The Last Emperors
A Social History
of Qing Imperial Institutions

EVELYN S. RAWSKI

The Philip E. Lilienthal imprint honors special books in commemoration of a
man whose work at the University of
California Press from 1954 to 1979 was
marked by dedication to young authors
and to high standards in the field of
Asian Studies. Friends, family, authors,
and foundations have together endowed
the Lilienthal Fund, which enables the
Press to publish under this imprint
selected books in a way that reflects the
taste and judgment of a great and
beloved editor.

University of California Press
BERKELEY  LOS ANGELES  LONDON
Contents

List of Illustrations vii
List of Tables ix
Acknowledgments xi
Introduction 1

PART ONE: THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE QING COURT
1. The Court Society 17

PART TWO: THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE QING COURT
2. The Conquest Elite and the Imperial Lineage 59
3. Sibling Politics 96
4. Imperial Women 127
5. Palace Servants 160

PART THREE: QING COURT RITUALS
6. Rulership and Ritual Action in the Chinese Realm 197
7. Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism at Court 231
8. Private Rituals 264

Conclusion 295

Appendix 1. Names of Qing Emperors and the Imperial Ancestors 303
Appendix 2. Imperial Princely Ranks 304
Notes 305
Bibliography 393
Glossary-Index 443
hallmark of barbarity by Chinese. The Ming dynasty founder had this to say about it:13

the . . . Ti [that is, Mongole] entered China . . . and both within and without the Four Seas there was none who did not submit to them. Could this have been achieved by human power alone? Indeed when Heaven transferred [its mandate] to them, the rulers were intelligent and the subjects were sincere . . . But . . . the rulers of the Yuan no longer observed the instructions of their ancestors . . . Things went so far that a younger brother [could] marry . . . his [deceased] elder brother's wife, and a son [could] have relations with his [deceased] father's concubine. Those above became familiar with those below . . . The result was that the rules of conduct between ruler and subject, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers broke down completely.

The levirate was forbidden in 1631 and 1636 by Hongtaiji. Although the ban was ignored in the marriages of Hongtaiji's half sister Mukushi to Eiu and then to his son, Turgei, and the sequential marriages of Hongtaiji's daughter Maketa to two sons of Ligden Khan (1636, 1648), it held for the rest of the dynasty. The Manchus tolerated cross-generational marriages, which Chinese avoided, and like the Mongols they favored matrilateral cross-cousin marriages (marrying mother's brother's daughter), and the sororate (marriage to sisters). The result was a very dense kinship network within the women's chambers in the palace. Isaac Headland, describing the court of Empress Dowager Cixi, notes that among her ladies in waiting were an adopted daughter, born to her brother-in-law Yixin (Prince Gong); a niece; and another niece by marriage. The density of these interlocking relationships would not have been untoward two centuries earlier, in the Shunzhi reign, when Fulin's first empress was the niece and his second empress the grandniece of one of his father's empresses.15

MARITAL POLICY

After permitting intermarriage between banner men and Han Chinese for more than a decade after their conquest, the Manchu rulers reversed themselves. In 1654 the Shunzhi emperor responded indignantly to a memorial from a Han Chinese official, who accused the emperor's servants of arousing anti-Manchu sentiments by purchasing girls in Yangzhou for the imperial harem. In his response, the emperor stated that "there have never been Han females in the palace under the house rules of Nurjag and Hongtaiji."16 As Ding Yizhuang notes, no one has yet discovered the actual regulation prohibiting intermarriage among the official records, although

an edict issued toward the end of the dynasty in the Guangxu reign cites this dynastic rule. That such a rule did exist is confirmed by imperial edicts from the Kangxi reign onward, which reiterate the prohibition or permit exceptions. Ding's search of the archives has uncovered fifty-seven cases, running throughout the dynasty, of marriages between bannermen and commoners (i.e., Han Chinese). Most (forty-five of fifty-seven) involved banner men marrying Han Chinese women. Of these, 74 percent were registered in the Imperial Household Department's bondservant companies. Twelve involved Hanjun banner daughters marrying Han Chinese. In one of these cases, the Qianlong emperor observed that the practice of Hanjun marrying commoners was of such long standing that it should be tolerated. He added, however, that the other banner groups must adhere to the Manchu regulations.18 Manchu banner daughters were not given in marriage to Han Chinese husbands. Ding concludes that the Qing prohibition on intermarriage focused on wives: she argues that Manchu bannermen could buy Han Chinese concubines.

Like many other non-Han dynasties the Manchus practiced a form of political endogamy. Noting the oft-repeated claim that the Qianlong emperor married his favorite daughter to the head of the Confucius family, Du Jiaji uses Kong archival materials to prove that the real wife was the daughter of Grand Secretary Yu Minzhong.14 The wives of emperors and princes came predominantly from a relatively small number of families belonging to the Mongol nobility and distinguished banner families. After 1653 brides for the Aisin Gioro were selected from banner officials' daughters aged thirteen to fourteen sui, who were required to present themselves at the palace in Peking before they could be betrothed to others. In this triennial draft of niuniu (beautiful women) some girls were immediately chosen to be wives or consorts for the princes or for the emperor himself. Others were appointed as ladies-in-waiting, serving for a five-year term: those who caught the emperor's eye during their service might be promoted into the harem. In contrast to the high social status of the niuniu, women selected through a separate annual draft for palace maids (gongniu) were daughters of bondservant officials in the upper three banners who served in the Neiwufu. They too might be promoted into the harem. Sixteen percent of the imperial consorts were originally palace maids.17

IMPERIAL CONSORTS

The highly stratified imperial harem seems to have been a Han Chinese structure that Manchu rulers adopted in the course of the seventeenth cen-
tury. Preconquest marriages among the elite may have approximated a truly polygonous system. Before 1636 all of Hongtaiji’s consorts were called fujin, the Manchu designation for the wife of a prince (beihe). Although Hongtaiji “rewrote” the historical record by posthumously promoting his birth mother to “empress” (huanghou), most of the women in his own as well as his father’s harem were not retroactively fitted into the seven-rank system. Hahanajacing, who bore Nurzaci’s first son, Cuyeng, was simply “first consort” (yuansifu); another, the mother of Manggultai and Degele, was “successor consort” (jihe). Of Nurzaci’s sixteen consorts, four were “side-chamber consorts” (zefei) and six, “ordinary consorts” (shuifei).

The same simple hierarchy continued in Hongtaiji’s time. The majority (ten of fifteen) of his consorts were identified by the older terms of his father’s generation. Over half of the consorts buried in the Shunzhi emperor’s consort tomb were identified simply as gexe, a Manchu term meaning “lady” that was later specific to princesses. Even in the late seventeenth century there were ordinary consorts among the consorts of the Kangxi emperor.

After 1636 the emperor’s consorts (throughout this chapter the term refers to the empress or to concubines) became differentiated into eight ranks, headed by the empress. As the emperor’s wife, she occupied a position above the other seven status groups, the highest being huangfufei, then in descending order gufei, fei, pin, guiren, changzai, and daying. Food, clothing, jewelry, stipends, and maids were allocated to the consorts by rank, with minute gradations exemplifying a ranked hierarchy.

Although the post-1636 consort ranks resemble the Ming system, the way in which the Qing system worked was very different and much more fluid. Unlike the Ming, which adhered to what might be called serial monogamy, the Qing did not limit the succession to sons of the empress.

Adding to the open-ended succession were practices that blurred the social distinctions among consorts. Imperial consorts of the first four ranks recruited through the xinshu draft came from the same social strata as empresses. Like empresses, they were invested with titles and performed domestic rituals signifying their incorporation into the harem. Consorts in ranks five through seven received no patents; they were frequently recruited through the maidservant (gongzhuo) rather than the xinshu draft and thus entered the palace without prior sacrifice at the ancestral altar. Even low-ranking consorts could be promoted to empress. Once promoted, these women received the same privileges accorded to those who had been invested with the title at marriage. Cixi offers an outstanding example of what was possible.

The Qing strategy of integrating brides into the imperial descent group “involved denying, or at least underplaying, a consort’s ability to claim rank and status in her own right . . . . The power of Ch’ing consorts and their families was greatly decreased by treating the emperors’ sexual partners primarily as women and only secondarily as members of classes, ranked hierarchies, and families.” The process began with elimination of the dowry (the imperial household itself supplied the dowry), thus erasing any possibility that the emperor’s in-laws could affect what happened to their daughter once she entered the inner court.

New consorts’ identities were “written over,” often many times, in the course of their lives in the palace. The father’s clan and personal name and his official title were often omitted for low-ranking consorts. Bondservants’ daughters who entered the harem with the fifth, sixth, or seventh rank were often referred to by only their clan name and rank. Higher-ranking consorts were given names, but these were not always unique: a 1734 list of palace inhabitants, for example, lists two consorts with the name Xiü, one holding the fifth and the other the seventh rank. Furthermore, these names sometimes changed. One study of ten lower-ranking consorts of the Daoguang emperor shows that half had their names altered during their time at court.

The example of Empress Dowager Cixi illustrates this point. When she entered the palace in 1853, she was called Lan (orchid), a name she shared with a consort of the Kangxi emperor and a consort of the Qianlong emperor. Only after her promotion to pin in 1854 was Cixi’s name changed to Yi (virtuous). After the birth of her son in 1856, she was again promoted and became first Yi fei, then Yi guifei. Cixi, the name by which she is known, was the title conferred on her when she finally became empress dowager.

Palace regulations made it virtually impossible for a consort to remain close to her natal kin. Visits home were rare and hedged with protocol, which demanded that a consort’s parents and grandparents prostrate themselves before her instead of the reverse. Parental meetings, which were permitted when a consort was pregnant or when her parents were elderly, required imperial permission. Court regulations aimed at limiting affinal interference in palace affairs prohibited casual social contacts between the inner quarters and the world outside. Consorts could not send servants to their family homes without special permission (see chapter 5) and were forbidden to give or receive anything from family members. The regulations were made clear in an edict issued in 1742 by the Qianlong emperor:

With respect to the taifei [senior widowed fei], what they possess was all bestowed on them by the Kangxi emperor. All that the fei of Mother’s
generation possess was bestowed on them by Father; similarly I have bestowed all that the empress possesses. Everyone should use these things frugally. It is not permitted to take objects owned in the palace to bestow on one’s family. It is also not permitted to bring objects possessed by one’s family inside the palace.29

Nor could the natal families of consorts try to curry favor by presenting gifts to other palace women. In 1856, when the “full month” of his first son was celebrated, the Xianfeng emperor angrily ordered that presents sent by Shou guifei’s mother be returned, noting, “The families of palace ladies are not permitted to have social dealings with the palace.”30

Motherhood

The palace career of consorts depended on whether they could produce children. In the final analysis, it was motherhood that brought consorts honor and, in some cases, political power. The ultimate prize in the “motherhood stakes” for consorts was bearing a son who became emperor. The inclusion of consorts from the whole spectrum of banner society helped Qing rulers neutralize the political power of matrilinear kinsmen. The actual record of succession demonstrates that heirs were selected without regard to the rank or family background of their mothers. Of the eleven emperors who ruled from 1644 to 1911, only one (the Daoguang emperor) was actually the son of an empress. The birth mothers of the Yongzheng, Qianlong, and Jiaqing emperors came from lowly bondservant backgrounds and must have entered the palace through the “back door,” that is, through the draft for maids.31

As soon as a consort became pregnant, special precautions were taken to ensure the health of the future child and its mother. The expectant mother received extra food rations; imperial physicians and midwives visited her at least once a month during the course of the pregnancy and more frequently in its final phases; baby clothes were prepared, and wet nurses and staff for the newborn child were hired. Archival reports on the 1821 pregnancy of Quan guifei, who gave birth to the future Xianfeng emperor, suggest that the bulk of the medical attention was focused on the last few weeks, when a physician and midwife were in constant attendance to await the onset of labor. By far the most-studied pregnancy was that of the future empress dowager Cixi. According to the archival materials, when Yi pin (Cixi’s title in 1856) became pregnant, an edict was issued authorizing her mother to reside with her in the Chuxiu palace until the birth. After the New Year, the Imperial Household Department began to recruit additional staff for

Cixi’s establishment: two nurses (see chapter 5), and four additional staff for domestic chores were added on the third day of the second month. As Cixi’s pregnancy entered the ninth month, two midwives were assigned to watch over her, with two imperial physicians on call. Later four other physicians were assigned and put on rota to provide around-the-clock staffing.32

Motherhood usually brought promotion, though rarely to the preeminent rank of empress. That was more generally conferred on his birth mother by a new emperor. If his mother predeceased him, a new ruler might honor his foster mother in this way. Fewer than half (eleven) of the twenty-four empresses during the Qing dynasty entered the palace with that rank. Virtually all the others were mothers or foster mothers of emperors.33

Widowhood and Regency

Women played significant political roles during the conquest period, when the rulers did not name their successors. In the struggle for primacy after Nurkaci’s death (see chapter 3), the senior beile may have forced Nurkaci’s senior widow Abahai, née Ula Nara, to “accompany the lord into death” (xun) because they feared the influence she might have exerted in favor of her sons, Dorgon and Dodo, who were also candidates for the khanate.34 The xun custom was abolished during the Shunzhi reign.

Hongtaiji’s mother was dead by the time he became the leader of the Manchus, and there was n0, strong maternal influence during his rule. Information concerning the “advice” he received from his consorts is likely to have been retroactively inserted into the historical record. After Hongtaiji died (1643), the mother of the infant who was enthroned as the Shunzhi emperor became an influential figure. Bumbutai was the daughter of a Khochin Mongol prince named Jaisang, who claimed descent from Chinggis Khan. She was presented to Hongtaiji in 1625, when she was about twelve years old.35 Bumbutai gave Hongtaiji three daughters and his ninth son. She was never made empress by Hongtaiji; in 1636, when he created new titles, Bumbutai was made a consort (fei) while Jere, his aunt, became empress. Only after the succession struggle between Hooge and Dorgon (see chapter 3) had resulted in the selection of a compromise candidate, Bumbutai’s son Fulin, was she made Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang. After Jere died (1649), Bumbutai became the central female in the palace. Her political role during Fulin’s infancy and the regency of his successor bears comparison with that of Empress Dowager Cixi, who dominated the last fifty years of the dynasty.36
joyed extraordinary imperial favor in the form of gifts and private residences outside the palace.

Supervisory eunuchs (shouling) of lower rank (ranks seven and eight)—a total of 124—were assigned to the different gates within the Forbidden City and to imperial gardens, villas, major altars and temples, imperial mausolea, palace halls, and storehouses that constituted the palace domain. Shouling were also appointed to the imperial pharmacy, tea bureau, and the buttery. Different shouling managed the tea, medicine, and food services for the empress dowager; the affairs of each widowed consort of the major ranks; and the personal staffs of the emperor’s children. There were even shouling in charge of the dog kennels and aviary. These supervisory eunuchs were responsible to the chief eunuch, who answered for their conduct to the Neiwufu ministers and the emperor.17

Alongside the official ranking system stood another status hierarchy, based on proximity to the emperor. The senior eunuchs in charge of the emperor’s private residence, the Yangxindian, and the Ruyi gate enjoyed considerable authority, often rivaling that of the chief eunuch, because of their constant attendance on the ruler. Eunuchs in charge of other halls that the emperor frequented comprised an elite, standing above eunuchs in personal service to the empress, consorts, and imperial offspring. Although eunuchs in attendance on a princeling had a relatively humble status in the palace hierarchy, they could rise to the top if their charge became emperor.

Eunuchs assigned to a palace resident all ranked above eunuchs performing specialized services. Ordinary eunuchs were graded into three ranks with graduated stipends in rice and silver. Some eunuchs were employed as barbers, others as masseurs; still others were trained in medicine and treated members of the court. Other eunuchs were taught to recite Tibetan Buddhist sutras or to become Daoist monks. Eunuchs waited on the emperor in shifts; when the emperor retired, a “sitting watch” was kept by the night shift so that someone was always within call to carry messages or fetch objects and persons. Eunuchs were essential because the physician on duty was the only male who was permitted to remain within the inner court at night.

Bondservants

The Qing devised an ingenious new solution to the problem of insubordinate eunuchs. They used another low-status group, the bondservants, to control and supervise eunuchs. By introducing a new element, the bondservant, into the palace administration, Qing rulers expanded the system of checks and balances within the palace. Bondservants were part of the conquest group and as such were clearly separated from the subjugated Han Chinese population. Because they occupied the lower rungs of the banner population, they were not (at least in law) allowed to intermarry with other banner groups. They were thus multiply marginal to Qing society. Qing emperors found bondservants useful precisely because this marginality made them completely dependent on the throne for their status.

Bondservants, booi (belonging to the household) in Manchu, were a hereditarily servile people registered in the banners. The status of booi was very different from that of slaves, who were called ahda in Manchu or booi ahda. Both ahda and booi were legally defined servile groups in the Qing. Most were descended from Chinese and other northeastern residents who had been taken captive during the conquest period and divided among the banner nobles, like other booty.19 Whereas ahda worked in fields, booi were in domestic service. Some bore arms and fought in battle during the conquest period alongside their masters. By 1656 they were enrolled in the developing banners as separate units.20

After the upper three banners—the Bordered Yellow, Plain Yellow, and Plain White—were taken over by the emperor, booi in these banners became the emperor’s household servants. With the Manchu conquer their activities were “elevated to a family level to a state level of operations.”21 Bondservants were enrolled in special bondservant companies, headed by guanling (in Manchu, booi de) and shouling. In its mature form, a bondservant banner was made up of twenty-nine (later thirty) companies.22 Bondservant guanling (with their underlings) were assigned to manage the affairs of the emperor’s consorts and grown sons. The empress dowager and empress were each assigned thirty guanling, who roamed in the post; the affairs of an emperor’s son and his wife were handled by one guanling. Extra guanling would handle matters when the emperor and court moved to Chengde, traveled to the ancestral tombs, or resided in the imperial villas.23 Especially in the early Qing, the Household Division staffed by bondservants was used to guard different parts of the Forbidden City.24

Booi in Palace Posts The term bai-tu-nge apparently first meant “applicable, useful” but later came to denote an “errand boy, handyman, underling.” According to Ye Zhu, it was a catch-all term for unranked clerks in government offices, artisans, and doctors. Many bai-tu-nge were bondservants.25 Archival documents show that bai-tu-nge were assigned to various kinds of duties.

By far the most numerous group of workers in the palace were the casual
Table 13. Number of Sula in Palace Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year*</th>
<th>Number of Sula</th>
<th>Number of Days in Reign Year*</th>
<th>Sula Employed (daily average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1761-61</td>
<td>36,495</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800-1801</td>
<td>27,542</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820-21</td>
<td>32,429</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848-49</td>
<td>17,799</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Reports from the ministers of the Imperial Household Department, found in Archives 446-5-55, nos. 323, 341, 429-53, and 531-34.

*Calculated from the lunar calendar used by the dynasty, which recorded events in terms of the reign year. 1760-61 and 1800-1801 were thirteen-month years, adjusting the lunar calendar to the solar cycle.

The demand for casual labor also varied by season. The first lunar month, which featured the annual gathering of officials at court, banquets for Mongol nobles, and New Year festivities, traditionally demanded large numbers of staff. So did the elaborate celebrations of the birthdays of the emperor, empress, and the empress dowager. Extra laborers were hired to pull up the grass and weeds in the “dog days” of summer. The size of the palace staff swelled during the winter solstice when the penultimate state sacrifice to Heaven took place, and in the last month of the year, when the court held numerous rites. When there were marriages of imperial grandsons managed by the Neiwufu, extra men had to be hired: such at least was the explanation in 1779 for the 1,167 extra hired during December. Extra heavy snowfalls might also require extra laborers: this was one of the factors leading to the 3,471 extra men hired in December 1782.

Casual labor was one item that the Qianlong emperor kept his eye on. In 1774, for example, he ordered the agencies of the imperial household to review their need for casual laborers. The ministers suggested eight areas in which their numbers could be reduced, while defending other areas where the numbers were “barely sufficient; cannot be cut.” On April 5, 1778, the emperor ordered that the total number of sula employed in a given year should not exceed 50,000, and that the annual total should be reported at the end of every year. The 1778 edict continued to be implemented into the late nineteenth century. And the palace actually never used its full quota, which came to 133 to 141 laborers a day (Table 13). By 1848 the number of sula being employed had been significantly reduced from the levels of earlier reigns.

Maidservants assigned to the palace residents were usually short-term inhabitants of the Forbidden City. Their status rested on the status of their master or mistress. Each member of the imperial family was assigned maids. The highest ranking female in the court was the emperor’s nominal mother, the empress dowager. She had twelve “palace maids” (gangwu); empresses received ten maids, and so on down to the lowest ranking consort, a daying, who might have only one. Palace records show that despite exceptions—for example, Empress Dowager Cixia had twenty maids—the regulations were implemented most of the time. The personal staffs of other imperial widows were often smaller than their allotment. For example, a 1751-52 list of the residents and staff in the Shoukang palace shows that Empress Dowager Cixia (the Qianlong emperor’s mother) had her full complement of maids, the third-ranking consort Yu had only six instead of eight maids, and several consorts of the seventh rank had only one instead of the nominal three.

The number of maids in palace service depended on the size of the imperial household. During periods when there were many consorts and children, as in the Kangxi reign, there were also more maids. The archival
documents show that the over 500 maids serving in the palace in 1734 represented a historical peak. During the Qianlong reign, the size of the household shrank as the emperor grew older. By the 1790s, only slightly more than 200 maids served in the palace. The number of maids increased from the Jiaqing reign onward. During the second half of the nineteenth century, between 150 and 200 maids were generally in palace service under Empress Dowager Cixi.

Maids were selected through an annual draft of the daughters of men in the upper three bondervant bannerson conducted by the Imperial Household Department. Each year, daughters who had reached the age of twelve were reported by the company captains for the draft and brought to the palace for inspection. After 1735, families residing far away from the capital and, after 1862, daughters of imperial wet nurses were exempted from the draft. Parents became more and more reluctant to give their daughters to palace service. According to one source,

“When our daughters are taken into the palace ... they are dead to us until they are twenty-five, when they are allowed to return home. If they are incompetent or dull they are often severely punished. They may contract diseases and die, and their death is not even announced to us; while if they prove themselves efficient and win the approval of the authorities they are retained in the palace and we may never see them or hear from them again.”

Nonetheless, the number of girls who were summoned was still very large. 2,092 banner daughters appeared for inspection in the 1736 draft; the number in the 1742 draft was 1,165 and hovered between 650 to 850 in the 1770s through 1832, falling below 500 thereafter.

As could be anticipated, by far the largest group—in one draft, 82.4 percent—of girls brought up for the gongnui draft were daughters of sula. Another sizable group had fathers who “wore armor” (pijia) referring to foot soldiers in the banner forces; less than 5 percent belonged to other status. A list of 110 maidservants in palace employment in September 1885 shows only a slightly different picture, with 33 percent from sula, 35 percent from foot soldiers, and 17 percent from Guards Division families.

Banner girls selected as maids served a set term, during which they would receive a stipend and food allowances. Maids were generally young, frequently thirteen to fifteen years of age. Except for the very few who, despite prohibitions (see chapter 4) entered the emperor’s harem, maids left at the end of five (later ten) years of service. The Kangxi emperor ordered that all maids thirty sui and over should be released to their parents to be married; the age limit was lowered to twenty-five by his son. On discharge at the end of their service they were rewarded with a lump sum of twenty taels of silver and released to their families to be given in marriage. And on occasion the empresses themselves arranged betrothals of bannermen to maids.

Bondervant society was also complex and hierarchical. Bondervants in the upper three banners could serve in the Guards Division (huijun) and the Vanguard Division (qianjun). They could become banner officers, take the examinations and enter the bureaucracy, or fill important positions within the Neiwufu. Since the textile factories in Suzhou and Hangzhou were under this department, bondervants did not all work in Peking. Some bondervants held powerful supervisory posts, were wealthy, and owned slaves; a fictional depiction of the lifestyle of this bondervant elite can be found in the Qing novel Honglou meng (Story of the stone). Other bondervants occupied menial positions. And at the bottom of the Neiwufu bondervant banner population, below it, were the state slaves, or sinjuku.

State Slaves

The Manchu term sinjuku first appears in a 1622 order that the Han Chinese soldiers captured at Fushun should be enrolled in special sinjuku companies. After 1644 the sinjuku status became a punishment imposed on persons found guilty of major economic and political crimes. Enslavement was one of the most extreme forms of punishment in the Qing criminal code. Unlike booi, who could be manumitted by their masters, sinjuku were public property, and the masters to whom they were assigned were not permitted to sell them or grant them freedom. Although the sinjuku were granted the same status under criminal law as the booi in 1738, they continued to rank below the bondervants. By the Kangxi to Qianlong reigns, sinjuku were enrolled in all eight banners, but only those registered in the upper three banners were eligible for palace service. Sinjuku came from diverse backgrounds. Many were unemployed bannermen or foot soldiers who were enslaved for bad debts, others were bannermen who failed to rectify deficits in government accounts while in office. One document presenting cases dating from 1661 to 1735 lists 170 individuals, whose wives, sons, sons’ wives, and other family members— a total of 762 dependents—were converted into sinjuku. With two exceptions all were bannermen. Seventy percent of those punished for bureaucratic crimes were Chinese bannermen (Hanjun), perhaps because they were favored for local administrative posts; 64 percent of these bannermen served
in local or provincial posts, as compared to 16 percent of the Manchus. By contrast Manchus dominated the category of political crimes: 64 percent of this group belonged to Manchu banners, and only 14 percent were Chinese bannermen.42 Some of the most illustrious conquest noble families had descendants who were so disgraced. Among those convicted of failing to compensate the government for deficits in official accounts were two descendants of Shang Kexi, Prince Pingnan, of conquest fame, and a descendant of the great Elidu, companion of Nurjihan.43

Of the Chinese bannermen enslaved for bureaucratic crimes, only 8 percent were assigned to the Imperial Household Department registers, as compared to 100 percent of the Manchu slaves. The same practice of sending Chinese bannermen to estates and the Manchus and Mongols to the capital companies under the imperial household prevailed for those guilty of political crimes. That Manchus and Mongols were favored over their Chinese banner counterparts—palace service meant easier living conditions and opportunities for winning redemption through imperial favor—is highlighted by the rare exceptions to this practice. The fall in 1718 of Zhutianbao, who had pleaded with the aged Kangxi emperor for the reinstatement of Yintreng as heir apparent, also brought down two Manchus in the Plain Red Banner. Zhutianbao’s father and Changlai were permanently put in a cangue—a heavy wooden board placed around the neck, a sort of portable pillory; their twenty-four dependents were made sinjeku, barred from serving in the Forbidden City, and sent instead to the frontier to undertake hard duty.44

During the Yongzheng reign, Hanjun sinjeku were assigned to banner units on the imperial estates, where they tended the vegetable and melon gardens; they performed “the most menial physical tasks” and occupied the lowest social status in the bondservant-banners. The movement of state slaves into the Neiwufu’s banner units also provided labor for imperial establishments.45 Whereas most Chinese bannermen who became state slaves were placed on the imperial estates, virtually all Manchu and Mongol sinjeku were registered under the guanling of the Neiwufu, where they formed a labor pool for palace service. Women of sinjeku status were also assigned to the palace ladies and imperial children to light the lamps, fetch the “washing the face water,” do needlework, and prepare noodles or cakes or offerings for the altars. In 1723 and 1736, a total of 5,193 sinjeku women were employed on such tasks in the Forbidden City; in 1759, the number had risen slightly, to include 5,440 persons. These figures did not include the sinjeku women performing similar chores at the imperial mausolea and palaces in Mukden, a total of 4,232 in 1682.46

Banner Servants

Wet nurses and nurses occupied the most prestigious status in the female side of the servant quarters. Each of the emperor’s sons and daughters had at least two and sometimes three wet nurses.47 An intimate relationship often developed between master and servant, giving occupants of these posts opportunities for upward mobility. Wet nurses—the Manchu term was memen eniye, abbreviated by imperial fiat in 1736 to menenjiye—were selected from among the wives of bannermen (including bondservants). According to regulations, names of nursing mothers would be submitted by the banner captains and overseers. When a woman was chosen, her own child would be fed by another wet nurse specially selected for that purpose. Wet nurses tended to be fairly young—in one list of seventy-two candidates, the average age was slightly over thirty-one sui—and the status of their husbands seems to have represented the whole range of banner ranks, from the unemployed on up.48

Wet nurses were well treated. In 1651 the Shunzhi emperor conferred the honorary sixth rank of nobility on the husbands of his three wet nurses, along with the privilege of transmitting the title for three generations. The Kangxi emperor also bestowed a title on his father’s wet nurse and ordered that she be buried with the honors due a duke’s wife. Wet nurses received cemetery plots near the imperial mausolea, commemorative steles, cemetery guards, and fields whose rental income would be used for mortuary rites. The Qianlong emperor gave his wet nurses a modest residence and 1,000 taels of silver.49

Wet nurses’ husbands tended to receive purely honorary posts, with some notable exceptions. Although Manduri, a bondservant in the Bordered Yellow Banner, won his freedom through battle valor, he probably owed his honorary title and post in the Imperial Household Department to his wife, who was the Shunzhi emperor’s wet nurse. The ancestor of the author of Honghou meng, Cao Xueqin, was Cao Xi. Cao Xi received promotion and founded the Cao family fortune because his wife, néé Sun, was the Kangxi emperor’s wet nurse. A granddaughter of theirs eventually married a Manchu prince.50

The son of a wet nurse of the Yongzheng emperor, Haiboo, rose to become a minister of the Imperial Household Department and superintendent of the Suzhou Imperial Textile Factory. Caught embezzling 220,000 taels of silver in 1740 while serving in the latter office, Haiboo would by rights have been severely punished. Bannermen guilty of much lesser crimes had been executed or imprisoned, and their dependents enslaved. But, the emperor
mused, “I think of the merit of his mother, who was my father’s wet nurse... if I completely confiscated Haibo’s estate, what would his wife and children live on? They would have nothing with which to carry on the rites for his mother.” Eventually, almost two years later, the emperor concluded Haibo’s case: “He ought to be heavily punished, but I can’t bear to do it. He is pardoned.”

Nurses (manari in Manchu; baonu in Chinese) played a more supervisory role. All the palace dependents, the empress dowager included, had nurses assigned to their staffs. According to regulations, manari were recruited from childless wives of men in the Neiwufu’s bondservant divisions; in reality, some nurses had children. The post tended to be assigned to older women, who continued their duties for unspecified periods of time. As with wet nurses, we know most about manari from the lucky individuals serving future emperors, who received a residence, silver, grave land, ritual lands, and grave guards from their grateful charges.

Nurses could also enjoy close relationships with their charges. One example is Sumalagu, a Manchu woman who taught the future Kangxi emperor his first Manchu letters and later served his son Yintao. A serving woman on the staff of Xuanye’s grandmother Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang, Sumalagu was sent to oversee the young child’s well-being when he was being reared outside the palace. Manchu-language documents indicate that the empress dowager called Sumalagu gege, a polite term that was also applied to the princesses. The Kangxi emperor called her “mother” (enije); his children referred to her as “mama,” a term of respect for a woman in one’s grandmother’s generation. When Sumalagu died in 1705, Yintao insisted on performing many funerary rituals for her in person, saying, “She raised me since I was little, and I have not been able to repay her.”

Companions

When imperial sons and grandsons entered the Palace School, they were assigned “boy companions” (haha juse) and anda (both are Manchu terms). The boy companions seem in fact to have been older—over age seventeen and thus adults in the Qing world—and were not companions so much as personal servants who accompanied the young princes to their classes. Selected from the banners, the haha juse rotated in their duties, which continued even after their masters married and set up separate households. A memorial dated March 30, 1821, shows the emperor permitting Siyanggi, a boy companion to his fourth son, Mianxin, to be released from Mianxin’s service in order to take up a position in the Board of Personnel. At the time of this memorial, Mianxin was approximately sixteen years old and was already married.

The Manchu term anda originally meant “a sworn brother, bosom friend, friend from childhood.” In the Qing it designated bannermen assigned to the Palace School who taught Manchu, Mongol, and mounted archery to the imperial sons. By the early nineteenth century, anda with martial skills tended to come from the northeast, “although their archery and horse riding are pure and skilled, as persons they are rustic and people look down on them.” Language teachers, “known as nei anda... were normally selected from among those translators in the banners who had achieved jinshi ranking.”

Anda were also banner officers whom the emperor personally selected. These anda functioned much as tutors did among the British aristocracy and were responsible for supervising the behavior of the princes. There seem to have been both “inner” (dorgi) and “outer” (iulergi) anda. Since outside anda accompanied the imperial sons when they traveled to the ancestral tombs to perform sacrifices, they may have performed a more ceremonial function. One memorial of 1774 shows that although the thirty-five-year-old fourth prince as well as his twenty-two-year-old and fourteen-year-old brothers were accompanied by outside anda, the two younger princes had their inner anda with them, suggesting a more supervisory or tutorial role for the inner anda. Anda were set apart from the other servants of the imperial family by their relatively high status. Examples of officers appointed to this post in the middle of the eighteenth century included second-class guardsmen in the Imperial Guard and colonels and lieutenant colonels in the Guards Division.

Artists and Artisans

The imperial factories (zhizaoju) were founded in 1663 to manufacture clothing, objets d’art, and religious objects for court use and the gift exchanges that were an integral part of the system of rulership espoused by the Manchus (see chapter 8). In 1693 the workshops (zaobianju) supervised by the Imperial Household Department were expanded into fourteen units, each specializing in the production of textiles, metal, glass, enamels, leather, icons, paintings, or printed books. At their peak in the Qianlong reign, there were thirty-eight workshops, located not only in the Forbidden City but also within the imperial villas. The imperial silk factories in Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Jiangning were also part of the same administrative system.
Although civilians could be hired on a temporary basis, most artisans were probably recruited from the upper three bondservant banners. Many were sinjukus. New artisans underwent a training period of three years; those with special talent would be recognized and rewarded. In 1671 the quota was set at 450 artisans and 284 short-term laborers, but with peace and prosperity the actual numbers exceeded these ceilings. The Imperial Weaving and Dyeing Office itself employed over 800 persons by the early 1730s; there were 276 silversmiths, 105 coppersmiths, 170 leather workers, and over 300 tailors in the palace workshops. The number of artisans thus employed by the palace has been estimated at 10,000 persons, with 7,000 employed in the Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Jiangning workshops alone, and additional short-term and long-term temporary workers.

In addition to recruiting artisans from servile statuses, the palace workshops employed skilled craftsmen from the Han Chinese commoner population. Furniture produced for the palace included “ornate, pseudo-roccoco designs” reminiscent of the “Canton style” in furniture. Skilled glassblowers from Bozhou, Shandong, introduced a new technique to make enameled glassware and painted enamels. Cantonese who had learned European glassmaking techniques were brought in to create the snuff bottles, ornaments, and objects d’art that the emperor bestowed on imperial relatives, high officials, and embassies from tributary states. The palace artisans produced enameled porcelains with European motifs, copied presumably from originals presented to the court. A notion of the volume of items produced is provided by a 1755 order for 500 snuff bottles and 3,000 other items to be used as gifts during the emperor’s sojourn in Rehe.

Chinese glass-making technology was apparently sufficiently advanced to make the production of enameled glassware a relatively simple matter. That was not the case with painted enamelware. The technique of painted enamelware, developed in mid-fifteenth century Flanders, was introduced into China through European presentations that caught the Kangxi emperor’s eye. When the emperor sought skilled workers who could reproduce this technique, he had the governor of Guangdong province himself search for skilled artisans and inquired amongst the Jesuits. Father Ripa and Giuseppe Castiglione, whom the emperor ordered into the palace workshop, failed the test (perhaps deliberately); not until 1719, when a French enamel master, Jean Baptiste Gaverseau, arrived, was “acceptable” enameled metal ware produced in the palace. Required for imperial use on all tours of the provinces, painted enamelware was used at funerals, births, weddings, at the first-rank sacrifices, and as gifts to worthy officials.

Because of its long and intimate links with Han Chinese literati culture, painting at court was a form of patronage with which emperors wooed literati to the support of the new dynasty. Chinese artists were invited to the court from the Shunzhi reign; some were appointed to high office in the Kangxi reign. The over two hundred painters working in the palace from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth century included, especially before 1736, Hanlin academicians and degree-holders, as well as famous artists like Gao Shiqi (1645–1704), whose residence in the Nanshufang (southern study) lent luster to the court. Among those hired specifically as court artists were the Jesuits. One of the most famous was Castiglione, who worked at the Qing court from his arrival on November 22, 1715, to his death on June 10, 1766. Castiglione developed a synthesis of Western and Chinese style (called xianfa in Chinese) and taught it to his students in the court painting academy. Castiglione painted imperial portraits, worked in enamel, jade, and lacquer, and provided Europeanized designs for the Qianlong emperor’s villa, Yuanmingyuan. He rose to become chief painter at court and an official of the Neiwu.

Many other Europeans served at the Qing court from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries. The Jesuits sent priests who were skilled in various genres of painting. Father Benoit, writing in 1772, described the Yuanmingyuan, where “at the entrance to the gardens is located the Ruyi guan, which is the place where the Chinese and European painters, European watchmakers who create automations or other machines, gemstone workers and ivory makers work.” While the Jesuits undertook these labors as a means to the hoped-for Christian conversion of the ruler and thence of the whole population, the Qing emperors viewed their European staff as a palpable manifestation of their status as the rulers of a multietnic empire, collecting tribute from all corners of the globe. From their point of view, the employment of Europeans in the palace workshops was proof of the correctness of their claims to be kluanghs—the khans of khans—and not just emperors on the Chinese model. That these Europeans were at the beck and call of the emperor is very clear from another account of how Frère Attiret was suddenly called to Rehe in 1754 to paint the Zunghar chieftains who had come over to the Qing side.

The artists, artisans, and other skilled persons working for the Imperial Household Department were truly international in their composition. About two hundred Tibetans, captured during the Jinglun campaigns, were brought to Peking during the Qianlong reign. Although most were stone masons who built a Tibetan-style watchtower in the Western Hills where
the Qing troops could be drilled over terrain resembling the battleground in Sichuan, Tibetan craftsmen specializing in the production of silver, wooden, and painted religious art as well as Tibetan translators, dancers, and singers were also installed in workshops within the Forbidden City and enrolled in a Imperial Household Department banner company.69

There were also Uighurs working for the court. After 1759 Uighur craftsmen who were skilled in creating jade and gold objects, dancers, and singers were brought to Peking and were also enrolled in a banner company under the Neiwu. During the Qianlong reign, over three hundred Uighurs worked for the court and resided in a “Uighur camp” inside the Tartar city.70

The actors employed by the palace fell under the jurisdiction of the Nanfu (court theatrical bureau), which was created about 1740. After 1753, when the emperor decided to recruit actors from Suzhou and Yangzhou, a Jingshan office was established for drama. During the 1820s the Nanfu and Jingshan were merged into the Shengpingshu, which trained eunuchs for theatricals and provided court entertainment. In its heyday during the Qianlong reign, there were “well over 2,000 actors providing entertainment for the imperial family.”71 The court’s drama troupes trained and rehearsed within the Forbidden City, the imperial villas in the Western Hills outside the capital, and in the emperor’s summer retreat at Rehe. Opera performances were not only a reflection of the ruler’s personal taste but essential for the celebration of festive occasions such as imperial birthdays, weddings, banquets for the Mongol princes, and the annual observances at New Year’s, the Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Guandu’s feast day. Although noted opera companies and actors were invited to perform within the palace during the periods 1751–1827, 1850–62, and 1884–1913, eunuchs were the mainstay of the court’s drama troupes. Eunuchs aged twelve or thirteen would be recruited for these companies and trained in the schools run by the palace staff. If they were successful, they might eventually be promoted to administrative and teaching posts within the Theatrical Bureau. Skill in acting was thus one route of upward mobility for the eunuch actors, as seen in the biography of Li Luxi, who was a longtime head of the Nanfu and its successor, the Shengpingshu, during the first half of the nineteenth century.72

THE PALACE BUREAUCRACY

Early Qing emperors often used the Imperial Household Department, or Neiwu, to perform diplomatic and fiscal tasks that exceeded their pri-mary responsibility of managing the emperor’s household affairs. Staffed by banner personnel, this agency represented another check on the civil service officials in the outer-court. The employment of bannermen also enabled Qing rulers to avoid the eunuchs’ domination of palace administration. More than any previous dynasty, the Qing succeeded in controlling their palace servants and in mobilizing the Neiwu to serve the throne.

The Neiwu developed during the early seventeenth century from what seems to have been the personal household administration of Nur- gaci. Some scholars believe it was created during the 1620s. By 1638 it was sufficiently institutionalized to merit a office building of its own in Mukden.73 Temporarily supplanted by the Thirteen Eunuch Bureaus from 1653 to 1661, the Neiwu was revived in the Kangxi reign and underwent extensive organizational expansion in 1667. The number of its officials, which stood at over 402 in 1662, had increased to 939 by 1722 and to 1,623 by 1796. Eventually, in the late nineteenth century, the department overlooked the operations of over 56 subagencies. From the middle of the seventeenth century through the rest of the dynasty, the Neiwu also maintained offices in Mukden.74

The Neiwu attained its “final, definitive form” in the Qianlong reign. Its mission as enunciated by the Yongzheng emperor was enshrined in a plaque over the entrance to its office: “Government and imperial household working in unison” (Gongfu yiti).75 Under this rubric, it carried out a bewildering variety of activities. It was first and foremost the administrative unit in charge of palace affairs. It was in charge of the warehouses, food, residences, and daily activities of the emperor and his family. It exercised jurisdiction over palace construction, security, rituals, and palace staff. But its activities extended far beyond the walls of the Forbidden City and the imperial villas. The Neiwufu was a major publisher, producing outstanding examples of printed works by imperial commission. It held monopoly rights over the profitable jade and ginseng trades. It ran textile factories in Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Jiangning that produced textiles for the court. Using the taxing powers of the state, it gathered precious objects such as sables, ermine, mink, and fox from parts of Mongolia and the northeast through the annual tribute system, reserving a portion for imperial use and disposing of the residue through the customshouses. The Imperial Household Department issued permits for the salt trade, the jade trade from Central Asia, and licensed “state merchants” to import copper for coinage during the early Qing. It issued loans at interest, acquired pawnshops, and derived revenues from its many rentals in the imperial city.76

Although the emperor’s private funds, managed by the Guangchusi
as the Six Vaults; the Department of Works (yingshoushi), the palace counterpart of the Board of Works and in charge of palace maintenance and repair; and the Jingshifuang, the unit that was in charge of the recruitment, appointment, and punishment of eunuchs. Ministers were appointed to manage the imperial villas and assigned to ritually important sites such as the imperial cemeteries. Special supervisory officials (guanli shenli) were also appointed to agencies such as the Imperial Buttery (yuxiaoshenli), which prepared the food for the palace, the Imperial Dispensary (yuyaojia), and the Nanfu (after 1820, the Shengjingshu). They could be appointed to oversee the proper conduct of princely establishments.80

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

Qing rulers used bannermen, bondservants, state slaves, and eunuchs to perform domestic tasks in the imperial household and to penetrate into strategic areas in the Qing administration.81 Their success in expanding the imperial prerogative is undeniable, and important. The massiveness of the palace establishment, however, was primarily dictated by a larger political agenda, familiar to students of kingship, the need to awe and impress subjects.

The Qing Imperial Household Department employed more people and engaged in many more activities than its counterparts in Europe. Its multitude of servants was not the only facet designed to awe foreigners and Chinese alike: the type of servants it employed, notably the eunuchs, was distinctive. The employment of eunuchs was strictly governed by summary laws enacted from 1701 on. Only officials of the first two ranks and nobles were permitted to have eunuchs. From the eighteenth century, princely households were required to report the eunuchs in their employ even though, after 1746, eunuchs who had been assigned to princes establishing separate households were no longer being directly paid by the Imperial Household Department.82 To ensure that outside employers were not harboring eunuch fugitives from palace service, nobles hiring a eunuch had to first send the applicant’s name, age, household registration, and personal description to the two agencies in the Imperial Household Department that were in charge of eunuchs’ personnel files. Anyone who employed a eunuch who had absconded from the palace was himself investigated. Even eunuchs who had obtained legitimate discharges were liable to punishment and return to imperial jurisdiction.83

Pressure on curbing the number of eunuchs employed outside the palace

(department of the privy purse), were separated from the taxes collected by the Board of Revenue, its outer-court equivalent, these distinctions were not always honored. From the early eighteenth century, the Privy Purse received “surplus quotas” (yingyu) at the customhouses that taxed trade in the capital, Kalgan, Jiujie, Hangzhou, Husha (near Suzhou), and Canton. By the early nineteenth century, officials fearful of imperial wrath hastened to deliver approximately two million taels of silver in surplus quota each year, while the regular quota (zhengdu) paid into the Board of Revenue lay in arrears.77 When officials’ estates were confiscated, they frequently ended up in the hands of the Neiwufu. During the Qianlong reign, a Secret Accounts bureau in the Neiwufu collected large “fines” that officials imposed on themselves in recognition of their failure to live up to the requirements of their posts.78 The tribute presented by emissaries from foreign countries and minority peoples within the empire became the private property of the emperor, just as the gifts he bestowed on the gift bearers were produced by the palace workshops. Finally, important elements of Qing relations with Tibet and Mongolia were handled by agencies such as the Sutra Recitation Office, lodged within the palace, rather than the Board of Rites. In all these ways, the Qing blurred the boundary between the emperor’s personal affairs and the affairs of state.

The Neiwufu had its own bureaucratic regulations, which were compiled and revised at intervals throughout the dynasty.79 Its highest officials, the ministers of the Imperial Household Department (zongguan Neiwufu dachen), eventually held the third rank in the eighteen-rank hierarchy of the civil service, but these officials were not Han Chinese degree-holders. The ministerial posts—there was no limit on the number of persons who could hold this title at any one time—were instead filled by Manchu princes with prior experience in the Imperial Guard (shijing), especially in the position of chamberlain of the Imperial Guard (lingshihua nei dachen), and by bondservants who had climbed up through service in the Neiwufu itself. The ministers thus came from quite different social status and backgrounds: some belonged to the Aisin Gioro lineage, others were of servile status. Mingling these individuals in the supervisory role served to ensure that no one group dominated the palace service.

Ministers had the overall responsibility for the functioning of the Imperial Household Department. Individual ministers were appointed on a rotating basis for one-year terms to supervise subsidiary units that were deemed to be especially sensitive, such as the Department of the Privy Purse, which was in charge of imperial revenues and expenditures as well