou and Liang, Qingchun’s relatives’ single-

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\(^7\) Zou Rong 鄒容, *Geming jun 革命軍* (The revolutionary army) (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongyingshe, 1954), 9-10.

\(^8\) Zou, *Geming jun*, 6

\(^9\) Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Lun bianfa bi zi ping Man Han zhi jie shi” 論變法必自平滿漢之界始 (On reforms must begin with the elimination of boundaries between Manchu and Han), in *Liang Qichao quanji 梁啟超全集* (Collected works of Liang Qichao) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 1: 52.
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minded pursuit of leisure activities like bird-keeping and opera-singing was symptomatic of the degeneration of the Eight Banners as a whole. Their idle lifestyle not only harmed themselves, but it was contributing to the ruin of China as a whole and all the peoples living in it.

By the last century of the dynasty, the bannermen’s “idleness” had become a contentious subject in Qing political discourse. People like Qingchun’s male relatives came to symbolize the decline of the Eight Banners as a military organization, and the degeneration of the Manchus as a race. To the Qing court, these people represented the alarming trend of bannermen abandoning the traditional customs and values of their Manchu ancestors from before the conquest. The founders of the Qing Dynasty relied on the might of the Eight Banners to conquer the lands and peoples that formed their empire, and the declining military capability of the bannermen represented the decay of the state’s power over its subjects. The questions of whether the state should continue to provide financial support for the bannermen’s livelihood, and how the state could continue to afford to do so, would become highly debated, thorny statecraft issues throughout the dynasty. For the Chinese reformers and revolutionaries, they perceived the pampered lives of the bannermen as evidence of the unequal treatment of Manchus and Han Chinese by the Qing court. Observing the numerous losses the Qing armies suffered against Western powers and internal rebels such as the Taipings, many Chinese intellectuals came to see the failures of the Eight Banners on the battlefield as representative of the weakness of the dynasty as a whole. The bannermen’s reputation hence saw a steep drop among the general public from the halcyon days of the seventeenth century. They came to be known as a people who did nothing but waste their
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lives on play and pleasure, becoming walking symbols of the decay and inertia of the Manchu regime.

When the bannermen are evaluated only according to their prowess as warriors, many of them clearly failed to live up to the state’s expectations by the end of the nineteenth century. This dissertation, however, seeks to understand how and why they had become this kind of “idle men” from their own perspective. Rather than regarding them only as failed extensions of the Qing state, I intend to study the bannermen as ordinary individuals who had their own agendas and aspirations for their lives. As members of the Eight Banners, these people were born into a status that conferred certain advantages and disadvantages that set them apart from the Chinese civilians. They occupied a unique place in Chinese society, where the Qing court bestowed upon them special favors and privileges that enhanced their social position, but also obstructed them from pursuing career paths outside of serving the state. The Qing rulers demanded them to continue to practice the way of life of their steppe warrior ancestors, even though most of them had settled for many generations in Chinese cities in environments that could not be more different than the steppes of their homeland. For bannermen like Qingchun’s relatives who did not desire careers in military or politics, but found themselves blocked from following alternative professions, leisure became an outlet through which they could forge their own career paths and engage in their own interests. These bannermen did not necessarily intend to rebel against the Qing court’s mandate, yet their personal desires and ambitions compelled them to live their lives in ways that contradicted the court’s ideal image of what a bannerman should be.
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In the past three decades, we have seen growing interest among modern scholars in the history of the Manchus and the history of the Qing as a Manchu dynasty, especially with the advent of New Qing History. Historians working in this subfield have made significant contributions in highlighting the multi-ethnic nature of the Qing Empire, and raising awareness for the importance of the investigation of Manchu-language sources when studying the dynasty. The works of these scholars have ignited much needed discussions regarding the parameters of the definitions of the terms “China” and “Chinese.” The primary focus of their studies, however, has been centered on the Qing state, and the sources that they primarily used generally prioritized the state’s point of view. Although these sources, such as state documents and didactical texts sponsored by the emperors or high-ranking officials, provide important information on the lives of the bannermen, on their own they tend to paint a holistic picture of who these people were (and who they should be).

This dissertation seeks to bring sources that favored the state’s perspective in discourse with materials that revealed the views of common bannermen far removed from the center of political power. These sources include poetry, novels, diaries, songs, and ballads written or performed by groups of people who, despite growing up as bannermen, expressed aspirations and sentiments that often ran counter to the ideologies and regulations that undergirded the Eight Banners system. In doing so, I argue that these bannermen used idleness as a means to circumvent the socio-political restrictions that the Qing court imposed on their daily lives, turning their leisure activities into new career paths that not only offered them financial relief, but also personal satisfaction.
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Conceptualizing Idleness and Leisure

The term “idleness” has commonly been used as a pejorative in the Western world. A person who is described as “idle” tends to be someone who is seen as inactive and slothful, ambling through life without purpose or worth. The avatar of such a figure would be Oblomov, the titular main character of the 19th century Russian novel who never worked a moment in his life, and whose defining trait is his complete unwillingness to make any commitments in his life, preferring instead to sleep all day.10 The author of the novel, Ivan Goncharov (1812-1891), created this character as a criticism of the all-pervasive, fatalistic inertia and apathy among the Russian aristocracy in the nineteenth century. Oblomov’s foil in the novel was his best friend Andrey Stoltz, who inherited from his German father the Teutonic industrious spirit, and worked hard to complete all of Oblomov’s duties for him, such that by the end of the novel Stolz wound up in control of not only all of Oblomov’s estates, but also his former fiancée and son.

This contrast between the vice of idleness and the virtue of diligence could be identified in philosophical and theological discourses throughout Western history. Back in Roman times, the Latin word *otium* denoted a life of inactivity that directly opposed *officium* or *occupationes*, the active public life that all Roman citizens were expected to lead.11 Roman orators and philosophers such as Cato the Elder, Aulus Gellius, and Plautus condemned *otium* as the cause of a person’s decline, like iron being consumed by rust if not used, and pointed to the dangerous possibility that it could make a person

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vulnerable to indulge in other vices.\textsuperscript{12} This view would be taken up in early Christian theology, where slothfulness, of which idleness was an aspect, was labeled as one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The writings of early Christian scholars such as Jerome and John Cassian highlighted the threat of idleness to the spread of the faith, as “the idle man grows dull in carnal desires, [and] is cheerless in spiritual works.”\textsuperscript{13}

The Oblomovistic view of idleness would only take shape fully, however, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, following the onset of the Protestant Reformation and the Industrial Revolution. The reformation brought forth the belief that the fulfillment of worldly duties, i.e. labor, is the only way to live acceptably to God, and that every legitimate profession had the same worth in His eyes.\textsuperscript{14} The introduction of factory production, meanwhile, linked labor and time together, which led to the emergence of the notion that idleness, or the lack of work, was hence a waste of time. This could be illustrated by Benjamin Franklin’s claim that “he that idly loses five schillings’ worth of time; loses five schillings, and might as prudently throw five schillings into the sea.”\textsuperscript{15}

The equation of time with money would become one of the central tenets of the so-called “Protestant work ethic,” as first introduced by Max Weber, as well as Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism. In other words, it formed the basis for the development of capitalism. Under this new understanding of work and time, hereditary aristocrats like Oblomov, whose lands and properties were handed to them on a golden platter rather

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Vickers, “Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance,” 6-8.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Weber, The Protestant Ethic, 16.
\end{itemize}
than earned through hard work, would become the embodiment of the sort of “idleness” that stood in the way of the spread of industrial mode of production, and hence the formation of a “modern” society.

The emergence of this mode of thought would have widespread and long term impact regarding work and idleness. It promoted the idea of self-determinism, that one has full control of their fate, and how far they could advance in life depends fully on their own effort (or lack of effort). In an ideal capitalist society, the rich become rich because they worked hard to attain their wealth; the poor become poor because they possess personal flaws. Expanded to a grander nationalistic level, countries that promote the virtues of assiduousness and austerity should experience advancement and growth, while those that allow the vices of indolence and idleness to linger among their peoples deserved to suffer stagnation. This belief in self-determination would spread from the Europe and America to the rest of the world through the forces of imperialism, and non-Western countries that sought to “modernize” themselves would introduce this idea to their societies. In Guilty of Indigence, Janet Chen shows how the urban poor of China during the Republican period were prominently labeled as “social parasites” and “lazy vagabonds” who were the architects of their own downfall. As shown above, the bannermen suffered similar accusations from proponents of modernization.

It was during this period that the concept of “leisure” that we understand today emerged. When evaluated based on just their basic meanings, “leisure” and “idleness” seemed to share many commonalities, and they should belong in the same terminological

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constellation. Both can have the meaning of “not being engaged in work.” Yet “leisure” is used as a much more benign concept, one that infers a sense of necessary rest and relaxation, rather than total inactivity and inertia that idleness implies. This is perhaps because the way leisure has been conceptualized in the Western world has been intricately linked to the equation of labor and time. The English historian Peter Burke, for example, has argued that the concept of “leisure” was invented in the early modern period of Europe and America. He traced it source not necessarily to the emergence of industrialization, but to the rise of discipline and regulation in Western society during this period, as illustrated by Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias.\textsuperscript{17} With the regimentation of work into “work hours,” there emerged a need for “non-utilitarian activities” that relieved the tedium and stress of work.\textsuperscript{18} Under this conception, leisure is not really the antithesis of work like idleness is. Rather, leisure is the complement to labor: it provides workers with the necessary relaxation they need from time to time in order to engage in work efficiently overall, or it rewards them with rest in their retirement after many years of hard work.

Starting from the late nineteenth century, the study of leisure has become a well-established field of social science in Western academia.\textsuperscript{19} Early works in leisure studies were based on social surveys and ethnographies conducted under the watch of the state, for the purposes of establishing optimum work hours to maximize the levels of

\textsuperscript{18} Burke, “Invention of Leisure,” 150.
production of the workers, and informing policy decisions on allocating resources
towards public welfare projects. These works contributed to growing awareness in
Western societies of the value of leisure as an important factor in improving the general
well being of the population. The 1950s and 60s saw rapid expansion and
professionalization in leisure studies. Sociologists such as Max Kaplan, Joffre
Dumazedier, and Geoffrey Godbey have observed that in the post-industrial world,
leisure had become an increasingly pivotal institution in Western society. Espousing
ideas that would become the central tenets of the so-called “leisure society thesis,”
Kaplan and his associates saw leisure as something that is related to freedom and choice
and brings about self-fulfillment.20 Aligning their ideas with the core theses of
modernization theory, these scholars saw the expansion of leisure as the corrective to the
ugly features of industrialism and urbanization that would bring about progress to an age
where the values of voluntarism, creativity, and tolerance would flourish. Through the
works of these authors, leisure was elevated to a pedestal where it became “the
touchstone to the future.”21

This perception of leisure, however, also received its share of backlash. Writing in
1899, Thorstein Veblen, in The Theory of the Leisure Class, argues that there was
essentially not much difference between the upper class of the pre-industrial era (the
warrior class, the landed aristocracy) and the upper class of the post-industrial era (the
capitalists, the intellectuals). Both engaged in occupations that were fundamentally
unproductive, while exploiting the fruits of the labors of the lower class, the peasants and

21 Chris Rojek, The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time (London: SAGE, 2010),
32. See this work for further state-of-the-field overview of the leisure studies discipline.
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the workers, whose work actually produce goods and services that were vital to the survival of society. The goods that the capitalists produce is created not for any utilitarian reason, but simply to advance consumption for consumption’s sake, or “conspicuous consumption.” They promote a lifestyle that lacked any purpose other than displaying their social status, or “conspicuous leisure.”22 By completely denying the value of the work of the upper class in post-industrial society, Veblen portrays them as functionally no better than the idle Oblomov, even if they may have perceived themselves as hard-working Stoltzs. In doing so, he calls into question the nature of “work” itself, which in turn leads us to reconsider the nature of “idleness.”

Outside of the dominant line of Western thinkers who perceive idleness as a sin and a vice, there were a few who sought to construe it as a valid or even more liberating and satisfying way of life. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger questioned the ultimate purpose of a way of life that preached unceasing devotion to public life, pointing out it leads men to chase endlessly and futilely after successions of public causes and personal desires, and describing it as “an existence which will never of itself put an end to your wretchedness and slavery.”23 In his view, _otium_ was not necessarily a state of complete inertia, but rather opens one up to follow other pursuits, such as reading and writing, that would also be beneficial to the greater public good, and hence simply a different form of _negotium_ (“business”). Later on, in eighteenth-century England, the writer and lexicographer Samuel Johnson published a series of short sketches titled _The Idler_. In the first essay, he proclaims that “every man is, or hopes to be, an Idler,” for

after all, “to be idle is the ultimate purpose of the busy.”  

For Johnson, idleness is a state of being that frees him of expectations and obligations, granting him spontaneity in his creative pursuits. Yet echoing Seneca to a certain extent, Johnson did not see idleness as the denial of work, pointing out that “labour is necessary in [one’s] initiation to idleness,” and that “he that never labours may know the pains of idleness, but not the pleasure.”

In their cases, work/labor and idleness were not conceived of as the opposite ends of a dichotomy, nor as complementary pieces like the post-industrial conception of work/leisure. Rather, they distinguish one kind of “labor” (politics, trade, industry) from another kind (writing, reading, other creative pursuits), with the latter often judged by the public at large to be “idle” due to their lack of immediately apparent utility. Their interpretations point to the contextual nature of the conceptions of these terms, and their potential for shifting meanings over time and space. This point is especially relevant in the case of the bannermen in the latter half of the Qing Dynasty, as their interests in more artistic endeavors and apathy towards their political duties were construed as “idleness” and “laziness.”

“Idle” in the Bannermen’s Context

Who was an “idle bannerman”? This may seem to be a straightforward question, but there are in fact different ways it could be answered. First of all, the “idle” was a specific category used by the Qing state to define bannermen who did not hold permanent employment with the state and did not receive regular salary. They were called *sula* in

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25 Johnson, *The Idler*, 34.
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Manchu, and *xiānsàn* 閒散 in Chinese. The term *sula* has its roots in the verb *sulambi*, which has the meaning of “to be left over.” As shown in Chapter Two, this term was used originally to refer to those in the Eight Banners who were people who had not yet been officially incorporated into the political and military system that the founders of the Manchu state had constructed. After the establishment of the Qing Dynasty in China, these people would become the leftover population of the Eight Banners. The Qing court needed these people to a certain extent as reserves to fill openings in the officialdom or the army whenever necessary, but as their population continued to rise throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they increasingly became a burden for the policy-makers. Many of these idle bannermen, unable to find stable employment in Qing officialdom outside of temporary labor (also called *sula*, but transliterated in Chinese as *sula* 蘇拉), sank to poverty and had to look outside of the state for financial support. Hence, although they were considered “idle” in the eyes of the Qing rulers, many of them had to be diligent in their daily lives to find any potential source of income for the sake of survival.

People like Shu Qingchun’s male relatives, however, would not fall under that designation, as they all held permanent positions in the Eight Banners bureaucracy. These men were “idle” because they appeared to be more interested in pursuing their hobbies and personal interests than engaging with their official jobs. Many of these bannermen would actually describe themselves using the Chinese term *xian* 閒 in their writings, which encompasses the meaning of “idleness.” For example, the nineteenth-century

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26 Hu Zengyi 胡增益, *Xin Man-Han dacidian* 新滿漢大詞典 (New Manchu Chinese dictionary) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1994), 696-697.
bannerman Mucihiy, whose daily life will be the focus of Chapter Three, titled his
diary Siyan cuwang lu meng (Xianchuang lu meng 閒窗錄夢), or “dreams idly recorded
by the window”. The eighteenth-century imperial clansman and poet Dunceng 敦誠
(1734-1791), who will be one of the subjects of study in Chapter Four, referred to himself
as “Xianyongzi” 閒慵子, or “Sir Idle and Lazy,” in one of his short sketches. Many
composers of zidishu 子弟書, or “bannermen tales,” often claimed that they created their
works while they were in a state of xian, as we shall see in Chapter Five. These
bannermen accepted or even embraced their reputation as “idlers,” despite potentially
drawing the ire of the Qing court.

Yet how idle were these “idlers”? The diary of Mucihiy reveals a man who
appeared to be very busy finding any means necessary to overcome his financial
difficulties and support the livelihood of his large family. This was someone who took up
multiple jobs and commissions as private tutor, translator, and even substitute
examination candidate, who even when carousing with his relatives and acquaintances
used these “idle” pastimes to look for potential means of income. Dunceng and his
various Eight Banner literati friends were all prolific writers who used their literary
output to bolster their social reputations among the elites of the capital. One of his

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27 *Xianchuang* 閒窗 specifically refers to windows with ornately decorated railings, and
*xian* in this case carries its original meaning of *lan* 隔, or “railing.” See Duan Yucai 段玉
裁, *Shuowen jiezi jizhu* 說文解字集注 (Collected annotations to the explaining and
analyzing characters), ed. Jiang Renjie 蔣人傑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe,
1996), 3:2502. Many poets from the Tang Dynasty onwards have, however, used this
word to signify a relaxed, idle atmosphere.

28 See also Elena Suet-Ying Chiu, *Bannermen Tales (Zidishu): Manchu Storytelling and
Cultural Hybridity in the Qing Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center,
2018), 190.
associates, Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (Cao Zhan 曹霑, c. 1715-c. 1763), “toiled for ten years” working on his novel, passing away before he could finish it.29 That novel, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber), would come to be considered one of the greatest masterpieces of Chinese literary history. The author himself, however, would never bear witness to the novel’s success and profit from it, having died long before it was published. On the other hand, composers of oral performance texts such as *zidishu* and *chaqu* 島曲 (“split songs”) had their works sold in marketplaces and temple fairs in the capital. Some enthusiasts of these genres, such as possibly Shu Qingchun’s uncle, made their livings as professional performers. Qingchun himself would later make a living as a professional writer after the Qing Dynasty fell. All these bannermen appeared to be quite active in their chosen careers or pursuits.

These people were hence not considered “idle” because they led completely Oblomovian lives, but rather because they were not engaged with what the Qing court expected them to do. They were born into a social system where all of them were preordained to serve the state in some capacity. The Qing rulers crafted an image of an ideal bannerman based on fulfilling this goal, one that they exhorted all in the Eight Banners to follow as a model for how they should behave in their daily lives. That bannerman was one who maintained the customs and virtues supposedly passed down from the ancestors of the Manchus from the pre-conquest era, including archery, horse riding, knowledge of the Manchu language, and frugality. These became the key characteristics of the “old ways of the Manchus” (*Manjusai fe doro*), a concept that

29 See the commentary of Red Inkstone (*Zhiyanzhai* 脂硯齋) at the start of the first chapter of *Honglou meng*. 
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would become increasingly prominent in the eighteenth century, particularly under the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796). According to this rubric, activities that enhanced one’s abilities or cultivation in these areas would be encouraged, such as hunting, wrestling, or studying Manchu-Chinese translation. On the other hand, activities such as watching opera, gambling, or carousing in teahouses were discouraged or even prohibited. Above all else, in the eyes of the Qing rulers, a hard-working bannerman was one who was actively contributing to the welfare of the state, or one who was diligently preparing himself for the prospect of doing so. A lazy bannerman, meanwhile, was one who devoted himself to engaging in activities that led them astray from fulfilling their official duties (or would-be official duties).

The court’s definition of “idleness,” however, was contested by how that idea was conceptualized among the Han literati, with whom the bannermen intermingled after the Qing Dynasty established its rule over China. Xian, along with various words in its terminological constellation such as xia暇 (free time), an 安 (tranquil), jing 靜 (still, motionless), yi 逸 (to escape, to retire, easy and comfortable), and yu 豫 (comfort), can commonly be found in literary works of literati who were inclined towards eremitism. Members of the shi 士 (“scholars” or “gentry”) class also had political and social pressure to follow a career path where they would take the imperial examinations then serve the state (shi仕). However, in the Qing Dynasty, only around one out of six thousand (0.01 percent) elite literate men could expect to pass all stages of the examinations, meaning

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that the vast majority of these literati were kept out of the gates of officialdom.\textsuperscript{31} Many literati who may have possessed the talents to successfully navigate past this grueling selection process also chose not to do so, choosing instead to “conceal” (\textit{yin} 隱) their talents and live in retirement. Many of these figures, influenced by Daoist thinking which exalted non-action (\textit{wuwei} 無為) and later Buddhist ideas which promoted quietude (\textit{jing} 靜), and saw quotidian political affairs as trifles. They celebrated \textit{xianju} 閒居 (\textit{xian} living) as an ideal way of life that freed them from the political obligations, and liberated their minds to roam in a higher aesthetic plane.\textsuperscript{32} The Six Dynasties literatus Tao Qian 陶潜 (365-427), for example, wrote in his poem “Living in Idleness on the Ninth Day” (\textit{“Jiuri xianju”} 九日閒居)\textsuperscript{33}:

\begin{quote}
斂襟獨閒謠，緬焉起深情，
棲遲固多娛，淹留豈無成。

Restraining my thoughts as I compose idle verses,
Profound sentiments arise from the far depths,
There are many pleasures to be had while at rest,
How could you say one could not accomplish anything when remaining in stillness?\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} Benjamin Elman, \textit{Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 106.

\textsuperscript{32} See Wang Yi 王毅, \textit{Yuanlin yu Zhongguo wenhua} 園林與中國文化 (Gardens and Chinese culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990), 194.

\textsuperscript{33} The “ninth day” refers to the ninth day of the ninth month, or the date for the Chongyang Festival.

\textsuperscript{34} Tao Qian 陶潛, “\textit{Jiuri xianju}” 九日閒居 (Living in idleness on the ninth day), in \textit{Tao Yuanming ji jiaojian} 陶淵明集校箋 (Exegesis to the collected collected works of Tao Yuanming), ed. Gong Bin 龔斌 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), 70-73.
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These literati thus idealized *xian* for affording them the personal time and space they needed to experience the world without the obstructions of repugnant political entanglements.

The bannermen who were the subjects of this study were hence caught between these two conceptualizations of *xian/sula*. The Qing court’s constant sermons for the bannermen to live according to the Manchu Way and avoid activities that it classified under rubric of “idleness” would continuously influence the bannermen’s mentality when evaluating their career choices. Their social-economic circumstances and their personal aspirations, however, drove them to often ignore or circumvent the state’s mandate, and continue to engage in those activities to either indirectly find alternative sources of income, or adopt them as their primary means of subsistence. In their case, the Western early modern conception of the dichotomies of work/idleness and work/leisure did not quite fit. Their leisure activities became their actual careers, and idleness was the way through which they found their new paths.

**The Eight Banners**

The Eight Banners system was a unique invention of the Qing Dynasty, an institution that combined administrative, military, social, and economic functions that governed a population that grew from around 700,000 to 1.2 million when the Manchus first entered Beijing in 1644, to somewhere between 2.6 million to around 4.9 million by the middle of the eighteenth century.\(^{35}\) It existed in parallel to the regular civil

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\(^{35}\) For the population data of the entire Eight Banners from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, see Elliott, *Manchu Way*, Appendix A, 363-364. For reference, Naquin gives the number of bannermen who entered and settled in Beijing in 1644 as
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bureaucracy, and by the eighteenth century, it had grown to encompass over ten thousand official positions, larger than all other sectors of the Qing government.  By the nineteenth century, when many bannermen had lost their ability to speak or read their native language, stopped following the original shamanistic religion of their forebears, and no longer cared to practice the customs that had defined the Manchus two centuries ago, these people still held on to their hereditary status in the Eight Banners that distinguished them from the civilians. As a common saying among the residents of the capital states, “there is no distinction between Manchu and Han, only banner and civilian” 不問滿漢，只問旗民.

Given that the majority of sources in Manchu language that we have today are produced by the Qing state, it is not surprising that much of the current scholarship on the bannermen approach them from the state’s perspective. Many studies on the formation of the Eight Banners during the pre-conquest era, for example, use the Jiu Manzhou dang 舊滿洲檔 (Original Manchu archives) and its edited version Manwen laodang 滿文老檔 (The old Manchu chronicles) as their main primary sources.  These archives were around 300,000. See Naquin, Peking, 293, and see especially 293-294, n. 28 for her detailed analysis of how she derived that figure.

36 Elliott, Manchu Way, 135.
37 The Jiu Manzhou dang, or the Manwen yuandang 滿文老檔, was compiled during the reigns of Nurhaci and Hong Taiji. These documents were recorded using the original “unpointed” Manchu script. These original documents were rediscovered in 1931 in the Grand Secretariat archives and were subsequently moved to the National Palace Museum in Taipei by the Nationalist government during the 1945-49 Civil War. The Manwen laodang was a recopied and revised version of the Jiu Manzhou dang that used the updated Manchu script featuring diacritical marks (tongki fuka, or “dots and circles”). One copy of these chronicles were found by the Japanese scholar Naito Konan 内藤江南 in the old imperial palace at Shenyang, and he together with Haneda Toru made photographic copies of these documents and brought them back to Japan. The originals continued to be kept in Beijing and Shenyang. See Chen Jiexian, “Jiu Manzhou dang
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popularized by the pioneering works of Manchu Studies scholars in Japan at the Toyo Bunko such as Kanda Nobuo 神田信夫, Matsumura Jun 松村潤, and Okada Hidehiro 岡田英弘 (who called themselves the Manbun rōtō Research Group), and in China and Taiwan such Jin Liang 金梁 and Chen Jiexian 陳捷先. Meanwhile, large collections of state documents created after 1644, in both Chinese and Manchu languages, can be found at the First Historical Archives of China 第一歷史檔案館 in Beijing and the National Palace Museum 國立故宮博物院 in Taipei, which have become the primary nexuses of research Qing studies today. Historical and biographical collections compiled by the Qing state (often in multilingual format), including the Baqi tongzhi 八旗通志 (Comprehensive history of the Eight Banners) and the Baqi Manzhou shizu tongpu 八旗滿洲氏族通譜 (Comprehensive genealogy of the Eight Banners Manchu clans), have also become important sources for scholars, especially those working on the institutional structure and political ideology of the Qing state.

The works of scholars such as Jonathan Spence, Beatrice Bartlett, Mark Elliott, and Evelyn Rawski, which made significant use of institutional sources, have presented


38 Jin Liang was the first person to provide a Chinese translation of Manwen laodang 滿文秘檔 (Secret archives of the Manchus) in 1933. Later on, Kanda’s group provided Japanese translations for parts of the Manwen laodang that was more accurate. See Kanda Nobuo, et al., Manbun rōtō: Manbun rōtō kenkyūkai yakuchū 滿文老檔：滿文老檔研究會譯著 (The old Manchu chronicles: Translations by the Old Manchu Chronicles Study Group) (Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1955-63). In Taiwan, Chen edited and published the copy of Jiu Manzhou dang found in the National Palace Museum in 1969.
in depth studies on the Eight Banners system and how it functions within the Qing administrative framework as a whole.\textsuperscript{39} The prominence of records and documents that focus on the Qing’s imperial expansion also allowed scholars such as Frederic Wakeman, Peter Perdue, and James Millward to reconstruct in detail major wars such as the Manchu conquest of China and the Qing-Dzungar wars, and explore the Qing’s management of frontier territories.\textsuperscript{40} In addition, these state-published sources also provide wealth of information on the lives and thoughts of the individuals at the highest level of hierarchy of the Eight Banners, especially those at the zenith, the Qing emperors. Qianlong in particular has been the subject of multiple studies on his universalistic ruling ideology.\textsuperscript{41} There is hence a sizable body of scholarship on what the Eight Banners looked like from up top, and how this system was supposed to function according to the designs of the Qing court.

In comparison, there is a relative paucity of studies that observe the bannermen mainly from their own perspective, particularly those who were socially or geographically located far from the center of power. Among Western scholarship, the


first of such works was Pamela Crossley’s *Orphan Warriors*, which presents a hagiography of three generations of a Manchu family living in garrisons in Zhejiang Province during the end of the Qing Dynasty. Using local histories and gazetteers, some of which were compiled by the subjects she studied, Crossley portrayed the decline in fortunes of an elite family that came from the renowned Suwan Gųwalgiya clan, as its members descended from local dignitaries in the mid-nineteenth century to penniless and jobless during the Republican era. In this account, the decline of this garrison banner family is framed against the background of the tremendous political and social changes that occurred in China during this time span, in which its members were directly damaged by cataclysmic events of this period such as the Taiping Rebellion. Through looking into the personal lives and thoughts of these bannermen, Crossley shows that in their case, counter to the standard narrative of the degeneration of the Eight Banners, it was not them who failed the Qing court, but rather the Qing court that failed them. These were people who were stigmatized for the perceived privileges they actually no longer enjoyed, and they had to forge new paths in their lives as the “identity-giving structures of the Qing dynasty” disintegrated over the course of this period.

Another work that presents a personal account of an individual bannerman is Nicola Di Cosmo’s translation of the diary of Dzengšeo, a mid-rank young Manchu officer who fought in the campaign to pacify the Three Feudatories’ rebellion (1673-1681). Unlike the Suwan Gųwalgiya family in *Orphan Warriors*, Dzengšeo was writing during the start of the Kangxi reign, when the Qing Dynasty’s golden age was just about

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to begin. This was when the deeds and accomplishments of the pre-conquest generation of bannermen, those who would later be upheld as the paragons of the “old ways of the Manchus,” were still within living memory. Yet Dzengšeo’s self-portrayal was not one of a natural-born warrior, but rather that of a reluctant soldier who was obliged to go to war but had no love for it.\(^{44}\) He showed the most happiness in this diary not with any victory in the battlefield, but rather when he was able to return home to meet his family, describing it as akin to the sensation of “being born again.”\(^{45}\) In highlighting the mistakes and follies of his commanding officers, Dzengšeo also gave us a glimpse into the rifts that existed within the Eight Banners ranks, even during this early period, which would be much harder to find using only institutional sources.

The bannermen’s involvement in the popular culture has also attracted significant scholarly attention. The performance genre of *zidishu*子弟書 (“bannerman tales”) has in particular become a simmering topic for academics in the fields of Manchu studies and Chinese oral performance literature. In China and Taiwan, scholars such as Chen Jinzhao and Huang Shizhong have expended great efforts compiling and cataloguing extant *zidishu* texts. A few of them, such as “Pangxie duan’er”螃蟹段儿 (Eating crabs song) which was written in mixed Chinese and Manchu, have been translated into English by Stephen Wadley and Mark Elliott.\(^{46}\) More recently, scholars such as Cui Yunhua and

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\(^{45}\) Di Cosmo, *Diary of Manchu Soldier*, 87.  
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Elena Chiu have written monographs the present in depth studies of *zidishu*. These performance texts include works that describe the bannermen’s daily experiences, expressed creatively through their own words. They reveal aspects of banner life that the Qing court would not have wished to be publicized.

These works that make prominent use of non-institutional primary sources on the bannermen all in one way or another showed the fractures that existed within the Eight Banners system. Throughout the dynasty, the emperors would constantly remind men of the Eight Banners, sometimes in private correspondences specifically addressed to banner officials written only in Manchu, that they shared a special bond that was familial and intimate, one that did not appeal to generic Confucian filial piety, but rather the direct master (*ejen*)-servant (*aha*) relationship that their lineages have shared throughout their collective history. The Qing rulers were eager to point out to the bannermen that the court has granted them gifts and privileges that no Chinese civilian would enjoy, and in turn expected them to fulfill their obligations to the court and repay that kindness. Yet this collegiality was not universally shared, and it was much more keenly experienced by those at the top of the Eight Banners hierarchy than at the bottom. For low-ranking bannermen such as the common foot soldier, government clerk, or especially the *xiansan* idle bannermen, they received very little income from the court when compared to their

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47 For further discussions on the historiography of *zidishu*, see Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 16-19.
48 For examples of such personal exchanges, see Elliott, *Manchu Way*, 164-171. As Elliott has pointed out, imperial correspondences with banner (particularly Manchu) officials were typically much more informal and personal in writing style when compared to normal imperial edicts. This intimacy was enhanced by the fact that the Manchu language lacked an imperial pronoun that would serve to distance the emperors from their subjects in their dialogues.
superiors, and they were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by those in power, in some cases even more so than the civilians. Instead of affection, they often felt abandoned by their banner overlords.

It is important to remember this social dynamic between the upper and lower echelons of the Eight Banners when evaluating the bannermen’s way of life. When the Qing court addressed the problem of the rising poverty within the Eight Banners ranks from the eighteenth century onwards, it often emphasized that this was a problem that the bannermen created for themselves due to their profligate and indolent lifestyle, straying from the path that their frugal, hardworking ancestors from the pre-conquest era had set for them. This shaped a narrative of decline for the bannermen, that due to their personal failings, some of them allowed themselves to fall prey to the vices and temptations of city life, and became degenerate wastrels with no recognizable talent in the eyes of the state. It was this narrative that late nineteenth-century intellectuals like Liang Qichao and Zou Rong would later adopt in their writings, except they expanded it much further to use it characterize all Manchu people as a race. Similar narratives of decline and decadence of elite military castes have developed in other early modern non-European empires, such as the samurai in Japan and the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire.

The aim of this dissertation is not necessarily to overturn this narrative, but to seek to give agency to the bannermen and understand from their perspectives why they made the choices that led them to be considered indolent and decadent. I do not intend to overlook institutional sources, and will in fact make substantial use of them, as the words and actions of the Qing rulers did have significant impact on the bannermen’s decision-making process. By also bringing in materials written by bannermen who were
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marginalized from the center of power, however, I intend to show there was a limit to the extent the court was able to influence their daily lives. The individuals that I will highlight in the following chapters were not rebellious against Qing rule, but they were willing to overlook the court’s exhortations and warnings, or even break government regulations, in order to accomplish their personal goals.

It should be noted that in this study, there is a conspicuous lack of discussions on the daily lives of the bannerwomen. The main reason that I have not focused on their experiences is that given that they were not permitted to take up official positions in the civil bureaucracy or the army in the first place, the concepts of idleness and leisure, when applied to their case, would take on different meanings. The Qing rulers did not apply the same standards of the Manchu Way on the bannerwomen as it attempted to on the bannermen, and although there were regulations that were enforced to differentiate the bannerwomen from their civilian counterparts, such as forbidding the marriage of bannerwomen with non-banner men and banning footbinding, they were much less concerned about Manchu women adopting perceived Chinese cultural norms and practices. Nevertheless, their lack of presence in this dissertation, especially on their potential influence on their fathers, husbands, and sons, or their role as symbols of either sloth or diligence, is a severe oversight that should be addressed in later iterations of this project. Fortunately, scholarship that explores the bannerwomen’s experiences and worldviews through their own writings has seen significant development in the last two decades. The nineteenth-century female poet and novelist Gu Taiqing has herself been the subject of study in multiple works by scholars such as Ellen Widmer, Yanning Wang,
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and Beata Grant. More recently, Wilt Idema has produced a translated anthology of the literature of nineteen other female writers from the Eight Banners, spanning nearly two hundred years from the Kangxi era to near the end of the dynasty.

**Chinese Culture? Manchu Culture?**

One of the common explanations for the bannermen’s transformation (or “decline”) was their attraction to “Chinese” culture. Indeed, several Qing emperors have themselves espoused this view. Going as far back to the pre-conquest era, Hong Taiji (r. 1626-1636) had already spoken of his fear that one day “the children and grandchildren of later generations will abandon the Old Way [of the Manchus], neglect shooting and riding, and enter into the Chinese Way.”

A century later, the Yongzheng Emperor (r. 1722-1735) would share the same fear, exhorting the garrison bannermen in the Jiangnan area to avoid slipping into “ways of leisure and idleness,” which he later linked to the “Chinese Way” that his great-grandfather had mentioned. By the reign of his successor Qianlong, this fear has become so strong that the emperor attempted to forbid students in the Imperial Clan Academy from studying Chinese books. In all these cases, unlike the Manchu Way, the Chinese Way was never clearly defined. It can be assumed to

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incorporate speaking and writing in the Chinese language, Chinese poetry, classical studies, painting, opera, social drinking, etc. These were common aspects of city life in China, particularly among the literati elites. The fact that these would become some of the favorite leisure activities of the bannermen, particularly in the capital, would seem to suggest that the Qing court’s fear was eventually realized.

It has been assumed among Chinese historians that when the bannermen acclimatized themselves to Chinese urban society and culture, they became fully assimilated and lost their original Manchu customs. This process has been called Sinicization, and it has been assumed that all foreign peoples, when they conquer parts or all of China and attempt to establish their own dynasty, would all eventually succumb to the influence of Chinese culture. The emergence of Manchu Studies as a major subfield, however, brought about increasing skepticism over the validity of the Sinicization theory. In her presidential address at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in 1996, Evelyn Rawski highlighted the abundance of Manchu-language documents found in the Qing archives that had been heretofore ignored by historians and called for the adoption of a “Manchu-centered perspective” to reassess Qing history. She referred to Sinicization as largely the product of twentieth-century Han Chinese nationalism. Her views were disputed by a response in 1998 from Ping-ti Ho, who vigorously defended the Sinicization thesis by highlighting the Qing emperor’s adoption of Chinese government system and in particular Neo-Confucianism.

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Scholars who support the Sinicization thesis tend to present “Chinese culture,” and in turn “Manchu culture,” as unproblematic, self-evident categories. Ho, for example, referred to the Qing rulers’ “unprecedented exaltation of Confucius” as “the very quintessence of Siniticism.” Later on, Pei Huang also pointed to the Qing court and the Manchu officials’ widespread adoption of Chinese language and names and Confucian teachings and values by the eighteenth century as evidence that “they were sinicized individuals, no longer Manchu warriors.” For these scholars, it appears that the equivalence of Confucianism with “Chinese culture” and “warrior” with “Manchu culture” was undisputed. Once the bannermen stopped venerating martial virtues and began studying Confucian classics and Chinese language literature, they would have shifted from one cultural paradigm to another.

This thesis assumes that the word “Chinese” as a descriptor of a race, ethnicity, or nation (mostly commonly referring to the Han people specifically), and the word “Chinese” as a descriptor of a culture, refer to the same thing. Indeed, Ping-ti Ho enveloped both under the general term of “Chinese civilization.” Yet there is much evidence that shows that Chinese culture expanded far beyond the political boundaries of China (which are constantly in flux in themselves anyways) and the ethnic boundaries of the Han people (which is a potentially problematic category in itself). Confucianism, for example, was accepted not just by the Manchus, but it was also adopted as the state ideology of the Joseon Dynasty in Korea, the Tokugawa bakufu in Japan, and the Lê

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55 Ho, “In Defense,” 143.
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Dynasty in Vietnam in the same period. Moreover, Confucian scholars from these different empires could all read and write in the same language of classical Chinese, and could (and did) study and critique each other’s works. Yet the Sinicization thesis has not been applied to all these different peoples as it has been with the Manchus, as they all have their own nations today. Given that the East Asian cultural sphere (also referred to as the Sinosphere) and the political-racial entities of China and Han Chinese are distinct, why should we assume that peoples like the Mongols and Manchu, who established their empires in the lands of China Proper, were uniquely susceptible to the forces of assimilation?

Moreover, accepting “Chinese culture” and “Manchu culture” as unproblematic categories leads to the essentialization of what it means to be “Chinese” and “Manchu.” As seen from above, the Qing emperors were very interested in imposing this worldview upon their subjects and segregating the banner population from the Han civilians, both physically and mentally. Yet when observed from the ground level by investigating the individual lives of common bannerman and Chinese civilian, the applicability of these totalizing categories begin to break down. By defining “Manchu culture” just as “warriors” who were skilled in archery and horse-riding, we are denying the “Manchuness” of any bannerman who did not personally show any predilection for war and martial activities (for example, someone like Dzengšeо). By incorporating northern drum songs, *kunqu*, and Cantonese opera under the label of “Chinese culture,” we are denying the overt linguistic and stylistic differences that exist between these art forms. This is not to argue that these categories should not be used at all, but to point out the importance of understanding their limitations.
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In order to move away from the Sinicization model, Elena Chiu has suggested cultural hybridity as an alternative model to evaluate the cultural exchange between the bannermen and the civilians. This is a term taken from the works of post-colonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha, evoked in context of the unique power dynamic between the colonial masters and subjects in British-controlled India. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explicitly criticizes “the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities.”

Through the processes of iteration and translation, he describes, the colonial subjects opened up liminal spaces where they could create cultural forms that disintegrated “the binary structure of power and identity” that their masters had intended to establish, thereby diminishing the power of the masters’ discriminatory power.

This colonial power dynamic did not, of course, exist in the same way in Qing society. Nevertheless, Chiu highlights the potential usefulness of this concept to explain, in particular, the “fusion of Manchu and Han Chinese cultural components into new forms that were irreducible to the sum of their parts,” such as the performance genre *zidishu*. This concept can become potentially very useful in helping us understand various other aspects of the bannermen’s daily life, yet perhaps it would be even more efficacious if we move beyond using the “Manchu”-“Han Chinese” dichotomy to describe the process of cultural exchange between the bannermen and the civilian.

This dissertation locates itself in the Qing capital of Beijing, where the imperial court resided. As the political center of the dynasty, many groups of people from all over

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59 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 237.
60 Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 1.
the empire congregated in the city, including government officials, examination candidates, businessmen, ecclesiasts, religious pilgrims, and entertainers. These people all brought with them their own distinctive forms of local culture to the capital, and continued to propagate their cultures through forming local place associations and conducting ceremonial or professional performance, making Beijing a melting pot of many different regional cultures that transcended simply Manchu and Han. This was reflective, as Paize Keulemans has pointed out, of the rising importance of regionalism and local identity overall in the latter half of the Qing that countered the teleology of the formation of a single Chinese nation and race.  

The Qing court originally intended to physically separate the banner population from the Han civilians by dividing the city into two parts and segregating them from each other. This process has been exaggeratingly described as “Manchu apartheid” by Frederic Wakeman. Yet the actual efficacy of this policy was found wanting, as scholars such as Susan Naquin, Andrea Goldman, and Liu Xiaomeng have shown. In *Peking: Temples and City Life*, Naquin shows that temples and shrines found inside both the Inner and Outer Cities, and religious pilgrimage sites locations in the suburbs of the capital, have all became places where the bannermen and civilian intermingled for both religious and entertainment purposes. Goldman illustrates how, despite the government’s repeated proscriptions, the bannermen continued to make their way to the Outer City’s theaters.

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63 Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life*, 408-409; 426-450; 535-541; 632-638.
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and playhouses to enjoy performances of opera from many different regional styles.\footnote{Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 63-114.} Using extant contracts and deeds signed between bannermen and civilians, Liu shows the great extent of influence Chinese merchants, in particular the rice sellers from Shandong, had on the bannermen as their debtors and landlords.\footnote{Liu Xiaomeng 劉小萌, *Qingdai Beijing qiren shehui* 清代北京旗人社會 (Banner society in Beijing during the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), 241-330.} Informed by these studies, this dissertation shows that what would come to characterize the bannermen’s social identities and cultural traditions was not the monolithic “Manchu Way” that court sought to impose upon them. Rather, it was the writings and music that the bannermen developed in their “idleness,” which were formed from pieces taken from various other regional cultures all over the empire, that would become their lasting cultural legacy.

**Chapter Outline**

This dissertation is divided into four main chapters. After this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, I will begin by surveying the use of the term “idle” in Qing political discourse in pre-1644 official records. I point out that during this era, when the Manchus were just beginning to build their burgeoning empire and were engaged in constant warfare with their neighbors, the “idle” (*sula*) was a classification mostly adopted for recently conquered peoples who were awaiting their eventual assignment to their proper positions in the Eight Banners system. Once the Qing Dynasty was established in China Proper, the court continued to view the idle bannermen (*xiansan/sula*) as a valuable reserve of manpower, and held the same expectations for...
them as any other bannermen. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the Qing rulers discovered that the population of the Eight Banners was rapidly outgrowing the amount of official positions available. The question of “Eight Banners Livelihood” (baqi shengji 八旗生計) subsequently became one of the enduring conundrums that the Qing court would face in the second half of the dynasty, as it would attempt to devise and implement various policies to accommodate an increasingly large number of idle bannermen who were struggling in poverty, all in the end to no long-term success.

Chapter Three will change the perspective from the Qing court to the bannermen themselves, in order explore how they confronted their livelihood problem. As I will show, by the middle of the eighteenth century, many bannermen have become accustomed to living with heavy debt and found various ways to manage it, some successful, some less so. Those at the bottom of the Eight Banners hierarchy found their relatively meager stipends to be insufficient to support the kind of life socially expected for a bannerman. Though later critics such as Liang Qichao portrayed them as lazy and unproductive, many poor bannermen were in fact happy to get their hands dirty and seek employment outside of the state framework to find alternative sources of income. Rather than depending solely on the state to solve all their financial problems, these bannermen actively tried to construct and maintain social networks, established on the principle of mutual aid, which they could turn to whenever they required assistance.

In this chapter, I will focus in particular on the case of Mucihiyan, a low-ranking Beijing bannerman from the Daoguang era, using his Manchu diary as the main primary source. Having suffered neglect and abuse by his superiors in the Eight Banners hierarchy, this bannerman chose to establish a new career as a private Manchu language
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tutor with the support of his friends and relatives. The fact that despite his family’s penurious financial state, he continued to engage in costly leisure activities such as visiting theaters and playhouses, would seem to give credit to the narrative of the bannermen’s decline due to their lack of self-control and attraction to the “good life.” Yet, as I will show, these activities actually served an important ulterior purpose, as they were communal activities where potentially financially beneficial relationships were made and maintained.

Chapter Four examines the bannermen’s immersion in Chinese literary tradition and their confrontation with the ideal of xian, or “idleness,” portrayed in the writings of Chinese eremitic scholars. After establishing itself in China, the Qing court imposed the bannermen as hereditary elites upon Chinese society. In order to establish relationships and win the respects of the local Chinese elites, many banner nobles began educating their scions in Chinese classics and literature, which led to the emergence of talented and renowned banner literati within one generation after the conquest. By the eighteenth century, we can find a surfeit of bannermen who became prolific producers of Chinese-language literature.

Among these men were those who either lacked the opportunity or the desire to pursue official and military careers, and instead found personal fulfillment in composing poetry and novels. They were particularly inspired by the way of life of the politically disengaged scholars (yinshi 隱士), yet they also realized that their status as members of the Eight Banners prevented them from being fully capable of adopting that lifestyle. Using the novel Dream of the Red Chamber, as well as the poems and essays written by various capital bannermen, I will analyze their inner thoughts on their condition as people
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caught between two worlds, longing to belong to one but unable to extract themselves from the other.

Chapter Five explores the bannermen’s engagement with the various forms of popular culture found in Beijing, and the shift some of them undertook to advance from amateur enthusiasts to professional performers. As the capital of the Qing Empire, Beijing became a gathering place of numerous distinctive styles of regional theater and popular performance, creating a diverse and lively entertainment scene. Despite numerous attempts by the Qing rulers to forbid bannermen from engaging in these frivolous acts, people from top to bottom of the Eight Banners hierarchy became enthralled by theater, including, hypocritically, many of the Qing rulers themselves. Absorbing various elements from these different types of popular performances, the bannermen eventually created their own genres of oral performance, such as zidishu and chaqu.

At the start, these banneremen were singing these ballads and songs in private settings such as amateur clubs, which was permitted by Eight Banners regulation. Yet due to financial pressure and their personal desires for recognition, many bannermen began to seek a larger, more public audience for their works. Some were content to sell their written performance texts on the marketplace in local bookstores and temple fairs under pseudonyms. Others, however, became professional performers, earning both fame among the public audience for their unique and skilled acts, and infamy among some of their peers for abandoning their elite positions and selling out to vulgar tastes. As illustrated in the conclusion, both amateur and professional bannermen performers would continue to thrive after the fall of the Qing Dynasty.
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Chapter 2:

Idleness and the Idle Bannermen in Qing Political Discourse

The Eight Banners and the State

“The Eight Banners was the foundation of our state,” the Qianlong Emperor began an edict he issued in the first year of his reign (1736) with this proclamation.66 Similar declarations have been issued throughout the Qing dynasty by various emperors and high officials. After all, with the Eight Banners soldiers serving as the backbone of their military, the Manchus were able to expand from their homeland in Manchuria to create an empire that encompassed China, Mongolia, and Tibet, and extended far into Central Asia. The Eight Banners grew from the Manchus’ founder Nurhaci’s personal hunting parties into a large and complex “hybrid institution” that, as Mark Elliott describes, “combined a range of military, social, economic, and political functions” that affected the lives of not only the banner soldiers themselves, but also their entire households.67

During the initial phase of conquest before 1644, Nurhaci 努爾哈赤 (1550-1626) and his descendants absorbed peoples of many different ethnicities that had settled north of the Great Wall under their rule, rapidly swelling the Eight Banners ranks and enhancing the potency of the Manchu military power. As the Manchus entered China, the bannermen formed a hereditary class of elites separate from the Chinese civilians, their

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66 See the Qianlong Emperor’s edict on Qianlong 1.4.22 (1 June 1736), in Qianlong chao shangyu dang 乾隆朝上諭檔 (Archive of Qianlong reign edicts) (Beijing: Dang’an chubanshe, 1991), 1:45-46.
livelihoods governed separately by the banners they belonged to. In exchange for their privileged status and various forms of exclusive benefits and favors rewarded to them by the court, they were expected by the court to offer their talents to the Qing state and only the state. This system, on the one hand, allowed the banner soldiers and officials to focus on their duties with the assurance that the material needs of themselves and their families would be fulfilled by the state. It served as a fiscal safety net for the bannermen, many of whom, as soldiers and military officers, would not otherwise be able provide stable financial conditions for their families, given the constant prospect of them being tied up in long military campaigns and their high risk of death. On the other hand, the stipend system made the bannermen dependent upon the Qing rulers to support their own livelihoods. This relationship ensured the loyalty of the Eight Banners to the emperor, securing the court’s absolute control over its premier military force, its most important instrument of power.

After the Manchus successfully established and consolidated their power in China by the end of the seventeenth century, the Qing dynasty heralded a long period of peace that spanned the reigns of the emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong. While the Qing continued to engage in wars with its neighbors on its Western frontiers, these were smaller in scale and did not require the amount of manpower needed to pacify the Chinese. Most bannermen were resettled in the new capital Beijing and in garrisons established in strategically significant cities across the empire, and their descendants would be born and raised in these cities without ever seeing their ancestral homeland of Manchuria. During the eighteenth century, the amount of people registered under Eight Banners ranks continued to swell, both through natural means and other mechanisms
such as adoption of Chinese children into banner households. Yet the amount of
government and military positions available did not, and could not, increase at the same
rate as the banner population. Unable to find permanent positions within the officialdom
or the military and restricted by the state from pursuing other occupations, many
bannermen ended up with no steady source of income to support themselves, and had to
rely on other members of their clans or banner companies for assistance. These
bannermen, as mentioned previously, were designated by the state as *xiansan* or *sula:*
“the idle.”

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Eight Banners had increasingly become
an unwieldy fiscal burden on the Qing state. A large and ever-growing number of
bannermen, especially the “idle,” found the state grants incapable of covering their daily
living expenses, and they thus lived in poverty and were burdened with heavy debt. The
question of how the Qing court can improve the living standard of the bannermen, while
its population continued to expand exponentially from generation to generation, came to
be known as the problem of “Eight Banners Livelihood” (*baqi shengji* 八旗生計). The
daunting task of solving this conundrum had become a major preoccupation of Qing
policy-makers, a persistent headache that, despite the large amount of money and effort
expended to cure it, would only get worse and worse as time went by. In various edicts,
memorials, and various statecraft writings concerning this issue, the “idle bannermen”
and their way of life featured prominently as a major source of the problem. In the same
edict mentioned above, the Qianlong Emperor would sharply rebuke the bannermen for
their habitual profligate spending on “gaudy clothing and sumptuous food” without any
sense of compunction, claiming that “the cause of the bannermen’s poverty was all
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founded upon [such behavior].” Numerous policies that Qianlong and his successors implemented to combat the Eight Banners livelihood problem directly targeted the “idle”, whether by creating employment for them, relocating them, or expelling them from the Eight Banners ranks altogether.

This chapter studies the evolution of “the idle” as an official designation of a group of people and “idle” as a concept in Qing political discourse, from the pre-conquest era to the early nineteenth century. As the Eight Banners system expanded and transformed over the first two centuries of Qing rule, the political significance of idle bannermen also changed over time. Before 1644, when the Manchus constantly needed to expand and replenish their army to subdue neighboring tribes and ultimately defeat the Ming, the leaders considered the “idle” to be much needed and desired manpower reserves. By the middle of the dynasty during the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns, however, as the Qing reached the limits of its expansion and the population of the Eight Banners swelled past saturation point, the idle bannermen changed from valuable resources to undesirable nuisance in the eyes of the Qing rulers. As these “idle men” became the focus of statecraft debates regarding the “Eight Banner livelihood problem,” their lifestyle came under the scrutiny of the court. Qing emperors and officials criticized the xiansan for their indolent, wasteful, and dissolute ways, pinning the blame for their financial difficulties on themselves. The policies they proposed and enacted revolved around making these people engage in other activities that the court approved of, so that they would no longer be “idle” in the eyes of the state.

68 Qianlong edict, 1 June 1736, in Qianlong shangyu, 1:45-46.
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The “Idle” in the Pre-Conquest Era

The use of the term “idle,” or sula/xiansan, as an official designation of people who were not employed by the state was a Manchu invention, as it did not exist in Chinese institutional history prior to the Qing. In previous dynasties, subjects of the state who did not hold official positions (guan 官) simply belonged to the common populace (min 民). The court referred to these people using terms such as shuren 庶人 or baimin 白民 when talking about specific persons, and baixing 百姓 or just min when talking about them as a group. This official/commoner (guan/min) dichotomy was complicated, however, by the intrusion of the Manchus and their Eight Banners system into the Chinese socio-political order. Under Qing rule, the term minren 民人 or “civilians” was used specifically to refer to the general population that did not belong to the Eight Banners, as opposed to the qiren 旗人 or bannermen. This new banner/non-banner (qi/min) dichotomy was intended by the Qing court to overlap with the old one, since it expected all bannermen to be employed by the state. Yet in the case of the “idle,” who did not hold official positions yet were still governed under the Eight Banners system, their position in this new social structure was tenuous.

The term “idle” used as a designation for a group of people was already part of the official lexicon of the Manchu state before 1644. In the Manwen laodang 滿文老檔 (The old Manchu chronicles), the official compilation of the annals of Nurhaci’s people during the pre-conquest era, this word was used in several instances to refer to recently conquered people after raids or campaigns. On the eighth day of the second month of the seventh year of Tianming 天命 (1622), for example, after taking the town Qijiabao
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during his conquest of the Liaodong peninsula, Nurhaci awarded among the acquired “idle” households thirty-five male adults each to every Executive Censor and Commander, and thirty male adults each to every Vice Commander. Later that same month, on the twenty-eighth day, while taking account of people who followed various Khalka Mongol princes, who surrendered or allied themselves to the Jurchens, in their relocation to Nurhaci’s new capital Liaoyang 遼陽, it was found that there were among them four hundred people who were “idle” and “solitary” (sula enteli), and did not belong to a specific prince. Three years later, in the tenth month of the tenth year of Tianming (1625), after conducting punitive attacks on Chinese civilians in several cities in Liaodong who were rebellious or uncooperative with their new rulers, Nurhaci felt contrite about massacring many educated men during these raids, and allowed over three hundred of the leftover “idle” (sulaka) scholars to take the examinations and take up official positions “according to Chinese ways.” In all these examples, the word “idle” was consistently used to refer to people who were considered to be “leftovers” or “extras,” who had not been fully incorporated into Nurhaci’s new administration.

During this period, the ethnic identity and basic socio-political structure of the people that would later come to be known as the Manchus were still in their nascent stage of formation. The term “Manchu” itself did not exist until 1635, when Nurhaci’s successor Hong Taiji coined it as the new name for his people (gurun). Most of “his

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70 Manwen laodang, fascicle 36, 5:1649-1650.
71 Manwen laodang, 66:26, 6:3046.
people” descended from the three Jurchen tribes: Jianzhou, Haixi, and Yeren. There were others, however, that traced their lineages back to other ethnic groups that lived in the geographical vicinities of the Jurchens, including the Chinese, the Mongols, and the Koreans. These peoples, in particular the Mongols, shared cultural, linguistic, social, and political ties with their neighboring Jurchens. Nevertheless, their eventual absorption into a holistic Manchu gurun was not a natural development, but a deliberate procedure carried out by the leaders of the Aisin Gioro clan over the course of the six decades prior to their conquest of Ming China.

Nurhaci and his successors used warfare as the primary means of transforming these various clans, tribes, and ethnicities into their own people. Nurhaci rose to the position of chief of the Left Branch of the Jianzhou tribe in 1583 at an opportune time, when the regional balance of power had recently broken down. The Hūlun Alliance, a confederation of Haixi clans led by the Hada clan, had held hegemony over the Jurchens for several decades, but the death of the Hada khan Wan in 1582 led to the collapse of the alliance. Although he was Wan’s son-in-law, Nurhaci quickly turned on his clan’s erstwhile allies, embarking on a series of military campaigns to impose his authority over the other Jurchen clans as well as the neighboring Khorchin and Karachin Mongol tribes. Upon achieving dominance over the all of the Jianzhou and Haixi clans, as well two of the major Yeren clans, Nurhaci declared himself as the “Bright Khan” (genggiyen han) of the Latter Jin state (amaga aisin gurun) in 1616. He then overturned the century-long political order of the Jurchens’ peaceful submission to Ming authority, officially

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72 However, not all Jurchens became Manchus. As Mark Elliott points out, many Yeren tribes were never integrated into Manchu social structure. See Elliott, Manchu Way, 48.
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declaring war on the Ming by proclaiming his “Seven Grievances” against the Chinese emperors in the same year, blaming them for the death of his father and grandfather. This heralded three further decades of nonstop warfare against the Ming forces, during which Nurhaci’s men overtook the entire Liaodong peninsula.\textsuperscript{73}

The key instrument that facilitated these continuous military campaigns was the niru-gūsa system, which eventually developed into the Eight Banners. Niru, meaning literally “arrow” in Manchu, originally signified a small unit of hunters, temporarily grouped together during seasonal hunts. Each niru typically consisted of ten people, with one of them selected as the leader of the unit (nirui ejen). Starting around 1601, Nurhaci adapted this transitory organization into a permanent military system, and greatly enlarged its scale, such that each niru, or “company,” included not only the soldiers themselves, but also their entire families. In 1615, he further gathered the various niru into eight separate gūsa, or “banners.”\textsuperscript{74} Under this new system, the previous social identities of the peoples who came under Nurhaci’s control were superseded by their new identity as bannermen. Their previous loyalties to their tribes, clans (hala), lineages (mukun), or villages (gašan) all became subservient to their allegiance to their absolute ruler. The bannermen devoted their services to the Aisin Gioro state, maintaining their military readiness at all times in preparation for the next war. In exchange, the state


\textsuperscript{74} For more detailed analysis of the origins and development of the niru-gūsa system, see Liu Xiaomeng, \textit{Manzu cong buluo dao guojia de fazhan} 滿族從部落到國家的發展 (From tribe to state: An early history of the Manchus) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007), 46-51, 123-151.
helped provide for their subsistence, granting a plot of land to each soldier when they were enlisted into a *niru*.\(^{75}\)

In the aforementioned examples from the *Manwen laodang*, the “idle” in both cases were men who were recently conquered by Nurhaci. At those points in time, these people had not been incorporated into the Eight Banners. Their “idle” status, however, appeared to be transitory. The idle men awarded to the various commanders would likely soon be converted into their soldiers or other productive members of their corps; the idle scholars would be made to take the examinations and turned into officials in Nurhaci’s fledgling bureaucracy. The “idle” hence appeared to be a liminal state of being in the process of the conversion of peoples from different ethnic and social backgrounds into a single collective of the proto-Manchus. The Jurchen leaders considered them “idle” not because they were doing nothing, but because they were not yet working for the Latter Jin state and hence had not yet become useful members of the society Nurhaci had constructed. It was a label that described their current sociopolitical status, rather than an indictment of their lifestyle choices.

In order to continuously grow their state so that they could challenge increasingly larger and stronger foes, Nurhaci and his successors needed to constantly expand their army to match their ambitions. When he began his campaign to unify the Jurchen tribes, Nurhaci had less than a hundred men under his command.\(^{76}\) Manpower became the most valuable resource for the proto-Manchu state, as it allowed its army to replenish and increase its supply of soldiers consistently, so that it could keep on waging wars on their

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\(^{76}\) Liu, *Manzhou buluo dao guojia*, 124.
neighbors. By 1616, when Nurhaci founded the Latter Jin state, he already had 201
*niru* under his command, each ranging from around a hundred to over five hundred men.
The number of *niru* would rise to 234 by 1626 when Nurhaci passed away, and then to
419 in 1635 when Hong Taiji renamed the dynasty to Qing and proclaimed “Manchu” as
the new name for his people.⁷⁷ As they acquired more and more territory and population,
the Aisin Gioro rulers also needed to continually expand their administrative framework
and employ more civil officials to exert effective control over their new conquests and
establish the legitimacy of their new dynasty. Given this constant need for more people to
fill openings in the army and the bureaucracy, the “idle” people were seen as valuable
reserves of manpower. They were a desirable resource that the Manchus actively sought
to acquire in all their military campaigns and raids in the pre-conquest period.

The Idle Bannermen Post-Conquest

In February 1644, the Ming capital Beijing was overtaken by Li Zicheng’s 李自成 (1606-1645) rebel army, and the last Ming emperor Chongzhen 崇禎 (r. 1627-1644)
committed suicide. Three months later, the Ming general Wu Sangui 吳三桂 (1612-1678)
surrendered to the Qing and allowed the Manchu forces to enter the Great Wall through
the Shanhai Pass. Soon, they drove Li Zicheng out of Beijing, and established it as their
new capital. Under the command of Dorgon 多爾袞 (1612-1650), Nurhaci’s fourteenth
son and Prince Regent of the dynasty, the Qing army quickly crushed both the remaining
Ming forces and the various rebel factions. Within fifteen years, the Manchus had

managed to completely conquer all of China, with the last remaining Ming loyalists banished to the island of Taiwan. The full pacification of China would only be achieved after the defeat of the Three Feudatories rebels led by Wu Sangui in 1681. After their suppression, the Manchus finally completed their “Great Enterprise” and ended their continuous military endeavors, only waging smaller scale wars along its frontiers afterwards, as the majority of China entered a long period of peace that would last until the nineteenth century.

Up until this point, the Manchu rulers had tried to impose control over newly conquered peoples through incorporating them within the administrative framework of the Eight Banners. Prior to 1635, many Chinese people who came under the Aisin Gioros’ control were directly absorbed into what would become the Manchu ethnicity. Prominent defectors such as former Ming generals Tong Yangzhen 佟養真 (d. 1621) and Tong Yangxing 佟養性 (d. 1632) were given noble status, while those of lesser pedigree who were enslaved by the Manchus in battles or raids, such as the ancestors of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* author Cao Xueqin, became *booi aha* (bondservants). Most of the Chinese who surrendered after the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1635, meanwhile, were grouped into the eight Chinese banners, which were founded over the course of the years between 1637 and 1642. This integration policy, however, largely ended after the Qing conquered China. When the Manchus took over Beijing, according to Susan Naquin’s estimation, around 300,000 bannermen moved into the new capital city, with around 60,000 eventually stationed in garrisons in other cities across the empire.\textsuperscript{78} The population of Ming China at that time, meanwhile, was around 250

\textsuperscript{78} Susan Naquin, *Peking*, 293.
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Although the Qing rulers did try to assimilate their new subjects to certain aspects of Manchu culture, such as forcing them to adopt Manchu clothing and hairstyle, the full integration of all Han Chinese into the Eight Banners would not be feasible. Hence, from 1644 onwards, the Eight Banners became much more of a closed system, and a clear distinction between bannermen and civilians emerged.

As the framework of the Eight Banners became more firmly established, the political usage of the term “idle” also became more stabilized. It was no longer used to refer to all subject populations that did not render service to the Qing state, as it was used exclusively within the context of the bannermen. By itself, the term in most cases referred to a bannerman who was of age yet did not hold a permanent official position. Because they were not officially employed by the state, the idle bannermen received no regular stipend. A bannerman could still be classified as “idle,” however, if he worked for the Qing court at a provisional capacity and earned a temporary stipend from the state. In fact, casual laborers hired on short-term basis to perform manual tasks within the Inner Court, typically drawn from the bondservant companies by the Imperial Household Department (Neiwufu 内務府), were collective referred to as sula, the Manchu term for idle, although in Chinese it was not translated as xiansan, but rather transliterated as sula


80 While it was used officially with this meaning in mind since the start of the dynasty, xiansan/sula would only be given an official definition in the official statutes in the Qianlong edition of the Collected Statutes of the Great Qing. See Yuntao 允祹, et al., eds., Qinding Daqing huidian 欽定大清會典, in Daqing wuchao huidian 大清五朝會典 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2006), 95:5b, 11:899.
This term was also used in context of imperial clan to refer to Aisin Gioro nobles who did not inherit ranking titles. These *xiānsān zōngshì* 閒散宗室 (*sula uksun*), however, were allowed to attend court functions and rituals and continued to receive regular stipends from the state on account of their noble status. Finally, a few regular official posts in the Eight Banners bureaucracy also contained the word *sula* in their Manchu titles, although their corresponding Chinese titles did not contain the word *xiānsān*. These positions include the *sanzhī dāchen* 散秩大臣 (*sula amban*) or *sanqīlāng* 散驍郞 (*sula janggin*).

The Qing state continued to see the idle bannermen as a pool of reserve manpower, as subjects who could be employed right away to fill low-ranking posts in the Eight Banners bureaucracy whenever there were openings. For example, in Kangxi 24.3.3 (Apr 6, 1685), the emperor received notice from the Hanlin Academy that they required on short notice more people who were adept at translating Manchu to Chinese. Kangxi set up an impromptu examination for non-ranking *bithesi* (clerks), previously...

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82 In 1782, Qianlong decreed that all *xiānsān zōngshì* who were direct descendants of Kangxi were to be dressed in the official regalia of fourth-ranked officials, even though they did not hold any actual titles. They were known as the “fourth rank imperial nobles” (*sipīn zōngshì* 四品宗室), distinguishing them from imperial nobles from other lineages who continued to be just called *sula uksun*. The amount of financial support both groups received fell from 85 taels of silver and 42.5 piculs of rice per year in 1671 down to 36 taels and 22.5 piculs annually in 1703. See Hui-min Lai, *Tianhuang guizhou: Qing huangzu de jiécèng jiégòu yú jìngjì shēnghuó* 天潢貴胄: 清皇族的階層結構與經濟生活 (The Qing imperial lineage: its hierarchical structure and economic life) (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1997; reprint: 2009), 275-277.
83 *Sanzhī dāchen*, or the Junior Assistant Chamberlain of the Imperial Bodyguard, was a second-ranked position of the second degree that served in the Office of the Imperial Guards (*shìwèichù* 侍衛處). *San qīlāng*, or the Junior Adjutant, was the title of a hereditary position that served in the compounds of a Prince of the Blood.
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cashiered banner officials, and idle bannermen who were capable in this regard to immediately fill this need.\textsuperscript{84} Similarly, in Yongzheng 1.12.3 (Dec 29, 1723), the administrative offices of the Banner Commanders (\textit{baqi dutong}/gūsa be kadalara amban 八旗都統) needed more clerks to reproduce official documents. Yongzheng ordered low-ranking soldiers and idle bannermen who were proficient in their literary ability to serve as salaried interns in the offices.\textsuperscript{85} Besides the civil and military bureaucracy, the service idle bannermen could provide to the Inner Court as \textit{sula}, or short-term laborers, was also significant, especially because the demand for their labor over the course of a year was very uneven. The first lunar month of the year, for example, usually required the Imperial Household Department to hire more \textit{sula}, as there tended to be more large-scale rituals and festivities taking place that month compared to the rest of the year.\textsuperscript{86} The idle banner population was hence seen as important extra cogs that could be inserted into the Eight Banners system whenever some parts needed to be replaced, or new holes needed to be plugged.

As the Qing court operated under the assumption that the idle bannermen would be able to fill openings within its civil and military officialdom seamlessly, it expected them to maintain the skills necessary to do so. Hence, the court demanded that they should maintain their martial capabilities, especially in the areas of horseback riding and

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Shengzu Renhuangdi shengxun} 聖祖仁皇帝聖訓 (Edicts of the Kangxi Emperor), 23:3a. In \textit{Daqing shichao shengxun} 大清十朝聖訓 (Edicts of ten reigns during the Qing dynasty) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1965), 1:261.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Shizong Xianhuangdi shangyu baqi}: \textit{Shangyu qiwu yifu} 世宗憲皇帝上諭八旗：上諭旗務議覆 (Edicts from the Yongzheng Emperor to the Eight Banners: Edicts and Responses Regarding Eight Banners Affairs), 1.55b.
\textsuperscript{86} Rawski, \textit{Last Emperors}, 168-69.
archery that the Qing rulers considered to be the fundamental skills of the banner army, as well as their speaking, reading, and writing ability in the Manchu language. Even though they did not receive the full benefits that regular bannermen were endowed with, the idle bannermen were held up to the same standards as their brethren by the court, and placed under the same political and social restrictions. The Qing rulers saw the military and officialdom as the only viable career paths for all bannermen, including the idle, and saw fit only in having them develop skills that were relevant to these fields. The Yongzheng Emperor, for example, issued an edict in the first year of his reign (1722) that ordered that all idle Manchu bannermen who lacked knowledge in the Manchu language were to be given three years to learn it, or else they were forbidden from being selected for openings in the Eight Banners army.\(^87\) Although the idle bannermen did not receive permanent wages from the court, it nevertheless sought to take ownership over their livelihoods and careers on account that they still belonged to the Eight Banners.

By the start of the eighteenth century, however, it was already clear that there were not enough positions available in the Eight Banners bureaucracy to satisfy the number of bannermen that were looking state employment. While the Qing leaders stopped actively incorporating new groups of people into the Eight Banners as they did in the pre-conquest era, banner population nevertheless continued to rise at a rapid rate, both naturally and through other means such as adoption of civilian children into banner households. According to Mark Elliott’s calculation, by 1720 the number of bannermen living in Beijing reached around 600,000, double the amount of bannermen who entered

\(^87\) Shangyu baqi, 1.49a-49b.
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the city in 1644. Meanwhile, over this same period, the amount of civil and military positions available in the state bureaucracy did not, and could not, increase at a similar rate. While the Qing continued to expand in its frontiers into Dzungar and Tibetan lands, it was no longer engaged in a constant state of warfare as it did before the conquest of China, and the turnover rate of the Eight Banner army decreased significantly. As a result, the state could no longer provide enough jobs to satisfy all banner population. This meant that for many idle bannermen, their “idleness” was no longer a temporary state of being, but rather a much more permanent predicament. They could not find openings in officialdom, but also found it difficult to seek alternative means of living, as the state actively discouraged them from pursuing other trades and geared their education towards only skills that the state found useful. Lacking stable income, many idle bannermen began to have trouble financially in supporting the livelihood of themselves and their families.

The Qing Court and Eight Banners Livelihood Problem

By the end of the seventeenth century, the bannermen’s everyday life had changed drastically from the pre-conquest days. During the times of Nurhaci, most of the people who would become incorporated into the Eight Banners still mostly lived in rural environments. After 1644, however, most bannermen were resettled into or near large cities. They became an urbanized population, in the case of the capital bannermen even forbidden by the state to live forty li away from Beijing city. After living in their new environments for several decades, the bannermen’s lifestyle naturally changed greatly to

88 Elliott, Manchu Way, 117-118.
be more adapted to city life. Moreover, in the capital and in the garrisons across China, the bannermen lived in urban areas where most of the population was Han Chinese. Although the state tried to separate the bannermen and the civilians by segregating them into different parts of the cities, the bannermen depended on their Chinese neighbors to provide goods and services necessary to fulfill their daily needs, and hence could not avoid interacting with them. After several generations, for many of the bannermen who were born and raised in Beijing and the Chinese garrisons, their attachment to their Manchurian homeland and the customs, practices, and even the language of their ancestors gradually dwindled. They grew up speaking Chinese and attuned to the culture of their localities, so it was unsurprising that they would lose sight of the “Manchu Way.”

In particular, the means through which the bannermen made their living changed greatly before and after the conquest of China. At the turn of the seventeenth century, most Manchus subsisted on agriculture and hunting. After they were resettled into the cities, however, their direct connection to nature was cut off. At the beginning of the dynasty, the court allocated each male Beijing bannerman thirty mu or more of tax-exempt and inalienable land. The Qing rulers expected that by extracting their own income through land ownership, the bannermen would not have to be completely dependent on state stipends and grants to support themselves and their families. In addition, the court assumed that the garrison bannermen would also benefit from this arrangement through their family connections in the capital. However, given that the bannermen could not leave their abodes within the cities for prolonged periods other than for official duty, they could not farm the land on their own, and had to rent the land to Chinese tenants and hire supervisors to collect the revenue for them. As Mark Elliott has
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pointed out, this ended up being an untenable arrangement. Lacking direct oversight over their properties, the bannermen were frequently cheated by their overseers and could not effectively control their tenants. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most bannermen had lost their lands, which ended up on the open market or taken over by the supervisors.89 Unable to directly provide for their own subsistence, the bannermen had to rely on the court to provide for their living.

This economic condition was especially difficult for the idle bannermen, because they had no stable salary from the court to rely on. Given their banner status, they were still eligible for economic benefits such as special grants for “red affairs” (weddings) and “white affairs” (funerals), as well as other forms of social welfare such as disability support. These awards, however, were contingency measures that bannermen could not receive on a regular basis. The idle bannermen could find temporary work at the court as sula, but the pay was quite poor and they enjoyed no job security.90 They were still, however, placed under the same occupational constraints as any other bannermen, and were not given instructions or resources from the state that would allow them to pursue any other means of living. The court may one day promote them to a salaried position, but they had no way of predicting when that would happen. In the meantime, they had to somehow get by without the “iron rice bowl” that their brethrens in the Eight Banners enjoyed, often living as parasites by feeding off of family members that did receive

89 Elliott, Manchu Way, 192-93.
90 For example, the booi (bondservant) sula Yin Changbao 尹常保, who was arrested for murdering his nephew-in-law in 1744, was being paid one tael of silver per month and two piculs of rice every quarter of a year. See Laiboo 来保, routine memorial, 30 July 1744, 02-01-07-04656-006, First Historical Archives of China (FHAC), Beijing, China.
stipends from the court. Many of them fell into poverty, surviving only by accruing more and more debts.

The Qing court already began to notice signs of financial difficulties among the Eight Banners population within thirty years of the founding of the dynasty. In the twelve year of Kangxi (1674), the emperor found that there were many Manchus who were living in poverty and with heavy debt. The Kangxi Emperor found this development to be incredulous, wondering how during the pre-conquest years under his ancestors Nurhaci and Hong Taiji, the bannermen were able to fulfill their official duties of going out to war or on hunts without ever incurring debts or failing to provide for their livelihoods. The emperor pinned the blame on their profligate lifestyle choices, pointing to the current bannermen’s leisure pursuits, such as gambling and visiting theaters, as the sources of their poverty. After lecturing the bannermen on the virtue of frugality, the Kangxi Emperor tried to alleviate this problem by giving idle Manchus positions in the army to provide them with stable income. This Kangxi edict exhibited the general pattern that many subsequent decrees from Qing rulers would follow when they discuss the bannermen’s financial troubles, in which they would point to their lazy and profligate lifestyle as the cause of their troubles, and then remind them of their ancestors’ frugal way of life and demand the current bannermen to follow their forebears’ example.

When the Yongzheng Emperor succeeded his father, he also took notice of the fact that because “the Manchu population has over-flourished and there [were] too many excess male adults,” many idle bannermen “who could not put on armor and did not

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91 *Shengzu shengxun*, 6:1b-2a, 1:76-77.
receive stipends had fallen to destitution and could not feed their families.”92 He continued to provide the bannermen with one-time lump sum rewards and promotions like his father did, but he also began to adopt much more drastic and large-scale measures. First, he revamped the “interest-bearing silver” (shengxi yinliang/forgošome madabure menggun 生息銀兩) program to help bannermen attain financial self-sustainability through investments and business ventures, and provide social welfare to those in financial difficulty without burdening the state treasury. Introduced in 1671, this fund originally functioned as a loan from the court to state officials or state-sponsored merchants to assist them in buying or selling goods for the state.93 The Yongzheng Emperor changed this system to make the general bannermen the main recipient and beneficiary of this fund. In the first year of his reign (1723), he sent 900,000 taels of silver as “interest-bearing silver” to the Manchu and Mongol banners as well as the Imperial Household Department, and he would expand this program in 1729 to include the garrisons and the hanjun. Although the main intended purpose of this fund was to provide financial assistance to bannermen for weddings and funerals, the Yongzheng

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92 QDBQTZ, 36:10a-14a, 9:3337-3345.
93 Wei Qingyuan 韋慶遠, “Kangxi shiqi dui ‘shengxi yinliang’ zhidu de chuchuang he yunyong: dui Qingdai ‘shengxi yinliang’ zhidu xingshuai guocheng yanjiu zhiyi” (The initial foundation and functioning of the “interest-bearing silver” system during the Kangxi period: study of the rise and fall of the “interest-bearing silver” system during the Qing dynasty, Part 1), Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu, no. 3 (1986): 60-69. Cao Xueqin’s grandfather Cao Yin was one of the officials who were constantly awarded the “interest-bearing silver” by Kangxi, which partially fuelled the rapid rise to wealth and prominence of his family. The inability of his successors to complete the interest payments, however, together with the change from Kangxi’s lax attitude towards repayment of debt to the state to Yongzheng’s much more stringent approach, explains the family’s quick downfall.
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Emperor allowed the banner officials in the capital and in the garrisons to invest parts of the fund in real estate and businesses, including pawn shops, in order to bear interests. This system was designed not only to allow each banner to maintain a stable and sustainable source of income that could provide for the social welfare of its people, but also to prevent the bannermen from accruing debt from the Chinese and limit the outflow of silver from the Eight Banners to civilian merchants.

Beyond providing them with extra income, the Yongzheng Emperor also tried to open more employment opportunities for the idle bannermen by greatly expanding the number of Eight Banners positions available. A year after he reformed the “interest-bearing silver” program, the emperor also ordered the establishment of a permanent reserve force, the “trainee soldiers” (yangyu bing/hūwašabure cooha 養育兵). He decreed that from each of the Eight Banners, 460 Manchus, 60 Mongols, and 120 hanjun, adding up to a total of 5,120 bannermen, were selected for this supernumerary force, with the Manchus and the Mongols each receiving 3 taels of silver each month as stipend, and the hanjun each receiving two taels per month. At this time, there was little strategic need for the state to expand the banner army to this extent. The Qing forces were engaged in a long continuous campaign against the Dzungars in the northwest, but there was no pressing need for more manpower. Moreover, if the court needed more soldiers to replace those fallen on the front lines or increase the size of the frontier forces, they could

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94 Wei Qingyuan, “Yongzheng shiqi dui ‘shengxi yinliang’ zhidu de zhengdun he zhengdu yanbian: dui Qingdai ‘shengxi yinliang’ zhidu xingshuai guocheng yanjiu zhi’er” 雍正時期對“生息銀兩”制度的整頓和政策演變: 對清代“生息銀兩”制度興衰過程研究之二 (The revision and evolution in policy of the “interest-bearing silver” system during the Yongzheng period: study of the rise and fall of the “interest-bearing silver” system during the Qing dynasty, Part 2), Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu, no. 3 (1987): 30-44.
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directly promote the idle bannermen. Nevertheless, the Yongzheng Emperor believed that under this system, the Eight Banners would have better chance finding “talented people,” and “idle men could also acquire more experience.”

These measures, however, did not offer an immediate solution to the problem of Eight banners livelihood, and within a few years, the Yongzheng Emperor became frustrated by the lack of improvement. In the fourth month of the fifth year of his reign (1727), he issued an edict berating the bannermen for their lifestyle choices. He began by claiming that the “original disposition” (suxing 素性) of the Manchus, in the days when their ancestors roamed Manchuria, was “pure and unsophisticated” (chunpu 淳樸), and at that time everybody was able to provide for themselves even during wars or hunts without any problem. The current bannermen, however, would only depend on state stipends to supply their daily expenditures. Despite the emperor’s repeated instructions and warnings, these people continued to lead profligate, extravagant lifestyles, flaunting state regulations to sell their rice salaries and purchase luxuries such as meat, wine, and expensive clothing, instead of saving their incomes in anticipation of days of need. This has led many of them to their current predicament, where their entire households were sunk into poverty, unable to fulfill their basic needs. The emperor pointed out that even the Chinese were able to maintain frugality in their daily lives and could plan their spending, so that the poor families could get by day to day without struggling to the extent that the bannermen did.

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95 Qinding baqi tongzhi, 36:10a-14a, 9:3337-3345.
96 Shizong Xianhuangdi shengxun 世宗憲皇帝聖訓 (Edicts of the Yongzhen Emperor), 26:3a-b. In Daqing shichao shengxun, 2:309-310.
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The Yongzheng Emperor highlighted that during the Kangxi reign, his father had at first passed out to bannermen who were living in debt over 5,415,000 taels in total, such that each family would receive several hundred, yet within one or two years these bannermen had completed wasted all this money on extravagances. He then granted them another large award of over 6,554,000 taels in total, with the same outcome. When he succeeded the throne, the Yongzheng Emperor himself claimed to have provided the bannermen with over 35.6 million taels of silver in sum up to then as rewards outside of their regular salary, and each time they would waste the court’s bestowment on food and drinks within a couple of days. He pointed out that this financial arrangement was untenable, and the bannermen must make changes in their daily lives to eliminate the decadent habits they had picked up. These “evil practices” include indulging in alcohol, gambling, visiting theaters or playhouses, engaging in quail fighting, cockfighting, and cricket fighting, as well as collecting expensive luxury items such as brass wares. He claimed that all of these practices had been banned for the bannermen by his father and himself many times, and unless the bannermen obey these imperial decrees, it would not be financially feasible for the state to continue to provide for their livelihood. He urged all banner officials and soldiers, as well as all idle bannermen, to obey his instructions.97

In this edict, the Yongzheng Emperor showed that he understood that the Eight Banners had grown so bloated that the court could not continue to offer the bannermen the same level of financial assistance without depleting its treasury. By his reign, the court was spending twenty to twenty-five percent of state revenues to pay for the living

97 *Shizong shengxun*, 12b-14b.
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expenses of less than two percent of the total population of the empire. In the eyes of the emperor, the script was completely flipped: rather than the bannermen serving and safeguarding the state, the state was catering to the whims of the bannermen. In particular, in the case of the idle bannermen, the state was granting rewards and creating new positions for a group of people who performed no or negligible duty for the it. This situation led the Qing rulers to pay more attention to the lifestyle choices of the bannermen, as they blamed their leisure activities as the cause of their fiscal intemperance. The Yongzheng Emperor believed that instead of wasting their life idling around in theaters and gambling houses, or fooling around with roosters and quails, the idle bannermen should “learn literary or martial skills” that were in his view much more productive use of their time and energy. It was hence in context of the “Eight Banners Livelihood Problem” that the “idleness” of the idle bannermen became a political problem for the Qing court.

When the Qianlong Emperor succeeded his father, he tried to continue the Yongzheng Emperor’s policy of opening the state treasury to help out bannermen who were heavily in debt at first. In eighth month of the first year of his reign, the new emperor granted a one-time loan of a year worth of stipend to all banner officials and soldiers. A year later, however, in an edict promulgated in the 9th month, the emperor pointed out that upon the implementation of this policy, the capital immediately witnessed inflation and rise in sales prices. In the edict, the Qianlong Emperor blamed the “treacherous” merchants of hiking up the prices, spoiling his good intentions of

98 Elliott, _Manchu Way_, 310-311.
99 _Shangyu baqi_, 1.57b.
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safeguarding the livelihoods of the bannermen in their chase for more profits.\textsuperscript{100} It was more likely, however, that many capital bannermen, who would have gotten this news much quicker than the ordinary civilians, immediately went on spending sprees in anticipation of this unexpected windfall, and rapidly drove up the price of money and merchandise in Beijing as a result. The failure of such measures to affect any long-term change to the bannermen’s financial troubles eventually led the Qianlong Emperor to take the opposite approach, focusing instead on shrinking the size of the Eight Banners so as to curtail state spending in this area and create openings for those who remained in the system.

As detailed in \textit{The Manchu Way}, the process of restructuring the banner registration system already begun during the Yongzheng reign, but it was the Qianlong Emperor who pushed this plan into full motion. The fundamental conceit of this operation was a reinterpretation of Manchu identity, in which one’s genealogical descent came to be used as the key element in distinguishing the “real Manchus” from the imposters who had interloped into the banner ranks. Under the emperor’s auspices, the court compiled comprehensive genealogical works such as the \textit{Comprehensive Genealogy of the Eight Banner Manchu Clans} (\textit{Baqi Manzhou shizu tongpu 八旗滿洲氏族通譜}). The credibility of one’s “Manchuness” came to be directly linked to how far back one could trace one’s genealogy to the founding period of Manchu history, while those who could not go very far were targets for the Qianlong Emperor’s purges.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Qianlong chao shangyu dang}, 1:218.
\textsuperscript{101} Elliott, \textit{Manchu Way}, 326-329.
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The first groups to go were those who belonged to the “secondary household status” of the banner ranks, such as the “separate-register households” (lingji dang’an hu 另記檔案戶) and “entailed households” (kaihu 開戶). These households descended from people who entered the Eight Banners through means such as adoption, which the court began to frown upon in the eighteenth century as it contributed to the overpopulation of the banner ranks. They were denied many of the basic rights that other bannermen enjoyed, such as the eligibility to take the translation examinations and enter officialdom through that route. Therefore, they were less capable of finding positions within the official bureaucracy, and much more liable to become idle bannermen. After issuing a series of edicts encouraging the secondary status bannermen to leave the Eight Banners on their own volition, in the twenty-first year of his reign (1756), Qianlong ordered “all separate-register, foster-son, and entailed households in the capital Eight Banners and in the outer garrisons be made forthwith to leave the banners and become commoners.”

After expelling the secondary status households, the Qianlong Emperor then took aim at the hanjun. As the last gūsa established in the Eight Banners, the Chinese banners always suffered poorer treatment than their Manchu and Mongol brethrens, enjoying lesser salary and financial rewards as well as only diminished forms of banner privileges such as legal immunities, lightened punishments, examination quotas, and participation in state rituals and hunts. Their ethnic connection to the Chinese civilians was viewed with suspicion, and they quickly developed a reputation for being the quickest to lose their martial capability and embrace the degenerate, “soft” customs of the Han people. In

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102 Elliott, Manchu Way, 329-333.
103 Elliott, Manchu Way, 77-78.
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1742, the Qianlong Emperor issued an edict in which he recognized that many members of the Chinese Eight Banners had become idle bannermen who were prevented from leading providing for their own livelihood like their Chinese civilian relatives due to their banner status, and as a result had to lead an idle life. Recognizing their “Chinese origin,” the emperor “allowed” the Chinese bannermen who entered banner ranks after 1644 to re-register their native place and “return” to civilian life. This was followed by a gradual process of “repatriation,” which led to ten thousand to fifteen thousand Chinese bannermen expelled from the Eight Banners. These purges brought down the banner population in the Qianlong reign drastically, creating openings in the banner bureaucracy for those who were idle but still classified as proper bannermen under the new state definitions to fill.

In Mark Elliott’s view, this policy saved the Eight Banners system from becoming too expensive for the Qing state to support and contributed to its resilience in surviving for another century until the dynasty itself collapsed. Yet it did not offer a permanent solution to the “Eight Banners Livelihood Problem,” only temporarily alleviating its deleterious consequences for a limited period. While many secondary status and Chinese bannermen were taken off the Eight Banners registers, these categories continued to exist. Because the court did not do much to prevent civilians from continuing to use methods such as adoption to enter the Eight Banners, within a few generations those categories were filled up with new members. During a similar reexamination of the banner ranks in the first year of the Daoguang reign (1821), the Manchu bannerman Mucihiyun (whose life will be the focus of the next chapter) confessed that he was actually born into a Han

104 Elliott, Manchu Way, 335-342.
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Chinese family but adopted into a Manchu household. He was then reclassified as a separate register household bannerman. By the start of the nineteenth century, the population of the Eight Banners, which the Qianlong Emperor had brought down to more manageable levels, quickly rose up again, and the Qing emperors and officials had to continue to scramble for new solutions.

At this point, the idle bannermen had fully transformed from a useful source of reserve manpower to an entrenched nuisance to the Qing rulers. There were no longer enough positions within the official bureaucracy to justify keeping such a large population in reserves and providing for their livelihood, doing nothing useful in their eyes, especially given that the court had even invented new positions such as the “trainee soldiers” just to provide some form of work for them. Yet the court was also unwilling to consider the alternative, which was to allow the bannermen to freely pursue other occupations outside of officialdom and military. Although they were willing to provide temporary relief to bannermen who were currently in financial trouble, the Qing rulers were not willing to break the system for the bannermen’s sake. They were intent on keeping the Eight Banners “as a closed, elite community of conquerors,” despite the severe ramifications on both the court’s finances and the bannermen’s well being.

They clung on the notion that the bannermen were people of their gurun, and if they took away the privileges and restrictions that distinguished them from the civilians, they would become fully immersed into Chinese culture and become indistinguishable from the conquered populace.

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105 Mu Chen shi 穆陳氏, plaint, 1838, 03-3791-034, First Historical Archives of China, Beijing, China.
106 Elliott, Manchu Way, 311.
Voices for Stronger Reform of the Eight Banners

As the “Eight Banners Livelihood Problem” continued to worsen rather than improve despite the Qing rulers’ efforts, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there were increasingly more voices below that called for more radical reform of the Eight Banners. Both banner and Chinese officials saw the existence of a large group of people who lived as parasites off of state welfare as highly wasteful, and called for the court to put them on a more productive path. One idea that was constantly raised was to resettle the idle bannermen in the capital to newly opened lands in the northeastern and northwestern frontiers. Such proposals would directly contradict the law that forbade capital bannermen from living more than 40 li away from the capital area, and potentially distract them from their training in the Manchu language and the military arts. They would, however, remove many of those who were living off of the salaries of others in their household or clan from the capital, relieving the financial burden of those who would remain there. Moreover, this idea would send the bannermen to their ancestral homeland or places where the living conditions were similar, where they could be further removed from the debilitating influence of Chinese culture. This would allow them to lead their lives in closer fashion to how their forebears did two centuries or so ago, something that should appeal to the Qing rulers whose decrees constantly reminded the bannermen of the pure virtues and frugal lifestyle of the ancient Manchus. The emperors’ actual reactions to these proposals, however, tended to be quite mixed and oscillating. While they tended to be open to at least experimenting with this idea, they usually could not follow through with it in the end.
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According to Liang Shizheng 梁詩正 (1697-1763), the Vice Minister of the Board of Revenue, discussions concerning relocating capital bannermen already began under the Yongzheng Emperor’s auspices. Such proposals, however, began to appear more frequently during the Qianlong reign. In the second year (1737), the Manchu censor Šuhede 舒赫德 (1710-1777) submitted a memorial pointing out to the court that the only long-term solution to the Eight Banners Livelihood Question was to grant them land and property through which they could extract their own income. Acknowledging the failure of the Eight Banners land policy at the start of the dynasty, Šuhede recommended transplanting the capital bannermen to the open lands of Manchuria:

The lands of Mukden (Shengjing 盛京), Heilongjiang 黑龍江, and Ningguta 寧古塔 were places where our dynasty first rose to power, and the soil of these lands is fertile and rich. I hear that there are large tracts of open space there that could be reclaimed and cultivated. Although I understand members of the Eight Banners should not live scattered in rural areas, since this is the land of our foundation, it seems to me that there is no harm in resettling them there. Moreover, since there are already over ten thousand banner soldiers stationed in the capital, in addition to the several tens of thousand idle adult males who are also living here, not counting the elderly and disabled. Following this proposal, we not only do not have to worry about weakening the defense of the capital, but we could also send more able soldiers to help garrison these important lands, making this truly a win-win situation.

A similar proposal would be submitted three years later (1740) by the Chinese censor Fan Xian 范咸 (1723 jinshi), although in addition to Manchuria, he also recommended for the

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107 Liang Shizheng 梁詩正, “Baqi tunzhong shu” 八旗屯種疏 (Memorial concerning resettling the Eight Banners to cultivate reclaimed land), in Huangchao jingshi wenbian 皇朝經世文編 (Collected statecraft writings of the Qing dynasty), ed. He Changling 賀長齡 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2011), 1:366.
108 Šuhede 舒赫德, “Baqi kaken biandi shu” 八旗開墾邊地疏 (Memorial recommending using the Eight Banners to reclaim frontier lands), in Huangchao jingshi wenbian, 1:365.
idle banenmen to be sent to northerwestern areas such as Anxi Department 安西廳 in Gansu Province. Both memorials highlighted the significance for the bannermen to possess fixed property that they could inherit and pass down within their families, and the need for the bannermen to support their own livelihood so as to no longer burden the state.

In the sixth year (1741), the Qianlong Emperor agreed to test out this idea. Identifying two locations in Jilin 吉林 as suitable locations for resettlement, he sent officials to first scout the land, construct facilities, and purchase livestock to assist the bannermen in their process of relocation. After three years of preparation, from 1744 to 1745, the court ordered a thousand idle capital bannermen to be moved to Jilin. The result was disastrous. Within three years, a third of the land rewarded to them became deserted wasteland, a third of the houses awarded to them were burned down or damaged, and three-quarters of their cattle had already died. By the eighteenth year of Qianlong (1753), most of the settlers had deserted their land. The emperor tried to restart this project in the same year, this time sending contingent of two thousand bannermen to Jilin. The result, however, was largely similar, and Qianlong completely abandoned this plan by 1769.110

In the following reign, Faššan (Fa-shi-shan 法式善, 1753-1813), the Chancellor of the Directorate of Education (Guozi Jian jijiu 國子監祭酒), attempted to revive the bannermen resettlement policy, recommending to the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1820) in

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109 Fan Xian 范咸, “Baqi tunzhong shu” 八旗屯種疏 (Memorial concerning resettling the Eight Banners to cultivate reclaimed land), in Huangchao jingshi wenbian, 1:366.
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1799 that idle capital bannermen should be sent to the “fertile lands” of the northwestern territories where they could make their own living. He was, however, sharply rebuked by the emperor for this “extremely absurd” idea, which would “leave the capital bereft [of bannermen].” Perhaps the Jiaqing Emperor, through learning about the failures of his father’s attempts to implement this plan, did not wish to repeat the same mistakes. Faššan ended up being impeached for his efforts. Yet by the seventeenth year of his reign (1812), the Jiaqing Emperor had wavered from his original stance on this issue, and decided to implement another resettlement project on his own volition. In addition to transplanting idle bannermen to Jilin again, Jiaqing also planned to relocate unranked imperial nobles (sula uksun) to the old capital of Mukden. He died, however, before any of his plans came to fruition.

His son, the Daoguang Emperor (r. 1820-1850), took up this mantle. Under the leadership of Fugiyūn (1748-1834), the Garrison General of Jilin, the emperor approved of yet another colonization effort in Jilin around the garrison at Shuangchengbao 雙城堡. At the beginning, Fugiyūn asked for volunteers among the idle capital bannermen to go to Jilin. Much to his chagrin, however, only 28 households

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111 Qing renzong shilu, 56:1b-4a, 28:721-23. Jiaqing directly invoked the 40 li rule in his zhupi of the memorial from the Grand Council detailing their interrogation of Faššan afterwards. See Grand Councilors 軍機大臣, palace memorial, 29 December 1799, 04-01-13-0219-025, FHAC, Beijing, China. It was likely, however, the Jiaqing was already looking for an excuse to get rid of Faššan after hearing reports that he embezzled money while serving as a chancellor in the Directorate of Education. This was the year that Jiaqing purged Heshen and his cronies from the court, and the emperor may be extra sensitive to reports of financial malpractices from his ministers.

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volunteered, and most of them were not even the idle bannermen whom he was targeting. Subsequently, he had to request the court to order the banner commanders to enlist 200 households, by force if necessary, to be relocated to Shuangchengbao. While this settlement was able to persist for a longer time, and was hence a relative success compared to the previous efforts, there were still many deserters who escaped back to their home.

The resettlement plan hence never became a viable, long-lasting solution to the Eight Banners Livelihood Problem as their proponents thought it would be. The idle capital bannermen typically showed little interest in going along with this policy, and when they did they proved to be poor colonists more often than not. Under state regulation, the idle bannermen were like all others educated to be soldiers or officials. Since the foundation of the Qing dynasty, very few of them had to personally go into the fields and farm on their own, their lands usually tilled for them by civilian tenants and income collected for them by their supervisors. Moreover, by the nineteenth century, the capital bannermen had lived several generations in Beijing; all of their relationships and contacts were built within the confines of the capital region. The officials who proposed the resettlement strategy might have seen this as an opportunity for the idle bannermen to extricate themselves from their difficult financial situations in Beijing, and live in self-sufficiency without needing state intervention. To the bannermen, however, going along with this plan meant leaving behind all of their families and friends to go fend for themselves in a completely unfamiliar place through means that they were never properly

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113 Fugiyūn 富俊, copy of palace memorial (lufu zouzhe 錄副奏摺), 18 November 1826, 03-3388-047, FHAC, Beijing, China.
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trained in. As Fugiyūn complained in frustration in one of his memorials to the Daoguang Emperor, many idle bannermen refused the call to move because “Shuangchengbao did not currently have any theaters, playhouses, tea shops, and drinkeries, so they could not idle around as they pleased there.” Even when the court managed to coerce the bannermen to move to the locations they desired, they could do little to prevent them from escaping back to the capital within a generation or so. Unfortunately for the Qing rulers, they could not turn back the clock to transform the Manchus back to the hunter-gatherers and subsistence farmers that they once were in Nurhaci’s days.

Other officials recommended plans that involved making bannermen learn new trades and bringing them closer to the civilians, but the court swiftly shut down these proposals. In 1816, Censor Luo Jiayan 羅家嚴 submitted a memorial recommending that all bannermen should learn how to spin and weave so they could make a living through that skill. The Jiaqing Emperor rebuked instead that “all bannermen should observe learning the Manchu language, horse-riding, and archery as their fundamental duties,” and any other pursuit should be considered secondary and unnecessary. For them to “engage in spinning and weaving and abandon horse-riding and archery, and furthermore indulge in the pursuit of petty profits, this will lead to them becoming merchants and leave [the capital] one after another.” To Jiaqing, this would betray the original mandate of the capital bannermen as an elite force stationed permanently at the capital. Luo was

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114 Fugiyūn 富俊, copy of palace memorial (lufu zouzhe 錄副奏摺), 18 November 1826, 03-3388-047, FHAC, Beijing, China.
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summarily cashiered, and Jiaqing warned that if Luo were a bannerman, he would have
suffered forty beatings and then been exiled to Ili.\textsuperscript{115}

Five years later, in 1821, the Kashgar Councilor Ulungga 武隆阿 (d. 1835)
submitted a secret memorial, pointing out that the Qing government’s policy of providing
extra subsidies and opening new military posts for bannermen had made no noticeable
improvement in the “Eight Banners livelihood problem.” They had only encouraged the
bannermen’s idle and indolent ways, and drained the state’s revenue. “Even if [such
policies] could alleviate the present conundrums, they would not have everlasting
effects,” Ulungga stated. The only long-term solution, he believed, was to make them
earn their own living, and the only way to achieve that was to disperse them, so they
could not live together and feed off each other’s bad habits. He recommended periodic
rotations between the capital and garrison bannermen, as well as inserting a large amount
of bannermen into the Green Standard armies. He thought that by making the bannermen
live closer to or among the civilians, they would eventually learn about and adopt more
productive ways of life.\textsuperscript{116} In this proposal, Ulungga went a step further than Luo Jiayan,
essentially calling for a full reconfiguration of the Qing military system and the fusion of
the Eight Banners and Green Standards, suggesting a eventual diminishment of the
boundaries between bannermen and civilians. The Daoguang Emperor was just as
receptive of his memorial as Jiaqing had been of Luo Jiyan’s proposal, and Ulungga was
heavily reprimanded as a result.\textsuperscript{117} In their dismissals of both Luo and Ulungga’s

\textsuperscript{115} Qing renzong shilu, 324:8a-9b, 32:277.
\textsuperscript{116} Ulungga 武隆阿, copy of memorial, 20 November 1821, 03-2843-45, FHAC, Beijing,
China.
\textsuperscript{117} Yinghe 英和, secret palace memorial (zhupi zouzhe 碣批奏摺), 8 December 1821, 04-
01-01-0614-001, FHAC, Beijing, China.
proposals, the Qing court showed that as much as it was concerned with the livelihood problems of the common bannermen, it was even more interested in preserving the façade of the Eight Banners as an elite military force paid for and fully controlled by the state. The Eight Banners was too valuable as a symbol of power for the Qing state to abandon for the sake of the individual bannermen.

This fundamental belief in preserving the Eight Banners system, however, would become heavily shaken throughout the nineteenth century from the beginning of the Opium War (Daoguang 19, or 1839) onwards. During this period, the long era of peace that lasted through the entire eighteenth century was interrupted by the invasion of Western Powers and a long, torturous civil war against the Taiping rebels. Despite their reputation at that point as indulgent wastrels whose martial ability had degenerated, the Eight Banners soldiers actually battled well against unfavorable odds. The banner soldiers under the command of the Khorchin Mongol general Sengge Rinchen僧格林沁 (1811-1865), for example, were able to successfully defeat the northern expedition army of the Taiping rebels, and repel the British-French joint forces at the Second Battle of the Dagu Forts (Dagukou 大沽口) in 1858 during the Second Opium War. These wars nevertheless left debilitating effects on the bannermen’s daily lives. Many of the garrisons in cities in Southeast China suffered tremendous losses at the hands of the Taiping rebels. The economic destruction caused by the rebels and the heavy indemnities imposed on the Qing court by the Western Powers and Japan after each successive defeat greatly depleted the state treasury. Despite their valiant performances in battles, the Eight Banners became more and more outdated as an army as the Qing undertook reforms to Westernize its military capacity, especially with the creation formation of the New Army.
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under the command of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916). As the century rolled on, the court came under increasing pressure from reformers as well as its own treasury to introduce fundamental changes to the Eight Banners system.

During the Xianfeng reign (1850-1861), the imperial noble and high official Sušun 肅順 (1816-1861) recommended to the emperor to drastically reduce the bannermen’s stipends and force them to find ways to become more self-sufficient. He might have been able to implement this plan when the Xianfeng Emperor appointed Sušun on his deathbed as one of the eight-man regency council in 1861, if he was not immediately arrested in a coup by the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835-1908) and put to death. During his execution, bannermen infuriated by his proposal threw bricks at him and applauded his decapitation.\(^\text{118}\) His efforts may have had some lasting effects, however, because in 1863 the court began to lift its restrictions on bannermen seeking other occupations.\(^\text{119}\)

Calls for further reforms of the Eight Banners intensified during the Hundred Days Reforms in 1898. Zhang Yuanji 張元濟 (1867-1959), a recent appointee to the Zongli Yamen 總理衙門, submitted a memorial to the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875-1908), advocating for the removal of the bannermen’s legal privileges, the end of social and occupational segregation of the civilians and the bannermen, the abolition of the diarchy in officialdom where all positions maintained separate slots for Manchu and Han officials, the gradual phasing out of the bannermen’s stipends, and the establishment of Western-style vocational schools for bannermen. Zhang’s views were shared by another

\(^\text{118}\) \textit{QSL}, 387:18a
\(^\text{119}\) Elliott, \textit{Manchu Way}, 311.
memorial submitted by Yuan Chang 袁昶 (1846-1900) at around the same time. These proposals attacked the fundamental tenets of the Eight Banners system, as conceived by the Qing rulers since the start of the dynasty. They would erase the qi-min dichotomy that distinguished the bannermen as the elite ruling class and remove the Qing court’s control over their livelihoods. It was also clearly, however, a straightforward way to release the idle bannermen from their parasitic way of life and find alternative means of living to support their own livelihood. The Hundred Days Reforms ended up collapsing after the conservative forces led, once again, by Cixi struck back. The Guangxu Emperor, who had been open to these suggestions, was placed under house arrest. Zhang was purged from his position and put in prison, while Yuan was executed in 1900 for his oppositions to the court’s sponsorship of the Boxers. After the end of the Boxers Rebellion, however, Cixi was forced to implement much of Zhang’s plans, erasing the different legal procedures for bannermen and civilians and permitting intermarriages between Manchu and Chinese. Yet to the very end of the dynasty, the Qing rulers could not abandon the Eight Banners system. The problem regarding how to support the idle bannermen would persist until (and even after, as will be seen in the conclusion of this dissertation) the dynasty itself has collapsed.

Conclusion

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When Nurhachi began his rise to power in Manchuria, he conceived of creating his own people with whom he would share a special, inseparable bond that would be stronger than their ties to their own clans, villages, or tribes. These people, who would become the bannermen, became Nurhachi’s professional army, in exchange for their ruler providing for the livelihood of themselves and their families. Using the Eight Banners system, the Manchus were able to rapidly convert recently conquered or surrendered populace into more soldiers to fight in their wars, or officials who could be used to fill out their newly constructed civil bureaucracy. To fuel their rapid expansion, the Manchus sought out to acquire more and more “idle” population to convert into their soldiers and workforce.

The Eight Banners system was pivotal in the creation of the Manchu race and country, and hence all subsequent Qing rulers would constantly repeat the common refrain of “the Eight Banners is the foundation of our state.”

After the conquest of China, the Qing court no longer tried to absorb the newly subjugated Chinese population into the Eight Banners, like it did to the various different groups of peoples of Manchuria prior to 1644. Instead, the bannermen were defined by the state through their differences compared to the Chinese civilians, living in separate parts of the city, enjoying different legal rights, and provided with different paths through which they could enter the state bureaucracy. The court established them as a hereditary aristocratic caste, whose offspring were in the court’s eyes destined to become members of the state. As the population of the Eight Banners would rapidly outgrow the number of official or military positions available to them, however, a increasing number bannermen, the xiansan or sula, would be shut out of officialdom and cut off from a regular source of income. These idle bannermen were still expected by the court to behave like any other
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member of the Eight Banners, training themselves in traditional Manchu martial abilities and the Manchu language in preparation for the day the court would promote them to salaried positions. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, that day would never come for many of them. The state had trapped them in a parasitic lifestyle, leading to many of them to fall into poverty.

The resulting “Eight Banners livelihood problem” would linger until the end of the dynasty, despite multiple attempts to solve it. The court tried both enlarging and shrinking the size of the Eight Banners ranks, hoping to find the right combination of policies that would establish a long-term solution without damaging the core tenets of the Eight Banners system. This aspiration, however, was continuously frustrated, as the majority of the court’s initiatives failed to have any lasting consequences. The Qing rulers continued to resist introducing more fundamental changes to the Eight Banners system, despite growing pressure from officials and intellectuals from both Manchu and Chinese ranks calling for more reform. To do so would require further blurring of the boundaries between the bannermen and civilians, a direction the court desperately sought to avoid until it had no choice but to follow in the last decades of the dynasty.

While the court hemmed and hawed at how to deal with the Eight Banners Livelihood Problem, the bannermen, seeing that they could no longer completely depend on the court for financial support, began to actively find their own ways to resolve their difficulties. They looked for alternative means of living outside of the official system, working around or even against state regulations that obstructed bannermen from seeking occupations outside of the officialdom and the military. From the Qing court’s perspective, these bannermen were doing nothing but idling around, because the court
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had defined “idleness” in context of the bannermen’s lifestyle as doing anything that did not contribute to their potential service to the state. As the next chapter will show, however, to the bannermen themselves, the line between “work” and “idleness” was not as clear cut as the court believed.
Chapter 3: Surviving Daily Life: The Bannermen’s Economic Struggles and Leisure

Life of Debt and Leisure

On the first day of the second month in the eighth year of Daoguang (March 16, 1828), Mucihiyan (Mu Qixian 穆齊賢), a bannerman who was serving as a steward (guanling 管領) to Miankai 綿愷 (1795-1838), Prince Dun of the First Rank 惇親王, took the thirty taels of silver he received as his bi-yearly stipend and converted that into cash at his local bank, receiving 76,200 wen in return. He immediately used that money to cover his numerous debts and expenditures. First, he sent twenty-four thousand wen to the rice-polishing shop (duifang 碓房) Baoxingju 寶興局 as interest payment. Next, he returned the 11,450 wen he owed to another duifang Sanshengdian 三盛店. 6,600 wen was set aside for rent. He then paid his debt of 2,800 wen to the restaurant Yangchunju 陽春居, 5,500 wen to the prepared meal store (hezipu 盒子舖) Jinlanzhai 金蘭齋, 4,000 wen to the general foods store Hongxinghao 宏興號, and 1,500 wen to another food shop Zhenchanghao 振昌號. Finally, he paid back his cousin Mu Henian 穆鶴年 2,000 wen, while still owing him 16,000. In total, 75,850 wen, or over 99% of his income for that half-year, were spent to cover his various debts. All he had left after these deductions to use for the next six months were 350 wen, barely enough to pay for his expenditures in one day. 121

121 Sūngyun 松筠 [Mucihiyan 穆齊賢], Siyan cuwang lu meng 閑窗錄夢 (Recorded dreams of Xianchuang), trans. Zhao Lingzhi 趙令志 and Guan Kang 關康 (Beijing:
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The financial plight of Mucihiyan was emblematic of the so-called “Eight Banner Livelihood Problem,” which, as shown in the previous chapter, became a major political and financial crisis for the rulers of the Qing dynasty from the eighteenth century onwards. Despite the court’s numerous efforts to improve the bannermen’s livelihood, as time went on more and more of them fell into poverty and had to rely on accruing heavy debt, as Mucihiyan did, in order to support their families. The Qing emperors believed that they have done all they could on their end to alleviate their banner subjects’ financial hardships, and insisted that the bannermen should learn to help themselves by living responsibly and frugally. According to the court’s vision, the ideal bannerman was one who would not squander his time on drinking or gambling and accrue heavy debt to pay for his extravagances, instead focusing his energy on refining their archery and horseriding skills and studying the “national language.” The Qing rulers expected all bannermen to behave according to this ideal image in their everyday lives, but beyond repeatedly reprimanding them through edicts or punishing them whenever they were caught stepping too far out of line, the court had no means to police the bannermen’s daily activities to ensure that they would fall in line with that vision.

From the perspective of common bannermen like Mucihiyan, their most pressing concern was to secure enough income to feed themselves and their families on a daily basis. Many of them found their stipends to be insufficient to fulfill their essential needs, despite what the Qing court believed. They needed to find alternative sources of income to supplement their state salaries. However, because they were educated under the

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Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2011), 13-14. For the original Manchu text, see Xianchuang, 331-32.
government’s directives to become soldiers, officers, or bureaucrats, these poverty-stricken bannermen found it difficult to pursue careers outside of state service. Given that the state actively discouraged them from developing skills in other trades and set up obstacles to prevent them from doing so, the bannermen found themselves at a severe disadvantage when competing for jobs against Chinese civilians outside of the military and officialdom. Their lack of knowledge of the market also made them prime targets for extortion and fraud by Chinese merchants. Under these dire circumstances, they had to resort to more creative tactics to secure different forms of financial support. Although they did not intentionally attempted to rebel against the Qing court, these bannermen were willing to engage in activities that were frowned upon by the court or even against the law in order to earn a living.

This chapter illustrates the financial struggles of common bannermen such as Mucihiyan and how they tackled their problems from their own perspective. In particular, I will focus on how bannermen in Beijing used their leisure activities to establish potentially financially lucrative relationships. The Qing court constantly berated the bannermen for the costly ways in which they made use of their idle time, considering many of the leisure activities that bannermen engaged in as frivolous and pernicious extravagances. For the bannermen themselves, however, these leisure activities had become not just sources of personal pleasure, but also entrenched routines in their social relations with their peers. Since they could no longer count on their official salaries to pay for their daily needs, they needed to find ways to augment their incomes elsewhere. Visiting playhouses and theaters and engaging in frivolous literary activities not only brought them joy and relaxation, but they were communal activities that were significant
in reinforcing their relationships with their friends and family, and establish and consolidate each of their personal standings among their peers. For the bannermen, such idle pleasures formed the basis for mutual reliance and assistance in times of need.

**Income Disparity and Social Stratification Within the Eight Banners**

Throughout the Qing dynasty, when the emperors addressed the Eight Banners, they often emphasized that all bannermen belonged to a single *gurun*. The meaning of this term ranged from “people” to “country” to “dynasty.” It signified that the bannermen were all part of a single collective that stood apart from those who did not belong within this *gurun*, most significantly the *nikan* or the Chinese civilians. One of the primary characteristics that distinguished the bannermen from the civilians was that they were people who “ate the emperor’s rice.” As stated in the Yongzheng Emperor’s admonishment to the scions of the Eight Banners in verse:

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\begin{align*}
& suwende boo usin šangnafi. \\
& biyadari menggun bele buhe. \\
& tarirakū bime jererenge baha. \\
& jodorakū bime eturengge baha. \\
\end{align*}
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[We] bestowed to you your abodes and your fields, 
Granted you silver and rice every month. 
So that you are able to eat food without having to cultivate it, 
And able to wear clothing without having to weave it. 

The fact that the bannermen’s livelihood depended on the stipends they received from the Qing court established a special relationship between the emperor and the Eight Banners.

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The bannermen could focus on dedicating their service to the state thanks to the financial safety net the court created, and the court in turn could count on the bannermen’s loyalty and maintain absolute control over its premier military force.

Yet within the Eight Banners system, members of the gurun were not all treated equally. In fact, the Eight Banners functioned as a clearly delineated sociopolitical hierarchy, such that those at the very top of pyramid earned much higher income from the state and enjoyed many more privileges than those at the very bottom. Regarding the bannermen’s stipend, it had two components, a monetary salary remunerated in silver and a grain salary received in rice. At the very top of the food chain were the “main line” imperial nobles (zongshi/uksun 宗室), who were the direct descendants of Qing founder Nurhaci’s father Taksi and bear the surname Aisin Gioro. During the Qianlong period, among the main line nobles, there were twelve main ranked hereditary titles, and each ranked title was further divided into various classes. Nobles with the highest title, the “prince of blood of the first degree” (heshuo qinwang/hošoi cin wang 和碩親王), received 10,000 taels of silver and 5,000 piculs of rice every year. Those with the lowest title, the “noble of the imperial lineage of the twelfth rank” (feng’en jiangjun/kesi be tuwakiyara janggin 奉恩將軍, received 110 taels of silver and 55 piculs or rice every year. Beneath them were the “unemployed imperial nobles” (sula uksun), who, as

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124 For common banner soldiers, their stipend is collectively called cianliang/ciyanliyang 錢糧. Individually, the silver salary is called bingxiang 兵餉, while the grain salary is called xingliang 行糧 when the soldiers are on a campaign and zuoliang 坐糧 when they are not. For officers and ranked officials, the silver salary is referred to as fengyin 俸銀, and the grain salary is referred to as fengliang 俸糧.

125 For complete list of the amount of stipend earned by each level of nobility, see Guo Songyi 郭松義, “Qing zongshi de dengji jiegou yu jingji diwei” 清宗室的等級結構與
Chapter 3: Bannermen’s Economic Struggles and Leisure

mentioned before, were members of the imperial family who were not able to inherit any titles. They also received remunerations from the court, but at a much lower annual rate than the ranked imperial nobles. As for banner nobility not part of the main-line imperial lineage, those who hold the highest regular title, “duke of the first degree” (gong/gung 公), received 700 taels of silver and 350 piculs of rice per year, while those who hold the lowest regular title, the yunqiweituwašara hafan 雲騎尉, received 85 taels and 42.5 piculs annually.

For bannermen without noble titles, the highest ranking military officers in the Eight Banners system, the banner commanders (dutong/gūsa be kadalara amban 都統) in the capital and the garrison generals in the provinces (jiangjun/jiyyanggiyün 將軍), received 180 taels of silver and 90 piculs of rice annually. Below them, the captains

經濟地位 (Stratification, structure, and economic status among the Qing imperial lineage), in Li Zongqing and Guo Songyi, eds., Qingdai huangzu renkou xingwei he shehui huanjing 清代皇族人口行為和社會環境 (Demographic behavior and social environment of Qing imperial lineage) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1994), 116-117, and Hui-min Lai, Tianhuang guizhou: Qing huangzu de jieceng jiegou yu jingji shenghuo 天潢貴冑:清皇族的階層結構與經濟生活 (The Qing imperial lineage: its hierarchical structure and economic life) (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1997; reprint: 2009), 268. According to Lai’s citation, the source of these figures is the Zongrenfu zeli 宗人府則例 (Statutes of the Imperial Clan Court) from the Guangxu period.

126 They are not to be confused with the regular xiansan/sula. In 1782, Qianlong decreed that all sula uksun who were direct descendants of Kangxi were to be dressed in the official regalia of fourth-ranked officials, even though they did not hold any actual titles. They were known as the “fourth rank imperial nobles” (sipin zongshi 四品宗室), distinguishing them from imperial nobles from other lineages who continued to be just called sula uksun. The amount of financial support both groups received fell from 85 taels of silver and 42.5 piculs of rice per year in 1671 down to 36 taels and 22.5 piculs annually in 1703. See Lai, Tianhuang guizhou, 275-277.

127 Liu Xiaomeng 劉小萌, Qingdai Beijing qiren shehui 清代北京旗人社會 (Banner society in Beijing during the Qing dynasty) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), 22.
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(zuoling/nirui janggin 佐領) received 105 taels and 52.5 piculs every year, while the lieutenants (xiaoxiaofunde bošokū 驍騎校) received 60 taels and 30 piculs every year.\(^{128}\) As for the common Eight Banners soldiers, in the capital a cavalryman received 36 taels of silver and around 23 piculs of rice annually, while a foot soldier received 18 taels and around 11 piculs annually.\(^{129}\) Garrison bannermen received less silver salary, but were given a greater amount of grain provision.\(^{130}\) Finally, at the very bottom of the pyramid were the *sula* or “idle bannermen,” who did not hold any permanent position within the official or military bureaucracy. As described in the previous chapter, these people had no “iron rice bowl” of their own, and in general had to feed off other members of their household who did receive stipends from the court in order to survive.

In addition to the regular stipends, bannermen also received other forms of remunerations from the court. Each of the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese banners were budgeted a set amount of silver every month reserved for the purpose of helping their men defray the costs of weddings and funerals.\(^{131}\) Each bannerman could apply for this special fund when such special occasions occur, the amount they received depending on their official ranks. Banner soldiers responsible for taking care of horses belonging to the


\(^{129}\) During the Shunzhi reign, the silver salary for a cavalryman and a foot soldier were initially set at two taels and one tael respectively. Their salaries were increased to the amount listed here during the Kangxi reign. See *BQITZCJ*, 29:1a-4a, 6:2029-35. See also Liu, *Beijing qiren shehui*, 44-45; Elliott, *Manchu Way*, 192.


\(^{131}\) The Manchu Banners received 700 taels, while the Mongol Banners received 300 taels. For the Hanjun, the upper three Banners received 300 taels as well, while the lower five Banners only received 220 taels.
state also received allowances to pay for horse feed. From the Yongzheng era onwards, all banner officials and officers were also eligible to receive the “nourishing honesty allowance” (yanglianyin/hanja ujire menggun), with the highest-ranking officers, the banner commanders, receiving 2,400 taels per year.\(^\text{132}\) Other forms of assistance include extra funding for soldiers on campaign, awards for achievements in battles, and disability support.

In addition to the income disparity, bannermen that belonged to higher orders in the Eight Banners social hierarchy, such as the Manchu and Mongol banners, enjoyed more political privileges than those that belonged to lower classes like the Chinese banners, bondservants, and secondary-status households. At the very top, nobles known as the “princes of iron cap” (tiemaowang 鐵帽王), whose ancestors provided exemplary service to the Qing founders, enjoyed perpetual inheritance of their titles. These positions were only open to Manchu and Mongol bannermen, as the hanjun could not be made dukes or princes after the Three Feudatories Rebellion.\(^\text{133}\) Throughout the Qing official and military bureaucracy, there were more positions available per capita for Manchu and Mongol bannermen than those that belonged to the other categories. Some elite military divisions, such as the imperial guard corps and the capital artillery division, only allowed Manchu and Mongol bannermen to join.\(^\text{134}\) Given such preferential treatment from the court, it was much easier for those that were members of the Manchu and Mongol


\(^{133}\) Elliott, Manchu Way, 334.

\(^{134}\) Elliott, Manchu Way, 334-335.
banners to maintain occupational and hence economic stability in their livelihoods than those that belonged to other categories.

For those at the top of the Eight Banners hierarchy, the damaging effects of the “Eight Banners Livelihood Problem” were barely felt under Qing rule, provided they could maintain their political status. Given their preferential treatment from the Qing court, the elite Manchu and Mongol clans could continuously sustain high levels of affluence and prestige for their family members from generation to generation, provided they could invest their considerable wealth wisely. For example, the Wanggiya (Wanyan 完顏) clan was one of the most significant Manchu families throughout the Qing dynasty, its lineage traced back to the ruling house of the previous Jurchen dynasty, Jin. It continued to maintain its prestigious status through making marriage alliances with other well-known families, including prominent Han Chinese families from the Jiangnan area. The clan dedicated much of its wealth to education, hiring prominent scholars to serve as private tutors for its scions and building a large library for them to use. This investment paid off spectacularly, as the Wanggiyans were able to achieve success in the imperial examinations and attain high-ranking positions in the officialdom in nearly every generation.\(^{135}\) For the privileged bannermen that were born into families like the Wanggiyan, they were given all the resources needed to attain lucrative positions in the Qing bureaucracy, so they would not have to worry about their daily livelihood.

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On the other end of the social spectrum, the lower-class citizens of the Eight Banners found it much harder to attain and hold on to any position within the officialdom or the military. Some of them were outright denied access to positions that would be readily available to other bannermen. As pointed out last chapter, the court considered those that belonged to the categories of “entailed households” and “separate register households” as interlopers in the Eight Banners system. From the Yongzheng reign onwards, these bannermen were forbidden from serving as regular soldiers in the Eight Banners. They were also denied the right to take the imperial translation examinations. For such bannermen, finding employment within the Qing state that provided them with sufficient income and job security to support their families’ livelihoods was a difficult task. Some of them had to accept assignments from the Imperial Household Department (Neiwufu 内務府), serving as clerks, laborers, or servants within the Inner Court or in the households of the princes. Many others could not find any sort of employment at all and had to fend for themselves in an “idle” state.

Late Qing Bannermen’s Financial Struggles

In one of his many zidishu 子弟書 (“bannermen tales”) works, the Daoguang era imperial clansmen and writer Helüshi 鶴侶氏 (real name Yigeng 奕菖) adapted the story of “The Man from the Qi State has a Wife and a Concubine” (“Qiren you yi qi yi qie” 齊人有一夫一妾) from the Confucian classic Mencius to allegorize attitudes toward

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136 Elliott, Manchu Way, 324-25.
137 Mucihiyan, as a “separate register” bannerman, pointed this out when he entered the examination compounds illicitly to take the translation examination for a regular household bannerman. See Siyan cuwang, 134 (Manchu 891-93).
poverty among the Eight Banners. In the original story, an ordinary man who lives with his wife and concubine would often come back home drunk. Whenever his spouses ask him where he had been, he would claim that he was partying with his rich and famous friends. Finding their husband’s stories suspicious, considering that none of these rich people ever came to visit their rather humble abode, the wife decides one day to secretly follow him around. She discovers that he has actually been begging for leftover food at various cemeteries.\textsuperscript{138} The \textit{Mencius} parable stopped at this point, but Helüshi provided a tragic ending to this tale: the wife and concubine promptly divorced the man, and he ended up starved to death.\textsuperscript{139} In the \textit{Mencius}, this story delivered a general message that the pursuit of wealth and fame often came at the cost of one’s dignity. Helüshi, whose numerous \textit{zidishu} covered various aspects of daily life as bannermen, used this story to instead reflect the substantial gap between expectations of how the bannermen should live and the reality of how many of them actually lived.

Throughout the dynasty, the Qing rulers constantly reminded their current generations of bannermen that their ancestors from Manchuria led a simple, frugal way of life, and beseeched them to follow the examples of Manchus of yore. The patterns of banner life, however, changed drastically after the establishment of the Qing Empire, except perhaps in the frontiers.\textsuperscript{140} During the pre-conquest era, the Jurchens/early

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{139} Helüshi 鶴侶氏 [Yigeng 奕賡], “Qiren you yi qi yi qie” 齊人有一夫一妾 (The Man from the Qi State has a Wife and a Concubine), in \textit{Menggu Chewangfu cang quben} 蒙古車王府藏曲本 (Lyrical texts found in the Mongolian Prince Che’s compounds), “Danchang guci” 單唱鼓詞 (Solo drum ballads), case 3, fascicle 65, 1a-5b.
\textsuperscript{140} Hence, it may not be a surprise that the only places where Manchu is still used in daily life today are located in Heilongjiang, the northernmost province of modern China.
\end{footnotesize}
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Manchus primarily subsisted through hunting and farming, deriving their livelihood directly from the land. Tribal warfare was a constant part of their lives, and they could attain extra wealth through loot. Once Qing rule was established in China, however, the majority of the bannermen was resettled inside or in the outskirts of strategically significant urban centers across China. They had henceforth become an urban people, even forbidden by the court from leaving their station for long periods of time. By the Qianlong era, they had been living in the capital or the garrison cities for several generations, and were only familiar with the customs and routines of city life. Hence, as shown in the previous chapter, when the Qianlong, Jiaqing, and Daoguang emperors tried to relocate capital bannermen back to Manchuria in a bid to return them to the pastoral lifestyle of their ancestors, most of them could not handle the transition and soon escaped back to their homes in Beijing.

During the conquest of China, the Eight Banners managed to appropriate large tracts of land in north China that used to belong to the Ming imperial family, officials, and loyalists. The confiscated land was redistributed among banner soldiers, and the Qing leaders assumed that the bannermen would be able to depend not only on their stipends for their livelihood, but also from their land allocation. Yet because the bannermen were stationed in the cities, they could not farm the land themselves. They had to find Han Chinese tenants to till the land for them, and hired *zhuangtou* 莊頭 (“estate heads”) to act as their bailiffs and collect rent for them.\(^{141}\) Because the bannermen could not be physically present at their estates often, the *zhuangtou* became the de facto landlords. Even though under Qing law banner land was inalienable, by the Yongzheng reign, half

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\(^{141}\) *Wakeman, The Great Enterprise*, 472-73.
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of the land owned by bannermen at the beginning of the dynasty was now under civilian control, most of which was acquired by former zhuangtou. Without any earnings from land ownership, the bannermen could only look to the state for financial support.

At the beginning of the dynasty, the bannermen were still able to lead a comfortable lifestyle using only their silver and grain stipends. Their financial safety net was the subject of envy of their Han Chinese neighbors, many of whom tried to find loopholes in state regulations to try to enter the Eight Banner registers themselves. During the early Qing, the bannermen could indulge in luxuries without compromising their basic livelihood. Yet after an initial period of tinkering, the amount of stipend each bannerman received at each level became permanently fixed in 1680. There was no attempt by the Qing court from that point onward to revise the stipends according to fluctuation of prices, making the bannermen extremely vulnerable to the negative effects of inflation. By the early nineteenth century, a bannerman like Mucihiyan, who earned a stipend equivalent to sixth-ranked officials, was struggling to cover the expenses of daily necessities with his salaries, as we will see below.

With their stipends increasingly inadequate in covering their basic expenditures, it might have been more lucrative for the bannermen to look for other economic opportunities outside of the Eight Banners. Liu Xiaomeng has pointed out that there were no specific statutes in Qing law that explicitly banned the bannermen from becoming merchants or artisans. Even though the court did repeatedly show disapproval towards

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142 Wakeman, Great Enterprise, 1:475.
143 Elliott, Manchu Way, 196. Their descendants would later become the secondary-status bannermen that the Qianlong Emperor tried to purge from Eight Banners ranks.
144 Elliott, Manchu Way, 196.
145 Liu, Beijing qiren shehui, 732.
allowing the bannermen to take up civilian professions (see Jiaqing’s rebuke of Luo Jiayan’s proposal to allow bannermen to learn to weave), there was no strict enforcement of this official stance, and the bannermen have shown on many occasions that they were very willing to go against the emperor’s wishes. Yet until the latter half of the nineteenth century, few bannermen pursued employment outside of what was provided within the official system. According to Ulungga’s secret memorial in the first year of Daoguang, “there are no past regulations that prohibit bannermen from becoming farmers, artisans, or merchants. That the bannermen do not engage in agriculture or trade is certainly due to the fact that they have no land or capital. It is, however, also caused by the fact that [at the start of the dynasty] every bannerman in a clan would serve either as officials and soldiers, and living off of their official salaries and stipends. They enjoyed luxurious lifestyles, and hence looked down upon such professions and refused to engage in them. As the years went by, this became their habit.”

The Kashgar councilor partly blamed the bannermen’s financial troubles on their own indolence and hubris. He also, however, pointed out that the state also certainly did not encourage the bannermen to follow that route, and did not provide them with any training or capital that would give them any competitive edge in the open market. In fact, because the court repeatedly emphasized the military and officialdom as the bannermen’s true callings, those were the life goals that most bannermen gravitated towards. Stipulations such as the prohibition against traveling away from the capital area for a long period added further constraints against this option, making it very difficult for the

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147 Ulungga, 03-2843-045.
bannermen to find work outside of the officialdom and the military even if they wanted to.

That did not mean that every bannerman did not try to do so. Due to their lack of ability, knowhow, and experience in the various trades, however, many found success in professions outside of the protection of the Eight Banners to be elusive. Consider, for example, the case of the late Qianlong era Manchu bannerman Mingfu 明福. Mingfu originally served as a guardsman at the gates of the Imperial Palace (hujun 護軍), but he was cashiered from his post due to dereliction of duty, which made him an idle bannerman (xiansan) and severed him from his stipend. He had already been kicked out of his family’s home due to his longstanding feud with his father, so he could not depend on his father’s stipend to survive. Unable to pursue other alternatives, Mingfu sold himself and his wife into servitude in the last month of the year Qianlong 54 (January 1790) for eight taels of silver with the help of two Chinese middlemen, an act that was strictly forbidden by the government. He performed so poorly as a servant, however, that two different masters kicked him out. He ended up accruing even more debts than before he started selling himself just to pay back his middlemen for their losses to these masters due to his misconduct.148

Due to his multiple failures, Mingfu decided then to instead sell only his wife, who was a Chinese bannerwoman of the Plain Blue Banner, into servitude. Even that plan went awry when, in a fit of drunken rage, he wandered to the mansion of his wife’s master and accidentally revealed the couple’s banner status, which led to his wife’s

148 Yunglang 永琅, et al., palace memorial, 3 August 1790, 05-0429-046, FHAC, Beijing, China.
dismissal. As a final resort, he had to sell his wife again to an official who was serving in
Shandong, far enough away that he could not somehow find another way to ruin this
opportunity. Yet he could not pay back the numerous debts to his middlemen for all the
previous botched deals, and foolishly filed a plaint against one of them, upon which he
was forced to reveal all of his transgressions to the state. As his punishment, Mingfu was
removed from the Eight Banner registers.\footnote{Yunglang, 05-0429-046.}

Mingfu was not the only example of bannermen who were willing to stoop as low
as selling themselves or members of their families. In the twenty-seventh year of
Qianlong (1762), an idle bannerman of the Plain White Banner named Liu Shuozi 劉碩
子 found himself in dire straits financially when he was ran away from his job as a printer
when his employer discovered that he did not actually know how to print books, then was
severely punished by the authorities when he was caught stealing someone else’s opium
pipe-bowl. He sold his brother’s widow and her two sons into the service of a Manchu
imperial guardsman for ten taels of silver, lying to him that they were civilians, but later
smuggled them out of their employer’s place after he discovered they were being
mistreated and could not stand living there. He was eventually arrested while trying to
come up with the money to pay back the buyer.\footnote{Yinlu 允祿, et al., palace memorial, 11 July, 1762, 05-0199-026, FHAC, Beijing, China.}

Another idle bannerman of the Plain White, Yang Lizhu 楊立柱, was fired from
his job at the kennels in the palace due to an argument with an eunuch, and failed to make
a living as a petty merchant. He sold himself and his wife in the thirty-third year of
Qianlong (1770) to a Manchu official for sixteen taels, but ran away after a year because
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they could not withstand their master’s harsh rules. They were soon caught by their owner’s son and brought to the authorities, where they revealed that they were bannermen.151

All these cases showed that when they were placed in desperate circumstances, there were plenty of bannermen who were willing to swallow their pride and take up demeaning jobs to survive. They were also willing to risk breaking the Eight Banners regulations to pursue opportunities that could improve their financial situation. Their upbringing, however, tended to shelter them from manual labor and mercantile matters, especially for those who came from more well off families. They did not have much familiarity with enduring hardship, which inevitably led to their failure in these endeavors. Whatever money they earned when they initially sold themselves and/or their family members were immediately used to settle their previous debts, yet their failures at handling even basic menial work only led to new debts coming their way.

The bannermen’s lack of experience and knowhow in the marketplace put the bannermen at a severe disadvantage in their commercial transactions with the Han Chinese. In the capital, because the Chinese merchants controlled access to all the basic resources that the bannermen need in their daily lives, there was no way they could avoid doing business with the Chinese. To even be able to spend the salary and eat the rice they received from the state, they needed to exchange what they received from the state for money they could actually use and food they could eat. The bannermen’s silver salary had to be converted into copper cash at local banks, known as qianzhuang 錢莊, before

151 Neiwufu Shenxingsi 内務府慎刑司 (Judicial Department of the Imperial Household), palace memorial, 5 September 1769, FHAC, Beijing, China.
they could be used in daily transactions. The rice they received from the state granaries had to be hulled at a *duifang* for it to be palatable to the bannermen’s particular tastes. As for all other foodstuffs, as well as water, clothing, furniture, utensils, and other necessities, these things also had to be procured from civilian merchants, because there were few bannermen-operated businesses. Moreover, whenever the bannermen needed cash on hand, they sought out Chinese merchants to ask for loans or pawn their belongings. For bannermen suffering dire financial circumstances, they often needed to borrow money from one merchant just to pay back a previous loan to another, leading to the dangerous practice of “eating next year’s food to satiate this year’s hunger” (*yinchimaoliang* 寅吃卯糧).  

Among the local merchants of Beijing, the ones that perhaps had the most impact on the bannermen’s lives were the *duifang* owners. The majority of these grain merchants originated from Shandong province, and they received state authorization to operate their businesses in the Inner City. Originally, the chief operation of these establishments was to exchange the coarse rice the state granary allocated to the bannermen for refined rice that they preferred to eat. Because they conducted so much business with bannermen, however, many *duifang* expanded beyond their typical commercial endeavors to offering loans to bannermen in need of financial assistance. As Liu Xiaomeng has discovered through examining surviving documents from Beijing *duifang*, the vast majority of their written pledges were concerned with monetary loans rather than grain transactions. In

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152 This was the idiom used by Lao She to describe how his family paid for their expenses during the twilight of the Qing dynasty. See Lao She, *Zhenghongqi xia*, 23.  
the diary *Siyan cuwang lu meng* mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, whenever the diarist Mucihiyan or any of his friends needed to take out a loan, instead of visiting banking institutions like *qianzhuang*, they would instead approach a *duifang* about this matter, attesting to the powerful influence of these shops on the capital bannermen’s lives.

**Means of Mutual Aid for the Bannermen**

Qing authorities were deeply uncomfortable with the bannermen’s high level of dependence on civilian merchants, and were concerned that these savvy and experienced businessmen were constantly taking advantage of gullible or desperate bannermen. In *Records of Sayings by One Hundred Twenty Elders*, Sungyūn 松筠 (1752-1835), a decorated Mongol banner official whose career spanned the reigns of Qianlong, Xianfeng, and Daoguang, pointed to the abuse suffered by the bannermen at the hands of Shandong merchants. In one of the stories that was purportedly told to him by a Manchu elder, he recounts that *duifang* owned by people from Shandong often kept too large a cut of the rice they received from the bannermen in their exchanges, and dismissed the customers’ complaints when the unfair nature of this practice were pointed out. The bannermen also often ran up debts at wine and meat shops opened by Shandong merchants, who would then constantly badger and ridicule those who could not pay back the money they owed.155 In this story, a virtuous lieutenant colonel of these bannermen’s

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regiment (canling/jalan-i janggin 參領) intervened. He called over all the banner families under his command and ordered them to stop eating meat and drinking wine, as well as consuming the coarse rice they directly received from the state granaries instead of exchanging them for finer rice from the duifang. By following his instructions, his subordinates were able to improve their financial well being, and were no longer in danger of falling victim to the Shandong merchant’s pernicious practices.156

In promoting stories like this, Qing leaders like Sungyūn showed that they preferred poor bannermen to turn to their own kin within the Eight Banners for help, rather than going outside and ask untrustworthy Chinese merchants for assistance. Sungyūn recognized that although the ideal would be for the bannermen to solve their own problems, as the Qing emperors often decreed that they should do, in reality many bannermen were so mired in their financial struggles that they were incapable of rescuing themselves. Sungyūn hence preached that the leaders within the banner system, including the commanding officer of every level of the banner hierarchy, from the captain to the lieutenant colonel to the banner commander, as well as the clan elders (zuzhang/mukūn i da 族長), should provide support for bannermen living under their authority. In addition to the lieutenant colonel mentioned above, the Record of Sayings of One Hundred Twenty Elders contained many stories of banner officers and elders taking the initiative to rally wealthier bannermen in the clan or company to provide assistance to those in dire financial straits and helping them repay their debts, then instructing these poor bannermen of the importance of practicing frugality and avoiding wasting money on excessive eating and drinking, idle social gatherings, and frivolous pursuits like songs

156 Sungyūn, Emu tanggū orin sakda, 3:27a-29b.
and operas, eventually leading them back to self-sufficiency.\(^{157}\) Through this collection of sayings and stories, which was originally written completely in Manchu and published with Chinese translation in 1809 (Jiaqing 14), Sungyūn promulgated the ideal that the Eight Banners should function as a giant family, and the banner officers at every level should behave like the patriarchs and have the duty of guiding those under their control to prosperity, while every bannerman should see each other as family members and be obligated to help those that were in need.

Yet how many of these virtuous officers and leaders described in *One Hundred Twenty Elders* actually existed throughout the Eight Banners? Given the overall trend of the continued deterioration of the “Eight Banners livelihood problem,” it seemed that the examples that Sungyūn raised were more likely to be isolated cases. In the Mingfu case, neither the lieutenant colonel of his regiment nor the captain of his company had any idea that one of their subordinates was in such a terrible fiscal state that he would consider selling himself and his wife to servitude. Both were severely censured and punished by the judicial department of the Imperial Household (Shenxingsi 慎刑司) for neglecting their duties.\(^{158}\) Likewise, in the Liu Shuozi case, both his lieutenant colonel and vice-lieutenant colonel received opprobrium for their inattention to this matter, and both were

\(^{157}\) Another example would be the story of a corporal (*lingcuí/bošoku* 領催) who found all of the people to whom the bannermen in his *niru* owed money to negotiate an agreeable scheme for all the debts to be paid back, and helped the bannermen to accomplish that in just over a decade by assisting them in balancing their books and instructing them ways to be frugal. See also the story of a clan elder who implored poverty-stricken bannermen of his lineage to practice frugality, while convincing wealthier members of the clan to help them when they were in need of money for weddings and funerals. Sungyūn, *Emu tanggū orin sakda*, 36b-43b.

\(^{158}\) Yonglang, 05-0429-046.
fined three months worth of stipends. Several other cases that involved idle bannermen committing thievery or illegally logging trees from imperial burial grounds were also all resolved with the offenders’ banner supervisors punished for their ignorance of their subordinates’ crimes. These affairs all indicate that Eight Banners officers seldom cared to look into the daily lives of those they commanded, and that they often appeared to have nonexistent relationships with their charges.

Rather than following the officially ordained relations established by the Eight Banners hierarchy, the bannermen tended to place more value and trust in social connections they forged on their own. The Qing leaders considered the bannermen’s patronages of teahouses, theaters, and storytellers as deviant extravagances, and urged them to cut these practices for the sake of frugality. In his stories from Manchu elders, Sungyūn constantly praised Eight Banners officers who were able to stop their subordinates from wasting their money on entertainment establishments. Yet to many bannermen, these “dissipate” pursuits were not simply what brought pleasure and relief to their lives, but by pursuing these shared leisurely interests, they strengthened their sense of solidarity with each other.

159 Yinlu, 05-0199-026.
160 For the thievery case, see Fuheng 傅恒, palace memorial, 14 July 1752, 02-01-03-04984-008, FHAC, Beijing, China. For the illegal logging case, see Tuoyong 託庸 and Cheng Jingyi 程景伊, palace memorial, 5 Nov 1773, 02-01-03-06286-001, FHAC, Beijing, China.
161 For example, in one story, a Lieutenant Colonel of Correspondences (yinwu canling 印務參領) is upheld as model for all other lieutenant colonels. He was able to convince the various clerks under his command to stop visiting teashops or wine shops, and prohibited the junior officers and soldiers on duty in his office from going to restaurants and playhouses as well as enjoying plays or songs. He also forbid members of his banner from partying or going on pleasure trips with each other. Sungyūn, Ėmu tanggū orin sakda, 3:19a-21b.
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By the nineteenth century, many banner officers and soldiers had become disillusioned with not just the monotonous nature of their jobs, but also the disingenuous nature of their relationships with their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates at their workplaces. In another one of his zidishu works, Helüshi portrays the daily routines of a young Manchu imperial bodyguard at his work. He describes his interactions with other people at work as follows:

立金門森森氣象熊腰虎背，見上司慓慓悚悚兔遁蛇行。
在同寅內有說有笑也是瞧人行事，與蓓拉們賞賜豐富故爾呼喚有靈。

When standing in front of the emperor’s gate, he commands awe with his imposing physique,
Yet when he sees his superiors, he starts trembling in fear and flees instantly.
When he is chatting or joking around among his colleagues, he still cautiously observes the others’ responses,
When his with the sula, he awarded them abundant gifts, so they all listened to his commands obediently. 162

In contrast to having to force themselves to interact with and placate people who they otherwise did not wish to associate themselves with in their offices or stations, in theaters and teashops in both cities of the capital, the bannermen were mingling with those who shared their hobbies and interests. In these much more casual and relaxed environments, the social significance of the patrons’ political statuses and positions diminished, and they could communicate to each other on more equal footings.

Building on the foundation of personal relationships formed upon such informal basis, the bannermen tried to solve each other’s financial troubles by setting up

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162 Helüshi 鶴侶氏 [Yigeng 奕赓], “Shao shiwei tan” 少侍衛嘆 (Laments of a young imperial bodyguard), in Chewangfu, case 1, fascicle 18, 3a..
associations or networks of mutual assistance. In this respect, the bannermen were simply following what Chinese civilians had already been doing for many centuries. Starting from the Ming dynasty and continuing throughout the Qing, Beijing witnessed the appearance and growth of cooperative associations such as *huiguan* 會館 (lodges), which were formed by people who shared the same native places and/or same professions. These organizations supported their members by offering them a gathering place to meet people of similar backgrounds and interests, and providing them with financial assistance when emergency circumstances arose, in exchange for their regular contributions.\(^{163}\) For the same purpose of mutual assistance, the bannermen also formed similar associations. Mucihiyen records in *Siyan cuwang* that in the second month of Daoguang 8 (1828), he and his nephew joined a cooperative called *Baishouhui* 百壽會, which was led by a bannerman and a Chinese civilian. Members of this organization donated three hundred to five hundred *wen* every month each, and if they fulfill their dues diligently, they each would be able to collect forty-two thousand *wen* after eight years. In the meantime, if any one of them needed funds to pay for funerals, they could ask the association to aid them with forty thousand *wen*, as well as provide them with various ritual equipments they needed to hold the ceremony.\(^{164}\)

High officials like Sungyūn were very suspicious of such associations, leery of the various potential ways for their members to suffer abuse and exploitation. In another tale from an elderly bannerman, Sungyūn described one type of such organizations known as *yaohui* 搖會 (“dice association”), which was popular among the bannermen. In


\(^{164}\) *Siyan cuwang*, 19 (Manchu 358-359).
this organization, a host would invite fifty to a hundred of his acquaintances to send in a fixed amount of money every month. The members would then meet and bid for the total amount of that was contributed that month through a game of dice, with all the money going to the person who rolled the highest. In Sungyūn’s eyes, these associations were exploitative rackets that would more likely bankrupt the bannermen who joined them, rather than provide them with any sort of assistance. He applauded the efforts of another virtuous lieutenant colonel who prohibited his charges from joining yao hui. Yet despite the disapproval of the authorities, such organizations continued to proliferate throughout the nineteenth century. These mutual assistance networks allowed the bannermen to improve their financial situation without compromising the way of life they had become accustomed to. By figuring out ways to help each other, the bannermen could become less reliant on what the Qing court gave them. Rather than giving up on various activities that brought them joy in their leisure times and practice austerity in their daily life in order to bring down their debts, many bannermen simply accepted that they will always be in debt in one way or another, and adapted their lives around it.

Under this context, one could perhaps see why “the man from Qi” from the beginning of this section insisted on pretending he was enjoying fabulous feasts with wealthy friends when he was actually begging for food in the cemetery. What bannermen like him feared were not poverty and starvation. By the nineteenth century, many of them had learned how to live under those conditions. Nor did the prospect of having to become a beggar seem too daunting for him to accept. When their situations compelled them to

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165 Sungyūn, Emu tanggū orin sakda, 3:11a-12a.
166 Sungyūn, Emu tanggū orin sakda, 3:13a-b.
do so, the bannermen were willing to swallow their pride and accept demeaning jobs and positions, as seen in the case of Mingfu. What made “the man from Qi” truly pitiful and desperate was the fact that he had no friends he could rely on for company and support. Being ostracized by his peers meant that he was deprived of any means at his disposal he could think of to turn his life around, and live the way he wanted to. He and his family would have to survive on their own, and that was too much for him and his two spouses to take.

In the second half of this chapter, I will explore in detail the economic decisions made by Mucihiyan with regards to his family’s financial situation, using primarily information he provided through Siyan cuwang lu meng. As his diary shows, in his case, other than providing him with the stipends he received for his official position, the Eight Banners system rarely acted as his benefactor. The constraints the state placed on banner livelihood served as major obstacles for him to find other means of financial assistance. Moreover, his lowly position in the Eight Banners hierarchy left him vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by his superiors. To support the livelihood of his family on a daily basis, Mucihiyan had to circumvent the regulations of the banner system to find ways to augment his income elsewhere. To do so, he, like many other bannermen of his time, joined local social networks that included both bannermen and Chinese civilians to find assistance and patronage, actively participating in leisure activities with his contacts to maintain his cordial relationships with them. This tactic allowed him to persevere through many political and personal setbacks and successfully manage his heavy debt burden.

Mucihiyan’s Background
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Much of what we know about Mucihiyan’s life comes from an extant manuscript of his personal diary. Titled Siyan cuwang lu meng 閒窗錄夢 (Recorded dreams of Xianchuang), this diary is an unique source that provides tremendous amount of information on daily life in the capital during the early nineteenth century. It was written almost completely in Manchu with the exception of names of specific people and locations that were given in Chinese, and a few Chinese sentences here and there, making it one of the very few extant manuscripts written in this language that were not translations of Chinese works. The only comparable primary source of this kind is the diary of the Manchu soldier Dzengšeo, written from 1680 to 1682 during the pacification of the Three Feudatories Rebellion. It contains five volumes, and covers his life in the years Daoguang 8 (1828), 9 (1829), 10 (1830), and 15 (1835). In every entry, he describes everything he did on that day, from the foods that he consumed, places that he visited, people he met, and activities that he partook, all the way down to minute details such as when he washed his feet and how much money he paid for a bag of ice. The manuscript, discovered by Japanese scholars in the Minoh Branch of the Osaka University Library, was translated into Chinese by Zhao Lingzhi and Guan Kang and published in 2011.

Mucihiyan was born a civilian in 1800 at Wanping County near Beijing, but he was adopted into a Manchu family when he was very young.167 His name means

167 Mu Chen shi 穆陳氏, plaint, 1838, 03-3791-034, First Historical Archives of China, Beijing, China. As Susan Naquin has pointed out, many civilians who lived in the Outer City were registered as residents of Wanping and Daxing counties for examination purposes, so Mucihiyan was likely born in Beijing rather than Wanping. See Susan Naquin, Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 411.
“cauldron” (ding 鼎) in Manchu; it is not known if he was given this name before or after his adoption, but he did have many civilian relatives who hailed from Shandong Province, likely from his birth family, that shared the surname Mu. His wife, surnamed Chen, was also a Han Chinese civilian.\(^\text{168}\) His birth father died when he was thirteen years old in 1813 (Jiaqing 18), and his elder brother by blood also passed away a year later. Since then, he had to shoulder the burden of providing for his birth mother as well as his own family. To make things worse, his brother-in-law passed away in 1821 (Daoguang 1), so he had to take care of his blood sister and her children as well.\(^\text{169}\) He had three sons with his wife, one of whom tragically passed away at a young age.

Although he was originally listed as a regular household bannerman, during a reevaluation of the Eight Banners registers during 1822 (Daoguang 2), he voluntarily reported the fact that he was adopted from a civilian family. He was henceforth reclassified as a “separate register household” booi (“bondservant”) of the Bordered Blue Banner, placed under the command of captain Buyan 布嚴.\(^\text{170}\) That same year, he started working as a steward (guanling 管領) at Prince Miankai’s compounds, a sixth-ranked position, receiving a stipend of 60 taels of silver and 28.5 piculs of rice per year.\(^\text{171}\) His

\(^{168}\) Mu Chen shi, 03-3791-034.

\(^{169}\) Siyan cuwang, 235 (Manchu: 1381-1383).

\(^{170}\) “Dun Qinwang Miankai fudi yuyuan jijin duoren an” 惇親王綿愷府第寓園囚禁多 人案 (The case of Miankai, Prince Dun of the First Rank, imprisoning many people in his compounds and garden), in Qingdai dang’an shiliao xuanbian 清代檔案史料選編 (Collection of selected sources from the Qing archives), vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2010), 359.

\(^{171}\) In his entry for the first day of the second month in the eighth year of Daoguang (March 16, 1828), which will be discussed in more details later, Mucihiyan stated that he received 30 taels of silver. Since silver stipends are distributed bi-annually, his annual total would hence be 60 taels. See Siyan cuwang, 86 (Manchu 331-332). Meanwhile, in his Daoguang 9.9.4 (Oct 1, 1829) entry, Mucihiyan recorded that he received 7.125 piculs
actual duties, as described in the diary, included drafting documents for the prince, delivering letters and messages, and teaching eunuchs serving the prince how to read and write. In 1835, however, he was demoted from the sixth to the eighth rank, his silver stipend reduced to 9.8 taels and rice stipend to 19 piculs.\textsuperscript{172} By 1838, he had been further downgraded to the status of a mere \textit{sula} (\textit{xiansan} 閒散, or “unemployed bannerman”).\textsuperscript{173}

The reason for Mucihiyan’s multiple demotions was his deteriorating relationship with Prince Miankai and his favored eunuch Li Qiucheng 李秋澄. Miankai himself had a long history of imprisoning and physically abusing his subordinates; back in 1822, when Mucihiyan started working for Miankai, the prince had already been censured for beating a eunuch to death. Mucihiyan had incurred Li’s ire by recommending the prince to stay away from Li, leading the eunuch to take revenge by slandering Mucihiyan to the prince.\textsuperscript{174} Mucihiyan was imprisoned during 1829 for six days from April 5\textsuperscript{th} to 10\textsuperscript{th} (Daoguang 9.3.2 to 3.7), locked in a room with a eunuch who was beaten nearly to death and doused by urine. He was only able to escape this time thanks to his mother pretending she was sick and pleading sympathetic eunuchs to let him go.\textsuperscript{175} From then on, throughout the period covered in the diary, Mucihiyan would not go back to the prince’s compounds, despite numerous orders demanding that he return to his post.

In 1836 (Daoguang 16), however, Miankai had him arrested and imprisoned him again, and this time Mucihiyan suffered several hundred whippings and had no contact for that season, which means that he received in total 28.5 piculs per year. See \textit{Siyan cuwang}, 144 (Manchu: 946).
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Siyan cuwang}, 230; 253 (Manchu: 1358; 1459).
\textsuperscript{173} “Dun qinwang an,” 359.
\textsuperscript{174} Mu Chen shi, 03-3791-034.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Siyan cuwang}, 95-97 (Manchu: 699-708).
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with the outside world. He was released only thanks to his wife lodging a plaint to the Imperial Clan Court (Zongrenfu 宗人府). Because of this case, Miankai was relieved of all of official duties and demoted to a Prince of the Second Rank (doro-i giyūn wáng/duoluo junwang 多羅郡王). For Mucihiyan, although he and his family were the victims, the Imperial Clan Court only allowed him “to be exonerated of his crimes” due to his pitiful conditions, while his wife was charged for filing a suit in her name against an imperial clansman. In 1848 (Daoguang 28), when Mucihiyan proofread the Manchu translation of Liaozhai zhiyi 聊齋誌異 (Liaozhai’s records of the strange), he was identified only as “native of Penglai county, Dengzhou prefecture” in Shandong (登郡蓬萊人), rather than by which banner he belonged as would be the standard for all bannermen. This suggests that in addition to losing his job, by this time Mucihiyan had been likely purged from the Eight Banner registers altogether and returned to civilian status.

Mucihiyan’s tribulations present a very different image of the bannermen than the one of the “noble warrior” that the court wished to project, or that of the “carefree aristocrat” that they came to be known to the general populace. Although he grew up in a Manchu family and was educated as a bannermen, he was not born into this status. As

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176 Mujangga 穆彰阿, copy of memorial, 26 July 1838, 03-3792-008, FHAC, Beijing, China.
177 Mujangga 穆彰阿, copy of memorial, 26 July 1838, 03-3792-008, FHAC, Beijing, China.
178 Jakdan (Zhakedan 扎克丹), “Yufan xiaozhuan” 禹范小傳 (Short biography of Yufan), in Manju Nikan Liyoo jai jy bi the 擇翻聊齋誌異 (Selected translations of Liaozhai’s records of the strange), trans. Jakdan (Beijing, 1848), 1a.
179 For more discussions regarding Mucihiyan’s banner status before and after his imprisonment in 1838, see the preface to the translation of Siyan cuwang lu meng by the translators Zhao Lingzhi and Guan Kang. Siyan cuwang, 1-9.
mentioned previously, during the Qianlong era (1735-1796), the state had already repeatedly purged people who belonged to the category of “separate register household” from the banner registers. He hence ranked at the very bottom of the Eight Banner system. Although at the start of the diary, he received a decent stipend thanks to his position in the Prince’s court, he was denied basic rights that other bannermen enjoyed due to his low status, such as the opportunity to enter officialdom through the translation examination. His employer, although doing so illegally, saw fit to treat him with the same level of contempt and indifference as he had shown to lowly servants and eunuchs.

On the other hand, as someone who occupied a status on the peripheries of the Eight Banners system, Mucihiyan formed more and closer relationships with civilians living in Beijing than many of his peers in the Eight Banners who were higher up in the social ladder. Several of his relatives were Chinese civilian merchants working in both the Inner and the Outer cities of the capital, and he was able to use his kinship bonds with them to negotiate better loans or financial deals for himself. He could also serve as a mediator or middleman in transactions between these merchants and other bannermen, and earn income and respect through such endeavors. His lowly status within the banner ranks thus allowed him to establish social and economic ties that would be much more difficult to attain for higher-level bannermen. These connections opened for him financial opportunities that might not have been available otherwise.

**Mucihiyan’s Official Income and Expenditures**

Although his background was rather unique compared to the typical bannermen of his time, Mucihiyan nevertheless lived in the same economic environment, and
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encountered similar fiscal difficulties, as his peers in the capital. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, even while he was still on the state’s payroll throughout the course of the diary, his stipend was not enough to pay for the expenses of his large family.\(^{180}\) His next recorded budget for the silver stipend received on the second month of Daoguang 9 showed that after the deductions, Mucihiyan would still have 13,320 wen left to spend, which appeared to be an improvement over his fiscal status this time the year before.\(^{181}\) His entry two days after receiving his stipend showed, however, that he still owed the rice merchants of Baoxingju 宝兴局 200,000 wen and had no way of paying them back at that time.\(^{182}\) The next payday in the eighth month of that year yielded 4350 wen net earnings.\(^{183}\) For the first half of the year Daoguang 10, he actually suffered a deficit of 2650 wen after all the deductions from his salary.\(^{184}\) Mucihiyan did not report a detailed budget for his final payday recorded in the diary, the second month of Daoguang 15. Given that by then Miankai had already reduced his salary by two-thirds, and Mucihiyan had to deal with all the expenditures involved with his youngest son’s illness and eventual death in the next six months, it was unlikely that his financial outlook saw any improvement in this period. Meanwhile, for the first year on record in the diary, Daoguang 8, Mucihiyan reveals his total spending for each month. His monthly expenditures hovered between 20,000 and 30,000 wen for the first six months, but

\(^{180}\) At the start of the diary in 1828, Mucihiyan had to provide for not only his own family, but also his sister’s. His nephews became financially independent by 1829, and his sister moved away in 1835.

\(^{181}\) Siyan cuwang, 86 (Manchu: 655-656).

\(^{182}\) Siyan cuwang, 87 (Manchu: 658).

\(^{183}\) Siyan cuwang, 135-136 (Manchu: 896-897).

\(^{184}\) Siyan cuwang, 187-188 (Manchu: 1151-1152).
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increased drastically to 46,200 wen for the seventh month.¹⁸⁵ This meant that his total expenses in a single month were vastly greater than his net earnings in half a year in any given year. Mucihiyan did not continue recording his monthly expenses for the subsequent years, but by just factoring in inflation, that figure would more likely rise than fall.¹⁸⁶

Besides his silver salary, Mucihiyan also received seasonal grain stipend from the state, which he also converted into cash at the duifang. Originally, the chief operation of the duifang was to exchange the coarse rice the state granary allocated to the bannermen for refined rice that they preferred to eat. Since 1710, however, bannermen were permitted by the state to sell their “surplus” rice to grain merchants, an activity that would become increasingly difficult for the government to regulate. By the Daoguang period, as the diary shows, many bannermen were actually selling their entire rice stipend to the duifang. Not only were low-ranking bannermen like Mucihiyan doing this, but even members of the imperial household were also following suit. On October 1, 1829, for example, he sold his entire newly collected grain stipend of 7.125 piculs for 26,400 wen. He also helped his friend, an imperial clansman, sell his stipend of 18.5 piculs for 115,588 wen.¹⁸⁷ Dividing the amount of money he received for his rice over three months, this means that Mucihiyan had about 300 extra cash to spend everyday. This

¹⁸⁵ No entries for the year Daoguang 8 were found after 7.29. His high expenditure for the seventh month could be explained by the fact that he spent majority of this month working at the Prince Dun compounds, while also having to deal with an illness.
¹⁸⁶ For further details regarding Mucihiyan’s biannual budgets for his silver stipends, please consult the appendix.
¹⁸⁷ Siyan cuwang, 144 (Manchu: 946). Note that Mucihiyan only received 3,705 cash per picul, while his imperial clansman friend was able to get 6,246 cash per picul. That is because the imperial clansman received a higher grade of rice than Mucihiyan as his stipend.
additional income helped a bit, but it was still not enough to improve his living standard substantially.\textsuperscript{188}

It is clear from these numbers alone that Mucihiyian could not rely on only his wages from the state to support his livelihood. He could not anticipate when the court would decide to provide him with additional subsidies, and had to supplement his stipends with other sources of income to ameliorate his current financial difficulties. According to his diary, Mucihiyian tried to do so through three means in general. He tried to find additional streams of revenue by himself through his own labor, pursuing additional work outside of his duties to Miankai. He also borrowed money, both formally and informally, from local merchants in Beijing whom he had formed close relationships with. Finally, he sought financial assistance from his friends and family. There was no official infrastructure in place that could help bannermen like Mucihiyian to explore these alternative options, so they had to find these opportunities by utilizing their personal contacts; the greater one’s social network, the more such opportunities could present themselves. To maintain such social network and make it grow, it was necessary to participate in so-called “idle engagements” such as visiting playhouses, going on sightseeing trips, outings at teashops and restaurants, and exchanging literary works with one’s peers, in order to preserve existing friendships and meet new allies. Hence,

\textsuperscript{188} For example, in his Daoguang 8.3.8 (Apr 21, 1828) entry, Mucihiyian records that he spent more than 400 \textit{wen} on such a meal with his relative Chen Ruitu at the restaurant Yongfuguan. That is already more than the 300 \textit{wen} extra daily income he gets by selling his rice stipend, which was supposed to fulfill his ration needs in the first place. See \textit{Siyan cuwang}, 25 (Manchu: 385).
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throughout this process, Mucihiyan continued to regularly partake in such leisure activities.\(^{189}\)

**Mucihiyan’s Alternative Sources of Income**

Over the course of the period covered in *Siyan cuwang*, Mucihiyan’s main source of income, other than his regular stipends, came from his work as a private tutor. When he was still living with his adopted Manchu family, he was educated in a private school that may not be unlike the school he would go on to establish, where he began studying Manchu.\(^{190}\) Having continued to hone his ability in the “national language” as he grew up, he became well known within his local community as a Manchu specialist. As he began to lose favor with Prince Dun, he began planning to use his literary skills to forge a secondary career as a teacher. On the twenty-second day of the first month of the year Daoguang 9 (Feb 23, 1829), a couple of months before he suffered his first imprisonment by Miankai, Mucihiyan opened his own private school (*jiashu* 家塾) at the Lidai Diwang Miao 历代帝王廟 (Temple of the monarchs of successive generations) near the Fucheng Gate 阜成門 on the west side of the city.\(^{191}\) From then on, he focused his attention on the operation of his private classroom in lieu of his official duties at the Prince Dun compounds, even refusing summons to return to his original workplace.

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\(^{189}\) The only time when his participation in such activities noticeably decreased was during the last year of his diary, Daoguang 15. That was mainly because he was preoccupied with his son’s sickness. His leisurely routines more or less resumed after his son died at the end of the fifth month.

\(^{190}\) Jakdan, “Yufan xiaozhuan,” 1a.

\(^{191}\) *Siyan cuwang*, 83 (Manchu: 643-644).
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Regarding the operation of his private school, the age range of Mucihiyan’s students extended from as young as eight years old to as old as over twenty. His classes catered primarily to fellow bannermen, but he also occasionally accepted civilian students.\footnote{For example, on Daoguang 10.2.3 (Feb 25, 1830), Mucihiyan accepted a civilian named Yu Xueguang 虞學廣 as his student. Mucihiyan only came in contact with this student, however, thanks to the introduction of his banner acquaintance Elcungge 銜勒崇額. Siyan cuwang, 187 (Manchu: 1150).} In general, every student (or his family) paid Mucihiyan a one thousand \textit{wen} tuition upon entering his school, although that number did not appear to be set in stone.\footnote{One student offered to pay as little as 800 \textit{wen}, while a few others paid 2,000 \textit{wen}.} Students would also continue to present infrequent monetary gifts to their teacher subsequently. Although Mucihiyan seldom elaborates on his curriculum, from what he has recorded his classes appeared to place heavy emphasis on translation between Chinese and Manchu. Many of his students aspired to enter officialdom through the translation examinations, and Mucihiyan adapted his pedagogy accordingly. One of the exercises he used, for example, involved one of his students composing a Chinese couplet together with him, then another student immediately translating it into Manchu.\footnote{Siyan cuwang, 99 (Manchu: 791).}

Outside of his classroom, Mucihiyan was constantly purchasing books that may have supplemented his teaching, including collections of sample translation examination questions and Manchu primers. He attempted to participate in the production of Manchu pedagogical texts himself, editing a manuscript of a collection of model essays for policy questions in the imperial examinations originally compiled and translated into Manchu by
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Io Pu 敦圃 during the Qianlong era titled *Ubaliyambuha simnehe bodon i durun kemun i bithe* 翻譯試策法程 (Translated policy essays for translation examination). 195

Besides teaching his regular classes, Mucihiyan also earned substantial income from smaller side businesses that involved his literary and artistic talents. Because Mucihiyan was highly literate and well-versed in calligraphy, his friends and local merchants often asked him to compose placards and couplets for their homes or businesses. In particular, with the assistance of one of his students, Mucihiyan was able to run a rather successful stall selling couplets for the Spring Festival (chunlian 春聯) during the weeks before the Lunar New Year in the year Daoguang 9 (January 1830). He managed to earn 6,720 wen in net profit through this undertaking. 196 He was also a skilled seal carver, and his friends constantly asked him to make seals for them.

In all these ventures, Mucihiyan received no official support of any sort. Even though through his private school he provided his fellow bannermen with Manchu education, an initiative that should find favor with the Qing rulers, Mucihiyan held his classes while was completely shirking his official obligations to Prince Dun, and was thus operating this personal business illegally. He had to instead to market his expertise and seek assistance and patronage through private channels. When decrying the deterioration

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195 Io Pu 敦圃, *Ubaliyambuha simnehe bodon i durun kemun i bithe* [Fanyi shice facheng] (Translated policy essays for translation examination), ed. Mucihiyan, manuscript (Beijing: 1845), 1: 3a-b. Unfortunately for Mucihiyan, it seems that he was not able to find a patron to help him get this book printed. The only copy of his original manuscript that I could find was part of Paul Georg von Möllendorff’s personal collection, and is today preserved at the Berlin State Library.

196 Siyan cuwang, 173-76 (Manchu: 1091-1102). Since no diary entries for the twelfth month of any other recorded years are extant, we do not know whether he ran this business every year, or this was only a one-time operation.
of the Eight Banners, the court often denounced their engagement with idle pleasures such as visiting teahouses and theaters as frivolous indulgences introduced into the bannermen’s lives after coming in contact with Chinese culture, which distracted them from using their free time wisely to study the Manchu language and practice horse riding and archery. Yet for the common bannermen like Mucihiyan, these leisure activities did not simply bring pleasure and relief to their lives, for through pursuing these shared hobbies and interests, they strengthened their sense of solidarity with each other. This kind of amity formed the foundation of interpersonal trust, upon which Mucihiyan could establish and maintain vital economic and personal ties with his fellow bannermen for the potential of mutual benefit. In order to acquire the resources necessary for running his school, absent of any official means for him to do so, Mucihiyan needed to be vigilant about dedicating time and energy to nurture his social network so that he could rely on the continuous assistance from his friends and relatives.

Despite his relatively low status, Mucihiyan was able to forge a large network of close friends and acquaintances in the Eight Banners. Several of his closest friends who are constantly mentioned in the diary were Manchus, including Deyentai 德音泰 (De Weiyi 德惟一) and Canghing 長興 (Chang Xiangpu 長祥圃) of the Plain Red Banner, and Kingsi 慶錫 (Qing Xichen 慶熙臣) of the Bordered Red Banner. These three bannermen became acquainted with Mucihiyan due to their mutual interest in studying the Manchu language, and they were not put off by the fact that Mucihiyan entered Eight Banners ranks through the illegal means of adoption. They have all over time passed the
examinations and became officials, and Kingsi was furthermore of noble descent. They were politically and socially better connected within the banner system, and often helped introduce Mucihiyan to new contacts and opportunities. For example, Deyintai and Canghing had studied Manchu under another renowned Manchu language expert, Jakdan (Zhakedan 札克丹), while Kingsi had also been friends with Jakdan for a long time. All three served as editors for Jakdan’s Manchu translation of the Ming novel Liaozhai zhiyi. When Jakdan needed a second proofreader for his translation, these three recommended Mucihiyan to him. Through his friends’ help, Mucihiyan received his only known credit in a published work, and became acquainted with a respected banner literati who shared his passion for studying Manchu.

Besides making friends within the Eight Banners, Mucihiyan also made many friends with local Chinese merchants. In this respect, Mucihiyan’s unique background as an adopted child from a Chinese family actually proved to be a unique advantage over most other bannermen. His birth family originally hailed from Shandong, and Mucihiyan shared a close bond with merchants from the province that few other bannermen could possess. The various duifang 碓房 (rice-polishing stores) that he visited the most in the diary, Baoxingju, Sanshengdian, Dechenghao 德成號, and Fuchenghao 復成號, were all staffed by his Shandong relatives Henian, Huanian 华年, Chunian 椿年, and Yonghua 永華 respectively, and many other managers and clerks that worked in these establishments

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197 Jakdan (Zhakedan 扎克丹), “Zhuan” 傳 (Biographies), in Manju Nikan Liyoo jai jy-i bithe 擇翻聊齋誌異 (Selected translations of Liaozhai’s records of the strange), trans. Jakdan (Beijing, 1848).
198 Jakdan, “Zhuan.” Also, Jakdan, Deyintai, and Canghing all belonged to the same Plain Red Banner.
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were also friendly with him. Besides the merchants working at *duifang*, Mucihiyian also formed personal friendships with many other storeowners among the over 150 establishments mentioned in his diary. In particular, he was close friends with Zhang Peiguang 張配光, owner of the apothecary Hai’antang 海安堂, Wang Lao’er 王老二, who works at the aforementioned prepared meals store Jinlanzhai, and Liu Zongrong 劉宗榮 from the tobacco and foodstuffs store Songmaohao 松茂號. Mucihiyian and these merchants would pay their respects to each other during the New Year, and mingle with each other in social events outside of the stores.

Through his contacts both inside and outside the Eight Banners system, Mucihiyian was able to attain the infrastructure and resources necessary to set up his various ventures. In the initial establishment of Mucihiyian’s private school, the assistance of two of his friends, Yi Changwu 伊昌吾 and Fen Meicun 芬槑村, was vital. While many private tutors during this period held their classes at their own home, Mucihiyian inhabited a residential compound (*dazayuan* 大雜院) where he shared living space with four other families, so there was no space for him to run his school there. Yi and Fen were both working at the Lidai Diwang Miao, the latter also running a private school there, and they assisted Mucihiyian in obtaining a room at the temple to set up his class. Moreover, both of Mucihiyian’s first students, Ilongga (Yi Long’a 伊隆阿) and Fen Xiu 芬秀, were Yi Changwu and Fen Meicun’s relatives respectively. Later on, Deyintai would also send his younger cousin Dexian 德銑 to Mucihiyian’s school, although Mucihiyian refused to charge Dexian a tuition Mucihiyian’s close friendship with...
Deyintai.\textsuperscript{199} Thanks to his friends’ word of mouth, Mucihiyan’s school was able to quickly grow from only two students at the beginning of Daoguang 9 (1829) to around ten at the end of the year.\textsuperscript{200} It would further expand by twenty-one new students within the first five months of the next year.\textsuperscript{201} After he was released from Miankai’s compounds in Daoguang 16 (1836), Mucihiyan would return to his school, and Jakdan revealed in his short profile of Mucihiyan in the preface section of the \textit{Liaozhai} translation that after more than a decade has passed since its initiation, Mucihiyan’s private school was still going strong.\textsuperscript{202}

Meanwhile, friendly local merchants provided him with the funding necessary to cover the operation costs of his school. As mentioned before, Mucihiyan had taken out a loan of 200,000 \textit{wen} from the rice merchants of Baoxingju ahead of receiving his silver stipend in the second month of the year Daoguang 9.\textsuperscript{203} While he never states in his diary what was the purpose of this loan, given the fact that the timing coincided with the beginning of his preparation for founding his school, the money was likely used to finance this project. The amount of cash he borrowed was greater than what he could earn from exchanging his silver stipend for the whole year, and there was no way he could pay it back in its entirety anytime soon. One of the shopkeepers at Baoxingju, Yi Guobao 衣國寶, was not happy with this fact, and Mucihiyan had to work out a deal with Yi in

\textsuperscript{199} Siyan cuwang, 194 (Manchu: 1181-82). Dexian’s immediately family may be having financial difficulties as well, as he was the one who could only offer 800 \textit{wen} for tuition.\textsuperscript{200} Eleven students in total were named in all of the entries of Daoguang 9, but one of them dropped out in the fifth month.\textsuperscript{201} Of these new students, one only attended five classes before leaving.\textsuperscript{202} Jakdan, “Yufan xiaozhuan,” 1a.\textsuperscript{203} Siyan cuwang, 87 (Manchu: 658).
which Mucihiyan would pay the store back two thousand *wen* every month.\textsuperscript{204}

Nevertheless, the fact that the *duifang* was willing to give him the loan in the first place despite knowing his penurious situation, and then afforded him the patience to defer the repayment when he did not have enough money to do so at the due date, revealed the close relationship Mucihiyan had with these Chinese merchants and the amount of trust they had in him to keep his word. This stood in contrast with the much more antagonistic relationships between the rice merchants and other bannermen that were depicted in the diary. For example, a bannerman named Man Jiu 滿九 had similarly borrowed money from a *duifang* with Mucihiyan serving as an intermediary in the deal. Both sides did not trust each other, especially because previously Man had tried to cheat the grain merchants by paying them back with counterfeit money. As a result, the *duifang* would constantly send their agents to badger Mucihiyan about Man’s overdue loans.\textsuperscript{205}

In return for all these kinds of assistance, Mucihiyan had to reciprocate in one way or another. Since he was poor and could not use money as compensation, he instead actively used his literary expertise to perform tasks for his benefactors as favors. Some of the favors were rather simple and ordinary, such as doing translation work for his friends. For example, on of the sixth month of the ninth year of Daoguang (July 16, 1829), he helped Deyentai, who was serving as a *bithesi* 筆貼士 (clerk) at the time, translate six imperial decrees.\textsuperscript{206} Other favors he performed, however, were much more dangerous, such as taking the imperial examinations in place of others. On the seventeenth day of the seventh month of the same year (Aug 16, 1829), Mucihiyan was asked by another friend,

\textsuperscript{204} Siyan cuwang, 135-136 (Manchu: 896-897).
\textsuperscript{205} See Siyan cuwang, 11; 133 (Manchu: 320-321; 887).
\textsuperscript{206} Siyan cuwang, 123 (Manchu: 838).
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Kui Wennong 奎文農, to sit in on the translation examinations in his brother’s name. Kui was another person who provided significant support to Mucihiyan back when he first founded his school, and Mucihiyan readily accepted the request. Ten days later, he would enter the examination compounds, which he was not supposed to be able to enter on account of his rank as a “detached household” bannerman, and proceeded to not only finish Kui’s brother’s translations, but also visit several of his acquaintances who were also taking the examination at other booths and either complete their answers for them or correct their translation mistakes. He would later perform the same favor for his own student Ilongga, taking the bithesi examination for Ilongga’s friend who “could not do translation.” Even though he risked reprisal from the Qing court if he was discovered defrauding imperial examinations, Mucihiyan was willing disregard the law to help out his friends. This revealed the lax enforcement of official regulations in translation examinations, but also showed Mucihiyan’s determination to fulfill his obligation to people in his social network for the purpose of mutual assistance.

In addition to completing these tasks, in order to preserve his close relationship with his friends and family, Mucihiyan needed to actively socialize with them on a daily basis. Despite always being in debt, he did not hesitate to constantly visit theaters, teahouses, restaurants, and temple fairs with both his banner friends and his civilian relatives and associates. Most of the time, he participated in these activities simply for the sake of his own pleasure, but he would also use these occasions to show his gratitude to

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207 Siyan cuwang, 131 (Manchu: 879).
208 Siyan cuwang, 134 (Manchu: 891-93).
209 Siyan cuwang, 156-157 (Manchu: 1009-1013).
those who had provided crucial assistance to him. During the New Years holidays before the founding of the school, for example, Mucihiyan spent several days socializing with Yi and Fen, including going with them on a two-day trip to the Juesheng Temple 覺生寺 on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the first month of Daoguang 9 (Feb 16-17, 1829).

Despite his difficult pecuniary situation, Mucihiyan was willing to the foot the entire four hundred wen bill for their dinner at the restaurant Siheguan 四合館.210 Other bannermen would also do the same for Mucihiyan when he provided them with important service.

After he agreed to serve as the substitute examinee for Kui Wennong’s brother, Kui invited Mucihiyan, along with their mutual friends Deyentai and Kingsi, on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month of the same year (Aug 23, 1829) for lunch and dinner, with a visit to the theater Qingshunyuan 建順園 in between.211

Sometimes, these social occasions could be quite profitable in themselves. For important occasions such as birthdays, holidays, weddings, births, and deaths, significant sums of money would be exchanged as gifts that could cover the entire costs of these celebrations. For his youngest son Mulu’s 穆鲁 full month celebration party (manyue 滿月) on the eighteenth day of the ninth month of Daoguang 9 (Oct. 15, 1829), Mucihiyan spent around 20,000 wen to prepare for the feast, and had to take out a 6,000 wen loan from Sanshengdian to cover these expenses. On the day of the celebration, however, he managed to receive 25,500 wen in gift, in addition to five pieces of silverware and a piece of handicraft, which provided him with a net profit of 5,500 wen, more money than he would earn through his silver stipend during that half-year. He was thus able to

210 Siyan cuwang, 81-82 (Manchu: 633-634).
211 Siyan cuwang, 133 (Manchu: 887-888).
immediately pay back his loan to the Sanshengdian two days later.\footnote{Siyan cuwang, 148-50 (Manchu: 963-974).} This was not, however, a one-way street. To receive all of these gifts during his events, Mucihiyan was obligated to also provide similar contributions for his friends’ occasions. Hence, within Mucihiyan’s social network, an active micro-economy could be found, with money constantly changing hands between friends. Such mutual assistance networks were established on the foundation of personal amity and trust between the participants, and were guided by the principle of reciprocity.

Those who failed to fulfill such social obligations risked losing their friends’ trust and goodwill, causing their acquaintances to become more reluctant to help them when emergencies arose. In contrast to Mucihiyan’s eager participation in social events, his banner friend Man Jiu often took others’ kindness and generosity for granted. Because Man was also very poor and constantly being chased by debt collectors, he sought to take advantage of Mucihiyan’s good relationship with the Shandong grain merchants to ask Mucihiyan to obtain loans from them for him. Man, however, was often absent from Mucihiyan’s social events, such as Mucihiyan’s mother’s birthday feast.\footnote{Siyan cuwang, 162 (Manchu: 1033). Mucihiyan believed that Man Jiu refused to come because Mucihiyan’s mother had rejected several of Man’s requests for loans from her.} While Man’s dishonest behavior in dealing with the \textit{duifang} as mentioned above did not do his reputation any favors, his unwillingness to proactively foster his relationship with Mucihiyan also led Mucihiyan to perceive him as unreliable. Hence, whenever Man Jiu complained of his own financial difficulties, Mucihiyan had very little patience and sympathy for his plight, concluding that everything that Man said was “nonsense,” and
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felt reluctant to help him.\textsuperscript{214} When attending the burial of Man Jiu’s deceased wife in 1835, Mucihiyan realized that many Man’s friends who he was familiar with could not be seen. He remarked, “Maybe they have ended their association with Jiuye?”\textsuperscript{215}

Conclusion

At the turn of the eighteenth century, many bannermen could no longer subsist off of the “iron rice bowl” provided by the state alone to maintain their standard of living. Their stipends, if they had any, were in many cases not enough to cover the basic living expenses of themselves and their families. This forced many of them to scramble for alternative sources of income in the open market to stave off poverty. By the reigns of the Jiaqing and Daoguang emperors, the Qing court felt it had exhausted its ability to find ways to assist the bannermen in their livelihoods. The Qing leaders believed that the bannermen needed to take the initiative to turn their own lives around. They needed to practice frugality and excise extravagant and superfluous habits from their lifestyle. Understanding that it was difficult for these changes to happen rapidly, prominent Qing leaders called on officers and elders within each banner and company to lead by example and guide their subordinates out of their penurious circumstances. For the Qing court, the ultimate goal was for both the Eight Banners system and the individual bannermen to become financially self-sufficient.

However, the common bannermen who were living in poverty were not interested in self-sufficiency. In reality, Sungyūn’s Confucian vision of the Eight Banners

\textsuperscript{214} Siyan cuwang, 162 (Manchu: 1037-1038).
\textsuperscript{215} Siyan cuwang, 272 (Manchu: 1532).
functioning as a harmonious familial unit was seldom realized in each banner and company, as commanders and officers were frequently ignorant of their charges’ daily lives. Instead of relying on the hierarchical relationships set in place by the state, the bannermen would rather place their trust on social networks they constructed on their own. Their leisure activities, considered profligate and dissolute practices by Qing leaders, became means for them to socialize with their neighbors, both banner and civilian, and consolidate their existing connections or make new ones. They used these relationships they built to trade money and favors with each other, helping each other out whenever necessary. They created their own micro-economy on the basis of their leisure networks, and relied on it for financial support when the Qing court could not provide for them. When one loan needed to be repaid, they would find someone else to borrow money. This meant that they would never be freed from their debt burden, but many of them did not mind that fact. After all, as Shu Qingchun believed his aunt would say to those who criticized her debt-ridden way of life, “what good is a bannerman if he doesn’t buy things on credit?”

Their way of coping with poverty was by no means a foolproof plan. They were often operating outside of the state’s protection, sometimes even against the law. They had to exercise good judgment to make the correct decisions in what opportunities to pursue, who to trust, and how they behave in front of their peers. Bannermen like Mingfu served as cautionary examples of what could happen when things went wrong. Yet many of them were still willing to take the risk and follow this path, defying the Qing leaders’ wishes and Eight Banners regulations. Some, like Mucihiyan, were able to negotiate a

[216] Lao She, Zhenghongqi xia, 7.
feasible strategy to withstand the financial difficulties they faced and find sustainable ways to support themselves and their families. Mucihiyun never had a successful political career. He could not pass the examinations and become a famous minister, or rise through the Eight Banners ranks to become a great military leader. Nevertheless, he was able to overcome numerous significant political and personal setbacks and continued to carry on with his life in a way he would like to live, without completely giving up on hobbies and interests that he was invested in. That in a way was a worthwhile accomplishment.

As we can see from his career choices, Mucihiyun was a highly erudite scholar who showed no penchant for martial activities. Never once did he mention in his diary of practicing archery, and he never practiced horse riding in preparation for combat. As the next chapter will show, many people who were raised in the Eight Banners, from the start to the end of the dynasty, shared his predilection. Many of these bannermen, unable or unwilling to enter civil or martial service to the state, would choose to indulge in their literary pursuits like Mucihiyun. They may not necessarily be under the same financial constraints that Mucihiyun faced that compelled him to pursue this path, but they nevertheless found personal fulfillment in their literary pursuits.
Chapter 4: Caught Between Two Worlds: The Ideal of Idleness in Eighteenth Century Bannermen Literature

The Bannermen and the Literary Tradition of China

When they were resettled into Chinese cities by the Qing state after the conquest of 1644, the bannermen faced a conundrum regarding whether to uphold their traditional elite identity as mounted warriors, or adapt to the social order of their new neighbors and embrace Chinese literati culture. The Qing court had hoped that they could do both, maintaining their martial prowess while also striving to attain literary erudition. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, multiple generations of bannermen have been born and raised in Chinese cities. Their livelihood depended no longer on their ability to extract gains and win glory on the battlefield, but on the banner status they inherited at birth. Although the Qing Empire continued to conduct military activities on its western frontiers, the court no longer needed to mobilize the entire Eight Banners for their wars against the Dzungars and Jinchuan peoples as it had to in its campaign to conquer the Chinese hinterland. With decreasing opportunities for wealth and prestige available through a military career, many bannermen gradually lost motivation to develop their martial skills. To them, it became increasingly more appealing and useful to advance their literary knowledge. It offered them a path to top positions in the government that was less harsh and deadly. It also enabled them to engage with their fellow elites among the Chinese on the same cultural level. Hence as time went on, more and more bannermen chose to focus on the way of the pen over the way of the bow and arrow, much to the consternation of the court.
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As they immersed themselves in Chinese literature, the bannermen became familiar with not only its forms and conventions, but also the values and sentiments it espoused. The ideals of eremitism, in particular, struck a cord with many bannermen who were dissatisfied with the lifestyle the state wished to impose upon them. Because they were born into the Eight Banners and inherited their obligations to the Qing state, they could not make the choice to walk away from official life as readily as Chinese scholars could. Through dedicating themselves to reading and writing, however, these bannermen could establish for themselves a way of life away from the battlefield, as the likes of Mucihiyan and Jakdan have shown in the previous chapter. Previous scholarship has discussed this cultural transformation under the parameters of acculturation or even Sinicization. In their consumption and production of literature, the bannermen certainly absorbed many elements of the Chinese literary tradition. As I will show, however, their status as bannermen prevented them from fully adopting the way of life of the Chinese literati, which led to subtle but significant differences in the way they approached concepts such as idleness and political withdrawal. Although they produced literature that would be similar to that which was created by the Chinese literati in form and style, the bannermen’s unique sociopolitical background led them to experience Chinese culture and literature from a different perspective.

This chapter will begin by exploring the emergence of bannermen who were highly literate in Chinese culture and associated closely with Chinese literati during the Kangxi reign. Upon the establishment of the Qing in Beijing, the Manchus were quick to educate their scions in the Chinese classical and literary tradition, and within a generation of the conquest of China, scholars whose literary talents were widely recognized among
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southern literati would appear. By the eighteenth century, with Manchu society no longer fully mobilized for war as it had been at the beginning of the dynasty, many bannermen who had little desire or prospect for political advancement turned to poetry and novels as their primary pursuits. I will closely examine one particular bannerman, Cao Xueqin, and explore his values and worldview through his masterpiece, the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Studying the novel in conjunction with poetry and prose produced by other Eight Banner literati of his time, several of whom were his personal friends or became the first readers of the novel, I will show that although they were attracted to the ways of the politically disengaged Chinese scholars, their status as bannermen prevented them from being able to fully embrace the lifestyle of “men of culture.”

The Emergence of Eight Banners Literati

Knowledge of Chinese literary arts was by no means unfamiliar to Jurchen society prior to the founding of the Qing Dynasty. The Jurchen chiefs employed men of learning who were literate in various languages, including Chinese and Mongolian, as court scholars (*baksi*) to handle communications with their neighbors and translate documents. When Nurhaci united the Jurchen tribes, he tasked two such scholars, Erdeni 额尔德尼 (1592-1634) and G’ag’ai 噶盖 (d. 1600), with the creation of a new script that would eventually become Manchu in 1590.217 Later, under the reign of Nurhaci’s son

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217 As Mårten Söderblom Saarela pointed out, however, the Koreans were already sending letters to the Jianzhou Jurchens using their language written in a Uigher-Mongol script in the late fifteenth century. It is unknown whether these early dispatches provided an early prototype for what would become Manchu, but the possibility exists. The first actual extant document written in Manchu after it was officially created was a record of Nurhaci’s war with the neighboring Ula tribe. Marten Soderblom Saarela, “Manchu and the Study of Language in China,” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015), 118-119.
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Hong Taiji, another baksi Dahai 達海 (1595-1632) further refined the new language with the additions of diacritical marks (“circles and dots”). The court also placed him and other scholars in the newly-established imperial academy (bithei yamun 文館) and tasked them with the translation of Chinese books into Manchu. These works included not only canonical texts like the Four Books and the Five Classics and the official histories of Chinese dynasties, but also works of literature including the Sanguo yanyi 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms; Manchu title Ilan gurun-i bithe). In the pre-conquest years, literacy was hence largely a specialized skill limited to this small group of scholars, many of whom were suspected by later historians of having foreign backgrounds. Their abilities were respected and recognized by the court, but they also lacked significant political power or influence. Meanwhile, the majority of the imperial nobles and military leaders that dominated early Manchu society had limited exposure to Chinese learning and literature. The majority of the Eight Banner soldiers under their

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218 The translation of Sanguo was began by Dahai, but he passed away before he could complete the project. Hong Taiji suspended the translation of the novel under the advice of court academician and Chinese defector Wang Wenkui 王文奎. The translation was resumed after Hong Taiji’s death under the auspices of the Prince-Regent Dorgon, and was completed in 1650 (Shunzhi 7). For more details, see Xiuyun 秀云, “Sanguo yanyi manwen fanyi yanjiu” 三國演義滿文翻譯研究 (Study of Manchu translations of Romance of the Three Kingdoms) (PhD diss., Minzu University of China, 2013), 36-46.

219 Li Guangtao has suggested that Erdeni came from a Mongolian family that lived in an area where Chinese was widely used in daily life, while Dahai was a Han Chinese living in southern Manchuria who was kidnapped by the Jurchens. See Li Guangtao 李光濤, “Lao Manwen shiliao xu” 老滿文史料序 (Preface to Sources in Old Manchu). In Ming Qing dang’an lunwenji 明清檔案論文集 (Collection of essays on Ming-Qing archives) (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1962), 21, 23. See also Soderblom Saarela, “Manchu and the Study of Language,” 118, 126.

220 Erdeni and G’agai were both eventually executed by Nurhaci, the former for corruption and the latter for suspected sedition. Dahai was also imprisoned by the Manchu founder for having illicit relationship with a maid-servant.
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command could not read or write in either their own language or the language of their recently conquered subjects when they entered Beijing in 1644.221

Once they found themselves to be the masters of China, however, the Manchu leaders quickly recognized the importance of acquiring knowledge of the Chinese literary tradition for themselves and their families. Upon settling into Chinese cities, Manchu nobles discovered that in Chinese society, social and cultural prestige was measured primarily according to one’s erudition. This was tangibly displayed through one’s success in the imperial examinations, or through producing prodigious volumes of literary works, often on the spot in social gatherings. Proficiency in other areas, such as martial abilities or technical knowledge, lacked similar level of cultural cache. The Manchu elites were keen to impress upon the Chinese literati that their new neighbors were not brutish outsiders seeking only to subjugate them through military superiority, but people capable of being their equals in the cultural field. From the imperial family to other aristocratic clans, Manchu nobles began investing heavily in educating their children.

Starting at the very top, the Qing emperors handpicked talented scholars from the Hanlin Academy to tutor their sons in Chinese classics and literature. The Kangxi Emperor was instructed in classical learning by the prominent Neo-Confucian classicists such as Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642-1718), and developed his knowledge of literary aesthetics in areas such as calligraphy and painting with the guidance of literati such as Shen Quan 沈荃 (1624-1684) and Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1644-1703). As a result, the future emperors would all become highly proficient writers, poets, and connoisseurs of fine art. Other imperial princes and Manchu nobles followed the lead of their rulers, and also

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employed prominent Chinese literati as private tutors. For example, Yolo 岳樂 (1625-1689), Prince An of the First Rank, recruited the Hunan literati Tao Zhidian 陶之典 (1622-c. 1701) to teach his children not only about the Confucian classics, but also poetry. Meanwhile, Mingju 明珠 (1635-1708), the grandson of the last prince of the Yehe Nara clan who rose to the position of Grand Secretary under the Kangxi Emperor, called upon the services of the prominent Jiangsu scholar Xu Qianxue 徐乾學 (1632-1694) as his son’s mentor.

Thanks to these investments in education, among the first generation of bannermen born to imperial or other notable aristocratic clans after the conquest of China, a significant group who became renowned for their knowledge and ability in Chinese literature emerged. Mingju’s son Sinde 性德 (original name Cengde 成德, 1655-1685) became highly respected for his talent as a poet in the genre of *ci* 詞, and his works were widely circulated and lauded by his contemporaries among the Chinese elites. Two of Yolo’s sons, Malhūn 瑪爾琿 (1663-1709) and Yueduan 岳端 (1671-1704), also became well-regarded poets and painters. Other Kangxi era erudite bannermen who shared similar background include Gose 高塞 (1637-1670), Wenzhao 文昭 (1680-1732), and Bordo 博爾都 (1649-1708), all of whom were imperial clansmen who won extensive acclaim among Chinese literati in the capital for their compositions and artworks. Outside of imperial clansmen and nobility, bannermen who came from families with close personal relationship with the emperor or high-ranking Manchu princes also possessed the financial and cultural capital to provide similar levels of education for their scions. This was the case for bondservant households of the Upper Three Banners, as men from
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such background were trusted by Kangxi to fill important positions in both the capital and especially the provinces due to their direct servile relationship to the emperor, which ensured their loyalty, and knowledge of Chinese language and conventions, which made them qualified to serve as a liaison between the Qing ruler and his subjects.\textsuperscript{222} The most prominent of learned bannermen that came from such background was Cao Yin 曹寅 (1658-1712), whose mother was the Kangxi Emperor’s nurse, and whose father was a close confidante of the emperor who went on to serve as the textile commissioner of Jiangning 江寧織造, a position Cao Yin would later inherit.

Through their literary talent, this post-conquest generation of Eight Banner elites was able to gain entry into Chinese literary communities, and establish friendships with Chinese literati as their equal cultural peers. Even though their fathers were commanders of the armies that subjugated many of these literati by force, this generation of bannermen had no qualms becoming friends and socializing with even those whose loyalty to the new dynasty was doubtful, and vice versa. For example, Cao Yin maintained close relationship with the Suzhou scholar Du Jie 杜芥 (1617-1693), who held a licentiate title under the Ming and rejected opportunities to pursue an official career after the Manchu conquest.\textsuperscript{223} Meanwhile, one of Yueduan’s associates was Dai Mingshi 戴名世 (1653-1713), who composed a preface for one of Yueduan’s poetry collections.\textsuperscript{224} Dai would later be executed by the Kangxi Emperor after seditious

\textsuperscript{223} Spence, \textit{Bondservant and Master}, 68-69.
\textsuperscript{224} See Yueduan 岳端, \textit{Yuchisheng gao} 玉池生稿 (Manuscripts of Yuchisheng) (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1990), 106-107.
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materials in support of the Southern Ming and Wu Sangui regimes were discovered in his work *Nanshan ji* 南山集. Even if some of these Chinese literati may still see the Qing government as an alien regime, they did not treat erudite banner elites like Sinde and Yueduan as cultural outsiders or interlopers. Indeed, as they shared the same language and cultural inclinations, the Chinese literati found much more commonalities with these banner elites than with lower-class people who shared their ethnicity.

These banner elites were not only highly educated, but were also eager to adopt various characteristics that personified a Chinese literatus. Unlike most Manchus of the previous generation, these bannermen took up multiple style names (*zi* 字) and pen names (*hao* 號) just as all cultured men in China would. Sinde’s style name, for example, was *Rongruo* 容若, and he adopted the pen name “the Mountain Man from the Land of Lanka” (Lengjia Shanren 楞伽山人), taking his reference from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Yueduan, meanwhile, had the courtesy name Jianshan 兼山, and used various pen names that included “Scholar of Heavenly Pond” (*Yuchi sheng* 玉池生) and “Master of Red Orchid” (*Honglan Zhuren* 紅蘭主人). Besides developing their literary skills, these bannermen also trained their ability in calligraphy and art so they could write and paint like the Chinese scholars. In addition to poetry and literary prose, many of these bannermen also became fascinated by Chinese drama, particularly the masterpieces of southern Kun opera. They not only frequently referenced stories from popular works like *Xixian ji* 西廂記 and *Mudanting* 牡丹亭 in their poems, but also composed their own dramas. Yueduan, for example, created *Yangzhou meng chuanqi* 揚州夢傳奇 (Romance of the dream of Yangzhou), a drama that became popular enough to be performed
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publically and received praise from renowned playwrights of his time including Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718) and Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645-1704). These bannermen were eager to be recognized as “men of culture,” and the Chinese literati had no problem doing so.

There were, however, aspects of the Chinese literati’s livelihood that the bannermen could not replicate. For the Chinese literati, the primary way of entering officialdom was through the imperial examinations. To do so, they must master the Confucian canon and become proficient in the eight-legged style of essay writing. For Manchu nobles, or bondservants who shared a close link with the emperor like Cao Yin, they had many other ways to advance to influential positions in Qing bureaucracy. They could choose to take the translations examination that was available only to bannermen, or they could simply take advantage of their connections in the court to find their way into a position, as Cao Yin appeared to have done. In 1699, the Kangxi Emperor also held a special examination for imperial clansmen only, in which people like Wenzhao participated, although Wenzhou’s answer was failed for citing Zhuangzi in his essay.

Some Manchu nobles did take the regular examinations anyways. Sinde, for example, attained the jinshi degree in 1676. Rather than receiving an assignment in the Hanlin Academy, as was usually the case for successful examination candidates, Sinde was however sent to serve as a imperial bodyguard (shiwei 侍衛), a military position that would not normally require a civil examination degree. Given that it was not necessary

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225 Hong Sheng also wrote one of the prefaces for the play. See Hong Sheng 洪昇, “Xu 序 (Preface), in Yueduan, Yangzhou meng chuanqi 揚州夢傳奇 (Romance of the dream of Yangzhou) (1701), 1a-b.
226 Spence, Bondservant and Master, 28.
227 Liu, Beijing qiren shehui, 620.
for these banner elites to compete in the examinations to enter state service, as the late Qing commentator Zhenjun 震鈞 notes, “there were few [among the Manchus] who dedicated their efforts in the art of examination essays.” Those who did show interest in developing their skills in that area would seldom show their works to others or publish them, “because it was considered to be an insignificant pursuit (mowu 末務).”

However much they wanted to be seen as “men of culture,” as members of the Eight Banners, the Qing court still expected these individuals to fulfill their military duties to the state. As Pamela Crossley has pointed out, the early Qing emperors Shunzhi and Kangxi wished to develop their own people into a “universal agent class” capable of fulfilling multiple functions that the state required, a vision that was shared by other conquest empires of the same period, most notably the Ottomans. The emperors tolerated the banner elites’ engagement with Chinese literature, and even produced and consumed Chinese poetry and paintings themselves. They expected, however, that these literary interests should not interfere with the bannermen’s martial training in the areas of archery and horse riding. Some of these banner elites did not enjoy the military life. Yueduan, for example, went to the northwestern frontiers with his father’s army when he was nineteen. He found this experience to be miserable, and longed for returning to the capital to rejoin his friends in his poetry club. On the other hand, both Sinde and Cao Yin diligently maintained their proficiency in archery and horse riding and fulfilled their military duties. Having both served as imperial bodyguards, they participated in several imperial hunts and northern tours as part of the Kangxi Emperor’s entourage. Sinde saw

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228 Zhenjun 震鈞, Tianzhi ouwen 天咫偶聞 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1970), 10.3b-4a.
229 Crossley, Translucent Mirror, 287.
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rapid promotion from third rank to first rank office in the Imperial Bodyguard corps, and may have advanced much further in Qing officialdom if not for his untimely death at age thirty. Cao Yin, meanwhile, came to hold two textile commissioner positions simultaneously, and remained one of the Kangxi Emperor’s most trusted ministers throughout his career. As Jonathan Spence pointed out, Cao Yin “appears to have been “genuinely Manchu on duty, and genuinely Chinese in his spare time.” Both Sinde and Cao were capable of balancing their wen and wu persona, just as the emperor had hoped all bannermen would do.

The idea that the Manchu customs became associated with work and Chinese literature with leisure became familiar among banner elites. Even for those who fulfilled their official duty attentively like Sinde and Cao Yin, it was a welcome respite to assume the role of a “man of culture” and engage with Chinese literature on their own or with their literati friends. This attitude was highlighted by another imperial clansman, Prince In Jen (Yinzhen 康禛, 1678-1735), who referred to himself as “the most idle person in the world” (tianxia diyi xianren 天下第一閒人). In his preface to a collection of assorted Chinese literary works that he selected titled Yuexin ji 悅心集 (Collection of delightful poems), he claimed that despite being born into luxury, he always felt “tranquil and leisurely, as if [he was] detached from the mortal realm” in his daily life. When he had some time to himself, he enjoyed reading literature and jotting down a few verses or sentences that “cleared up obstructions and washed away distractions,” that “made one feel carefree and relaxed, and allowed nature to take its course.” This “idle man” would later take up perhaps the most time-consuming and difficult position in the state when he

231 Spence, Bondservant and Master, 53.
became the Yongzheng Emperor. After ascending to the throne, In Jen pointed out that he no longer had as much free time to indulge in reading literature, yet his “tranquil” and “peaceful” nature remained the same, which motivated him to publish the verses that he had previously handpicked into this collection.\textsuperscript{232} Even though he would go on to carefully cultivate his public persona as a hardworking ruler, In Jen did not shy away from revealing his personal need for leisure, and commended the efficacy of Chinese literature in providing him with mental relief.

For many of these banner elites, the lifestyle of a withdrawn scholar (\textit{yinshi} 隱士), freed of his official commitments to pursue his cultural interests unreservedly, was especially enticing. Some bannermen did try to fully embrace this way of life. Wenzhao, for example, rejected his stipends from the state after failing the imperial clansmen examination, and went to live in the countryside on his own means.\textsuperscript{233} He described his daily life after making that decision as follows:

\begin{quote}
A small room with the long screens shut,
Not a single speck of dust.
Poems are written not just to relieve stifling feeling,
Wines are purchased just for entertaining guests.
I pick up pine nuts into my worn-out basket,
And feed the remaining grains to the cranes and the pheasants.
I plan to cut out a piece of “geese islet” silk,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{232} Qing Shizong 清世宗, \textit{Yuexin ji} 悅心集 (Collection of delightful poems) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1939; reprint 1960), 1.
\textsuperscript{233} Tiebao 鐵保, comp., \textit{Xichao yasong ji} 熙朝雅頌集 (Collection of elegant odes of the splendid dynasty) (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1992), 229.
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And paint a picture of my small garden.\(^ {234} \)

In this poem, Wenzhao was keen to impress upon his readers his relaxed and carefree attitude towards life after relieving himself of the burden of his official duty to the court.

Most other banner elites, however, did not find it as easy to abandon their stipends and official positions as Wenzhao did. Even though he continued to serve the Kangxi Emperor loyally as an imperial bodyguard, Sinde expressed his personal dissatisfaction with this position in his writings, believing that his talents were being wasted. In a farewell poem to his close friend Yan Shengxun 嚴繩孫 (1623-1702) after Yan decided to withdraw from officialdom and leave Beijing, he expressed his frustration towards his unfulfilled ambition and his desire to follow Yan into retirement:

江流浩淼江月墮。此時君亦應思我。  
我今落拓何所止。一事無成已如此。  
平生縱有英雄血。無由一濺荊江水。  
荊江日落陣雲低。橫戈躍馬今何時。  
忽憶去年風雨夜。與君展卷論王霸。  
君今偃仰九龍間。吾欲從茲事耕稼。

When the moon falls below the vast river surface.  
I believe at this time you are also thinking about me.  
Right now I am living in futility with no end in sight.  
As it is I have accomplished nothing in life.  
Even if my veins are filled with the blood of a hero,  
I have no cause to spill it in the waters of Jing River.\(^ {235} \)  
The sun falls above the Jing River and the clouds are low.  
When can we find the sight of warriors holding their weapons aloft and horses galloping?  
I suddenly remember last year during that stormy night,  
When you and I unfurled the scrolls and discussed the matters of state together.  
You are now passing time peacefully among your siblings and peers.

\(^ {234} \) Wenzhao 文昭, “Xiari xianju” 夏日閒居 (Idling at home on summer days), in Xichao yasong ji, 230.

\(^ {235} \) The Jing River is a portion of the Yangzi River that runs through Hubei and Hunan provinces. Several significant battles between the Qing forces and the rebel armies of the Three Feudatories were fought in the areas surrounding the river.
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I wish from now on to till the fields and plant crops.\textsuperscript{236}

Despite persisting in his martial training as the court dictated, Sinde could find no
opportunity to apply his abilities in actual battles like his forefathers did. Unhappy at his
lack of political accomplishments, Sinde expressed his desire to follow his friend to live
in leisure in the countryside. Yet as he expressed in another poem, he found himself
unable to actually carry through with that plan:

鹤生本自野。終歲不見人。
朝飲碧溪水。暮宿蒼江濱。
忽然被繒繳。矯首盼青雲。
僕亦本狂士。富貴鴻毛輕。
欲隱道無由。幡然遂華纓。
動止類循牆。戢身避高名。
憐君是知己。習俗苦不更。
安得從君去。心同流水清。

A crane is originally born in the wild.
It would not see a human all year round.
In the morning it drinks from the azure creek.
In the evening it rests at the riverbanks.
Suddenly it has been captured.
Lifting its head it gazes at the sky.
I was originally also a wild man.
Who judges wealth and prestige to be as insignificant as a goose feather.
I wanted go into reclusion, but know no way of doing so.
So I chose the opposite path and put on an official’s cap.
[As an official] all of my movements have to be extra careful.
I have to go in hiding in order to avoid making too much of a name for myself.
I appreciate that you are my intimate friend.
I agonize over the fact that I could not change my habits.
How can I follow you and leave this behind.
So my heart can be as pure as the flowing river.\textsuperscript{237}

\textsuperscript{236} Nalan Xingde 納蘭性德, “Song Sunyou” 送蓀友 (Farewell to Sunyou), in

\textsuperscript{237} Nalan Xingde, “Yehe yin zeng you” 野鶴吟贈友 (The song of wild crane, a gift to a friend), in \textit{Tongzhitang ji}, 3.18b.
Comparing himself to a crane (a common metaphor for a hermit in Chinese literary tradition) in captivity, Sinde reveals in this poem that even though he had considered withdrawing from political life, he could not see a practical way for himself to do so.

For those who could not resign from their duties to the state, they had to settle for using Chinese literature as an intermediary to experience the leisurely way of life that they longed for. In Jen, for example, could not abandon the throne to pursue a lifestyle that would suit his “tranquil” personality. Instead, he perused the works of past recluses such as Tao Qian and Hanshan 寒山 and found selected works from them that helped him attain a leisurely state of mind. In Jen, in the preface to Yuexin ji, makes the case that that is sufficient. Using the story of an exchange between two Tang Dynasty Chan Buddhist masters, he argues that physical experience was secondary to mental intuition:

昔朗禪師以書招永嘉禪師山居，師答曰，未識道而先居山者，但見其山，不見其道。未居山而先識道者，但見其道，必忘其山。見道忘山者，人間亦寂也。見山忘道者，山中乃喧也。

Master Lang (Zuoxi Xuanlang 左溪玄朗, 673-754) once invited Master Yongjia (Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺, 665-712) to reside in the mountains with him. Master [Yongjia] responded: “Those who do not fathom the Way yet reside in the mountains could only see the mountains and cannot see the Way. Those who do not reside in the mountains yet fathom the Way would see the Way and forget about the mountains. For those who see the Way and forget about the mountains, they would be find peace even among the mortal realm. For those who see the mountains but forget the Way, they would be disturbed by clamors even in the mountains.”

As someone who was “naturally inclined towards tranquility,” In Jen did not need to physically locate himself in the places that past Chinese recluses had lived in and reenact the practices that they had engaged in, in order to embody the ideals that these scholars

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238 Qing Shizong, Yuexin ji, 2.
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represented. For many banner elites who are not willing to abandon their political ambition or state financial support, this was an alternative they settled for.

Eight Banners Literati in the Eighteenth Century

“Recently I have found that the literary refinement among the Manchus has far surpassed that found among the Han people.” The Qianlong-era poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) made this observation in the supplement volumes to Suiyuan shihua 隨園詩話 (Commentaries on poetry from Harmony Garden), a collection of his literary critiques. He discovered that even bannermen who held military positions could all compose poetry.²³⁹ Yuan’s view reflected a great expansion in Chinese cultural literacy among the Eight Banners during the nineteenth century. Thanks to the continued generous endowments they received from the Qing court, the imperial nobles were able to keep investing in the education of their descendants, so that more and more “men of culture” appeared every generation.²⁴⁰ Beyond the Manchu nobility, however, other groups of banner population also began producing highly educated individuals capable of creating Chinese literature. For example, as shown in the Baqi yiwen bianmu 八旗藝文編目 (Catalogue of literature of the Eight Banners), compiled by late Qing bannerman Enhua 恩華, the first literary collections of Mongol bannermen began appearing during the Qianlong reign.²⁴¹ Indeed, several renowned Mongol literati emerged during this period,

²⁴⁰ Zhaolian 昭槤, Xiaoting zalu 嘯亭雜錄 (Miscellaneous records of Xiaoting) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 25.
²⁴¹ See Enhua 恩華, Baqi yiwen bianmu 八旗藝文編目 (Catalogue of literature of the Eight Banners) (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2006), 127-132. The first literary
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including the previously mentioned Faššan and Sungyūn. Meanwhile, the number of literate women listed in the same bibliography more than doubled from the Kangxi-Yongzheng period to the Qianlong-Jiaqing period.\(^{242}\) They included not only female writers born into the Eight Banners such as Gu Taiqing 顧太清 (1799-1877), but also Han women who married into banner families such as Yun Zhu 悅珠 (1771-1833).

It was not just Chinese observers from the outside who recognized this trend. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bannermen became more aware of their own cultural achievements. This led to some banner scholars to conduct compilation projects of literary works composed within the Eight Banners. During the Qianlong reign, two different bannermen, Zhuo Qitu 卓奇圖 and Yi Funa 伊福納, each compiled a collection of bannermen poetry, titled *Baishan shicun* 白山詩存 (Preserved poetry from Changbai Mountain) and *Baishan shichao* 白山詩抄 (Poetry manuscripts from Changbai Mountains) respectively.\(^{243}\) Both compilations were never completed, and their manuscripts are unfortunately no longer extant. On the basis of these two collections, however, the Manchu bannerman Tiyeboo 鐵保 (1752-1824) compiled his own collection of Eight Banners literature titled *Baishan shijie* 白山詩介 (Introduction to poetry of Changbai Mountain).\(^{244}\) He would later expand upon this collection much

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\(^{242}\) Ibid., 156-161.

\(^{243}\) “Baishan” 白山 refers to the Changbai Mountains, the mythical birthplace of Nurhaci’s ancestor. It was commonly used as shorthand for the Eight Banners.

\(^{244}\) According to [Faššan, Tiebao kept both *Baishan shicun* and *Baishan shichao* in his book collection. See Fa-shi-shan 法式善 [Faššan], *Taolu zalu* 陶蘆雜錄 (Assorted records of Taolu) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 91.
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further and present it to the Qing court, where it received imperial ordination from the Jiaqing Emperor and given the title Xichao yasong ji 熙朝雅頌集 (Elegant chants of prosperous times). Xichao consists of a hundred and thirty-four juan, containing over six thousand poems composed by five hundred and thirty-four poets from the beginning of the dynasty to the end of the Qianlong era. The backgrounds of the banner writers whose works were selected ran the gamut from imperial clansmen and high officials to idle bannermen and women from all twenty-four banners. Tiyeboo’s friend Faššan was closely involved in the editorial process of this compilation, especially in researching the biographical backgrounds of the chosen poets. He would further publish his short critiques of the works of around half of the poets included in Xichao in a volume titled Baqi shihua 八旗詩話 (Conversations on poetry from the Eight Banners).245

Not everybody, however, shared such enthusiasm towards the literary production of the Eight Banners. One anonymous bannerman, having read Suiyuan shihua, made several comments that disputed the ability of several Eight Banner poets who Yuan Mei praised. For example, when Yuan recounted a story of the Manchu commander Fuheng 傅恒 (1720-1770) praising Yuan’s poetry, the commentator questions its veracity, pointing out that Fuheng was illiterate in Chinese and would have no idea how to appreciate poetic talent.246 He also completely dismisses the poetic talent of Cinglan 慶蘭, son of the Grand Secretary Yengišan 尹繼善 (1694-1771).247 The commentator does

245 See Faššan, Wumen shihua hejiao 梧門詩話合校 (Complete collated edition of conversations on poetry from Wumen) (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2005), 466-531.
246 Mao Guangsheng 冒廣生, ed., Piben Suiyuan shihua 批本隨園詩話 (Commentary edition of Conversations on poetry from Suiyuan) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1934), 16b.
247 Mao, Piben, 29b.
recognize the literary ability of Faššan, but questions his moral character. He claims that during the compilation process of *Xichao yasong ji*, Tiyeboo delegated most of the work to Faššan. Faššan used the materials already collected in *Baishan shijie* for half of *Xichao*, but for the other half he simply auctioned away available places to the highest bidders, willing to even rewrite or fabricate the poems they presented to him. As a result, “even those who were completely illiterate, as well as children and women,” would all find themselves mixed among the ranks of the great poets of the Eight Banners.  

Although the commentator casted doubt on the level of literary ability across the Eight Banners, his remarks revealed how increasingly important it was for a bannerman to acquire a literary reputation for himself during this era. At the beginning of the dynasty, most high-ranking Manchu commanders and officials saw little value in preserving and publishing their literary output, unless they held serious interests in these pursuits like Sinde and Cao Yin did. Among all the Eight Banners Grand Secretaries who served under the Shunzhi and Kangxi emperors during the seventeenth century, with the exception of former Ming officials who were granted banner status such as Hong Chengchou 洪承疇 (1593-1665), the only surviving piece of personal writing from any of them is a single poem by Mingju that was selected in *Xichao yasong ji*. During the Qianlong reign, however, it became standard practice for prominent bannermen to establish themselves as capable scholars and poets. Military leaders such as Akdun 阿克

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249 Other Eight Banner Grand Secretaries such as Ning Wanwo 宁完我 and Kicungge 祁充格 have participated in court-sponsored publications, but none of them have had their own writings according to *Baqi yiwen bianmu*. By contrast, most of their contemporary Chinese colleagues have all left behind *wenji*. 

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敦 (1685-1756) and his son Agui 阿桂 (1717-1797), Yue Zhongqi 岳鐘琪 (1686-1754),
and Fuheng’s sons Fuk’anggan 福康安 (1753-1796) and Fucanggan 福長安 (d. 1817) all
left behind wenji 文集 (literature collection) or shiji 詩集 (poetry collection); so too did
leading officials such as Ortai 鄂爾泰 (1677-1745), Yengišan, and Hešen 和珅 (1750-
1799). This shift showed that the bannermen were progressively ascribing more to the
social norms of the Chinese literati elites. They were interested in seeking the approval of
influential Jiangnan scholars like Yuan Mei, and put effort into learning their language,
etiquette, and practices.

For the eighteenth-century bannermen, it became more important to build up their
reputation as talented scholars due to how increasingly difficult it was for them to earn
recognition and prestige through the official avenue. As previous chapters have
discussed, it was during the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns that the Eight Banners
population began to visibly outgrow the number of available posts in Qing officialdom
and military. This led to growing competition for limited amount of positions that offered
potential opportunities to accomplish worthy deeds and earn fame and glory, either on the
battlefield or in the central court and local magistrates. Only a few could rise to the top,
while the majority toiled in anonymity in low-ranking offices for their entire lives, or
could not find a way into the bureaucracy altogether. In The Manchu Way, Mark Elliott
pointed to the position of bithesi, or clerks, as often a stepping-stone towards successful
official careers for several prominent bannermen, according to their biographies in the
standard Qing histories.²⁵⁰ Yet much like the case with the civil service examinations, the

²⁵⁰ Elliott, Manchu Way, 151-152.
few success stories should not cover the fact that for the majority of the hundreds of
bithesi that existed at any time during the eighteenth century (and even more so in the
nineteenth century), they would not advance very far above this lowly position. For
example, the brothers Dunceng and Dunmin 敦敏 (1729-1796), who I will discuss further
in the next section, could only rise to insignificant posts in the official banner schools and
the Imperial Ancestral Temple respectively after serving as bithesi.

Even for those who did rise to the top, their political careers were often highly
volatile due to a series of major upheavals that occurred starting in the late-Kangxi era.
Both Sinde’s father Mingju and his archrival in court, Songgotu 索額圖 (1636-1703)
were brought down due to their involvement in the succession controversy towards the
end of the Kangxi reign. Mingju was implicated for his close relationship with the
deposed Crown Prince Yinzhi 胤祉 (1677-1732) and sent to prison on corruption
charges, while Songgotu was executed for supporting the claim of his grand-nephew, the
third prince Yinreng 胤祹 (1674-1725). After the Kangxi Emperor’s passing, a large
number of banner officials also suffered reprisals from the Yongzheng Emperor for their
connections to his rival brothers. Perhaps most famously today, Cao Yin’s son Cao Fu 曹
頫 (1706-1774) was cashiered from his position as the Jiangning textiles commissioner
and placed under arrest, officially for mismanagement of funds but also likely because of
his close personal links to Kangxi’s ninth son Yintang 胤禟 (1683-1726).251 Yongzheng
later became suspicious that the prominent officials and generals that supported his claim

251 See Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌, *Hongloumeng xinzheng* 紅樓夢新証 (New evidential
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were amassing too much power, and purged several of them as well. The most prominent examples were the emperor’s erstwhile confidantes Nian Gengyao 年羹堯 (1679-1726) and Longkedo 隆科多 (d. 1728), but Yue Zhongqi was later also relieved of his military command and nearly beheaded. Further controversies during the Qianlong reign would ruin the political reputation of Ortai, who, because his student Hu Zhongzao 胡中藻 (1695-1755) was found guilty of seditious writings and executed, was posthumously removed from the Temple of Virtuous Officials 賢良祠. At the start of the Jiaqing reign, Hešen, once the most powerful official in the Qing Empire thanks the Qianlong’s favor, was ordered to commit suicide by the new emperor for his rampant corruption. Fucangga and Faššan were also implicated on corruption charges and both were cashiered. All these examples showed that in Qing officialdom, those who rose to the highest ranks might also suffer the hardest falls.

These numerous political controversies not only ruined the careers and reputations of these banner officials themselves, but also potentially shut down the political prospects of their descendants and relatives by association. Cao Xueqin, who was either Cao Fu’s son or nephew, was still young when his family had its properties confiscated by the state, and he could never find any jobs in officialdom outside of teaching positions in banner schools. Another unwitting victim of the Kangxi succession crisis was Dunceng and Dunmin’s close friend, another imperial clansman Yungjung 永忠 (1735-1793), whose grandfather Yinti 胤禵 (1688-1756), the fourteenth son of the Kangxi, was placed under house arrest by Yongzheng. Outside of his noble title of Bulwark-General of the State (Fuguo jiangjun 輔國將軍), Yungjung never was given any official duties other than appearances at ceremonial functions. The commentator of
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*Suiyuan shihua* happened to be one of the sons of the imperial clansman Ulana 伍拉納, who was executed in 1795 for corruption due to his close association with Hešen.\(^{252}\) His family’s properties were also confiscated by the state, just like the Cao family. His bitter rebukes towards many high-ranking Manchu officials, especially Hešen, revealed his frustrations at the fact that he became an innocent victim of the turbulent political climate and rampant culture of corruption in the Qing state during the late Qianlong reign. In the cases of these bannermen, the transgressions of their forebears had cost them any chance for advancement in officialdom.

Whether because of such political upheavals or just through intensifying competition for a small number of significant official positions, the fortunes of the families of several prominent officials could dissipate very rapidly. The collapse of the Cao family has been immortalized in the Cao Xueqin’s novel. The families of other prestigious or wealthy bannermen also suffered similar downturns. The Hu Zhongzao case not only brought posthumous dishonor to Ortai’s name, but his nephew Ocang 鄺昌 (1691-1760), the Governor of Gansu who was a close friend of Hu, was also ordered to commit suicide. Ocang’s family also had its properties seized, and his granddaughter, the female poet Gu Taiqing, lived in exile in several provinces in the south, and took on a fake last name to disguise her heritage.\(^ {253}\) She later married Yihui 奕繪 (1799-1838), a *doro-i beile* 多羅貝勒 (Prince of the Third Rank), but only as his concubine. Meanwhile,

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\(^{252}\) Mao Guangsheng, who rediscovered these commentaries to *Suiyuan shihua* in the early Republican period, identified the commentator as someone whose name started with Shu 舒. See Mao’s preface in *Piben suiyuan shihua*, 1a. Some historians have determined that he was Ulana’s oldest son Shukun 舒坤, while others believed that he was the second son Shudun 舒敦.

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Wenhe 文鶴, one of Yengišan’s grandsons, had served as an imperial guardsman, but eventually died in “extreme poverty.”\footnote{Piben Suiyuan shihua, 14b.} The commentator of Suiyuan shihua also pointed out that one of his cousins, a bannerman named Zhishu 志書, also ended up living in destitution despite being born wealthy, and his six sons “had nothing to eat, and had no choice but to become thieves.”\footnote{Piben Suiyuan shihua, 26a.} For bannermen like Cao Xueqin, such a downward spiral from luxury to deprivation could only be rationalized as part of the natural social order: “All grand feasts must eventually disperse.”\footnote{Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, Honglou meng 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982; reprint 2000), 1:171.}

As mentioned last chapter, these eighteenth-century bannermen who could not find stable employment with the state struggled with financial difficulties, given the fact that the state heavily discouraged them from pursuing other professions. Yet even for those who still held noble titles or low-ranking positions and received enough stipend to live on, their grim prospects for advancement nevertheless forced them to search for other purposes in life to fulfill. For many of them, the one skill they could rely on was their literary talent. Their ability to write poetry, draw paintings, and compose calligraphy presented them with means to make a living, and also allowed them to enter social networks that offered opportunities for patronage or mutual assistance, as Mucihiyan was able to take advantage of later in the Daoguang era. Through their literary creations, moreover, they could build for themselves a reputation for knowledge and refinement, and receive recognition within their local communities and even across Chinese elite...
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society as a whole, allowing them to attain a level of respect that many of those who managed to advance much higher in officialdom could never achieve.

**Dream of the Red Chamber in Context of Eighteenth Century Bannermen Community**

The *Dream of the Red Chamber* is known today as one of the greatest masterpieces of Chinese literature. The novel has by itself spawned an entire academic field dedicated to its study that would come to be known as Redology (*hongxue* 紅學). The accumulated scholarship that Redologists have produced has made Cao Xueqin one of the most well-studied people in Chinese history. Yet during his lifetime, he was a peripheral figure, someone whose only claim to fame was his once great family name, built by the accomplishment of his ancestors, particularly his grandfather Cao Yin, which Cao Xueqin had no ability or opportunity to emulate. Before it became a national treasure, it was an incomplete manuscript that circulated among a small community of bannermen readers in the capital for several decades.

The *Story of the Stone* 石頭記, the original title given to Cao Xueqin’s novel, begins at the start of time with the legend of the goddess Nüwa mending a hole in the heavens. She created thirty-six thousand five hundred and one magical stones as her building blocks, but after she completed her project, one was left over. That stone was abandoned at the foot of “Greensickness Peak” (Qinggeng Feng 青埂峯), where it attained consciousness and gained magical powers.257 One day, a monk and a Daoist

257 “Qinggeng” 青埂 is homophonous to the word *qinggen* 情根, which signifies “sentimental attachment.” In the novel, many places and people are given names with such euphemistic double-meanings.
priest encountered the stone, and they took it with them to the mortal realm, where it
could experience life in a refined, aristocratic family. After many generations, the two
eccentric ecclesiasts found the stone back where it was originally, but now carved with an
account of all of its experiences during its reincarnations. The story ends with a short
poem:

無材可去補蒼天。枉入紅塵若許年。
此係身前身後事。倩誰記去作奇傳。

Lacking the talent to mend the heavens.  
Entering the mortal realm for many years in vain.  
These are what happened to me throughout my life as a mortal.  
Who may I ask to record this and transmit this story? 258

Hence, at the very beginning, the novel emphasized that this is a personal story of
someone who could not fulfill the purpose of their existence.

The person the stone eventually reincarnated as is Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉, the main
protagonist of the novel who was born into a wealthy, prestigious family. The
extraordinary circumstance under which he was born, coming out of his mother’s womb
holding a piece of beautiful jade in his mouth, earmarked the boy for greatness in the
eyes of his elders in the Jia family. Yet their high hopes for him would soon be dashed.
When Baoyu was one year old, his father tried to predict his son’s future ambitions by
presenting the boy with various objects to see which he preferred, but to his father’s
dismay, Baoyu only showed interest for feminine objects such as rouge, powder, combs,
and bracelets.259 As he grew up, he purposefully shunned the classical studies his father
assigned to him, nor did he care to develop any other professional talents. Instead, he

preferred to fool around with his female relatives and young maids all day in the large family garden. He derived his greatest joy from his literary interactions with his talented cousins and sisters. They formed their own poetry club, where Baoyu was initially given the nickname “Idle Man of Luxury” (fugui xianren 富貴閒人) in jest.\textsuperscript{260}

This novel was finally published in 1791 under a new name, \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber}, more than thirty years after the first manuscript versions of \textit{The Story of the Stone} began to circulate. While the manuscript versions stopped abruptly at chapter eighty in the middle of the plot, the published edition contained forty extra chapters that provided a definitive ending to the story. \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber} attained immense popularity in rapid fashion, intoxicating the minds of readers both male and female. Incredibly, within only a few decades, \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber} grew to become a franchise that overshadowed other established literary standards, such as \textit{The Romance of the Western Chambers} (Xixiang ji 西廂記) and \textit{Romance of the Three Kingdoms} (Sangguo yanyi 三國演義), that had been in existence for centuries at that point. It spawned numerous fan sequels, including one authored by Gu Taiqing. Various famous scenes from the novel were adapted into operas, songs (including many zidishu), and games. Yet despite its domination of the literary scene throughout the nineteenth century, a couple of questions continued to vex its readers: who was the author of the novel Cao Xueqin, and why did he write this novel?

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At the beginning of the twentieth century, these two questions became the primary subjects of inquiry for many leading intellectuals. Initially, some scholars, such as Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, the principal of Beijing University from 1916 to 1927, believed that the story of the novel was based on palace intrigues or gossips surrounding elite Manchu families, offering veiled criticisms of the Qing regime. Cao Xueqin was hence positioned as a Chinese nationalist who was exposing the grimy secrets of the Manchu overlords through allegories and metaphors. These scholars, which came to be known as the “exploring obscurities” school (suoyin pai 索隱派), treated the novel as a giant riddle, and tried to decipher individual words or phrases as if they were codes. Their methodology was criticized another set of scholars, including Hu Shi 胡适, Yu Pingbo 俞平伯, and Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌, who advocated a more “scientific” and “objective” method of studying the novel by finding concrete historical evidence regarding the author. They came to be known as the “evidential studies” school (kaozheng pai 考證派), and they tried to apply rigorous philological methods to analyze novel’s authorship. In his book Honglou meng kaozheng 紅樓夢考證 (Evidential study of Dream of the Red Chamber), Hu was able to authoritatively identify Cao Xueqin as a bannerman of Chinese descent and a grandchild of Cao Yin, using references to the novel’s author in various literary and historical sources written during or right after the author’s lifetime. These included poems found in the literary collections of Dunceng and Dunmin, which documented their personal interactions with the novel’s author and identified his real name as Cao Zhan 曹霑. Using the evidence they found, the kaozheng scholars
concluded that this novel was an autobiographical work, and the stories found in the novel all reflected events that Cao experienced or witnessed in his life.\footnote{For a detailed summary and analysis of much of the historical sources concerning Cao and his novel that were uncovered by scholars of the \textit{kaozheng} school, including Manchu language sources, see Huang Yinong 黄一农, \textit{Er chongzou: Hongxue yu Qingshi de duihua} 二重奏: 紅學與清史的對話 (A Duet: Conversations between Redology and Qing history) (Xinzhu: Qingda chubanshe, 2014).}

The \textit{kaozheng} scholars should be credited for bringing the Eight Banners background of Cao Xueqin to the foreground of mainstream academic discussions. In particular, their studies ignited academic interest into the various manuscript editions of the novel that circulated before its publication. It has been found that before the published edition \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber} attained national fame, various copies of novel, several of which contain commentaries by someone called “Red Inkstone” (Zhiyanzhai 脂硯齋) who appeared to know the author personally, were already being widely distributed and consumed within a small community of literate elites in Beijing during the latter half of the Qianlong era. Moreover, the majority of the novel’s first readers were bannermen. Interestingly, some of Cao’s friends, such as Dunceng and Dunmin, did not directly comment on Cao’s novel in their own writings.\footnote{Yu Yingshi argues that the Dun brothers may have contributed to the early commentaries of the \textit{Story of the Stone} that have since been attributed to “Red Inkstone” and another figure, “Odd Tablet” (Jihusou 崧笏叟). See Yu Yingshi, “Dunmin, Duncheng yu Cao Xueqin de wenzi yinyuan” 敦敏、敦誠與曹雪芹的文字因緣 (Dunceng and Dunmin’s literary relationship with Cao Xueqin), in \textit{Honglou meng de liangge shijie} 紅樓夢的兩個世界 (The two worlds of \textit{Dream of the Red Chamber}) (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2002), 120-147. The essay was originally published in 1976.} Another one of Cao’s associates, Mingyi 明義, did compose twenty poems based on various characters and
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scenes in the novel. In his short preface to these poems, Mingyi was still lamenting that the novel had not been widely circulated and few people know about it. Yungjung never met Cao during his lifetime, despite sharing many of the same associates as him, and after Yungjung found a copy of the *Story of the Stone* through his (as well as Mingyi’s) relative and colleague Moxiang, he showed his regret for that fact in one of his three poems dedicated to the novel. Eventually, a few manuscripts did find their way to cities in the south into the hands of Chinese literati, with these bannermen often serving as the conduits. Local booksellers also began to acquire copies of the novel by the late eighteenth century, including the publisher Cheng Weiyuan who eventually produced the novel’s first published edition with the support of Gao E, a Chinese bannerman who was a candidate for the national level imperial examination at the time.

The likes of Dunceng, Dunmin, Yungjung, and Mingyi have now become widely recognized names in Redology as members of Cao Xueqin’s extended social network. Yet before kaozheng scholars like Hu Shi “rediscovered” these individuals because of their connections to Cao, they were already respected poets and scholars among Eight Banners elites. Dunceng, Dunmin, and Yungjung had fifty-eight, thirty-five, and fifty of their poems selected into the *Xichao yasong ji* respectively. In *Xiaoting zalu*,

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263 Mingyi 明義, “Ti Honglou meng” 題紅樓夢 (On Dream of the Red Chamber), in *Luyan suochuang ji* 綠煙瑣窗集 (Collection of green smoke and embroidered window) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 105-109.
265 Yongzhong 永忠, “Yin Moxiang de guan Honglou meng xiaoshuo diao Xueqin” 因墨香得觀紅樓夢小說弔學芹 (Saw the novel Dream of the Red Chamber through Moxiang, mourning Xueqin), in *Yanfenshi ji* 延芬室集 (Collected works of Chamber of Extending Fragrance) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), 778.
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(Miscellaneous records of Xiaoting), Zhaolian 昭梿 (1776-1830), an imperial clansman who was a generation below these three, praised them for their literary talent. Dunceng and Dunmin’s poetry were lauded for “following the style of late Tang and expressing abundantly leisurely sentiments.” Yungjung was not only praised for his “elegant poetic style,” but also for his calligraphic works that “captured abundantly the flavor of the Jin Dynasty masters.” 266 Cao Xueqin may have attained far greater levels of fame after his death thanks to the popularity of Dream of the Red Chamber, but during his lifetime, he was very much a peripheral figure in this social circle, whereas these Manchu nobles commanded far more acclaim for their literary production.

Since the 1970s, many academics, particularly in the West, have pushed back against the kaozheng school’s methodology. In his essay “The Two Worlds of The Dream of the Red Chamber,” Yu Yingshi pointed out that in the novel the author created two separate worlds, “the utopian world” and “the real world,” which corresponded to what took place outside of the Grand Prospect Garden where the young protagonists resided, and what took place inside the garden. Thus far, kaozheng scholars has only concentrated their attention on uncovering “the real world,” and completely ignored the author’s artistic vision in his creation of “the utopian world” that is filled with imagination and ingenuity. 267 As Yu would go on to illustrate, the main narrative arc of the novel focuses on the construction, development, and ultimately inevitable destruction of this pure and refined ideal world: it was built upon a polluted foundation, and it ultimately could not resist and had to succumb to the corrupting influence of the impure and tawdry real

266 Zhaolian, Xiaoting zalu, 25.
267 Yu Yingshi, “Honglou meng de liangge shijie” 紅樓夢的兩個世界 (The Two worlds of The Dream of the Red Chamber), in Honglou meng de liangge shijie, 36.
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world. By obfuscating the two worlds and reducing every scene in the novel to potential personal experiences of the author, kaozheng scholars were guilty of obscuring the literary accomplishments of the novel. Yu Yingshi’s rebuke of the kaozheng scholars and proposal to return literary criticism back to the study of the novel was shared by several other Western scholars, including Anthony Yu, who disparaged the autobiographical approach for seeing the novel as “little different from district and regional gazettes, anthologies of court transactions and memorials, merchant account books, or the Collected Writings on the Statecraft of the Ming Dynasty.”

For historians who intend to use the Dream of the Red Chamber as a historical source, these are important criticisms that need to be heeded. As I proceed, I will seek to use the novel in conjunction with the literary output of other Beijing bannermen to show their adoption and adaptation of the Chinese literary concept of “idleness” in forging their own persona. In doing so, I will make extensive use of the sources that past kaozheng scholars have brought significant attention to, such as the literary collections of Dunceng, Dunmin, and Yungjung. It is not my goal, however, to comb through them to find obscure details of Cao’s life, but to examine them together with The Story of the Stone to explore these bannermen’s portrayal of themselves and their peers. I do not wish to completely reject the autobiographical angle in studying the main protagonist of the novel, Jia Baoyu, for I believe the author’s personal experiences and sentiments had significant input in the creation of this character. However, rather than concentrating on how much Baoyu’s stories mirrored specific aspects of Cao’s life, I will compare the way this

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color{black}\textbf{character was portrayed in the novel with how other banner scholars of the same period described their worldview in their literary output, in order understand how this group of bannermen understood their place in society. As Evelyn Rawski has pointed out in her article “The Banner Story of the Stone,” studying the Story of the Stone under an Eight Banners context “is a reflection of the importance of contemporary circumstances in both the creation and reception of literature.” It does not, however, preclude other approaches to analyze the novel, for its popularity has clearly shown that it has transcended “the particular culture of its creators.”}\footnote{270}

\textbf{Caught Between Two Worlds: Conception of Leisure and Eremitism in Dream of the Red Chamber and Eighteenth Century Bannermen Literature}

In the same article, Rawski illustrated various ways the Jia clan in the novel demonstrated typical attributes and activities of a wealthy Eight Banners household. Unlike most Chinese elite families who derived their status from continued success in the imperial examinations, the Jia family came to prominence thanks to their ancestors’ heroic deeds on the battlefield, which was much more characteristic of prominent Eight Banners clans.\footnote{271} Although the two branches of the family, Ningguo 宁国 and Rongguo 榮国, subsequently invested heavily in education and several of its descendants earned jinshi degrees, many male family members continued to hold military titles, hereditary or

\footnote{270} Evelyn S. Rawski, “The Banner Story of the Stone,” in Approaches to Teaching The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber), ed. Andrew Schonebaum and Tina Lu (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2012), 157.\footnote{271} As Jiao Da 焦大, an elderly servant of the Ningguo branch of the family, illustrates, the two founders of the Jia clan were both military leaders who earned their noble positions through merits on the battlefield. Cao, Honglou meng, 1:113. See also Rawski, “Banner Story of the Stone,” 148-149.
otherwise. In the novel, the Jia clan was depicted as having extraordinarily close relationship with the imperial court. Baoyu’s eldest sister, Yuanchun 元春, was selected by the emperor as one of his consorts, which during Qing times only daughters of bannermen were eligible for that status. Members of the family frequently socialized with imperial nobles such as the Prince of Beijing 北靜王, and eunuchs from the palace constantly entered and exited the Jia mansions at will. In its past, the Jia family had hosted the emperor and his entourage during one of his imperial tours, just as the author’s family did when his grandfather Cao Yin was serving as the textile commissioner in Nanjing. Other signs of the Jia family’s background could be seen in their dress, dietary practices, and social functions, which I will not elaborate here.

Throughout the Story of the Stone, however, the main character Baoyu is portrayed as an iconoclast of his family, constantly rejecting or ignoring the duties a scion of the Jia clan was expected to fulfill. He paid minimal attention to his classical studies, believing that “many things besides the Four Books are made up.” Nor did he show any proclivity towards martial pursuits. When he found Jia Lan 賈蘭 practicing the traditional Manchu pursuits of horseriding and archery, Baoyu simply laughed at his nephew for wasting his time. He harbored no political ambition, claiming that he would be willing to “come and go naked and without attachments.”

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272 Jia Zhen, for example, inherited a “third-rank” noble status as well as the position of “Fierce and Powerful General” 威烈將軍. Jia Rong, his son, received a fifth-rank officer post in the Imperial Guards that was purchased by his father. Cao, Honglou meng, 1: 174.
274 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:210.
275 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:50.
276 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:353.
277 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:297.
behave like a typical dissolute youth of his time. Although he attended a few social events with his young, wealthy male friends, he never showed persistent interest in the activities that they enjoyed, such as whoring, gambling, and visiting the theater. Baoyu hence conformed to neither the Qing court’s vision of an ideal bannerman, nor society’s expectation of how a banner youth would typically behave.

Instead, Baoyu lived up to his nickname of “Idle Man of Luxury,” constantly wandering the Grand Prospect Garden aimlessly. His favorite companions are his female sisters and cousins, as well as the numerous young maids who served in both mansions. His relationship with most of these girls remains platonic, with the exception of his closest handmaiden Aroma. At the beginning of the novel, when Jia Yucun 賈雨村, a distant relative of the Jia family, discussed the clan with his friend Leng Zixing 冷子興, the latter famously quotes Baoyu, “Girls are made of water and boy are made of mud. When I meet a girl, I feel refreshed, but when I meet a boy, I feel repulsed by his odious smell.” This contrast of female purity and male pollution could be elucidated by the “two worlds” theory that Yu Yingshi proposed. In general, boys were expected by birth to develop the skills necessary to make a living and provide for his household, with the highest attainable goal being an examination degree and a position in the government. This is especially expected of bannermen, who were born as “the emperor’s men,” and were all expected by the Qing court to serve the state. This made men susceptible to the various corrupting influences of society. In contrast, girls in their youth were generally sequestered within their households and cut off from polluting worldly affairs. They could not take the examination and become government officials, so they were not

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278 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:28.
burdened with political ambitions. Of course, eventually they would be forced to leave their maternal home and be married off to another household, which would inevitably lead to their loss of purity. This dilemma led Baoyu to sadly proclaim that girls who were originally “priceless pearls” suddenly “develop a bunch of bad problems” and lose their luster after they get married, and became no more than “fish eyes” once they get old.”

To him, enclosed world that the young maidens resided in represented the height of elegance and refinement (雅), and there is no greater tragedy when they are physically and mentally invaded by forces of vulgarity and mundanity (俗) that emanated from outside world.

In the same discussion between Jia Yucun and Leng Zixing, they tried to find ways to classify someone like Jia Baoyu. Leng was ready to dismiss Baoyu as a typical skirt chaser, but Jia Yucun vehemently disagreed. After listing a large number of famous heroes and villains of Chinese history who all made great political impact during their lifetimes one way or another, Yucun went on to introduce a third category of people who were in between good and evil. These people were blessed with superior innate wit and intellect, but also cursed with natural proclivity towards eccentric and heterodox thinking and behavior. According to Yucun, when this type of people were born into wealthy or noble families, they become “infatuated lovers and hopeless romantics”; when they were born into educated households of meager means, they become “reclusive scholars and lofty aesthetes”; when they were born into the bottom wrung of society, they become

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279 Cao, *Honglou meng*, 1:811-812. For further discussions on the *Dream of the Red Chamber*’s use of gender to highlight the contrasts of the real world and the ideal world, see Louise Edwards, *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dreams* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
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“great actors or celebrated entertainers.” In this categorization, all these types of people are united in their antipathy towards all forms of political engagement. Under the dichotomy between shi (political service) and yin (political withdrawal), the choices that these figures make in their lives consistently fall under the later end of the spectrum. Indeed, as Yucun goes on to list examples of individuals that belonged to the third category, he placed Baoyu together with several famous recluses of the Chinese eremitic tradition, such as Xu You 许由, Tao Qian, and the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢.

Jia Baoyu’s disinterest in political and worldly engagement was shared by his creator’s friends. In his short sketch “Xianyongzi zhuan” 閒慵子傳 (Biography of Sir Idle and Lazy), Dunceng introduced an anonymous man who is characterized by his “idle” (xian 閒) and “lazy” (yong 懶) lifestyle. This was a person who was born into status, but neglected his classical studies since he was young, much like Baoyu. He holds no ambition towards political advancement, and is neglectful towards fostering social connections. When his parents were still alive he was able to find official employment with their help, but after they passed away he quickly retired from official life and lived in a way that befitted his moniker. Other than for occasions that absolutely required his attendance such as funerals, the only times he would leave his abode was to meet his close friends for food, drinks, and merry discussions. Over time, his more worldly relatives all found his way of living to be laughable and pitiful, and have stopped paying attention to him. This only made Sir Idle and Lazy become more and more content with

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280 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:29-30.
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his lifestyle. Just as the character Baoyu likely embodied many facets of Cao Xueqin’s own personality and worldview, this Sir Idle and Lazy also could be read as a self-portrayal.

This form of aversion towards political engagement has been interpreted as a form of opposition against the hierarchical order of the Qing Empire. Scholars of the “exploring obscurities” school such as Cai Yuanpei, as mentioned earlier, believed that the *Dream of the Red Chamber* was filled with hidden messages that advocated toppling the Qing and recovering the Ming (*fan Qing fu Ming 反清復明*) throughout the novel. Although the works of Cai and others have long been dismissed for their unscientific methodology, other Redologists continued to give credence to the observation that the novel carried anti-government sentiments. Yu Yingshi, for example, highlighted passages within the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as poems by the Dun brothers and another of Cao’s friends, the Chinese bannerman Yiquan 宜泉, that suggested their resentment towards the ruling regime. While he found it impossible for the two imperial clansmen to be “anti-Manchu,” Yu raised the possibility that Cao and Yiquan were developing a kind of “Han ethnic identity” that showed resistance towards the Qing rulers. Meanwhile, from the 1950s to the 70s, Redologists in the PRC such as Li Xifan 李希凡, under the ideological influence of the Communist Party, interpreted the motive of the novelist as exposing “the class struggles in feudal society.”

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281 Duncheng 敦誠, “Xianyongzi zhuan” 閒慵子傳 (Sir Idle and Lazy), in *Sisongtang ji* 四松堂集 (Collected works of the Hall of Four Pines) (Beijing: Wenzue guji kanxingshe, 1955), 3.22b-23b, 186-188.
282 See Li Xifan 李希凡, *Cao Xueqin he ta de Honglou meng* 曹雪芹和他的紅樓夢 (Cao Xueqin and his *Dream of the Red Chamber*) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), 10.
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revolutionary thinker who fought against not just the Qing regime, but also the entire “feudal” sociopolitical order.

These interpretations of the political motives of Cao and his friends, however, overstated the nature of their antipathy towards the Qing state. Going back to the genesis story at the beginning of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the stone is not resentful towards the goddess Nüwa for failing utilize it to fix the sky. It recognizes that it did not possess the talent or disposition to fulfill that task, and instead desires to experience a completely different way of life. Likewise, his reincarnation Baoyu’s resistance towards the political career that his family expected him to strive for is very passive. Although he ignores his classical studies and often make outrageous, subversive statements as seen above, he is also meek and fearful when confronted by authority figures in his household. Whenever his father, the model scholar-official Jia Zheng 賈政, was at home, Baoyu would frantically retrieve his Confucian textbooks and pretend to be studying diligently. When he received a heavy beating from his father in chapter 33, Baoyu readily accepts his punishment and showed no sign of struggle whatsoever. Despite suffering grievous injuries, he was actually happy that his beating led to his cousins and maids showering him with concern, thinking that it was worthwhile to allow “all of his life’s ambitions dissipate” and pass away just to find out how much they would grieve for him.\(^{283}\)

Baoyu’s lack of overt resistance towards his elders in the family mirrors the way the Jia clan’s relationship with the imperial court, as all its family members presents themselves in an inferior position to the imperial princes and quivers in fear whenever they receive imperial summons, which as Evelyn Rawski points out is consistent with the bondservant

\(^{283}\) Cao, *Hong lou meng*, 1:450.
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background of the author’s family. While the novel illustrated miscarriages of justice by local magistrates, the authority and legitimacy of the imperial court was never questioned. Neither did Dunceng, Dunmin, and Zhang Yitao ever express any explicit frustration with or criticism of the Qing court.

What bannermen like Cao and the Dun brothers protested against were the values and expectations that society imposed upon men who were born into their circumstances. Throughout *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Baoyu frequently goes on tirades against career opportunists who placed political advancement and recognition above all else. When his cousin Xue Baochai 薛寶鈺 recommended that he should pay more attention to his classical studies, Baoyu laments that a “pure maiden” like her would be contaminated by the ways of treacherous careerists and their shameless devotion to “fishing for fame and reputation” (*diaoming guyu* 釣名沽譽). He gets along the best with his other cousin Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and respects her the most because she never exhorts him to go out into the world and make a name for himself. He detests meeting literati officials (*shidaifu* 士大夫) such as his father’s various friends and guests, especially the social conventions that he had to follow when greeting and speaking with them, and he tries to go into hiding whenever this type of people want to see him. His attitude towards socializing for the sake of forging political connections matches that of Sir Lazy and Idle, as described by Dunceng.

Through Baoyu, the novel expresses the view that not only is the behavior one has to engage in to seek political advancement noxious, but moreover that the goal they are

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trying to reach is ultimately meaningless. This belief, heavily influenced by Buddhist ideology and Zhuangzi philosophy, is summarized by the “Won-Done Song” (“Haoliao ge” 好了歌) that the monk and the Daoist from chapter one recites:

世人都曉神仙好。惟有功名忘不了。
古今將相在何方。荒冢一堆草沒了。

世人都曉神仙好。只有金銀忘不了。
紛紛只恨聚眾多。及到多時眼閉了。

世人都曉神仙好。只有嬌妻忘不了。
君生日日説恩情。君死又隨人去了。

世人都曉神仙好。只有兒孫忘不了。
癡心父母古來多。孝順兒孫誰見了。

Men all know that salvation should be won,
But with ambition won’t have done, have done.
Where are the famous ones of days gone by?
In grassy graves they lie now, every one.

Men all know that salvation should be won,
But with their riches won’t have done, have done.
Each day they grumble they’ve not made enough.
When they’ve enough, it’s goodnight everyone!

Men all know that salvation should be won,
But with their loving wives they won’t have done.
The darlings every day protest their love:
But once you’re dead, they’re off with another one.

Men all know that salvation should be won,
But with their children won’t have done, won’t have done.
Yet though of parents fond there is no lack,
Of grateful children saw I ne’er a one.286

In these verses, the author, through the two ecclesiasts, points to the main motivations for men to follow the path of political service: to attain renown, to gain wealth, to establish a

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286 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:17. Translation by David Hawkes, see Hawkes, Story of the Stone, 1: 63-64.
family, and to provide for their descendants. He exposes each of these goals as ultimately empty and meaningless. Rather than struggling an entire lifetime reaching for an examination degree and a government position that would in the end bring about nothing but transient rewards, would it not be more preferable to live a comfortable, leisurely life free from such concerns?

This line of thinking draws significantly from the eremitic ideals espoused in the literature of Chinese scholars who withdrew from political life. As Willard Peterson has pointed out, “as an ideal, the man of the mountains represented untrammeled independence and freedom from society’s demands; as a reality, he often sought to have contact with society on his own terms.” Some yinshi decided to “hide their talents” due to political disagreements with the ruling regime, such as loyalists of a previous dynasty who refused to serve the new one. Others simply found dealing with quotidian political affairs to be unsuitable to their personal acclivity, and chose to quit their government positions or even ignored the examination route altogether. These figures celebrated “living in idleness” as an ideal lifestyle that freed them from the political obligations, and liberated their minds to roam in a higher aesthetic plane. While earlier yinshi such as the Four Hoaryheads of Mount Shang 商山四皓 from the Western Han Dynasty or Tao Qian from the Eastern Jin Dynasty retreated to the mountains or the countryside, many literati during the Ming-Qing period who chose this way of life often forged their personal space inside or near major cities to continue to participate in cultural activities.

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287 Willard Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 131. “Man of the mountains,” or shanren 山人, was a common epithet taken up by yinshi, particularly during the Ming Dynasty.

288 See Wang Yi 王毅, *Yuanlin yu Zhongguo wenhua 園林與中國文化* (Gardens and Chinese culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990), 194.
and maintain close contact with friends who remain inside the bureaucracy. Yuan Mei, for example, purchased a garden inside Nanjing after his political retirement, where he hosted many literary events with his female disciples. In a short preface to his poems on *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Mingyi commented that the Grand Prospect Garden was based on the former family garden of the Cao family, which would later become Yuan Mei’s Harmony Garden (*Suiyuan 隨園*).

This was perhaps the impetus for Mingyi to send the novel to Yuan.

Yet while bannermen like Cao and the Dun brothers longed for the lifestyle that Yuan practiced, they found it much more difficult than Yuan to claim that their preferred way of living made them a “superior scholar” (*gaoshi 高士*). Yuan’s various unorthodox activities after his retirement, such as his close relationships with his female disciples and his numerous trips to local brothels, that elicited great controversies in his local area, but he paid no heed to other people’s criticisms. He continued to promote his way of life through publishing books such as his collection of favorite recipes (*Suiyuan shidan 隨園食單*). Cao Xueqin, however, exhibited much more doubt towards the validity of his main character’s worldview. When Baoyu first appeared in character in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the author accompanied his entrance with a couple of *ci*-poem titled “Xijiang yue” (*West Jiang Yue*):

無故尋愁覓恨，有時似傻如狂。
縱然生得好皮囊。腹內
原來草莽。潦倒不通世務。愚頑怕讀文章。行為偏僻
性乖張。那管世人誹謗。

富貴不知樂業。貧窮難耐淒涼。可怜辜负好韶光。于國于家無望。
天下無能第一。古今不肖無雙。寄言纨袴与膏粱。莫效此儿形狀。

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He goes out of his way looking for anxiety and resentment. Sometimes he acts as if he is a fool or a lunatic. Even if he was born with a pretty shell, His innards reveal his vulgar nature. He is unruly and wild, lacking understanding of worldly affairs. He is ignorant and stubborn, dreading reading classical essays. His behavior is deviant, and his disposition is eccentric. Caring naught for the ridicules of common people.

When he enjoys wealth and rank, he does not know to be content with his lot. When he suffers poverty and debt, he would not be able to stand the desolation. How pitiful that he is wasting his glorious youth. Giving back nothing to either his country or his family. The number one most useless person in the world. He is second to none in his lack of ability and morals. A word to all sons of rich and noble families: Do not follow his example.290

Rather than praising Baoyu’s eccentric beliefs and unorthodox behaviors, characteristics typical of famous Chinese yinshi, the author immediately excoriates his protagonist’s worldview upon his initial appearance. It is notable that in the prior chapter during Jia Yucun’s discussion of Baoyu’s disposition, although he was described as being a similar type of person in general to recluses like Xu You and Tao Qian, Baoyu was actually placed in a subcategory with the likes of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 and Emperor Huizong of Song 宋徽宗, people who were held positions of power but abandoned their responsibilities in favor of pursuing their own passions, and ended up ruining their countries and families.291

This suggests Cao’s awareness that as a bannerman, he was born into a status that dictated that he could not simply choose to live a life that Jia Baoyu has wished. Under the paradigm of the Manchu Way mandated by the Qing court, the bannermen were the

290 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:49.
291 Cao, Honglou meng, 1:29-30.
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emperor’s men, and held the hereditary duty of serving the state. Even though in reality, people like Cao Xueqin had no prospect for advancement in the bureaucracy, and personally had no desire to do so either, the way he portrays Baoyu, as shown in the previous paragraph, shows that he still felt guilty that he could not fulfill his state-mandated destiny. His friends appeared to share that same remorse. In naming the central figure in his essay “Sir Idle and Lazy,” Dunceng deliberately chose a character, yong 倭, that has a negative meaning to refer to him. Their friend Yungjung illustrated his shame with his own idle lifestyle in a poem dedicated to a painting of the backside of a horse, describing its attitude as thus:

開煞天開飽芻粟。
羞將正面與君圖。

So idle in the imperial stable, filling my stomach with hay, Ashamed of showing my facade for you to draw.292

Much like how Cao Xueqin used a stone that lacked the talent to repair the skies to refer to himself, Yungjung identified closely with a warhorse that was left to idle in its stable all day long, far away from the battlefields it was destined to roam.

Yuan Mei’s Harmony Garden and the Grand Prospect Garden in *Dream of the Red Chamber* offer an instructive contrast in the differing conception of idleness and reclusion between Chinese literati and bannermen scholars. According to Craig Clunas, the garden gradually transformed from a site of physical labor and production to a site of aesthetic appreciation and consumption during the sixteenth century.293 In particular, for

292 Yungjung 永忠, “Ti Fu Ju’an beimian ma tu” 領福聚薈背面馬圖 (Commenting on Fu Ju’an’s portrait of the backside of a horse), in *Yanfenshi ji*, 712.
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withdrawn scholars who could not retreat to the remote countryside due to their social obligations or personal preferences, but also wished to maintain a degree of separation from the hustle and bustle of urban centers, personal gardens served as a convenient medium for their refuge. Although these gardens no longer served any agronomic purpose, the “recluses” who owned continued to depend on them to make a living. Devoid of political positions, late Ming withdrawn scholars such as Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639) and Zhao Huanguang 趙宦光 (1559-1625) needed to find alternative means to maintain their elite status. Their gardens became “locus of conspicuous consumption,” a means through which they could exhibit their immaculate tastes to the general public, as well as primary sites for literary activities that would became their main sources of income. 294 薛元默 inherited this tradition from these late Ming figures, tying his garden directly with his literary production by using its name, Harmony Garden, to advertise his various books. Hence, for these Ming-Qing withdrawn scholars, the possession of their private gardens symbolized their successful political engagement, exhibiting their ability to establish a separate way of life from examinations and officialdom that was defined by the pursuit of leisure and pleasure. No longer able or willing to retreat into nature, these gardens became these literati’s Peach Blossom Springs, their personal, individualized otherworldly utopia where they could cut themselves off from the real world.

In Dream of the Red Chamber, the Grand Prospect Garden also served as Baoyu’s sanctuary from the ugly political and economic businesses that the Jia family is engaged in. It is a place where the male authority figures seldom entered, and where all the

294 Clunas, Fruitful Sites, 96.
inhabitants lived in their own dwellings, each with its own individualized environment that reflected its owner’s personality. Inside the garden, Baoyu is free to indulge in his literary pursuits, particularly with his talented cousins and sisters in the Crab Flower Club. Yet this garden was not his own. Although he was allowed by his father to provide plaque inscriptions and couplets for many of the abodes, pavilions, and sites within the garden, the name “Grand Prospect” was given by his sister, the imperial consort. While Yuan Mei treated his Harmony Garden as the permanent location of his political withdrawal, Baoyu’s family never intended for the boy to stay in the Grand Prospect Garden forever, as they expect that once he has grown up, he will get married and pursue the same path towards officialdom as all other young men of his social stature. Moreover, as Yu Yingshi has pointed out, this supposedly otherworldly and pure garden was constructed above grounds where nefarious acts of coercion, incest, and murder had taken place. Throughout the novel, despite the façade of refinement and purity that is present in scenes of the poetry club’s activities, various forms of pollution intrude upon the garden to show that it is not impenetrable to the defiling forces of the real world.

Cao Xueqin’s Eight Banners background may have influenced his conception of eretimitism, which led him to construct and portray the Grand Prospect Garden in this manner. Unlike their Chinese counterparts, banner scholars had their freedom further restricted by the Eight Banners regulations. Chinese literati like Yuan Mei could retreat into the countryside or the mountains if they were disposed to doing so, but capital bannermen could live far from Beijing without the court’s permission. Yuan was

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295 Cao, *Honglou meng*, 1:241-242. Yuanchun also provided the names for all the main dwellings, such as Baoyu’s own House of Green Delights (Yihongyuan 怡紅院), and changed several of Baoyu’s inscriptions.
comfortable with making the decision of retiring from his official post, knowing that he could support his leisurely lifestyle through selling his writings and investing his wealth in “more than a hundred mu of land.”\textsuperscript{296} The banner scholars, however, relied on their stipends as their primary secure source of income. As seen in the previous chapter, by the nineteenth century, their stipends were becoming insufficient for covering their daily expenses, and men like Mucihiyun had to look for other kinds of work regardless. Mucihiyun could rely on his background to maintain good relationships with civilian merchants and make use of his contacts to support his various non-state ventures. For bannermen like the Dun brothers and Cao who were born in imperial or elite families, however, they had little experience or knowledge of trade or commerce, which made them dependent upon their stipends to maintain their standard of living.

Yet what the state gave, it could also take away, and from the bannermen’s point of view these decisions could be made capriciously without any warning. The Cao family suddenly changed from one of the Qing court’s most favored confidantes to \textit{persona-non-grata} for political reason that would be difficult to comprehend from Xueqin’s perspective. Throughout his adulthood, he barely made a living working as a instructor in state schools and other odd jobs, and died before he was fifty in destitution. As he stated in the introduction to his novel, he ended up “accomplishing nothing of worth, and ended up dejected and impoverished for half my life.”\textsuperscript{297} Just as Baoyu was only allowed to live the way he liked as much in his garden as his family permitted him to do so, the bannermen’s livelihood was dependent upon the Eight Banners system. They could not

\textsuperscript{297} Cao, \textit{Honglou meng}, 1:1.
easily extricate themselves from the direct control of the state as readily as Chinese recluses could.

In the various pre-1791 manuscripts of the *Story of the Stone*, the novel cuts off abruptly at chapter 80. At this point in the story, the authority figures of the Jia family has already begun intruding upon Baoyu’s refuge and imposing their order over his life. In Chapter 73, Baoyu’s mother mandated a sweeping inspection of the garden and expelled several maids, including Baoyu’s favorite Skybright. Meanwhile, in chapter 79, one of his sisters, Yingchun, was married off into a military family to a cruel, abusive husband. This signaled the beginning of the end of Baoyu’s untrammeled and carefree eremitic lifestyle in the Grand Prospect Garden with his female literary companions. Then, in chapter 81 in the Cheng published edition, he was immediately sent back into school, where he began learning how to write examination essays. He was then forced into marrying his sensible cousin Baochai rather than his favorite Daiyu, and then suffered through a long bout of insanity. As he was losing control of his own life, his family suffered one setback after another, with several of its male and female senior figures passing away or arrested, and its assets seized by the court. At the end of the novel, Baoyu recovers and suddenly decides to dedicate himself fully to his classical studies, passing the imperial examinations in seventh place and contributing to the recovery of his family’s fortunes.\(^{298}\) Immediately after receiving his honors at court, however, Baoyu disappears, and eventually his father found him with the monk and Daoist from the start of the novel, leaving his family to become an acolyte himself.\(^ {299} \)

\(^{298}\) Cao, *Honglou meng*, 2:1588-1589.

\(^{299}\) Cao, *Honglou meng*, 2:1594-1595.
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These last forty chapters have now generally been attributed to Gao E, the chief editor of the first published edition of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Some *hongxue* scholars, most prominently Zhou Ruchang, saw many of the story elements in these chapters, especially Baoyu returning to school and later passing the examinations, as “an extreme betrayal of the established pattern of plot progression of the original novel.”

Using various clues that they believe the original author left behind throughout the first two-thirds of the novel, these Redologists suggest that Cao Xueqin had a much more grim ending in mind for the Jia clan and Baoyu, with the family completely falling apart without any hope for recovery and Baoyu ending up in the streets as a beggar. Given the doubts regarding the conclusions of the novel, it is difficult to assert with certainty on how Cao intended to finish his story. Nevertheless, whether it is in the actual conclusion we find in the published edition, or in the other hypothetical conclusions suggested by various modern scholars, there is a general consensus that Baoyu’s utopia in the garden would be ultimately destroyed, and he will be forced to face the real world. Yet as the stone that was left over, “unfit to fix the sky,” he could not find a place in this world that could accommodate his disposition and worldview. Even in the Gao E ending, where Baoyu suddenly showed an aptitude for the examinations that appears contrary to Cao

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300 Zhou Ruchang, *Honglumeng xinzheng*, 725. Gao E’s personal background may have influenced the changes in Baoyu’s character in the last forty chapters. Unlike Cao, who was born into wealth but lost all his privileges when he was young, Gao came from an unremarkable Chinese banner family and eventually worked his way up the official path. He repeatedly took and failed the provincial examinations until he finally attained the *juren* degree when he was fifty years old in 1788, while he was likely working on the last forty chapters. He would pass the national examinations in 1801 and went on to serve in various official positions for around a decade. Besides his contributions to *Dream of the Red Chamber* and his personal literary collections, he also wrote a manual for official conduct and a manuscript of collected sample examination essays.
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Xueqin’s initial presentation of the character as “the number one most useless person in the world,” he could not actually stay the course with the official path and abandoned his career and his family immediately.

As bannermen, people like Cao and the Dun brothers lived under a different set of rules and social expectations than the Chinese literati whose way of life they aspired to. The Qing court believed that all bannermen should render their services to the state, and expected them to focus their education on preparing for careers in the officialdom or the military. While the path of eremitism was always available to Chinese literati who grew tired of studying for the examinations or serving in the state bureaucracy, political disengagement was a less viable option for the bannermen, particularly imperial clansmen like Dunceng and Dunmin, who depended on the state for their livelihood and had to obey the Eight Banners regulations. The state-mandated “Manchu Way,” particularly under its most enthusiastic evangelizer the Qianlong Emperor, did ultimately have a degree of ideological hold on the mindset of these bannermen. It was not enough to stop them from ignoring their military training and examination studies and pursue their literary interests. It was, however, enough to make them feel shame for doing so.

Cao Xueqin produced one of the greatest novels in Chinese literary history that would entrance and inspire its readers for the two subsequent centuries and spawn its own field of studies. Although they never attained the level of posthumous fame that Cao was able to claim, Dunceng, Dunmin, and Yungjung also became highly regarded for their poetry and artwork within the capital bannerman circle. Yet while they were alive, they felt unaccomplished and incompetent because of their chosen lifestyle. As Cao described in another poem in the opening chapter of his novel:
Chapter 4: Ideal of Idleness in Bannermen Literature

滿紙荒唐言。一把辛酸淚。
都云作者痴。誰解其中味。

Pages full of idle words
Penned with hot and bitter tears;
All men call the author fool;
None his secret message hears.  

For all the acclaim the *Dream of the Red Chamber* would receive after his death, Cao never thought he was producing a great literary masterpiece that he could build his career and reputation around while he was writing the novel. Instead, it was one of the many literary activities that he pursued, much like Dunceng and Dunmin’s poems and Yungjung’s paintings. The novel was an idle pastime that the court frowned upon, and he expected very few people would read and comprehend his sentiments.

*Ernü yingxiong zhuan* and the Re-conception of the “Two Worlds” in the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, the bannermen continued to be prolific producers of literature, as can be seen through the prodigious amount of literary collections from Jiaqing period onwards that have been recorded in catalogs such as *Baqi yiwen bianmu*. More compilations that focused specifically on the literary output of the Eight Banners also appeared at the end of the dynasty. Shengyu 盛昱 (1850-1900), an imperial clansman, compiled the *Baqi wenjing* 八旗文經 (Model essays of the Eight Banners) with the editorial support of his cousin, the Chinese bannerman Yang Zhongxi 楊鐘義 (1865-1940). This 60-juan collection includes over six hundred prose written by a

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hundred and seventy-nine banner writers from the Kangxi to Guangxu reign. Yang was also responsible for a compilation of *ci*-poetry composed by bannermen that was published in the Xuantong reign titled *Baishan cijie* 白山詞介 (Introduction to *ci*-poetry from Changbai Mountains), as well as a series of collected literary critiques titled *Xueqiao shihua* 雪橋詩話 (Conversations on poetry from Xueqiao) that contain rare and valuable bibliographical information on Eight Banner writings.

Although bannermen literary culture continued to flourish in the nineteenth century, the sense of guilt and shame that they were unable to fulfill the Manchu Way and meet the court’s expectations of them persisted. Wenkang 文康, the author of the novel *The Tale of Romance and Heroism* 兒女英雄傳 (*Ernü yingxiong zhuan*), was born into a family with an illustrious past like Cao Xueqin. His grandfather Leboo 勒保 (1740-1819) was an accomplished general who was credited with crushing the White Lotus rebellions, and he eventually rose to serve in the Grand Council under the Jiaqing Emperor. Wenkang himself also served in various official positions throughout his life, but he suffered destitution and hardship at a later stage of his life. While the political missteps of his elders diminished Cao’s prospects for political advancement, Wenkang’s family fortunes were ruined by the wanton behavior of his children. Styling himself

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302 According to Ma Congshan 馬從善 in one of the novel’s prefaces, Wenkang had served in the Lifan Yuan 理藩院 as a Director (*langzhong* 郎中), as well as various provincial posts. He was assigned to be the Imperial Resident in Tibet, but could not actually go serve due to illness. See Ma, “Preface,” in Wenkang, *Ernü yingxiong zhuan* 兒女英雄傳 (The tale of romance and heroism) (Changsha: Yueli shushe, 1991).

303 See Ma’s preface. According to Ma, by the time Wenkang was writing this novel, he had sold off most of the assets he inherited, and was living in squalor with “not much more than his pen and ink.”
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“the Idle Gentleman of Yanbei” (Yanbei Xianren 燕北閒人), Wenkang chastises himself at the start of his novel as “a wall of made of dung and dirt that could not be plastered” (不可圬也的一堵糞土之牆) and “a piece of rotten wood that could not be carved” (不可雕也的一塊朽木).\(^{304}\) This self-deprecation is reminiscent of the way disparaging manner Cao Xueqin introduced Baoyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

As Paize Keulemans has pointed out, the story of *The Tale of Romance and Heroism* is structured spatially to force its male protagonists to leave their sheltered existences as elite literati and confront the chaos and vulgarities of the outside world.\(^{305}\) The male romantic lead, An Ji 安驥, is a young Chinese bannerman who at the beginning of the novel led a cloistered life focused entirely on studying for the examinations. He is given an almost excessively feminine characterization, as he is described as who never leaves his home without the supervision of his servants, who does not understand any words outside of proper speech and gets mad whenever somebody says anything remotely uncouth, and who blushes at the sight of any unfamiliar woman.\(^{306}\) When his father is wrongfully imprisoned, however, An Ji had to travel on his own to bring over the bail money, and during this trip, a group of bandits captured the boy. Just as he is about to be slaughtered for food, a young female knight errant called the Thirteenth Sister 十三妹 rescues him. Eventually, An Ji marries Thirteenth Sister, and with her support he passes the examinations and becomes an official, as well as helping her avenge the wrongful death of her father at the hands of an evil minister. By the end of the story, the

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previously naïve and inhibited boy has become an accomplished man after experiencing all the adventures he had outside his home.

In both *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The Tale of Romance and Heroism*, the authors mapped out their novels both spatially and thematically in two contrasting worlds, one located in the interior, in the secluded studio within the households of the main male protagonists of these novels, and the other the wider world outside of their homes. Yet while the former portrays the tragic gradual destruction of Baoyu’s sanctuary, the latter takes a more triumphant approach. Wenkang shows that An Ji is able to grow up and achieve success thanks to his experiences in the lively and vulgar outside world, particularly the lawless world of *jianghu* (“rivers and lakes”) where knights-errants (*xiake* 俠客), outlaws, and vagabonds freely roamed. The real world in *Dream of the Red Chamber* is represented as source of corruption, and Baoyu could not, and was not willing, to comply with what society at large expects him to accomplish. An Ji (and his father An Xuehai 安學海) may be perplexed and bemused by the coarse, noisy mundane urban landscape and the lawless, uncouth *jianghu*, but *The Tale of Romance and Heroism* ultimately shows that these elites could have much to appreciate about the streets and the marshes, and learn from the common people. Unlike in Cao’s novel, where the vulgar real world eventually devours and tears down the elegant ideal world, Wenkang seeks to show the potential for the two worlds to come together in harmony. 307 This points to recognition and acceptance by Wenkang that the bannermen could no longer live in a separate world on their own, that they have to find ways to adapt to living among the common civilians in order to thrive.

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Doing so did not necessarily mean giving up their elite interests and hobbies. As employment opportunities for bannermen within the state bureaucracy continued to dwindle in the last century of Qing rule, their literary ability became a talent that they could rely on to find alternative sources of income. As discussed in the last chapter, Mucihiyen was someone who was able to market his various literary skills to make a living and establish for himself a recognizable role within his local community. In the next chapter, I will explore how other bannermen in the second half of the nineteenth century managed to turn another area of their leisurely pursuits, that of popular performance and theater, into viable careers. To do so, many of them had to sacrifice the ability to enjoy and appreciate these artistic endeavors as amateurs in exchange for performing them to a wider, vulgar audience as professionals. They had to turn their idle pleasures into their jobs, a concept that would no doubt be highly offensive to Jia Baoyu and, perhaps, his creator Cao Xueqin.
Chapter 5: Invention and Popularization of Eight Banners Performance Genres

Chapter 5:
Amateurs and Professionals: The Invention and Popularization of Eight Banners Performance Genres in the Nineteenth Century

Useful Skills and Worthless Skills

Waka. sini ere absi serengge. inenggidari ebitele jefi. tenggeri fifan tebeliyehei fitherengge ai sebjen. gebu oki sembio. ede akdafi banjiki sembio. muse jabšan de manju ofi. jeterengge alban i bele. baitalarangge caliyan i menggun. booi gubci uju hukšehe bethe fehuhengge gemu ejen ningge kai. umai jingkini erdemi be tacirakū alban de faššan yaburakū bime. fifan manggi tenggeri. julen manggi ucun. baibi erebe bai ta obuši tacici. manju be hūtubuhakū semeo. baiitangga günin be bai takū bade fayabure anggala. bihe hūlaci eheo.

No, what are you saying? How could you just fill your stomach and fool around with *pipa* and *sanxian* everyday? Do you want to make a name for yourself [doing this]? Can you rely on this to make a living? We are fortunate to be born as Manchus. We eat the state's rice and spend the state’s money, so everything that we own, from the top of our heads to the bottoms of our feet, all came from our lord. Instead of developing proper skills or devoting your efforts to official duty, you would play with the *sanxian* after you are done with the *pipa*, and bury your head in songs after you are done with composing lyrics. Don't you know that you are bringing shame to us Manchus when all you would study are these sorts of matters? Instead of wasting your valuable energy on such useless endeavors, why not read some books?

The above passage was a sample text in the conversation book *Ilan hacin i hergen kamcibuha gisun i bithe* 三合語錄 (Selected dialogues in three languages), published in the tenth year of Daoguang (1830) in Beijing. Originally compiled by Jy Sin 智信 during the Qianlong era, it was subsequently edited and translated into Mongolian by Fugiyūn, the Mongol Plain Yellow Banner official who had petitioned for the resettlement of *sula*

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308 Jy Sin 智信, *Ilan hacin i hergen kamcibuha gisun i bithe* 三合語錄 (Selected dialogues in three languages), Mongolian translation by Fugiyūn 富俊, eds. Fugiyūn and Delek 德勒克 (Beijing: Wuyuntang, 1830), 4:300b-303b.
capital bannermen to Shuangchengbao in Jilin province ten years prior. Much like his fellow Mongol bannerman Sungyūn, whose *Record of Sayings by Hundred Twenty Old Men* he also translated, Fugiyūn was deeply concerned by the his fellow bannermen’s declining interest in cultivating practices that would make them useful to the state, and by their pursuit of shallow hobbies that would have no relevance to their potential official careers. While in his preface Fugiyūn only pointed to this text’s utility in learning the Manchu language, conversation books like *Sanhe yulu* also fulfilled another purpose: to educate their readers in how to behave as proper Manchus. In this specific passage, the speaker emphasized the importance of developing one’s “proper skills,” or in the original languages, *bengsen* or *benshi* 本事. The ability to play musical instruments such as *sanxian* (the three-stringed lute) and *pipa* (the four-stringed lute) and expertise in popular songs were explicitly excluded from this category, the worthlessness of such skills in an official setting highlighted.

In making such a distinction between “proper” and “worthless” talents, this text reiterated the Qing court’s vision of shaping all bannermen into martial elites destined only for careers as soldiers, officers, or officials for the state. Under this assumption, the only skills that were “proper” or “useful” were those that would contribute to the state’s interests. Yet as mentioned in the previous chapters, by the time this didactical text was published, the number of positions provided by the court and the Eight Banner system could not satisfy the number of bannermen looking for jobs with the state. Moreover, many bannermen were not interested in pursuing careers in officialdom or the military, either because they found their talents or temperaments unsuited to life as officials or soldiers, or they were put off by the corruption and malpractices that pervaded the
bureaucracy. For these people, because they could not achieve advancement through the official system or did not desire to do so, there was little incentive to learn “proper skills” such as studying the classics or learning archery if they were not personally invested in such matters.

To such bannermen, songs, operas, and other forms of performance arts popular in Beijing at the turn of the nineteenth century provided not only entertainment and distraction from their official duties, but also an alternative way of life or even career outside the framework of the state. Despite the claims of the speaker in the passage, enthusiasts of theater and music came from all walks of life in banner society, including not only low class bannermen who lived on the fringes of officialdom, but also those who held revered positions within the court like high officials, imperial nobles, and even the Qing rulers themselves. They were not only aficionados of existing Chinese genres, but by the Qianlong period, when Sanhe yulu was first compiled, they had created their own theatrical and story-telling traditions. While many who became involved in these pursuits remained devoted connoisseurs or amateur practitioners, some went further to become composers or even professional performers. Although this path would lead them away from the traditional route to honor and prestige through passing the imperial examinations and attaining high official titles, it would nevertheless bring them fame and adulation within their local social spheres, and eventually even among the general Beijing public. Unlike the sense of monotony and insignificance many of them felt vis-à-vis their official duties, crafting songs in their own chosen names and performing them on stage to an adoring audience provided these bannermen with the personal accomplishment and adulation that they craved.
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This chapter will study the bannermen’s engagement with the world of popular entertainment in Beijing in their leisure times from the last decades of the eighteenth century to the start of the nineteenth century. In particular, I will concentrate on the musical and story-telling traditions that emerged from within banner society, including the zidishu 子弟書 (bannermen tales) and chaqu 斷曲 (split songs), as well as the various categories of oral performance that branched out from them. They were originally composed and performed in private gatherings within bannermen social circles for the purpose of recreation. By the Daoguang period, however, a number of bannermen began to compose and perform these genres for a wider public, popularizing these genres across ethnic boundaries to a mass audience in the region surrounding the capital. While the “proper skills” of horse-riding and archery gradually lost their practical relevance through the nineteenth century, these musical and story-telling traditions created by the bannermen through their expertise in song lyrics and instruments, derided by high-minded officials like Fugiyūn, would reach the height of their popularity during this period, and leave behind an indelible legacy through their impact of Beijing popular culture. The ideal of Manchus as elite warriors disappeared, and the image of bannermen as experts in popular entertainment and arbiters of cultural taste would prevail.

The Capital Bannermen and Beijing’s Entertainment World

By segregating the banner and civilian populations in the capital, as well as in the garrisons, the Qing court intended to split them into two distinct social and cultural spheres. Just as the state had planned for the bannermen to be self-sufficient economically, so it also hoped that by physically separating them from the civilians, it
would have limited the bannermen’s exposure to Han cultural norms. As we see in the
previous chapter, however, in reality the bannermen eventually discovered could not
sustain themselves with only the state’s stipend, and hence they could not fulfill their
daily needs without the support of civilian merchants. Likewise, the flourishing
entertainment districts of the Outer City in Beijing would prove too attractive for
residents of the Inner City, and the theaters, teahouses, restaurants, and brothels located
in the latter part of the capital would become the favorite hangouts of the bannermen. The
wall erected between the two groups of people could not stop them from intermingling; it
functioned simply as an obstacle that they had to scale.

The majority of the theaters, winehouses, teahouses, restaurants, and brothels that
residents of both halves of Beijing patronized could be found near the main avenue
leading out of the Zhengyang Gate (正陽門, or Front Gate 正門), the middle of the three
gates that connected the Inner and Outer cities. The Dashilar street 大柵欄, situated to
the west of the main avenue just outside the gate, appeared as the primary commercial
hub of nineteenth century Beijing during the Qianlong period, was the home of five of the
eleven major theaters in the capital during the Daoguang reign. The nearby Bada
Hutong region 八大胡同 became the capital’s largest red light district in the Qianlong
period as well, and the denizens of the capital could visit the numerous music halls

309 See Naquin, Peking, 411; Goldman, Opera and the City, 69-70.
310 Zhichaozi 枝巢子 [Xia Renhu 夏仁虎], Jiujing suoji 舊京瑣記 (Miscellaneous
records of the old capital) (Taipei: Chun wenxue chubanshe, 1972), 93; Chongyi 崇彞,
Dao Xian yilai chaoye zaji 道咸以來朝野雜記 (Miscellaneous records of the court and
the commoners during the Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns) (Beijing: Beijing guji
chubanshe, 1982), 8. See also Goldman, Opera and the City, 69.
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(quyuan 曲院) located there to enjoy performances of drum songs and shadow plays.\textsuperscript{311} Further south around the midpoint between the Zhengyang Gate and the Yongding Gate 永定門, the Tianqiao district 天橋 surrounding the Temple of Heaven emerged as another major entertainment center from the Daoguang period onwards. Street performers such as storytellers, acrobats, vaudeville acts, magicians, and martial artists could congregate there and showcase their acts at designated areas.\textsuperscript{312} In addition to visiting these entertainment quarters, the bannermen could also enjoy theatrical performances at temple fairs held during particular ritual occasions. According to Susan Naquin, by the turn of the nineteenth century over twenty temples in Beijing had permanent stages constructed within their premises.\textsuperscript{313} Wealthier bannermen could furthermore invite entertainers to perform at their own homes during their private social gatherings.\textsuperscript{314} Through patronizing these performers, who came from different regions all across the empire, the bannermen were able to come in touch with a diverse range of forms and styles of performance traditions.

The Qing court was deeply disturbed by this fact, and throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it tried to enact various policies to limit and control the bannermen’s contact with these cultural forms of Han Chinese origin. Starting in the Kangxi reign, the court repeatedly issued edicts banning the establishment of theaters inside the Inner City, and forbidding capital bannermen from entering these premises in the Outer City. It has also tried to forbid clerics from sponsoring theatrical performances

\textsuperscript{311} Zhichaozi, Jiujing suoji, 98.
\textsuperscript{312} Zhang Cixi 張次溪, Tianqiao yilan 天橋一覽 (Panoramic view of the Heaven’s Bridge) (Taipei: Jinxue shuju, 1969), 23.
\textsuperscript{313} Naquin, Peking, 84. See also Goldman, Opera and the City, 87-89.
\textsuperscript{314} Goldman, Opera and the City, 97-112.
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during temple fairs.\textsuperscript{315} To reinforce these policies, the court repeatedly issued warnings to the bannermen to not reside outside the Inner City, and set up curfews that would force the Inner City denizens to return to their homes by certain hours.

Such policies, however, attained only very limited success in keeping the bannermen away from the theatrical stage. These decrees did appear to have some effect in containing commercial playhouses to outside the city walls. Within the period covered in the diary \textit{Siyan cuwang lu meng} during the Daoguang reign, all of the theaters that Mucihiyan visited were located in the Outer City. Yet attempts to prevent the bannermen from secretly visiting the entertainment quarters listed above were ultimately ineffective. Throughout the dynasty, there were numerous cases of bannermen secretly enjoying operas that were brought to the court’s attention, such as the 1806 scandal in which the Censor Heshun 和順 exposed several banner officials frequenting a theater and even performing onstage with actors, only to be later discovered to have been a regular customer of the same theater himself.\textsuperscript{316} As Andrea Goldman has pointed out, the state was too overstretched in its resources and too inconsistent in its determination to properly enforce such policies, and hence these regulations had to be constantly reiterated while their actual effects dwindled.\textsuperscript{317}

The state’s constant injunctions against the harmful impact of these Han cultural practices on maintaining the “old ways of the Manchus” rang rather hallow when the Qing emperors themselves were keen patrons of Chinese theater. The court maintained a

\textsuperscript{315} Goldman, \textit{Opera and the City}, 92.
\textsuperscript{316} See Goldman, \textit{Opera and the City}, 72; Liu, \textit{Qiren shehui}, 699-700.
\textsuperscript{317} Goldman, \textit{Opera and the City}, 75-76.
large permanent theatrical troupe within the palaces, governed and trained by an agency under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Household Department called the Southern Bureau (南府) (it was renamed the Bureau of Ascendant Peace [昇平署] in 1827). At its peak during the Qianlong reign, this office commanded around 1,500 actors, consisting of both eunuchs trained from within and troupes recruited from outside the palace.318 Court performance saw a brief decline through the middle of the nineteenth century after the 1813 Eight Trigrams invasion of the Forbidden City, when all non-eunuch actors were sent back to their native places. It was revitalized again during the Xianfeng era due to the patronage of the emperor himself as well as his empress, the eventual Empress Dowager Cixi.319 During significant occasions such as the birthday celebrations of the emperors or empress dowagers, not only were the imperial actors put to work, but well-known troupes from across the empire were also requisitioned to the capital to perform. Indeed, many provincial troupes took advantage of such occasions to establish their footholds in Beijing. The Sanqing troupe 三慶班 from Anhui Province, for example, was invited to the capital to perform for Qianlong’s eightieth birthday in 1790, and their popularity with their new audience paved the way for other Hui troupes to enter Beijing as well.320 The imperial court was hence just as guilty of indulging in Han theater as their banner subjects. Just like how Xue Baochai, one of the main characters in the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, described, while the “parents” banned the “children”

318 Goldman, *Opera and the City*, 106.
320 See Liu, *Qiren shehui*, 698.
from consuming the Chinese drama on the surface, in reality “they enjoy these plays behind our backs, and we enjoy these plays behind their backs.”

The court was thus ultimately unable to curb the growing influence of Chinese plays and operas on the bannermen’s lives. I have already described how visiting these entertainment quarters and consuming such performances together had become ingrained practices within the social interactions among bannermen communities, and how individual bannerman such as Mucihyan could utilize his participation in these activities to expand his social network and discover new economic opportunities. That, however, should not deemphasize the fact that these people also greatly enjoyed doing these things for their own sakes. For many bannermen, their love for plays and songs had far exceeded that of simple pastimes, which they took pleasure in once in a while, but had in fact become all-consuming passions that devoured their time and energy. This situation was satirized in the *zidishu* “Scorning the Husband Because of Plays,” in which the wife of a bannerman complains to her husband that he would not even eat his meals without thinking about plays:

新添的放上飯不吃涼一個冰冷，手拿著筷子掅圓把棹面子敲。
滿嘴裡嘟噥連幫帶唱，也不知把菜回了幾次杓。
好容易扒拉了一口放下碗。你還說分不清四皷與什麼過橋。
耐著煩盼爺用畢了膳，你還要拉拉排場把食水消。

You would not eat the meal I just prepared for you and let it go ice cold, and would instead swing your chopsticks around in circles and hit the table with them to the beat.
Your mouth would not stop mumbling and humming, Who knows how many spoonfuls of your meal returned to your dishes. With great effort I saw to it that you finally took one bite of your rice and put down the bowl,

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Yet you are still muttering about how you couldn’t distinguish the “four drums” or something about “crossing the bridge.”

With great patience I waited for you to finally finish your meal,
Yet now you want to put on a show to help digest the food.

This husband went beyond passively watching and listening to plays, and went the extra step to attempt to emulate the performances of his favorite actors, going so far as stealing his wife’s clothes, makeup, and accessories to dress himself up like a xiaodan 小旦 (young female role in Chinese theater) on the stage. This satirical portrayal of the opera enthusiasts among the Eight Banners reveals the anxiety of the breakdown between the borders of the elite and the profane.

Unable to prevent bannermen from indulging in commercial opera, the Qing court at least tried to police which musical styles the bannermen should consume. At the start of the dynasty, the culturally dominant genres in the capital were those that originated from southeast China, including the Kun melody (kunqu昆曲) and the various variants of the Yiyang style (yiyang qiang弋陽腔). Over the course of the next two centuries, however, a diverse variety of other musical systems also found their way into Beijing,

322 The “four drums,” or sigu 四鼓, actually refers to the siguxian 四股弦, which is another name for the instrument sihu 四胡, as well as a genre of opera popular in southern Hebei, particularly in the region surrounding the city of Xingtai 邢台, that primarily utilized this instrument. “Crossing the bridge,” or guoqiao 过橋, is a headwear prop worn by actors playing imperial consorts, princesses, or palace maidens on stage. See Zhang Yuezhong 张月中 et al., eds., Zhongguo gudai xiju cidian 中国古代戏曲辞典 (Dictionary of Chinese classical theater) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1993), 122, 325-326.
323 Henglangu 恒蘭谷, “Wei piao ao fu” 為票傲夫, in Chewangfu 只望夫, case 1, fascicle 9, 2b-3a.
324 “Wei piao ao fu,” 4a-5a.
325 The Yiyang variants include gaoqiang 高腔 and jingqiang 京腔, both of which evolved from the original Jiangxi Yiyang melody at around the Beijing area.
including *qinqiang* 秦腔 from Gansu and Shaanxi, *erhuang* 二黄 and *xipi* 西皮 from the Hu-Guang region, *liuziqiang* 柳子腔 from Shandong, and *bangziqiang* 梆子腔 which first came into prominence in Shanxi and Shaanxi. Faced with the situation of this eclectic mix of musical traditions all vying for the attention of the denizens of Beijing, the court intervened by cataloging these different genres as high-brow or low-brow. The literati respected Kun opera for the aesthetic sophistication of their melodies and lyrics, and the court recognized and legitimized this general opinion by placing it under the “elegant category” (*yabu* 雅部). All other genres were grouped under the “flowery category” (*huabu* 花部), sometimes derisively referred to as “chaotic drumming” (*luantan* 亂彈).326 Up to the Daoguang reign, the court primarily patronized the “elegant category,” with the palace troupes trained exclusively in the *kun* and *yi* styles of singing.327 It was generally dismissive towards the “vulgar” *huabu* genres, and even actively hostile towards some traditions such as the *qinqiang* that were considered to be exceptionally lewd and transgressive. Through active policies, as well through sanctioning imperially ordained compiled works such as the *Jiugong dacheng nanbeici gongpu* 九宮大成南北詞宮譜 (Compilation of musical scores from the southern and

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326 *Luantan* originally referred to an early form of *qinqiang* specifically in the Ming and early Qing. From the Qianlong reign onwards, however, it began to be used as a pejorative term that covered all non-Kun opera. See Zhongguo xiju cidian, 220. See also Guo Jingrui 郭精銳, “‘Luantan’ yu jingju” 亂彈與京劇 (“Chaotic drumming” and Peking opera), in Liu Liemao 劉烈茂 and Guo Jingrui, Chewangfu quben yanjiu 車王府曲本研究 (Studies of libretti from the mansion of Prince Che) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2000), 77-80.

327 Goldman, *Opera and the City*, 119-120.
northern arias in all nine modes), the court asserted itself as the chief cultural authority and taste-maker in the field of music and opera.

Andrea Goldman argues that the court was moderately successful in imposing their preferences on their banner subjects through dictating what genres it allowed to be performed and what it did not allow. For example, the state was able to arrest the rapidly rising popularity of qinqiang in the capital in the late eighteenth century by expelling its most popular performer, Wei Changsheng 魏長生 (1744-1802), as well as his disciple, Chen Yinguan 陳銀官, from Beijing, leading to other troupes to stop referring to their style as qinqiang. Yet the court could not impede the overall trend of the popularity of huabu genres eclipsing that of their more “elegant” counterparts in Beijing in the nineteenth century. As Zhaolian mentioned, the libretti of huabu operas consisted of gossips and chatters of the commoners, and their music was seductive and catchy, which made them much more attractive and accessible to the ordinary urban populace than the much more exclusive and sophisticated Kun opera, which only a minority of highly literate elites could comprehend. They would eventually even conquer the tastes of the court itself, for from the Xianfeng reign onwards, huabu operas would come to dominate the repertoire of court performances, and Qing emperors and consorts would extend their patronage to actors trained primarily in huabu rather than in Kun opera.

Although through its patronage the court was able to assert significant influence on the marketplace, ultimately it was but one voice mixed into the cacophony of the world of professional entertainment. The most successful entertainers were those who

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328 Goldman, Opera and the City, 124-127. For more on Wei Changsheng, see Zhaolian, Xiaoting zalu, 169.
329 Zhaolian, Xiaoting zalu, 167.
could supply products that could find a wide array of audiences. The Anhui troupes that dominated the Beijing theater scene in the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, did not specialize in any specific genre. Instead, they recruited and trained versatile performers who could sing in multiple styles, including not only huabu styles like erhuang, xipi, bangzi, and but also even the yabu Kun melody. Their performances broke down genre divisions, combining elements of different styles to produce new ones, leading to the creation of the new genre pihuang 皮黄, which coalesced the musical systems of erhuang and xipi, but also incorporated elements from other traditions such as Kun opera and qinqiang. To further appeal to the sensibilities of the locals, these troupes also used the Beijing dialect in their performances and emphasized its unique characteristics. This newly amalgamated style would form the musical foundation for Peking opera, which would eventually become popular in capital theaters from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards.

Just as most of the operatic styles that were in vogue in Beijing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries originated from other provinces, most types of folk songs that were performed in Beijing’s playhouses, teahouses, and music halls were also imported from outside the capital. One of the earliest collections of Beijing folk songs, Nishang xupu 霓裳續譜 (Supplementary formulary of the rainbow skirts), which was published in 1795, contained librettos collected by the seventy-year-old Tianjin native Yan Zide 顏自德 that had been orally transmitted by musicians active in the capital.330 The types of

330 Wang Tingshao 王廷紹 preface, in Nishang xupu 霓裳續譜 (Supplementary formulary of the rainbow skirts), compiled by Yan Zide 顏自德 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 1a-b.
tunes covered in this work include *xidiao* 西調 (originated from Shanxi-Shaanxi region), *matoudiao* 馬頭調 (originally sung by dock workers of the Grand Canal in Hebei), *jiandianhua* 剪靛花 (popular first in Henan, Hubei, and Hebei provinces), *huanglidiao* 黃瀝調 (popular tune since the Yuan Dynasty from the Jiangnan region), and *chaqu* (emerged from bannermen communities in Beijing). And just as most popular troupes in the Qing Beijing during that period came from places like Anhui and Sichuan, the singers and musicians who performed these popular songs were immigrants from provinces to the southwest of Beijing. They tended to be courtesans or blind performers who were brought to the capital when they were young, and trained by elder musicians in singing or playing instruments like the *pipa* or *sanxian*. They were instructed to adopt the local dialect and customs, and even made to put on costumes fashionable among women in Beijing at that time.

The existence of this vibrant, constantly growing popular entertainment industry facilitated the bannermen in the formation of their own traditions of oral performance in many ways. The multitudes of genres and styles on display in the Outer City’s leisure quarters offered inspirations and influences for the bannermen in their own creative processes. The active and diverse marketplace also afforded the bannermen the space to eventually unveil their works to a wider public and earn widespread recognition and celebrity, whether through publishing written libretti or even performing on their own stages. This provided an avenue for the bannermen to talk about their daily lives and their

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331 Li Jiarui 李家瑞, *Beiping suqu lüe* 北平俗曲略 (Summary of popular songs in Beiping) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 6-7.  
332 Li, *Beiping suqu*, 7.
communities in their own voices, not only among themselves so as to develop their own cultural traditions, but also to people living outside their walls who would normally not be able to access such information about their lives, so as to weave their artistic traditions into the larger cultural consciousness of the capital. In doing so, they were contributing to the creation of a Beijing popular culture that attained its uniqueness through the blending of numerous “foreign” elements.

The Emergence of Bannermen Oral Performance Traditions

While the bannermen could not be completely deterred from visiting the raucous Outer City entertainment districts, the city wall and the regulations that reinforced its presence did still establish obstacles that the bannermen had to bypass. For high officials such as Censor Heshun, these barriers could be circumvented without much difficulty. For bannermen of lower social standings and less secure income, however, the cost of accessing these entertainment establishments might be a significant impediment. Although most theaters and playhouses were located just outside of Zhengyang Gate, bannermen who did not live close to that gate would still need to cover significant distance to get there. Mucihiyen lived in west side of the Inner City near Fucheng Gate 阜成門. To get to Zhengyang Gate, he would first take a carriage to Xi’anmen 西安門 on the west side of the Forbidden City, which would cost him around sixty wen, and then take another ride to his destination for around one hundred wen.334 The total

333 Until, of course, he was caught doing it by the court, at which point it will become very difficult for him.
334 See the entries for Daoguang 8.2.5 and Daoguang 8.2.7 for these exact figures, in Siyan cuwang, 14-15.
transportation cost of this one-way trip could come to half of the income he received as his silver stipends after all the deductions from fulfilling various debts and expenditures (see Appendix). For his own enjoyment, and for the sake of reinforcing and expanding his social network to attain long-term economic benefits, Mucihyan would still make this trip from time to time. He tended to do so together with one or more friends, so that his acquaintances could cover the parts or all of the travel and food cost. In the end, however, a low-income bannerman like him simply did not have the financial wherewithal to take on this trek frequently.

Moreover, some bannermen’s taste for entertainment simply did not agree with the general urban populace of Beijing. Some of them, especially those of high social standing, found the raucousness and bawdiness of commercial opera and songs to be unbearable. Zhaolian, Prince Li of the First Degree until 1815 when he was stripped of his title, found the noises produced by the cymbals in Yiyang style theater to be too boisterous, and its singing to be too noisy, for a “refined individual” to bear. He acceded that qinqiang was much more seductive and soothing to listen to, but he nevertheless still characterized its lyrics as “lewd and vulgar,” suitable more to the tastes common urbanites.\(^{335}\) Hence, although most bannermen and eventually even the Qing court fell under the spell of huabu opera, there still existed during the turn of the nineteenth century a small but influential minority of banner elites such as Zhaolian who aligned their tastes closer to those associated with Chinese literati culture, and preferred more elegant and sophisticated forms of theater. As the influence of Kun opera continued to decline in the

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\(^{335}\) Zhaolian, *Xiaoting zalu*, 167.
capital, however, their options for cultured musical performances that met their standard of refinement dwindled.

For these reasons, there existed a demand among the bannermen for alternative options of entertainment outside of those on display in the Outer City. What the marketplace could not offer, they sought to provide for themselves. The imperial court forbade the bannermen from engaging in public performances for financial profit. It was not illegal, however, for them to perform for their own amusement as amateurs. They were not allowed to put on costume and makeup as a professional actor would in their performances, but they were allowed to simply sing with the accompaniment of instruments (qingchang 清唱). While the state prohibited the entrance of commercial theaters and playhouses into the Inner City, it could not impose any effective control on what the bannermen did in private settings such as social gatherings, other than to repeatedly exhort them to eliminate extravagances and practice frugality. The bannermen were hence allowed to forge shared spaces where they could enjoy performing to each other in their leisure with minimal official interference.\footnote{Some accounts claim that the court even went as far as validating the bannermen in their leisure endeavors by giving them “dragon tickets” (longpiao 龍票), which granted them permission to sing songs and tell stories in amateur settings. See Zhu Jiajin 朱家溍, Gugong tuishi lu 故宮退食錄 (Records of leisurely pursuits in the imperial palace) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2000), 2:864; Yi Zengxun 伊增塤, Gudiao jintan: Beijing bajiaogu chaqu yanjiu pingzhu 古調今譚：北京八角鼓岔曲研究評注 (Modern discussions on ancient tunes: Study and commentary on Beijing bajiaogu and chaqu) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2011), 11. As Elena Chiu has pointed out, however, evidence that support the existence of such an artifact has been circumstantial at best. See Elena Suet-Ying Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity in Manchu Bannermen Tales (zidishu)” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 43.}
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These shared spaces provided the bannermen with the platform upon which they could share ideas and practices, which contributed to the formation of their own oral performance traditions. The two major genres that will be explored here are the *zidishu* and the *chaqu*, both of which emerged during the Qianlong reign and rose in popularity during the Jiaqing and Daoguang eras. Both traditions evolved over time, such that multiple subgenres eventually branched out from them. While both started out as private recreations performed within enclosed settings, some practitioners eventually started performing *zidishu* or *chaqu* publically in commercial establishments such as restaurants and teahouses as well, going as far as doing so professionally despite state prohibition. Through their efforts, these genres managed to reach a wider audience beyond the confines of banner society within the Inner City.

*Zidishu*

*Zidishu* was also known as *qingyin zidishu* 清音子弟書 (“pure tunes” bannermen tales), *zididuan’r* 子弟段兒 (bannermen pieces), and *xianzishu* 絃子書 (lute tales). *Zidi* 子弟 (“sons and brothers” or “scions”) was a term commonly used to refer to bannermen throughout the Qing dynasty (as a shorthand for *baqi zidi* 八旗子弟), so the storytelling genre that they created was hence called *zidishu*. Its origin is a topic of debate among modern scholars. Hatano Taro advocated the view that *zidishu* was a purely Manchu oral tradition that evolved from Manchu folksongs and shamanic music. He asserted that the first *zidishu* were composed in Manchu or Manchu and Chinese in parallel during the Yongzheng era, but Manchu content in *zidishu* gradually disappeared as the dynasty went on, as the bannermen became more accustomed to using Chinese to compose these
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texts. As Elena Chiu has pointed out, however, there is currently only one Manchu-Chinese parallel text zidishu extant, as well as a few others that were written in mixed Manchu and Chinese. Considering that there are several hundreds of zidishu that still survives to this day, it seems unlikely that if all of it were originally written in Manchu, so few examples of these would be discovered today.

Other scholars have pointed instead to various Chinese theatrical and storytelling traditions as sources of inspiration for the creation of the zidishu. The predominant view asserts that zidishu first appeared in the Qianlong period, and was closely related to guci 鼓詞 (drum songs), a storytelling genre that had been popular in Northwest China since the Song Dynasty. During the Qing, guci was still commonly performed in commercial playhouses, although most performers tended to only sing the most significant parts of a story, rather than the entire work. Similarly, most zidishu that were based on established novels or plays usually selected famous portions of the stories that the audience was already familiar with. Furthermore, zidishu had many similarities with guci in the organization of its contents, as both shared in general a seven-character sentence structure that allowed extra characters to be inserted outside of their melodic forms, and both followed the rhyming scheme known as shisanzhe 十三轍 (“thirteen rhymes”). The

338 Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 54-55.
339 This practice was known as zhaichang 摘唱, or “selective singing.”
only difference is that while *guci* had a spoken portion (i.e. *shuobai* 說白), *zidishu* was sung in its entirety.\(^{340}\)

Because of their similarity, Zheng Zhenduo classified *zidishu* under the category of *guci*, and Fu Xihua also considered *zidishu* an “offshoot” of *guci*.\(^{341}\) Chen Jinzhao also found this view to be the most credible, pointing further to the fact that late Qing sources such as the Guangxu-era Manchu scholar Zhenjun 震鈞 also explicitly linked *zidishu* to *guci*.\(^{342}\) Cui Yunhua, while agreeing that *guci* and *zidishu* were intricately related, also suggested the Cantonese storytelling tradition *muyushu* 木魚書 (wooden fish songs) as another possible source of artistic influence, pointing out that the libretti of *zidishu* were usually much more aesthetically sophisticated than those of *guci*, and showed more commonalities with those of *muyushu*.\(^{343}\) Elena Chiu, however, has disputed Cui’s view as over-simplistic, pointing out that there were plenty of *zidishu* (as well *muyushu*) that deployed coarse local expressions, and both were too firmly rooted in their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds to have too much to do with each other.\(^{344}\)

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\(^{340}\) Chen Jinzhao 陳錦釗, “Zidishu zhi ticai laiyuan ji qi zonghe yanjiu” 子弟書之題材來源及其綜合研究 (The source materials of bannermen tales in addition to a comprehensive study of this genre) (PhD diss., National Chengchi University of Taiwan, 1977), 179-180; Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 51-52.

\(^{341}\) See Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Zhongguo suwenxue shi* 中國俗文學史 (History of popular literature in China) (Beijing: Beijing gongye daxue chubanshe, 2009), 452-455; Fu Xihua 傅惜華, ed., *Zidishu zongmu* 子弟書總目 (Complete catalogue of bannermen tales) (Shanghai: Shanghai lianhe wenyi chubanshe, 1957), 1.

\(^{342}\) Chen, “Zidishu ticai,” 179. Chen was citing from Zhenjun 震鈞, *Tianzhi ouwen* 天咫偶聞 (Hearsay from close to heaven) (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1970), 7.27b-28a.

\(^{343}\) Cui Yunhua 崔蘊華, *Shuzhai yu shufang zhi jian: Qingdai zidishu yanjiu* 書齋與書坊之間：清代子弟書研究 (Between literary studios and booksellers: Study of Qing dynasty bannermen tales) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), 14-19.

\(^{344}\) Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 49-50.
While structurally speaking, *zidishu* had most in common with *guci*, musically speaking the way it was sung was much more similar to Kun opera or *gaoqiang* 高腔, a variant of the Yiyang style, with a low pitch and many changes in tones. Meanwhile, regarding the contents of *zidishu*, its composers drew from a wide pool of literature for inspiration for its stories, as shown by Chen Jinzhao’s exhaustive overview of the source materials for 183 *zidishu* that he encountered. That includes novels, dramas, current events, and personal stories. Kun operas and *pihuang* dramas were particularly prominent as sources for the *zidishu*, as its composers closely adapted the libretti of these plays into the lyrics of their own works. In fact, many *zidishu* that were based on famous episodes from novels such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* or *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* were actually adapted from theatrical productions of these stories. Hence, outside of scholars such as Hatano that believed that *zidishu* descended directly from Manchu oral performance traditions, most *zidishu* experts would agree in general with Elena Chiu’s statement that *zidishu* was “a form of cultural production in response to contemporary artistic genres,” especially those prevalent in Beijing during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, and that “it derived from multiple sources and eventually transcended these sources as a sophisticated aggregate of literary aesthetics and performing arts.” In which case, *zidishu* was a genre of music that belonged to the banner community not because it had some kind of mythical Manchu origin, but because the bannermen of eighteenth and nineteenth century appropriated various elements from different genres of

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345 Fu, *Zidishu zongmu*, 10.
346 Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 52.
performance popular in the capital and blended them together into a style that became uniquely theirs.

The earliest dated zidishu that survives today is “Zhuangshi jiangxiang” 莊氏降香 (Madam Zhuang burning incense) composed by Luo Songchuang 羅松窗. A 1756 copy of its libretto was discovered by Fu Xihua, making Luo a bannerman who was active during the early Qianlong period. The fact that Luo was one of the founders of this lyrical tradition was corroborated by the Jiaqing era scholar Gu Lin 顧琳, who named Luo as the first one responsible for writing down the lyrics of zidishu and popularizing the genre, and by a later zidishu composed by Helüshi 鶴侶氏, which referred to Songchuang as an early great master of this genre, along with later authors Han Xiaochuang 韓小窗 and Yunchuang 芸窗. The libretti composed by early masters from the Qianlong and Jiaqing periods such as Luo and Han tended to be adaptations from existing literature. During the Daoguang reign, however, there appeared a significant amount of new zidishu that were based on contemporary sources. Some were based on recent events, such as the Qing pacification of the Jahangir Khoja (Zhangge’er 張格爾) rebellion in 1828 and the Lingguanmiao 靈官廟 scandal of 1838. Others described more ordinary occurrences in the daily life of common bannermen living in the capital. In particular, Helüshi left behind sixteen zidishu that were all based on mundane experiences of his own life or those close to him. He is one of the few zidishu composers whose personal background is

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347 Gu Lin 顧琳, “Shuci xulun” 書詞緒論 (Preliminary discussions on ballads and lyrics), in Zidishu congchao 子弟書叢鈔 (Collection of copies of bannermen tales), eds. Guan Dedong 關德棟 and Zhou Zhongming 周中明 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 821; “Guang Huguosi” 逛護國寺, 9a.
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well known to modern historians: his real identity is Yigeng 奕赓, an imperial clansman who was the son of Mianke 綿課, Prince Zhuang of the first degree. Yigeng was also the author of Jiamengxuan congzhú 佳夢軒叢著 (Collected works from Jiamengxuan), a collection of historical works focused around the Eight Banners.

Musically speaking, zidishu was sung with the musical accompaniment of the sanxian, either with one performer singing and one playing the instrument, or with a single performer accomplishing both roles. It was mostly sung in manban (slow-meter), the slowest meter in traditional Chinese theatrical musicology, which made it stand out among other oral performance genres as especially difficult for one to comprehend the lyrics or learn to sing by oneself.³⁴⁸ Stylistically, zidishu was divided into two camps, the “Eastern tune” (dongdiao 東調) and the “Western tune” (xidiao 西調). The zidishu composed by early masters such as Luo and Han were sung in the former style, which aficionados such as Gu Lin considered to have embodied more masculine virtues such as “uprightness and vigorousness,” which “echoed the tunes of the ancients.” The latter style emerged later, and was musically closer to Kun opera. It was usually adopted for romantic stories, and was criticized by Gu for containing too much soft, “feminine” tones (yinqiang 陰腔).³⁴⁹ As the performance of zidishu declined after the Xianfeng reign, most musical scores of zidishu have been lost, although recent scholars such as Elena Chiu have tried to reconstruct them based on notations found in a few surviving libretti.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ See Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 137-139.
³⁵⁰ Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 139-143.
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*Chaqu and bajiaogu*

When talking about the origins of *chaqu*, scholars often cite the Guangxu era *biji* *Dao Xian yilai chaoye zaji* 道咸以來朝野雜記 (Miscellaneous records of the court and the commoners during the Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns), written by the Mongolian bannerman Chongyi 崇彝. He recorded that *chaqu* was invented by a bannerman named Wen Xiaocha 文小槎, who participated in Qianlong’s campaign against the Altishahri Uyghurs in Xinjiang in 1758-1759, as well as the two campaigns against the Jinchuan hill peoples in Sichuan in 1747-1749 and 1771-1776. On his way back from these wars, Wen created tunes that celebrated the glorious victories of the Qing empire, which came to be known as *xiaochaqu* 小槎曲 (songs of Xiaocha). Its name was later shortened to *chaqu* 槎曲, and then further bastardized as its present name *chaqu* 岔曲. The introduction to *Shengpingshu chaqu* 昇平署岔曲 (Cha songs from the Bureau of Ascending Peace), written by the Beiping Palace Museum librarians, also gave a similar genesis story, yet the name of the inventor of *chaqu* was given instead as Bao Xiaocha 寶小岔. They added that after the campaigns, Xiaocha was invited to perform at private gatherings by his fellow soldiers. The popularity of his songs eventually spread to the court, where the Qianlong Emperor, entranced by their melodies, ordered his eunuch actors to be trained in these tunes, and had small stages constructed in several of his studios so he could listen to their performances while relaxing.\(^{352}\)

\(^{351}\) Chongyi, *Dao Xian yilai*, 105.

\(^{352}\) *Shengpingshu chaqu* 昇平署岔曲 (Split songs from the Bureau of Ascending Peace) (Beiping [Beijing]: Guoli Beiping gugong bowuyuan wenxianguan, 1935), 1a-b.
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The credibility of this story, however, may need to be taken with a grain of salt. Neither Wen Xiaocha nor Bao Xiaocha could be found in any Qing sources other than Daoxian yilai chaoye zaji. Unlike the founders of the zidishu genre such as Luo Songchuang, whose works are still extant today, no works of Xiaocha have been discovered by modern scholars, nor have they even been referenced by late Qing sources or later chaqu. Since Chongyi recorded his account a full century after the general period when Xiaocha was supposedly active (and the Palace Museum librarians several more decades later during the Republican period), it is possible that he was reporting a common legend passed around bannermen circles regarding the genesis of chaqu, and that Xiaocha was an invented figure mythologized as its founder.

The first chaqu that survived in print today are found in the popular song collection Nishang xupu, which as mentioned before was published in 1795, around twenty years after the last Jinchuan campaign. As mentioned before, the chaqu in this volume were gathered together with many other genres of popular folk songs, all of which were performed by professional musicians at commercial playhouses or at parties of wealthy elites. The collection divided its chaqu into various categories, including pingcha, mancha, qizicha, kanzicha, shucha, xicha, etc. Many of these chaqu were juxtaposed with tunes of other genres, sometimes with one other kind of tune inserted in between (a subgenre that came to be known as chuanxin chaqu), sometimes with multiple different tunes in the middle (which came to be known as yaojie). This suggests that the chaqu of this period was closely related to and influenced by other popular folksong traditions prevalent in Beijing during the late eighteenth century, rather than a standalone invention as claimed by Chongyi.
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Thematically, the large majority of the chaqu in Nishang xupu are focused on romantic subjects, rather than militaristic jingles celebrating the Qing’s military accomplishments. The uniqueness of the Nishang xupu chaqu has led some scholars to fully discredit the Xiaocha origin story, and going even further to claim that chaqu was actually a type of popular Chinese folksong that was later co-opted by the bannermen as their own cultural tradition. While Chongyi’s account certainly deserves to be questioned, the claim that chaqu was popular among the general populace of the Northwest before it became well known as a bannermen performance genre also lacks the support of historical evidence. It appears to me to be more possible that like zidishu, the creators of these songs were bannermen who were influenced by existing popular Chinese songs in Beijing, and experimented with them to concoct this new genre.

The general structure of the chaqu became more standardized after Nishang xupu. The multiple subgenres of chaqu found in Nishang was shrunk down to just two different divisions in the catalog of Hundred Volumes Zhang (Baiben Zhang 百本張), famous seller of hand-copied libretti of popular opera and songs during the late Qing, which were changcha 長岔, or long chaqu, and xiaocha 小岔, or short chaqu. Tracking the evolution of chaqu is a much more difficult task than doing so for zidishu. While many zidishu writers would include their epithet at the beginnings or endings of their works, information on the composers of chaqu before the latter half of the nineteenth century is practically non-existent. It was only until the Tongzhi era did we start learning about the

353 See for example Song Qing 宋青, “Guanyu chaqu yuanliu de wenti” 關於岔曲源流的問題 (Concerning the question of the origin of split songs), Zhongguo yinyue 中國音樂, no. 3 (1991): 62-63.
354 See Li, Beiping suqu, 106.
names of specific famous chaqu performers, such as Suiyuanle 隨緣樂, Quan Yueru 全月如, and De Shoushan 德壽山. Moreover, unlike zidishu authors who usually constructed the contents of their works around a story or an event, chaqu composers were more interested in expressing their sentiments and feelings toward particular themes, which makes them much harder to date using their subject materials. The only reliable method is to use the publishing dates of collectanea such as Nishang, Baixue yiyin 白雪遺音, and Baiwan ju quan 百萬句全 to establish the latest possible year for when the chaqu included in them were composed.355

Regarding its performance, the primary instrument that came to be associated with the chaqu was the bajiaogu 八角鼓, or the octagonal drum. The drum is claimed to be of Manchu in origin, and was popularly played throughout Northwest China. Its eight sides and eight corners, as well as the eight pieces of wood used to form the foundation of the drum, were said to represent the Eight Banners. The symbolic significance of this drum as the representation of the unity of the Eight Banners became so strong, however, that the term bajiaogu eventually no longer just referred to the drum itself. It was used to refer to the entire category of popular bannermen lyrical tradition that included chaqu and its various offshoots and subgenres. In a typical chaqu performance, the singer would beat on the bajiaogu himself, while another musician would accompany his performance by playing the sanxian. Structurally speaking, chaqu typically is divided into three parts. The singer would start with an opening known as chashou 岔首, then pause for a musical

355 See Yi, Gudiao jintan, 2-4. Baixue was published in 1828, and Baiwan was published in 1856.
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interlude (guoban 過板). He would then continue central part of the song, then pause again for second shorter interlude, an unique feature known as woniu 臥牛. Finally, he finishes the song with its last part, the chawei 峽尾. In the case of previously mentioned subgenres such as chuanxin and yaojie, or the even longer paizigu 牌子曲, one or multiple tunes of other genres would be inserted between the chashou and chawei as the song’s middle portion.

The Amateurs and the Professionals

Zidishu and chaqu first emerged from within the walls of the Inner City, and they were at first mainly performed as private leisure activities within bannermen communities in Beijing. The arenas at which performances of bannermen musical traditions initially took place included the amateur clubs (piaofang 票房) and the salon (tanghui 堂會). The amateur clubs were private gatherings of musical enthusiasts where they could perform for one another. The name derived from the fact that Beijing natives referred to conducting guest performances without pay as “zoupiao” 走票, and frequent participants of these clubs were called piaoyou 票友. They could be located within the mansion of the leader of the club, known as ba’ertou 把兒頭, or at spaces rented from restaurants, teahouses, or wineshops. The club would meet on pre-established dates. The leader would send out official invitations written on ivory tablets, and the members invited to perform were obligated to come.356 The shushe 書社 (zidishu clubs) was a

356 Nü guoke 逆旅過客, Dushi congtan 都市叢談 (Assorted conversations regarding the capital city) (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1995), 127; Xia Renhu 夏仁虎, Jiuqing
more exclusive form of amateur clubs, a gathering of a smaller group of close friends
dedicated to the appreciation of zidishu, similar to the literary clubs popular among Ming-
Qing literati, like the Crab-Flower Poetry Club described in Honglou meng.357

Meanwhile, the salon, as Goldman indicated, had been a long-standing social
institution among the elites in China, and banner elites acquired this custom from late
Ming literati who kept their own private theater troupes.358 The host would employ
entertainers, usually professionals who were primarily active in the Outer City, to amuse
his guests. These hired singers and musicians were trained in a variety of performance
arts, including bannermen genres like zidishu and chaqu. If they were professionals, they
would be remunerated for their services. By the nineteenth century, there existed standard
repertoires for salon performances, with relatively established set lists of acts to be
performed in specific orders. These included the quantang bajiaogu 全堂八角鼓
repertoire, in which bannermen genres figure prominently. According to Chang Renchun
and Zhang Weidong’s descriptions, a typical quantang bajiaogu program would start
with singing a few short chaqu, usually celebratory in nature, in addition to a few magic
and acrobatic acts. The main course would contain a wide variety of possible

suojì 舊京瑣記 (Trivial records of the old capital) (Taipei: Chun wenxue chubanshe,
1970), 95-96. It is possible that stories regarding the “dragon tickets” (longpiao) were
derived from these commonly used terms.
357 Chiu, “Cultural Hybridity,” 92-98; Cui, Shuzhai yu shufang, 113-115. For further
descriptions of the regulations and conventions of shushe, see Gu, Shuci xulun, 829-830.
Cui suggests that the zidishu clubs, as described by Gu Lin in the Jiaqing period were a
precursor to the amateur clubs that appeared in the Daoguang era. Chiu, on the other
hand, argues that Gu Lin designed the zidishu club he described as a response to the
amateur clubs, which he obliquely criticized for putting too much emphasis on
performance skill.
358 Goldman, Opera and the City, 97-98.
performances including bannermen genres like *zidishe*, *paiziqu*, *danxian*, etc., but also oral traditions that originated in Chinese communities, such as *matoudiao*, *lianhualuo*, *shibuxian*, and various forms of *dagu* drum songs. The entertainment was usually ended with senior ranking performers, whether amateur or professional, putting on their best acts, or perhaps with a few comedic bits. Hence, while the amateur clubs were more focused around a few specific genres, salon performances allowed for a more eclectic mix of genres to be put on display.

Compared to the commercial entertainment establishments in the Outer City, the amateur clubs and salons offered more controlled environments for the performers and the audience. In these venues, the participants, particularly the hosts, could dictate for themselves the programs and conventions for their events, and they did not have to share their entertainment with vulgar Outer City urbanites. These spaces were not entirely completely enclosed within the bannermen community. Chinese people who lived or often entered the Inner City, especially government officials and their scions, also could become members of an amateur club and learn to sing *zidishe* or *chaqu*. Professional entertainers were also invited to bannermen salons and acquired knowledge of the performance of bannermen genres, as described above. The entrance of such outsiders into these spaces, however, was moderated primarily by the bannermen, and there were far more formal regulations and social rituals that participants must follow in these settings than in commercial theaters. Not all of these meetings would go according to

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360  It is possible that the *chaqu* included in *Nishang xupu* came to being during such salon performances, given their more eclectic nature.

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plan; drunken behavior and fights were not uncommon sights at the end of such gatherings, when the club members or guests had a bit too much alcohol. Nevertheless, within these venues the bannermen did not have to rub shoulders with people they did not plan to nor desire to share their company.

Even though the bannermen were heavily influenced by commercial opera in the production of *zidishu* and *chaqu*, they sought to elevate themselves and their storytelling and musical traditions culturally apart and above from their Chinese counterparts. As Elena Chiu has pointed out, in presenting themselves as amateurs who composed and performed these works simply for their own enjoyment, they have adopted the “amateur ideal” of Chinese literati “to promote their artistic leisure activities as a means of asserting their cultural superiority.” They perpetrated the ideal that their musical traditions were inherently more elegant and sophisticated than other popular genres, often associating their artistic products and performances with the word “pure” (*qing* 清). Similar to the state’s attempt to separate the “elegant” Kun opera from the “coarse” *huabu* plays, *zidishu* aficionados like Gu Lin emphasized the importance of preventing “evil practices” from entering their craftsmanship, so that the *zidishu* could remain “free from vulgarity” (*tuosu* 脫俗). Moreover, the bannermen became so synonymous with

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362 Chang and Zhang, *Xiqing tanghui*, 222.
364 One of the alternative names of *zidishu* was *qingyin zidishu* 清音子弟書, or “pure sound bannermen tales.” They also separated their own methods of performing the natively Chinese musical genre *shibuxian* from how it was performed in the Outer City’s commercial theaters, calling their ways as the “pure style” (*qingmen* 清門), and the other ways as the “muddied style” (*hunmen* 渾門). See Li, *Beiping suqu*, 17; Nilu, *Dushi congтан*, 115.
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the act of performing as amateurs that by the nineteenth century, this way of behavior
simply came to be known as *zidi*, as opposed to the way of “business” (*shengyi* 生意) that
professional performers who publically sought payment for their services had practiced.

Yet while following the “way of zidi” could reinforce a bannerman’s socio-
cultural standing as a gentleman of refined tastes among his immediate peers, the “way of
business” offered him the potential for monetary gains and celebrity status among a much
larger audience. The rewards of the latter would prove irresistible for several bannermen,
who left the cocoons of the private amateur clubs and entered the marketplace to bring
their crafts to the wider Beijing public. It was possible that they were further motivated to
do so due to the high level of internal competition among bannermen within their small
communities inside amateur clubs. There survive several accounts of bannermen who
devoted so much of their time and energy on what were supposed to be leisure activities
to gain cultural recognition that they ended up shirking their official duties or even
bankrupting their families. For example, a certain vice director in the Imperial Household
Department in the late Qing, surnamed Wen, failed at learning how to sing any form of
opera, so to impress the fellow members of his amateur club, he visited performer in the
Outer City to learn *sahuocai* 撒火彩, the technique of creating firework effects for stage
productions of plays that originated from Sichuan theater. After several decades, he
finally mastered this craft, but in the meantime he had lost his entire family fortunes.\(^{366}\) It
was clear from such stories that despite their common refrains, many nineteenth-century
bannermen were growing unsatisfied with simply performing for the sake of self-
amusement, as the amateur ideal dictated.

\(^{366}\) Zhichaozi, *Jiujing suoji*, 96.
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One means for the bannermen to expand their fame was to disseminate the libretti of their works to a wider audience through publishing houses and booksellers. Although a small portion of zidishu and chaqu were printed in woodblock editions by publishers such as the Wencuitang 文萃堂, the majority of the libretti for these bannermen genres were distributed as hand-copied manuscripts by booksellers such as Baiben Zhang, Leshantang 樂善堂, Biyetang 別埜堂, and Jujuantang 聚巻堂. In addition to their regular operations at their stores, these booksellers would also open stalls at temple fairs. In the zidishu “Visiting the Huguo Temple” 逛護國寺, the author, attributed as Helüshi by Chen Jinzhao, described visiting to Baiben Zhang’s stall at the temple market, and asking the proprietors, Zhang Da 張大 and Zhang Er 張二, to reproduce two works for him.367 Zidishu might have also been available for rent at steamed bun shops.368 Libretti of bannermen genres were hence widely distributed throughout the capital, even beyond Beijing to the nearby cities of Tianjin and Shenyang, through these distribution networks, and the recognition and appreciation of these cultural traditions would expand far beyond the boundaries of the Eight Banners. Readers of these libretti would also come to know the names of the composers if they had been given within the texts, thus allowing the reputation of zidishu specialists such as Luo Songchuang and Han Xiaochuang to grow. This channel allowed bannermen to showcase their products in textual form to a larger audience without compromising their amateur affectations, since the financial arrangements between the composers and the booksellers regarding the distribution of these texts, if they existed at all, were entirely hidden from the public’s view.

367 “Guang Huguosi,” 3b-4a.
Yet for some bannermen, they were not interested in being known by the public as simply writers of *zidishu* and *chaqu*. They wanted to be recognized by the Beijing masses as expert performers. They would hence enter commercial locations found in both the Inner and the Outer City and started showcasing their skills there. These aspiring public performers often chose a particular type of establishment, the teahouse (*chaquan* 茶園), as the setting for their performances. One of the highest profile figure to do so was the imperial clansman Yiqi 奕綺, who in 1839 put on a number of performances of programs within the *bajiaogu* repertoire, which most likely included *chaqu* and its various offshoots, at several teashops in Beijing. This news caused a huge stir in the capital, as these teashops eagerly put up advertisements announcing these events all over the streets. Yiqi would do everything necessary to please his audience, even allowing lowly actors to insult him on stage for their amusement. Eventually, Qing court learned about this news. Yiqi was stripped of his noble title, given forty beatings, and placed under house arrest; he died three years later.  

Yiqi might have been an exceptional case, for his status as an Aisin Gioro clansman was likely what attracted much of his audience, as well as the reason why he soon incurred the wrath of the state. A more positive example for aspiring professional public performers would be Shi Yukun 石玉崑, who rose to prominence as a famous storyteller at around the same period. Shi is generally considered to be a native of Tianjin; although there have been speculations that he may have been a bannerman, no substantive proof exists to support that claim. In the Daoguang period, he began to

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369 *Yigeng* 奕赓, *Jiamengxuan congzhu* 佳夢軒叢著 (Collected works from Jiamengxuan) (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1994),
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perform at teahouses on the west side of the city, such as Fuxingju 復興居 just outside of Fucheng Gate 阜成門. Some scholars have categorized Shi as a *zidishu* performer.\(^{370}\) Yet the works he performed that he became primarily known for, which included the story cycles “Longtu gong’an” 龍圖公案 and “Sanxia wuyi” 三俠五義, were performed in a different style to the typical *zidishu*. They included spoken portions, as well as rhymed prose known as *zan* 贊, although musically speaking Shi’s renditions showed influence of *zidishu* songs, especially the Western style tune.

Shi Yukun’s popularity during his heyday could be seen in the *zidishu* “Ping Kun lun” 評崑論, in which the anonymous composer, who went to listen to Shi’s storytelling on a whim, found the teahouse where he was performing to be packed with over a thousand patrons.\(^ {371}\) Mucihiyan could have been a member of that audience, for he regularly visited Fuxingyuan to enjoy Shi’s storytelling in his idle time during the period covered by his diary. He had become such a celebrity that his name would be invoked by booksellers when distributing copies of libretti of his performances. His unique style came to be named after him as *shipaishu* 石派書, which publishers would use to distinguish his works from *zidishu* and others, and they were being sold at a much higher price than other genres. Decades later, when his stories were adapted into popular novels, the publishers would also explicitly reference his name and emphasize his role as the original storyteller. As Paize Keulemans has pointed out, Shi’s celebrity had grown to

\(^{370}\) See for example, Li, *Beiping suqu*, 9.

\(^{371}\) “Ping Kun lun” 評崑論, 2a.
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such a high point in the late Qing that his name had become a sort of brand that was “synonymous with quality storytelling performances.”

Following Shi’s path, the Chinese bannerman Si Ruixuan 司瑞軒 also achieved considerable fame through his public performances during the Tongzhi and Guangxu periods. Si, better known by his stage name Suiyuanle 隨緣樂, was according to Zhang Cixi originally an official serving in the Directorate of Astronomy (Qintian jian 欽天監). After quitting his position in the government, he became a fulltime professional entertainer who performed at various teahouses, both near the famous temples in the Inner City and at around the Heaven’s Bridge area in the Outer City. Although he performed songs with similar structure to chaqu, he did so only by himself without the help of another person for musical support. He eschewed the use of the bajiaogu completely, and sang only to the accompaniment of sanxuan played by himself. Similar to Shi Yukun creating his own style of shipaishu, Suiyuanle’s innovations led to the formation of a new genre of performance known as danxian 單弦. The late Qing novelette Xiao E 小額, written by Song Youmei 松友梅 and published in 1907, included an episode in which the titular main character goes to a teahouse to listen to Suiyuanle’s performance. While Zhang Cixi mentioned that tickets to see his performances cost between 560 and 640 wen, in the novel the character was charged 700 wen. The zidishu

372 Keulemans, Sound Rising from Paper, 84.
373 Zhang, Tianqiao, 73.
374 Chongyi claims that Shi Yukun was actually the founder of danxian, and Suiyuanle followed his lead. That, however, could not be true since the singing style and structure of Shi’s works differ greatly from danxian. See Chongyi, Dao Xian yilai, 9.
375 Zhang, Tianqiao yilan, 73; Song Youmei 松友梅, Xiao E 小額 (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 1992), 33-35.
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“Suiyuanle,” written by another anonymous composer about his experience listening to Suiyuanle’s performance, alluded to the fact that like Shi’s storytelling sessions, Suiyuanle’s danxian acts could also fill an entire teahouse, such that the composer had great difficulty getting past all of the guests to leave the establishment to relieve himself. While Suiyuanle may not have had as great of an impact on Chinese popular culture as Shi Yukun, he did transmit his performance style to his successors De Shoushan, Quan Yueru, and Zeng Yongyuan, who were themselves influential popular performers during the last years of the Qing dynasty and the opening decades of the Republican period.

Those who maintained their status as amateur aficionados of popular culture took umbrage at the success of professional performers like Shi Yukun and Suiyuanle. In the two zidishu that described Shi Yukun and Suiyuanle’s shows respectively mentioned above, both composers adopted hostile attitudes towards each of their respective main subject. In “Ping Kun lun,” the author retold with disdain how various members of the audience tried to curry favor with Shi by showering him with gifts. He considered Shi’s performance to be unexceptional, and found him to be no different than any other professional who had to “solicit other people’s good graces,” and his ultimate goal was nothing more than “convert this tea fee into his allowance.” He found the environment of Shi’s teahouse to be unbearable for a “poor scholar” like himself whose only goal was to appreciate “pure songs and elegant tunes.” Meanwhile, the composer of “Suiyuanle,” meanwhile, was deeply offended by the performer’s constant use of vulgar language and

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376 “Ping Kun lun,” 1a-5b.
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lewd jokes to elicit cheap responses from the audience. He was deeply appalled by Suiyuanle’s “shameless” behavior, comparing him to “a monkey whose ugly behaviors could not be put to words.” He was furthermore dismayed at the general atmosphere of the establishment, decrying its constant state of raucousness (*luanluanhonghong* 乱乱哄哄) and cacophony (*naochoachao* 鬨吵吵), and in the end would rather just go back to his home to practice the *sanxian* alone.377 Beyond their mockeries of the actual performances, both *zidishu* revealed that those who sought preserve the “way of the *zidi*” were disturbed by the trend of bannermen performers becoming professionals, and sought to preserve the status quo of enjoying their “elegant” leisure activities within the safe enclosed spaces within the Inner City, away from the baleful influence of the marketplace.

They were, however, ultimately powerless to arrest this trend. During the periods of reform after the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the court further loosened their control on bannermen livelihood, granting them more autonomy to look for alternative employment outside of the state bureaucracy and military. Many bannermen were able to take advantage of this freedom to become professional entertainers like Shi Yukun and Suiyuanle, supporting their livelihood and finding their place in Beijing society using their knowledge and skills in performance arts acquired while they were “idle.” Amateur clubs would persist, even past the end of the dynasty to the Republican period. That said, the amateur ideal that their members sought to uphold within those private spaces was slipping, as more and more club members found themselves in financial difficulty. While in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, each club member must use his own

377 “Suiyuanle,” 1a-5b.
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income to cover the costs of their performances, such as transportation fees and payment for necessary costumes, equipments, or instruments, towards the end of the dynasty many piaoyou were too impoverished to reserve funds for these purposes. The host would need to for these members’ performance costs, and even secretly gave them a bit extra as remuneration. This practice came to be known as chipiao 吃票, and this behavior made the relationship between the club host and club members no different than that between a teahouse and a professional performer.

Conclusion

By the nineteenth century, the Qing court’s mission of reviving the Eight Banners as a powerful military by reinstilling the warrior virtues of the “old Manchus” into the current stock of bannermen had become nothing but a mirage. Most of the bannermen families living in Beijing had by that period resided in the capital for numerous generations. Their homeland was no longer the steppes of Manchuria, but rather the hustling and bustling metropolis of Beijing. Their current home did not foster an environment that would encourage bannermen to practice archery or horse riding in their leisure. Instead, commercial opera and other traditions of performance arts that were prevalent in Beijing’s entertainment districts captured the passions of many bannermen. Their enthusiasm for popular entertainment allowed them to develop a deep well of knowledge regarding the composition and performance of various genres, which contributed to their creation of their oral performance traditions. Instead of being experts in war, the bannermen had become experts in singing and storytelling (as well as various other forms of leisure pursuits). They have adapted to their current reality.
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Bannermen communities became split, however, in how this knowledge should be used. Some believed that they should share their talents with only a small group of peers who were intellectually capable of appreciating the performances of these genres to the fullest. Others found the financial rewards and prestige that could be had by performing their genres to a much wider public to be too attractive. This divide in “the way of the zidi” and “the way of business” revealed ideological divisions among the bannermen regarding how they fit in to Beijing society as a whole in their new identity. Should they keep their distance from the commercial world of the Outer City and remain as aloof and detached cultural critics? Or should they fully immerse themselves into that commercial world and share their knowledge with other performers and enthusiasts?

By the end of the nineteenth century, many bannermen were compelled towards the latter path. Some did so simply for financial reasons. The Qing state was already struggling with the “Eight Banners livelihood question” before it was forced into major wars against forces both internal and external. After the financial devastation caused by the Taiping Rebellion and the payment of successive debilitating reparations after several wars against Western powers, the court became even more incapable of providing financial assistance to the bannermen. As their only source of income gradually dried up, the bannermen had to fend for themselves, and for many of them, their only marketable bengsen was the musical talent they accumulated through participation in amateur clubs.

Yet beyond simple financial concerns, the bannermen could also find the sort of celebrity and recognition that they could no longer achieve as soldiers or officers on the battlefield. While they no longer had the ability or opportunity to become the next Hailanca, they could aim to be the next Shi Yukun. However mean a reputation an
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entertainer might have had, to many bannermen like Suiyuanle, it was at least a form of reputation that was attainable to them, and that was still preferable to utter obscurity. The world of entertainment became the new battlefield for bannermen, a place where they could attain fame and reputation through their own ability and knowledge and earn substantial financial rewards for their performances.
Chapter 6: Epilogue and Conclusion

The Fall of the Qing and the End of the Eight Banners

During the Xinhai Revolution, the bannermen became the target of racial violence throughout the capital. As described in *Orphan Warriors*, Yichang of the Suwan Gūwalgiya clan from the Hangzhou garrison heard news of genocidal attacks against Manchus, or even anybody who were considered to possess “Manchu” characteristics (men with “fair complexions” or “flat heads”, women with unbound feet), in several other garrisons. In Wuchang, where the flames of revolution were first lit, 800 Manchus were hunted down and murdered, their corpses covering the streets and heaped together outside the city gates. In Xi’an, it was reported by the foreign press that over 20,000 bannermen were starved out and massacred by local mobs led by the secret society *Gelaohui* 哥老會 (“Elders Brothers Society”). However much the bannermen may have acculturated and integrated themselves into Chinese society, that was completely overwhelmed by the immense racial hatred that was stirred up among many segments of the Han Chinese population by the revolutionaries during the events of 1911.

The end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, however, did not immediately spell the end of all special privileges for the (now technically former) members of the Eight Banners. During the negotiation for the abdication of the Xuantong Emperor, Empress Dowager

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Longyu 隆裕太后 (1868-1913) was able to secure two treaties with the Yuan Shikai 袁世凱. The Articles of Favorite Treatment for Manchus, Mongols, Uighers, and Tibetans (Man-Meng-Hui-Zang gezu daiyu tiaojian 滿蒙回藏各族待遇條件) ensured equal basic rights and protections for all these main minority groups, and in addition continued the distribution of regular stipends to former Eight Banner soldiers. The Articles of Favorable Treatment (Qingshi youdai tiaojian 清室優待條件) provided the imperial family five hundred thousand dollars (yuan 元) per year to sustain their livelihood, and another one-time grant of two million dollars to open welfare facilities to assist bannermen who were struggling in poverty. The status of “bannerman” would hence continue to exist in a sense until 1924, when the warlord Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882-1948) occupied Beijing and exiled the Qing emperor and his immediate retinues to Manchuria.

These two treaties might have provided the bannermen with temporary reprieve and protection, yet many of them still did not feel safe. Those who survived the carnages of 1911 had to learn to live in cities that have been home to them for many generations, but have now become hostile to their existence. Many changed their names to ones that appeared more Han Chinese. Some members of the imperial clan, for example, adopted the surname Jin 金. 379 Some others simply chose common Chinese surnames such as Zhao 趙. A few bannermen even went as far as to completely renounce their banner identity and ask to be re-registered as a Han civilian. 380 Moreover, the bannermen’s

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379 Jin, or “gold,” is a direct translation of aisin.
380 Dan, Remote Homeland, 92.
livelihood problem in Beijing only worsened in the Republican period, as the new
governments had much less incentives than the Qing court to prioritize providing them
with financial relief. The Office of Eight Banners Livelihood, established to continue to
distribution of stipends to the bannermen, received insufficient funding and suffered
chronic corruption among its officers, leading to delays or cuts in the bannermen’s
provisions. Any attempt by the bannermen to petition for the government to provide more
support to this bureau fell on deaf ears. Unemployment among the banner communities
in Beijing, already a huge problem in the nineteenth century, would only worsen during
the chaos of the early twentieth century, as multiple warlords traded control over the
capital and political instability became the status quo. Even those at the upper echelons of
Eight Banners hierarchies, such as imperial clansmen and former nobilities, were now
suffering from the same problems as the rest of the banner population, having to get by
financially through selling or pawning their prized possessions.

During this time of crisis, the bannermen had to rely more than ever on their
private connections and non-governmental mutual aid networks to find subsistence.
Formal organizations such as the Livelihood Society of the Two Guards’ Barracks and
the Eight Banners (Lianghu Baqi shengji hui 長護八旗生計會) were established to
distribute land donated by wealthier banner people to those who were in need. These
could be seen as the spiritual successors to the associations that Mucihiyian participated in
a century earlier. Personal social networks also continued to be key in helping the
bannermen find financial opportunities. For example, several former banner nobles, such

381 Dan, Remote Homeland, 89-90.
382 Dan, Remote Homeland, 97.
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as the imperial clansman Zaizhen 載振 and Puwei 溥偉 and a former minister of the Imperial Household Department Zengchong 增崇, invested in banks (qianzhuang) and pawn shops operated by the merchant family Liu. The business relationship between these banner nobles and Han merchants was strengthened by the numerous dinners and feasts they shared. In particular, they enjoyed watching performances together in the Liu family’s private theater. The entertainers the Lius’ hired included bannermen such as Xi Xiaobo 奚嘯伯 and Rong Jianchen 榮劍臣, who made their livings as professional bajiaogu performers. The “idle” way of life of the bannermen and the leisure activities that they pursued, decried so much by the Qing court and then the Chinese revolutionaries, turned out, for some, to be the key to their survival.

Bannermen and “Old Beijing” Culture

What did expire with the Qing Dynasty was the political pressure for the former bannermen to comply with the “old ways of the Manchus” and prioritize serving the state as their main goal in life. They now have no institutional obstructions to prevent them from pursuing their preferred lifestyle or occupation. In the post-1911 Revolution world, talent in traditional literary composition and expertise in popular culture, disparaged previously by the Qing rulers and Eight Banners leaders like Fugiyūn, have now become skills that the former bannermen could rely on to make a living in a new, rapidly changing society. During the heyday of the New Culture Movement in the 1920s, when

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383 Ding Yizhuang 定宜莊, Lao Beijing ren de koushu lishi (Oral history of the denizens of old Beijing) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2009), 1:263-265.
384 Ding, Lao Beijing ren, 274-276.
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all kinds of foreign –isms became in vogue and traditional culture came under assault, these former bannermen, especially in the former capital Beijing (now temporarily renamed Beiping 北平), became the repository of customs, practices, and values that were emblematic of the world of the bygone days. As Liu Ruzhou 劉汝舟, a descendant of the aforementioned Han merchant family, pointed out, these bannermen may lack any abilities (nengnai 能耐) or skills (bengshi 本事) that would help them find careers in politics or trades, but they at least possessed “culture” (wenhua 文化), and they could still make a respectable living through their cultural expertise.385 The following are examples of such people who used that expertise to find their role in a modernizing city.

Shu Qingchun was twelve years old when the Qing Dynasty came to an end. He was living on meager means with his mother, his father having perished when fighting against the Eight Nations Alliance during the Boxer Rebellion when he was only two years old. Qingchun was able to enter a private school thanks to the assistance of a family friend who was an imperial clansman, and he eventually graduated from Beijing Normal School 北京師範學校 in 1918 after dropping out of a previous high school due to financial difficulties. He eventually made his name writing novels and plays under the penname Lao She, focusing mainly on the daily life of common people living in Beijing. His mastery of vernacular prose, and in particular his masterful usage of the Beijing dialect in his dialogues, made him exceptionally popular and well-regarded during his time. *Rickshaw Boy* (Luotuo Xiangzi 駱駝祥子), one of his most famous works, described the life of a simple rickshaw puller living in Beijing whose honesty and

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diligence earned him nothing but pain, loss, and scorn, leading him to eventually succumb to the vices of the city and fall to a lifestyle of indolence and excess, a theme that would not be unfamiliar to many capital bannermen during the nineteenth century.\(^{386}\)

His affinity for the hardship of the ordinary people originally earned him the adulation of the Chinese Communist Party, and he was appointed the vice chairman of the China Writers Association under the People’s Republic of China, among various other titles and honors. Yet during the Cultural Revolution, when he was still writing *Under the Plain Red Banner*, he was denounced as a “counter-revolutionary” and a “capitalist roader” by the Red Guards, and was severely beaten and publically humiliated. Heartbroken, Lao She committed suicide by jumping into Taiping Lake 太平湖 in the Inner City in 1966. After the “decade of madness,” Lao She would be rehabilitated, his works celebrated again as seminal works of modern Chinese literature.

Yanshou 延壽 (1890-1942) was born a few years earlier than Lao She under the Mongol Plain Blue Banner. A member of the distinguished Malat 瑪拉特 clan, he was the great-great grandson of decorated Qing governor Sungyūn, who has already been mentioned earlier in Chapter Four. He served as an official first in the Court of Colonial Affairs (Lifanyuan 理藩院) during the waning years of the Qing Dynasty, then transitioned to the Bureau of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs (Meng-Zang Yuan 蒙藏院) of the Republic of China after the 1911 Revolution. What Yanshou was truly passionate about, however, was Beijing opera. He not only become a regular patron of numerous

\(^{386}\) Lao She, *Luotuo Xiangzi* 駱駝祥子 (Rickshaw boy) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2009).
Chapter 6: Conclusion

opera houses and amateur clubs throughout the capital, but also committed himself to learning various aspects of opera performance from many famous actors and musicians, often going on stage using the name Yan Jupeng 言菊朋. In 1923, he was invited by the renowned actor Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳(1894-1961) to perform with him in Shanghai, but he was discovered by his superiors and cashiered from his position. From then on, Yan Jupeng, much like Si Ruixuan a few decades before him, became a professional entertainer. He became renowned as an actor of the old man role (laosheng 老生). Both of his sons, one of his daughters, and his grandson all continued his legacy and became accomplished performers in their own rights. This lineage that used to be known for producing great generals and officials for the Qing court, is now renowned for producing great Beijing opera actors.  

The brothers Puru 溥儒 (Pu Xinshe 溥心畬, 1896-1963) and Puhui 溥僡 (Pu Shuming 溥叔明, 1906-1963) were the grandsons of I-hin (Yixin 奕訢, 1833-1898), Prince Gong of the First Rank and one of most powerful figures in the Qing court in the middle of the nineteenth century. Unlike their illustrious grandfather, these brothers had no interest in politics, preferring instead to cultivate their knowledge and ability in poetry, calligraphy, painting, and various other literary and artistic pursuits. The fall of the dynasty relieved both brothers of all of their political duties and allowed them to focus completely on what they enjoyed doing, and both became eminent polymaths in the capital, with elder brother Pu Xinshe in particular attaining great fame as one of the most

celebrated calligraphers and painters of his time. Both shared amateur interests in composing and performing chaqu, and the younger brother Pu Shuming was in particular devoted to preserving this genre and elevating its literary status.\(^{388}\) The brothers would eventually run into financial difficulties, however, and Pu Xinshe had to make dues by selling his artworks.\(^{389}\) The Chinese Civil War (1945-49) separated the brothers, as Pu Xinshe departed for Taiwan and later taught at the National Taiwan Normal University and Tunghai University, while Pu Shuming remained in Beijing to continue to host amateur poetry and bajiaogu clubs. These two descendants of Nurhaci forged their own paths as keepers of traditional cultural knowledge, and they attained acclaim and adulation in that way.

Through the works of such people, various vestiges of the urban culture of the “old Beijing” were preserved. In Lao She’s novels, we could experience vicariously through his vivid descriptions the sights and sounds of the streets of turn of the century Beijing. His masterful use of the Beijing dialect, replete with words and phrases that had Manchu origins, especially breathed life into his characters. Yan Jupeng and his family maintained the vast cultural knowledge that has accumulated among banner theater aficionados who consumed, critiqued, and performed Beijing opera across multiple generations. He was able to use that knowledge to develop his own style of performance, the Yan Style (Yanpai 言派), that emphasized clear enunciation and emphasized


\(^{389}\) Ding, Lao Beijing ren, 1:119.
individuality and creativity in singing. Through their amateur clubs, Pu Xinshe and Pu Shuming kept the tradition of *bajiaogu* performance alive in the former capital. Although *zidishu* composition and performance largely disappeared after the 1911 Revolution, *chaqu* would remain a living art form to this day. In many private gatherings in Beijing and its surrounding cities today, the same *chaqu* that Jakdan and Mucihiyian would have enjoyed a century ago continue to be sung and taught.

**The Bannermen’s Transformation in a Global Context**

As mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the Qing bannermen were not the only elite military social class of a non-Western early modern empire to be considered to have suffered “degeneration” and “decadence.” In Japan during the Tokugawa era (1603-1868), the samurai transformed from “semi-autonomous warriors” to “domesticated bureaucrats,” many of whom became similarly ineffective on the battlefield and prone to the attractions of urban life by the end of *bakufu* (“Shogunate”) rule. In the Ottoman Empire, the janissaries (*yeniçeri*), the elite infantry corps originally forbidden to marry or engage in any trades besides serving as the sultan’s soldiers, had by the sixteenth century became “less and less effective as a fighting force,” such that many of them “hoped never to see a battle in his life.” The declining effectiveness of these “warrior castes” paralleled the general weakening of their respective regimes. The Qing and the Ottomans were nicknamed the “Sick Man” of East

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Asia and Europe respectively, and saw their empires gradually diminish under the pressure of Western imperialism. While the bannermen outlasted the Qing Dynasty, the Janissaries were disbanded in 1826 after they revolted against attempts at military modernization by the sultans Selim III and Mahmud II. In Japan, young samurai from mostly peripheral domains rebelled in 1868 to overthrow the bakufu and restore the emperor to power. They began a program of modernization that would strengthen Japan to become an imperial power in its own right, but in doing so, they sacrificed their, and many their peers’, former social status, eliminating the samurai class and revoking many of its privileges in 1877.

Was there a direct connection between the declines in the military capability and “warrior spirit” of these military castes and the fall of the political regimes that sponsored them? On the surface, the link appears to be obvious. After all, it was the failures of the Qing, the Tokugawa, and the Ottomans to stand up to foreign military aggression and suppress internal rebellions that precipitated their eventual collapse. The perception that the bannermen, the samurai, and the Janissaries, men who were raised specifically by their respective states to win their wars and expand their empires, could not even put up a good fight against the forces of Britain, Russia, and the U.S., held great sway. Their failures offered the perfect symbols that showed the contrast between the old hereditary aristocracy that took war to be their entitlement, and the new professional armies that took war to be their occupation; and in general, between tradition and modernity.

What the bannermen’s personal accounts show us, however, was that the existence of any kind of “warrior spirit” as a general, defining characteristic of a large group of people was highly questionable. One may be born into a social status that
labeled them as a soldier, but that did not mean that they would necessarily grow up with the aspiration to become one. There certainly were bannermen who continued to believe in the Manchu Way even to the end of the dynasty. They fought bravely against the foreign invaders and internal rebels, even if their individual deeds ultimately went unappreciated due to the overall losses that the Qing Dynasty suffered. Yet many others, like Mucihiyen, Cao Xueqin, and Suiyuanle, did not have the inclination or the ability to become soldiers, no matter how the state may try to cajole them follow one predetermined path in life. They wanted to become scholars, novelists, and singers, and they eventually found ways to do so despite the court’s obstructions. This may point to a fundamental flaw in the idea of a hereditary military caste that would eventually lead to its breakdown, whether or not these non-Western empires would encounter the forces of Western imperialism.
**Appendix**

**Appendix: Mucihiyan’s Biannual Budgets in Siyan cuwang lu meng**

First half of Daoguang 8 (1828)

Received 30 taels silver converted to 76,720 *wen* at Xiaoliuhe 小六合
- 24,000 *wen* (Baoxingju 宝興局)
- 11,450 *wen* (Sanshengdian 三盛店)
- 6,600 *wen* (rent)
- 2,800 *wen* (Yangchunju 陽春居)
- 5,500 *wen* (Jinlanzhai 金蘭齋)
- 4,000 *wen* (Hongxinghao 宏興號)
- 1,500 *wen* (Zhengchanghao 振昌號)
- 2,000 *wen* (relative Mu Henian 穆鶴年)

= 350 *wen* (0.45% of income)<sup>392</sup>

First half of Daoguang 9 (1829)

Received 30 taels silver converted to 78,200 *wen* at Jintaiyi 晉太義
- 29,000 *wen* (relative Mu Huanian 華年)
- 9,500 *wen* (Jinlanzhai 金蘭齋)
- 9,900 *wen* (rent)
- 4,000 *wen* (Baoyuantang 保元堂)
- 1,500 *wen* (Zhengchanghao 振昌號)
- 480 *wen* (Yongshenghao 永盛號)
- 350 *wen* (Yongfuguan 永福館)
- 5,000 *wen* (Interest to pawn shop)
- 2,000 *wen* (sister)

= 13,320 *wen* (17% of income)<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Numbers taken from entry of Daoguang 8.2.1, from *Siyan cuwang* 13-14 (Manchu: 331-32).

<sup>393</sup> Entry of Daoguang 9.2.1, from *Siyan cuwang*, 86 (Manchu: 655-656).
Appendix

Second half of Daoguang 9 (1829)

Received 30 taels silver converted to 76,400 wen at ?
- 30,000 wen (Mu Huanian)
- 9,000 wen (rice)
- 6,000 wen (rent)
- 3,400 wen (clothing)
- 2,000 wen (medicine)
- 2,000 wen (incense)
- 1,500 wen (Zhenchanghao 振昌號)
- 4,800 wen (dried goods)
- 3,400 wen (Fushoutang 福壽堂)
- 5,000 wen (sister)
- 9,300 wen (pawning back a clock)

= 4,350 wen (6% of income) 394

First half of Daoguang 10 (1830)

Received 30 taels silver converted to 81,500 wen at ?
- 17,100 wen (Mu Huanian)
- 10,000 wen (Yi Yuanzhen 衣源珍)
- 5,000 wen (sister)
- 6,000 wen (rent)
- 4,000 wen (Yi Jiahui 衣嘉會)
- 34,000 wen (pawning back possessions)
- 6,000 wen (invite Yi Yuanzhen to opera house)
- 2,000 wen (incense)

= - 2,650 wen (-3% of income) 395

395 Entry of Daoguang 10.2.4, from Siyan cuwang, 187-188 (Manchu: 1151-1152). No budget was recorded for the first half of Daoguang 15. Instead, Mucihiyan complained that only 9.8 taels of his 30 taels of regular salary (his last as a sixth rank official) was distributed him, and the silver he received was in poor quality.
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