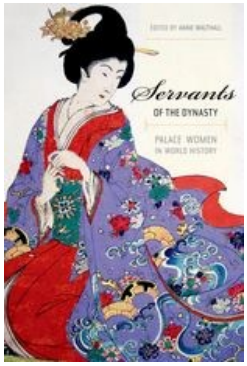

Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History

Anne Walthall (ed.)

https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520254435.001.0001

Published: 2008 **Online ISBN:** 9780520941519 **Print ISBN:** 9780520254435

CHAPTER

7 Qing Imperial Women: Empresses, Concubines, and Aisin Gioro Daughters

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https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520254435.003.0007 Pages 137–158

Published: October 2008

Abstract

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when the Manchus ruled China, palace women played a significant role in maintaining Manchu ethnic identity and constructing a multiethnic empire. They can be divided into two categories: imperial consorts (empresses and concubines), who entered the palace through marriage, and Aisin Gioro daughters, who received imperial membership by birth. Starting in the eighteenth century, imperial consorts were selected exclusively from the hereditary military units known as banners. As for imperial daughters, the emperors usually married them to Manchu high officials or to the elite of other ethnic groups in order to buy support and cooperation. Imperial daughters thus played a significant role in shaping Qing territory and stabilizing Manchu rule. When examining imperial marriage from the perspective of the interaction of gender, ethnicity, and social status, one can see that in taking wives the Qing court was more concerned with ethnicity, while giving wives social status became a more significant consideration.

Keywords: Qing dynasty, Manchus, China, palace women, imperial consorts, empresses, concubines, marriage, Aisin Gioro daughters, ethnicity

Subject: History of Gender and Sexuality, Political History, Medieval and Renaissance History (500 to 1500), World History

When the Qianlong emperor took Xiang *fei* as his concubine in 1760, he made an exception by taking a non-Manchu woman into the inner palace. Xiang *fei* was Uyghur, considered a distinctly different ethnicity by the Qing court. Worse, she was Muslim in a court that used religious practices as one way to distinguish its ethnic identity from that of the surrounding Han Chinese population. Yet when the Qianlong emperor married his seventh daughter to a Mongol prince, no one thought anything of it. Although emperor and

daughter belonged to the same social and ethnic group, they experienced status and ethnicity differently because of their gender.

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when the Manchus ruled China, palace women played a significant role in maintaining Manchu ethnic identity and constructing a multiethnic empire. They can be divided into two categories: imperial consorts (empresses and concubines), who entered the palace through marriage, and Aisin Gioro daughters, who received imperial membership by birth. Starting in the eighteenth century, imperial consorts were selected exclusively from the hereditary military units known as banners.[1] They made the inner court a Manchu world for emperors and princes in distinction to the outer court, where men
p. 138 might easily be influenced by Chinese culture. As for ↳ imperial daughters, the emperors usually married them to Manchu high officials or to the elite of other ethnic groups in order to buy support and cooperation. Imperial daughters thus played a significant role in shaping Qing territory and stabilizing Manchu rule.

Consorts and daughters served the Qing dynasty in different ways. Qing rulers chose marriage partners primarily from the banner population through triennial selections—a system that met Manchu imperial needs to maintain the ethnic purity of the ruling group. Whereas intermarriages between non-banner women and banner soldiers were tolerated (though not encouraged), Qing emperors and princes after the Kangxi period (1662–1722) were prohibited from marrying anyone not from the banners. Imperial daughters, in contrast, did not have to be married within the banners. Since they had high social status by birth, they became "gifts" to the Chinese high officials and Mongol princes to whom they were married in order to gain political or military support for the Qing in the dynasty's early years. As soon as the Qing stabilized their rule in China proper and on the frontier, more Aisin Gioro daughters married Manchu aristocrats. When examining imperial marriage from the perspective of the interaction of gender, ethnicity, and social status, one can see that in taking wives the Qing court was more concerned with ethnicity, while in giving wives social status became a more significant consideration.

Imperial Consorts

In early Chinese dynasties, emperors usually selected their marriage partners from the families of high-ranking officials. Establishing conjugal relations between the imperial family and the social elite was an effective way to consolidate the power of the ruling house. All too frequently, however, consorts' relatives tried to take advantage of their connections to develop their own power at court. Sometimes, when the emperor was young or weak, they might go so far as to override his authority. After the Song dynasty (960–1279), emperors generally selected imperial consorts from lower-ranking elites and even from commoners in order to reduce the potential power of consort families.[2]

The selection of imperial consorts marks an important difference between Chinese and conquest dynasties—those established by non-Han people.[3] Jennifer Holmgren lists three points to summarize common characteristics of marriage politics among non-Han rulers. First, nearly all non-Han states actively discouraged or severely circumscribed marriage ties between the imperial family and the Chinese. Second, the circle of imperial marriage partners tended to remain relatively stable. Consequently, the various sets of
p. 139 in-laws overlapped to a much greater extent than in native Chinese regimes: that is, the same groups ↳ continued to supply both wives and husbands for imperial offspring almost indefinitely. Third, in non-Han states there was more careful regulation and thus a much higher correlation between political privilege and social status as seen through marriage relations with the royal house than in Chinese states.[4]

The Manchus did more than simply imitate previous non-Han dynasties. Like other non-Han rulers, they forbade intermarriage between the throne and the Chinese after they established the Qing dynasty. But the Qing imperial family did not have a stable and narrow circle of marriage partners comparable to the Xiao family, which in the Liao dynasty (907–1125) constantly provided wives and husbands to the imperial

family. Instead, the Manchus generally chose imperial consorts from a broader social group, the banners. In the following pages, we will see how Manchu rulers adjusted the policies and practice of choosing imperial consorts according to the political and ethnic needs of the time. We will also see how women contributed to consolidating Qing political power and constructing Manchu ethnicity.

Since the names of Aisin Gioro rulers and their reigns appear frequently in this discussion of the policies and practice of imperial marriage, I have created a table to which readers can refer (see table 7.1).

Table 7.1 The Reigns of Aisin Gioro Rulers

	Personal Name	*Reign Name*	*Reign Dates*
1	Nurhaci	Tianming	1616–1626
2	Hongtaiji	Tiancong; Chongde	1627–1643
3	Fulin	Shunzhi	1644–1661
4	Xuanye	Kangxi	1662–1722
5	Yinzhen	Yongzheng	1723–1735
6	Hongli	Qianlong	1736–1795
7	Yongyan	Jiaqing	1796–1820
8	Minning	Daoguang	1821–1850
9	Yizhu	Xianfeng	1851–1861
10	Zaichun	Tongzhi	1862–1874
11	Zaitian	Guangxu	1875–1908
12	Puyi	Xuantong	1909–1911

Marriage Practices before the Eighteenth Century

Before the conquest of China, Jurchen/Manchu nobles often married women from different clans and ethnic groups. Nuptial bonds won Nurhaci and his son ↳ Hongtaiji political and military allies during the unification of the Jurchen tribes in Liaodong (northeastern China) and the subsequent conquest of China. Nurhaci had fourteen consorts: two were daughters of the Khorchin Mongol elite and the rest were from the noble families of other Jurchen clans.[5] During Hongtaiji's reign, marriages between the Aisin Gioro family and the Mongols were most common. Among his nine high-ranking consorts, six were Mongol women.[6] In 1636, Hongtaiji changed the title of his regime from Jin to Qing. In the same year, to show his gratitude for Mongol support and further consolidate political relations, Hongtaiji granted official titles to his five consorts, all of whom were from distinguished Mongol families.[7]

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After the Manchus entered Beijing in 1644, they adjusted their marriage policies to suit the new political and social environment. In 1648 the Shunzhi emperor issued a decree emphasizing harmony between Manchu and Chinese: "Our nation has brought order to the Central Plain and people under Heaven are one family. Manchu and Han officials and commoners are all my children. To promote a harmonious relation between these two peoples, there is no better way than encouraging them to marry each other. From now on, we will not stand in the way of Manchu and Han officials and commoners who want to join together in marriage."[8]

Several days later, the emperor issued another decree on Manchu–Han intermarriage that focused on administrative formalities:

> I want to see harmonious cohabitation of Manchu and Han, so I issued a decree earlier to encourage intermarriage between these two peoples. Manchu officials' daughters who want to marry Han should inform the Board of Revenue....If common bannermen's daughters who want to marry Han have registered with the Board of Revenue, they need approval from the Board. If they have not registered with the Board of Revenue, the captain of the banner company to which they belong has the right to marry them out. As for Han officials' daughters who want to marry Manchus, they should inform the Board of Revenue, too. This is unnecessary for commoners' daughters who want to marry Manchus. Manchu officials and common bannermen are allowed to marry Han women only when these women are taken as first wives [not as concubines].[9]

The Shunzhi emperor raised the issue of intermarriage because of tension between Manchus and Chinese in the wake of the conquest. He believed that the new intermarriage policies would help eliminate ethnic conflicts and bring peace.

The Shunzhi emperor tried to follow his own decrees. Intermarriage had occurred between the imperial
p. 141 family and the sons of the Ming defectors who ↳ surrendered to the Manchus during the conquest and later became known as the Three Feudatories. In addition, some Han women entered the palace through marriage. Two of the Shunzhi emperor's consorts were Han Chinese.[10] The Kangxi emperor took the daughter of the Han official Wang Guozheng as his concubine.[11] Another source records that in the late years of the Kangxi emperor, six or seven Han women lived in the palace. Most of them were from Suzhou or Hangzhou. They had no titles until the last year of the Kangxi reign, when they were granted low-ranking titles (for titles, see table 7.2).[12] The Yongzheng emperor also had a Chinese concubine.[13]

Table 7.2 Ranks of Qing Imperial Consorts

Title in Chinese	*English Translation*
Huanghou	Empress
Huang guifei	Imperial concubine, first rank
Guifei	Imperial concubine, second rank
Fei	Imperial concubine, third rank
Pin	Imperial concubine, fourth rank
Guiren	Imperial concubine, fifth rank
Changzai	Lower-level concubine
Daying	Lower-level concubine

NOTE: For a brief description and the ordering of ranks, see Brunnert and Hagelstrom [1912] 1963, pp. 2–3.

During the first decades of the dynasty, Qing emperors did not perceive any danger of losing their ethnic identity and being sinicized. Instead, they saw the boundary of Manchu ethnicity as flexible and negotiable —a conception that sprang from the origins of the Manchus and their experiences in Liaodong, where many Han Chinese and other peoples were incorporated into Manchu banners. Rather than attempting to control

marriages of Manchus with Chinese out of worry about sinicization, the Manchu rulers' priority was to incorporate social elites from other ethnic groups, especially the Chinese.

Choosing Imperial Consorts through the Draft

It is not known when the Manchu rulers established the system in which the young women in banners had to undergo a draft by the imperial house before their marriage could be arranged. I assume it began during the Yongzheng reign.[14] According to Qing statutes, all young women in banners, except those with certified
p. 142 physical disabilities or deformities, went through the process of ↳ *xiunu* (elegant female) selection. If their parents or banner leaders married them out before they participated in the imperial inspection, all involved —including parents, clan leader, and local banner officials—would be punished.[15]

Under the draft system, every three years all banner women between thirteen and sixteen *sui* (age counted from the first new year after birth) were required to present themselves at the Forbidden City in Beijing. Before the selection, the Board of Revenue sent notices to banner officials in the capital and in provincial garrisons. With the help of clan heads, the banner officials submitted a list of all available women to the banner commanders' headquarters in Beijing and to the Board of Revenue. The Board of Revenue then set a date for the selection. On the appointed day, girls were brought by their parents or relatives, together with their clan heads and local banner officials, to the Shenwu (Martial Spirit) Gate of the Forbidden City to await inspection.[16]

Qing statutes did not state in detail how and by whom the girls would be inspected. Other sources indicate that court officials performed the first inspection by matching those present against the list previously submitted and choosing, on the basis of physical beauty, as many as were needed to serve in the palace.[17] Some were immediately rejected. They were free to marry other bannermen so long as they had the approval of their parents and banner leaders. Those who passed the initial inspection were called "registered" (*jiming*) or "documented" (*liupai*) and stayed in the palace.[18] During the next five years, they would go through a series of further investigations into their family background and birth dates to see if their astrological sign matched that of the person they were about to marry. Those who qualified remained in the palace as imperial consort candidates. They had no daily expenses and received one tael of silver per month as a stipend until they were either promoted into the consort ranks or released from the palace.[19]

Another source for imperial consorts was the imperial bondservant companies. The girls from these companies ages thirteen *sui* or older were required to go through the process of palace maid selection before they could get married. The Imperial Household Department supervised this annual draft, and the girls selected generally served the court as maids rather than as candidates for imperial consort. However, neither emperor nor princes were prohibited from finding mates among this group. Many imperial consorts, including empresses, were initially palace maids. For example, the birth mothers of the Yongzheng, Qianlong, and Jiaqing emperors all came from a bondservant background.[20] Four of the Kangxi emperor's consorts were palace maids before they were promoted. Two of the Qianlong emperor's consorts were also from bondservant families, and the Jiaqing emperor's first empress was the daughter of an Imperial Household Department manager.[21]

p. 143 The drafts, which were intended to guarantee Qing emperors and princes the ↳ best marriage partners, were significant in two ways. First, they broadened the scope of imperial consorts selected from Mongol and Chinese elites to the whole banner population, regardless of social rank. Second, the draft emphasized the ethnic identity of the candidates for imperial consorts. The girls who entered the palace had to come from banner families, either from the regular banners or from the bondservant banners. According to Evelyn Rawski's statistics, 76 percent of the imperial consorts entered through the *xiunu* draft and 16 percent were

originally palace maids.[22] These figures suggest that banner affiliation, one of the trademarks of ethnic identity, became the Qing rulers' first consideration when selecting wives and concubines.

Problems with the Pursuit of Ethnic Purity

Manchu rulers had difficulty maintaining the ethnic purity of the imperial house and blocking Chinese cultural influence in the palace. After the Kangxi period, the Qing tolerated intermarriage between bannermen and women not in banners. In the eighteenth century and later, it was not uncommon for bannermen, especially *hanjun*, to marry Chinese women.[23] The emperors seemingly gave tacit consent to the status quo, admitting that "[m]arriage between Chinese bannermen and Han women has been going on for many years now. It is pointless to prohibit it."[24] Traditionally, the children of such unions were registered in banners. If the child was a girl, she would have to face the draft as soon as she came to age. Many girls who entered the palace as candidates for imperial consort actually had Chinese mothers and relatives and might have been raised in the Chinese way. According to So Changbo and Kim Kyongson, who traveled to China in the early nineteenth century as secretaries of the Solsticial Embassy from Korea, in cases of Chinese–Manchu intermarriage "sons followed the customs of their fathers, daughters those of their mothers. Thus the son of a Chinese mother and a Manchu father would contribute his military service under one of the Eight Banners, while the daughter would have her feet bound."[25] It is logical to think that these girls might have imitated their Chinese mother in other customs and practices as well.

Manchu emperors began to notice these problems as early as the mid-eighteenth century. When the Qianlong emperor inspected the candidates, he found some girls who emulated Han Chinese clothing and jewelry. In a decree issued in 1759 he declared: "This is truly not the Manchu custom. If they do this before me, what is willfully worn at home?... Although this is a small matter, if we do not speak to correct it, there must gradually be a change in our customs, which are greatly tied to our old Manchu ways. Take this and have the banner high officials proclaim it to the bannermen."[26] Later in 1804 the Jiaqing emperor found that
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some drafted girls even had bound feet, wore ↳ only one earring (the Manchus customarily wore three earrings in each ear), and wore wide-sleeve robes like those of Chinese women.[27] In 1806, the emperor issued a decree emphasizing that "wearing wide sleeve robes and having bound feet are changing basic Manchu traditions. Nothing is more serious than this. I demand all the banners prohibit it."[28] As result, the Qing court narrowed the scope of the draft to exclude some daughters from *hanjun* households. While all the Mongol and Manchu soldiers were still required to send their daughters for the selection, the girls from common *hanjun* families were exempted from the inspection, unless their fathers were sixth-rank or higher banner officials. The court claimed that the new policy was "based on a consideration for financial problems and other difficulties experienced by the common Chinese bannermen. It showed that the emperor sympathized with their plight."[29] However, I see this change in the broader context of its ethnic and cultural implications for the imperial house, which the court doubtless considered.

Mark Elliott argues that whereas the court used the labels "civil" and "military" (*wen* and *wu*) to separate Han and Manchu men, it divided Han and Manchu women by the size of their feet, the number of their earrings, and the style of their clothing.[30] Reliance on this method explains why the Jiaqing emperor was so bothered by the problem when he learned about signs of sinicization among candidates for imperial consort. It is also logical to think that these Chinese-like outward appearances reflected only the surface of acculturation. Perhaps cultural erosion had occurred at a deeper level among banner women, particularly women from *hanjun* families. Therefore, after the mid-eighteenth century, the emperors became more and more sensitive to Chinese cultural influence in the inner court through marriage and tried to select as few imperial consorts as possible from Chinese banners.

Another means by which the ethnic purity of imperial consorts was contaminated was the practice of adopting children from civilian Chinese families. According to Manchu tradition, bannermen without

legitimate heirs could adopt children from their own clans to maintain their family lines and inherit the family property. If there were no suitable children for adoption within the clan, they could adopt children from other clans, but the children had to be from banner families. The adoptive parents were to inform the head of their clan and the child's original clan, and then register the child in the banner as their own child.[31] However, after the Yongzheng period, many adopted children were taken illicitly from Chinese civilian families. As a result many "false Manchus" were registered in Manchu banners.[32] According to a census
p. 145 undertaken in 1821, there were about 2,400 Chinese registered in either the Manchu ↳ banners or the Mongol banners in Beijing through adoption, and 1,795 in the garrisons at Jiangning and Jingkou.[33] Qing emperors thus made every effort to distinguish these people from the regular banner population.[34] But throughout the Qing dynasty, the ethnic boundary between true Manchus and "false Manchus" remained blurred.

That Aisin Gioro males chose wives and concubines from the entire banner population, using the banner registration system, heightened the problem for the Qing ruling house. In an effort to address this issue, the Qianlong emperor issued an edict in 1756, emphasizing that "by imperial favor, let all separate register, foster son, and entailed households in the capital Eight Banners and in the outer garrisons be made forthwith to leave the banner and become commoners."[35] An imperial edict of 1822 took a similar approach: "[L]et all adopted Chinese sons be registered in separate files. Their sons should be registered as civilians. Their daughters should be exempted from the election."[36] The court's effort to cleanse the false Manchus from the banners was important not only economically, as the court began having trouble feeding the increasing banner population after the Qianlong period, but also ethnically. If daughters of false Manchus entered the palace through the draft, it would bring Chinese cultural influence into the inner court and hurt the Qing national interest.

Women as Cultural Reservoirs

When examining the significance of ethnic boundaries for Manchu rule in China, Mark Elliott compares the Manchu situation with that of the European colonial regimes. He believes that "[f]or the sake of reproducing their power, both types of regimes required that the ethnic boundaries dividing them from the people they governed be very clearly drawn. This meant, in turn, that sexuality and nuptiality of the ruling ethnic elite had to be carefully monitored."[37] It is true that Manchu rule in China and European colonial regimes in Asia and Latin America shared common concerns over intermarriage or sexual relations between colonizer/ruler and colonized/ruled. One difference is that European colonial regimes never allowed their people to marry the local population (though concubinage was tolerated).[38] During the first years of the Qing dynasty, by contrast, Manchu rulers actively encouraged Manchu–Chinese intermarriage, as we have seen. Only after they saw the danger of becoming sinicized did they increase vigilance over ethnic boundaries by prohibiting intermarriage. Another difference is that Europeans made the prohibition universal: no Europeans, regardless of their gender and social status in the colonial regime, should marry indigenous people. But the prohibition against intermarriage during the Qing applied only to common
p. 146 banner women and Aisin Gioro males.[39] In other ↳ words, intermarriage for the Manchus was more closely related to gender and social status than it was for Europeans.

Adjustments in intermarriage policies during the Qing dynasty always reflected the urgent need of rulers to further their political and ethnic interests. By the Qianlong reign, Qing priorities shifted from harmonizing Manchu–Han relations to preserving the Manchu ethnic identity. Women were given special attention. While the Qing court tolerated bannermen's taking Chinese wives, banner women were prohibited from marrying non-bannermen since female exogamy would threaten Manchu ethnicity by reducing the Manchu population.[40] Although common banner soldiers were allowed to marry Chinese women and make their families a site of acculturation, a marital tie with Chinese women was not an option for Aisin Gioro males. The drafts helped maintain the ethnic purity of the ruling house and minimize Chinese cultural influence in

the inner court. It is clear that palace women had a role in the construction of ethnic identity that was not confined to childbearing—reproducing heirs for Aisin Gioro line; they also helped reproduce and maintain Manchu culture within the inner court.

Increased vigilance over acculturation in the inner court can be also seen in other regulations applied to palace women. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when Manchu rulers anxiously saw sinicization rising among the common banner population, they tried to build a closed Manchu world for emperors and princes, the core figures of the Manchu rule in China. Women were involved in this effort and played important roles as cultural reservoirs. For example, to emphasize the importance of the Manchu language, banner women who could speak it were hired as tutors to teach Aisin Gioro children in the Forbidden City.[41] At the shamanic shrines built inside the Inner City, rites performed after the 1660s were monopolized by shamans "selected from the wives of high officials belonging to Gioro households of the upper three banners."[42] These policies indicate that the Manchu rulers tried to reduce acculturation in the inner court to a minimum.

Discussions of significant roles for palace women in the Qing usually feature the empress Xiaozhuang (Hongtaiji's empress) and Empress Dowager Cixi, whose influence and power over court politics are emphasized. Such an approach implies that women were important only when they acted as men did, directly participating in policy making or other public affairs. That the Qing court strictly regulated the selection of imperial consorts indicates that women were a vital part of Qing political life. By playing women's roles—as wives, concubines, or mothers of the emperors or princes—palace women helped shape Manchu ethnic identity: they preserved an inner quarter in which the imperial elites could live their private lives in the Manchu way.

Imperial Daughters

Unlike consorts who married into the imperial family, Aisin Gioro daughters were born into it. Princesses include the emperor's daughters and sisters (the daughters of the late emperor), and daughters of princes fostered by the emperor or empress.[43] Some who were not related by blood to Aisin Gioro but received special favor from the emperor, empress, or empress dowager were also granted the title of princess.[44] Those without the title of princess were called *gege*, a Manchu term meaning "young lady."[45]

Imperial daughters were ranked according to their blood relationship to the emperor and the title of their mothers (see table 7.3). For example, the daughters of the empress had a title that gave them a rank equivalent to that of a first-degree prince; daughters of the emperor's concubines and those adopted by the empress were granted a rank equivalent to that of a second-degree prince. The daughters of princes were graded into five ranks determined by the blood relationship between their fathers and the emperor.[46]

Table 7.3 Titles and Ranks of Imperial Daughters

Rank	*Title*	*Rank*	*Relation to Emperor*
1	*Gurun gungju*	Princess, first rank	Daughter of emperor and empress
2	*Hosoi gungju*	Princess, second rank	Daughter of emperor and consort
3	*Junzhu*	*gege*, first rank	Daughter of prince
4	*Xianzhu*	*gege*, second rank	Daughter of prince
5	*Junjun*	*gege*, third rank	Daughter of prince
6	*Xianjun*	*gege*, fourth rank	Daughter of prince
7	*Xiangjun*	*gege*, fifth rank	Daughter of prince

SOURCES: Brunnert and Hagelstrom [1912] 1963, p. 8; Wang Shuqing 1982, p. 31.

Unlike low-ranking childless consorts, who might disappear from the Aisin Gioro genealogy, the names of imperial daughters were recorded even if they died in infancy. Imperial daughters "retained membership in their natal families throughout their lives."[47] They did not, as other wives usually did, become members of their husbands' families upon marriage. Instead, they brought their husbands into the imperial family and added their husband's name to the imperial genealogy.

The husbands of imperial daughters were called *efu*. Their status was determined by their wife's rank and was generally three grades lower than their wife's. For example, a first-rank princess's husband was given
p. 148 the title *gurun efu*, ↳ with a rank equivalent to that of a fourth-ranking prince; a second-rank princess's husband became *hosoi efu*, a rank equivalent to that of a fifth-ranking prince. The men who married princes' daughters received various titles according to their wife's rank, and they thus were ranked lower than those who married princesses.[48]

Imperial daughter marriage is one of the keys to understanding Qing politics and relations with other ethnic groups. When discussing Qing policies of intermarriage, Rawski points out that "non-Han rulers tended to use marriage as a device to cement alliances within their own conquest circle or with foreign rulers."[49] This approach was embodied in the marriage of Aisin Gioro daughters. Whereas the emperor and princes chose wives or concubines from the banner population through the drafts, imperial daughters were married to Mongol princes, Manchu aristocrats, or, on some occasions, Chinese high officials. These marriages not only "reinforced and reaffirmed Qing bonds with particular noble houses in the banner elite"[50] but also cemented ties between the Manchu ruling house and its foreign allies.

Marital Ties with the Chinese

In the early seventeenth century, the rising power of Nurhaci and Hongtaiji threatened the declining Ming regime. Military conflicts erupted along the northeastern frontier. To win the support and cooperation of Ming generals in Liaodong, Nurhaci gave them Aisin Gioro women as wives. In 1618, before he attacked Fushun city, he promised the Ming general defending the city a woman from the Aisin Gioro clan in marriage if he surrendered. After the general surrendered, Nurhaci gave him one of his granddaughters.[51] Later the general joined the Chinese banner.[52]

In 1632, Hongtaiji accepted the suggestion of Prince Yoto, his nephew, and assigned one thousand Manchu women to surrendered Chinese officials and generals for them to marry. He also classified these Chinese into groups by rank and gave them wives accordingly. "First-rank officials were given Manchu princes' daughters as wives; second-rank officials were given Manchu ministers' daughters as wives."[53] Hongtaiji believed that only through intermarriage between Chinese and Manchus would he be able to eliminate ethnic conflicts in the areas he conquered; and "since the Chinese generals and Manchu women lived together and ate together, it would help these surrendered generals to forget their motherland."[54]

During their first years in China, the Manchu rulers continued to give imperial daughters to Chinese high officials. These included the sons of the Three Feudatories—the Ming defectors rewarded with large and
p. 149 almost autonomous fiefs in the south.[55] It is clear that when the Manchu rulers created their empire, ↳ female exogamy with the Chinese "functioned as an important means of winning new allies and stabilizing military coalitions."[56] After Manchu rule was consolidated in China proper, marital ties between imperial daughters and Chinese officials or generals became less frequent. Whereas four Manchu princesses married Chinese during the first century of Manchu rule over China, none did so after 1750.[57]

Marital Ties with the Mongols

The preferred marriage partners for imperial daughters were not Chinese but Mongol princes. According to Rawski's statistics, more than 58 percent of imperial sons-in-law were Mongols.[58] The Manchus considered the Mongols to be their "brother state" because they shared common values. Nurhaci once said, "[T]he Manchus and Mongols have different speech but their clothing and customs are the same as one people."[59] More significant than this cultural familiarity was the Manchu rulers' need for Mongol military support during their conquest of China.

The Mongols shared geographical borders with the Ming in the south and the Jurchen/Manchus in the east. These three powers engaged in a tripartite confrontation in the early seventeenth century. Because the Jurchen/Manchus were not strong enough to attack the Ming with only their own troops, they needed to make the Mongols their military allies. Some tribes—for example, Khorchin Mongols and the five tribes of inner Khalkha Mongols—needed the Jurchen/Manchu forces to be their allies against other tribes as well, especially those in the north. Therefore women were exchanged as "gifts" to reinforce military alliances between the Manchus and Mongols. In 1617, Nurhaci married the daughter of his younger brother Surhaci to Enggeder, son of a Khalkha khan.[60] He also gave gifts and women to Mongols who surrendered and incorporated them into banners. For example, in 1621 two Khalkha princes led their tribes to the Manchus. In recognition of their support, Nurhaci married his daughter to one prince and his brother's daughter to the other.[61] In 1626, Nurhaci married one of his granddaughters to the Khorchin Mongol prince Aoba.[62] Nurhaci had nine daughters, and three were married to Mongol princes.[63]

After Hongtaiji took power in the late 1620s, he continued to marry Aisin Gioro daughters to Mongols, giving them in exchange for Mongol military support. The number of Manchu princesses married to Mongols reached its peak during his reign (1626–43). Of thirty-two princesses who married Mongol princes in the Qing dynasty, twelve were Hongtaiji's daughters.[64] During this time, the Manchus focused on developing and consolidating friendship with Khorchin Mongols, while simultaneously competing with
p. 150 Chahar Mongols over control of the Mongol tribes in southern Mongolia. In 1635, when the allied ↳ forces of Khorchin and Manchus defeated the Chahar Mongol leader Ligdan Khan, Hongtaiji gave his second daughter to Erke Khongkhor Eje, son of Ligdan Khan, who would become the leader of the Chahar Mongols after his father died.[65] One change from previous custom was that Hongtaiji married his daughters not only to those who came over to the Qing and became banner members living in China proper, but also to Mongol princes who remained on the Outer Mongolia steppe. The frequency of marriage exchange with Mongol princes improved relations between Manchus and Mongols, as nineteen Mongol tribes came over to the

Qing during the Hongtaiji period.[66] Incorporated into the banner system, they played a significant role in the Manchu conquest of Ming China.

Marital ties between the Manchu imperial house and Mongol elite also benefited Qing rulers when they expanded the empire to the west during the first decades of the dynasty. After the Manchus incorporated eastern Mongol tribes into the Qing system, the outer Khalkha tribes in the north and the Oirat (or Uriad) tribes in the west became targets—powerful Mongol tribes that, once controlled, could be used as a military buffer along the western and northern frontier of the Qing empire. In 1688, under the leadership of Galdan, the Zunghars from the Oirat tribes attacked the Khalkha and forced them to move south. The Qing seized this opportunity to create a feud between the two Mongol forces, supporting the Khalkha against the Zunghars. Within a decade, Khalkha tribes gradually submitted to the Qing, and by 1691, all the Khalkha Mongols were incorporated into the Mongol banners. Again, imperial daughters became a diplomatic weapon used in marriage exchange with the Khalkha to secure the alliance. In 1697, the Kangxi emperor married his sixth daughter to a grandson of Tushiyetu Khan.[67] In 1702, an alliance with the Jasaghtu Khan was cemented by his marriage to the daughter of a Manchu prince.[68] In 1706, Tsereng, a descendant of Sayin Noyan Khan, married Kangxi's tenth daughter.[69] These Mongol sons-in-law put their tribes under Qing rule.[70]

Marriage between imperial daughters and Mongol princes continued to the end of the Qing dynasty. However, it became less popular by the mid-eighteenth century, reflecting the declining political and military significance of the Mongols as the Qing western and northern frontier stabilized. The genealogy of the Aisin Gioro clan records thirty-one marriages between Manchu princesses and Mongol nobles from 1600 to 1750, while only four such marriages took place over the next one hundred years and no Manchu princess married a Mongol after 1850.[71] Moreover, no imperial daughters married western or northern Mongols after 1770, by which time the Zunghar and Muslim rebellions had been suppressed.[72] Instead, the Qing limited their selection of Mongol grooms to the seven tribes of southern Mongols who had submitted
p. 151 to the Manchus and ↳ accepted incorporation into Mongol banners before the Qing dynasty was established.[73]

The new approach to selecting Mongol grooms can be understood as part of a Qing strategy for imperial security. On the one hand, after the western frontier was relatively secure, Manchu rulers no longer needed to ally with the Khalkha Mongols against the Zunghars and other rebellious forces. Therefore, sending imperial daughters to the remote Mongol steppe became meaningless. On the other hand, the Manchus still needed to maintain a harmonious relationship with Mongols, especially the thirteen banners of seven tribes in southern Mongolia and eastern Manchuria. In geopolitical terms, these tribes formed a crescent around Mukden and Beijing, cities that had political and military significance for Qing rulers.

Marriages of Imperial Daughters with the Manchu Elite

Marrying imperial daughters to Manchu aristocratic houses started before the Manchu conquest of China. Most common were marriages between the Aisin Gioro clan and the houses of Hohori and Eidu—both were the earliest supporters of Nurhaci when he unified the Jurchen tribes. Hohori had six sons: two of them married imperial daughters, and Hohori himself married Nurhaci's first daughter.[74] Marital ties between Hohori and Aisin Gioro lasted for generations.[75] Another prominent Manchu aristocrat was Eidu. Each generation of his family renewed marital ties with the Aisin Gioro during the first two centuries of Qing rule.[76] The Niohuru clan descended from Eidu's sons became a prominent marriage partner of the imperial house. From approximately 1600 to 1800, seventy-seven Niohuru males married Aisin Gioro daughters, while seventy-two Niohuru women entered the palace through marriage.[77]

Marriage exchange between the Aisin Gioro clan and Manchu noble families became more frequent after the Yongzheng reign, reaching its peak in the late Qianlong period.[78] The change began with the Qianlong emperor's decree in 1751. Under the existing system for choosing imperial grooms, as soon as a princess or a *gege* came of age to marry, a list of candidates would be submitted to the emperor for selection. In the 1751 decree, the emperor pointed out that the list contained nothing but the names of Mongol candidates. He emphasized that candidates from Manchu noble families should also be included on the list.[79] After the mid-eighteenth century, sons of Manchu nobles became the main source of imperial grooms. The Jiaqing emperor reinforced this requirement in 1801.[80]

If we view marrying across ethnic lines as a device to cement political alliances during the Qing dynasty,
p. 152 then the change brought about by the Qianlong ↳ and Jiaqing emperors was clearly a sign that the significance of the Mongols in Qing rule had declined. In other words, Qing rulers no longer needed political and military support from the Mongols as much as they had during the conquest period and the dynasty's first decades. By the mid-eighteenth century, the main challenge was to preserve the Manchu ethnic identity. Therefore, the Manchu rulers became more sensitive to the original ethnic background of the imperial grooms and preferred to marry their daughters to nobles from Manchu banners rather than those from Mongol or Chinese banners, even though these bannermen were in theory part of the Manchu people and lived as the Manchu did.

The Political Implications of Marriage

Throughout the dynasty, Manchu emperors kept tight control over their daughters' marriages. Marriage policies changed over time as the needs of the Qing court varied, but some principles remained the same. Unlike imperial consorts, who might come from common banner families and might even be palace maids, imperial grooms had to be men of high social status. According to the regulations on imperial marriage, women of the Aisin Gioro clan were not allowed to marry bannermen registered as *linghu*.[81] No imperial daughter ever married a non-elite man. This pattern indicates that considerations of status and nobility played a crucial role when Manchu rulers chose their sons-in-law.

Since Aisin Gioro daughters had lifelong membership in the imperial family, they did not in fact marry out. Instead, they brought their husbands into the imperial family. Many Mongol grooms lived in Beijing after they married Aisin Gioro daughters; their children were reared in the capital and studied at the palace school.[82] During the early years of the Manchu conquest, some imperial daughters were married to Chinese generals or to the local elite. In such cases, their husbands were incorporated into the banner system and eventually became Manchu. In fact, as Evelyn Rawski notes, the Manchu emperor "did not 'give away' his daughters; he used them to obtain sons-in-law."[83] These men were either military leaders or the social elite in their own communities. Incorporating them into the Manchu ruling house helped the Qing establish and consolidate a multiethnic empire. In this way, imperial daughters played an important role in constructing the Qing empire.

Manchu rulers had two major concerns during their 267 years of rule in China. One was to maintain their ethnic identity in order to avoid sinicization; the other was to incorporate the elite of Mongol, Chinese, and
p. 153 other ethnic groups into the Qing ruling house and establish a multiethnic empire. As an important ↳ part of the conquering ethnic group, Manchu women made a major contribution to Qing imperial interests.

In discussing women's roles in Chinese society, Rubie S. Watson raises a key question: if men could be fathers as well as officials, literati, landlords, woodcarvers, and so forth, were women in some sense "just women"?[84] By examining imperial women's lives, especially their marriage patterns, we see that women in the Qing were never just women. As imperial consorts, they constituted a reservoir of Manchu cultural identities, reproducing Manchu heirs for the empire and creating a closed Manchu world within the

Forbidden City. As daughters of the Aisin Gioro clan, they helped consolidate a multiethnic empire by establishing marital ties between the Manchu ruling house and the elite of other ethnic groups.

A comparison of Qing policies regarding common banner people and those for Aisin Gioro members helps us understand how, in the Qing dynasty, gender was linked to ethnicity as well as social status. During most of the Qing dynasty, Manchu rulers implemented two sets of intermarriage policies. For the common banner people, the policy strictly forbade intermarriage between banner women and Chinese men. All banner women ages thirteen *sui* or older had to go through the triennial *xiunu* selection or annual palace maid selection. Only those who were not selected could marry, upon receiving permission from the banner authority. When they married, they were not allowed to marry Chinese commoners. If they did, they would be expelled from the banner and their parents (and sometimes the banner elders) would be punished. In contrast, bannermen were allowed, though not encouraged, to marry non-banner women.[85] This gendered duality reflected the main concerns of the Manchu rulers about their ethnic security. Since the children from marriages of banner women and Chinese men were considered to be Chinese while the children of bannermen and Chinese women were unquestionably Manchu, only female exogamy had the power to harm imperial interests by reducing the Manchu population. Therefore, as Mark Elliott argues, "controlling women's reproduction was indeed a way to secure ethnic boundaries and resolve a major 'tension of empire.' "[86]

The marriage policy applied to members of the imperial household looks very different from that for common banner people. A gendered duality still existed in the prohibition of exogamy, but it worked in the opposite way. Generally, Aisin Gioro males were not allowed to marry non-banner women, either as wives or as concubines. As a result, all imperial consorts were exclusively from one specific social and ethnic group —the banners. Whereas ethnic identity was a major concern when imperial wives were chosen, nobility
p. 154 became the primary criterion in the selection of grooms for imperial daughters. ↳ Imperial daughters never married common bannermen. When a groom was selected, his family background—its status in society and its political or military importance to the Qing rule—took priority over his ethnic background. Although some princesses and *gege* married into Manchu aristocratic houses, the largest number married Mongol princes. A few even married the sons of high Chinese officials, especially before the Qianlong reign.

At first glance, it seems odd that Manchu rulers allowed common banner soldiers to take Chinese wives but forbade Aisin Gioro males to do the same. Whereas Manchu rulers prohibited female exogamy among common banner people, they married their own daughters and sisters to Mongol and Chinese nobles. However, if we look more closely at how Qing rulers used marriage to serve their political needs, the pattern becomes understandable. The Manchu court forbade imperial male exogamy for the purpose of keeping Chinese cultural influence away from the Forbidden City, a measure crucial to slow down the speed of acculturation of the emperors and princes. It used imperial female exogamy to reinforce and reaffirm Qing bonds with other ethnic groups, especially the Mongols, who played a significant role in helping the Manchus establish the Qing dynasty and expand the empire. Precisely because the Manchus ruled China as an ethnic minority, imperial women—empresses, concubines, and daughters—had to aid in meeting the state's special needs.

Notes

My thanks to Susan Mann, who helped me in shaping many ideas that appear in this chapter. My most sincere gratitude goes to Alan Sweeten, who generously read earlier drafts of this paper and provided valuable comments.

1. The banner system was a unique political, social, and military institution in Jurchen/Manchu society. It was created in 1601 with four banners, and expanded to eight in 1615. Another eight banners, called the Mongol Eight Banners, were added in 1635, when a great number of Mongols joined the system. In 1642, the Qing organized Chinese soldiers into the

hanjun section (Chinese Eight Banners). For more information about the formation of the banner system, see Elliott 2001, pp. 56–63; Rawski 1998, pp. 61–63.

2. The above summarizes points made by Holmgren 1991, pp. 73–75.

3. After the tenth century, five conquest dynasties were established: Liao by Khitan (907–1125), Xi Xia by Tanguts (990–1227), Jin by Jurchen (1115–1234), Yuan by Mongols (1260–1368), and Qing by Manchus (1644–1911).

4. Holmgren 1991, p. 78.

5. Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 8899–8901.

6. Hua 1983, p. 46.

7. Jiang 1987, pp. 67–71.

8. *Da Qing Shizu shilu* 1964, 40:11a.

9. *Da Qing Shizu shilu* 1964, 40:14 a-b.

p. 155 10. One of them, Ke *fei*, was the daughter of the Han official Shi Shen, who served the Qing court as *shilang* (vice president) of the Board of Personnel (Zhao Erxun 1976–77, p. 8910). The other was Chen *shi*, whose father's name is unknown. She gave birth to the fifth prince Changying (see Wang Peihuan 1993, p. 335, table).

11. Wang Peihuan 1993, p. 337.

12. Zhang 1990, p. 668.

13. Wang Peihuan 1993, p. 341

14. Scholars generally hold that beginning with Shunzhi's second empress in 1653, the emperors and princes chose their consorts through the triennial *xiunu* selection (see Wei Qi 1984; Shan 1960, p. 98; Wang Shuqing 1980, p. 40; Rawski 1998, p. 131; Wang Daocheng 1985, 307). I believe, however, that the *xiunu* selection as a system was established much later (see Shuo Wang 2004, pp. 217–19).

15. *Da Qing huidian shili* 1899 (hereafter cited as Guangxu ed.), 1114:12.

16. *Da Qing huidian shili* 1764 (hereafter cited as Qianlong ed.), 154:13a-b.

17. Elliott 2001, p. 254.

18. According to Wu Zhenyu, each girl had an informational card with her when she was brought to the palace. The card listed her father's name, the banner she belonged to, and her age (Wu Zhenyu 1985, p. 274).

19. *Da Qing huidian shili*, Guangxu ed., 1114:12.

20. Rawski 1998, p. 134; Kahn 1971, p. 88.

21. Rawski 1991, p. 188, table 5.3; Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 8917–8920; Wang Peihuan 1993, pp. 342–45; Wang Zhonghan 1993, p. 252.

22. Rawski 1991, p. 187; 1998, p. 131.

23. Ding 1999, pp. 335–36, table 13; pp. 337–40, table 14. Perhaps the best Englishlanguage translation for *hanjun baqi* is “Chinese martial” (see Crossley 1999, p. 97 n. 23).

24. *Da Qing Gaozong shilu* 1964, 748:30a.

25. This is Ledyard's translation of *Yŏnhaengnok sŏnjip* [1832] 1960–62, 1181ba; see Ledyard 1974, p. 14. I want to thank Susan Mann for directing me to this article and to the collection of diaries of Korean travelers.

26. *Da Qing huidian shili*, Guangxu ed., 1114:19. Here I use Rawski's translation (Rawski 1998, p. 40).

27. Zhang 1990, p. 951.

28. Zhang 1990, p. 39.

29. *Da Qing huidian shili*, Guangxu ed., 1114:19.

30. Elliott 1999, p. 65.

31. For more information on the fashion of adoption among the Manchus, see Elliott 2001, pp. 331–32. See also Lai 1997, pp. 37–52.

32. The term “false Manchu” is Elliott's (2001, p. 325).

33. Wang Zhonghan 1993, p. 59.

p. 156 34. For details about adoption in the Eight Banners, see Wang Zhonghan 1993, pp. 56–59; Elliott 2001, pp. 322–42.

35. *Da Qing Gaozong shilu* 1964, 506:2b–6a.

36. *Da Qing huidian shili*, Guangxu ed., 1114: 19.

37. Elliott 1999, p. 69.

38. Stoler 1989, p. 637.

39. Imperial daughters married sons of the Manchu elite or the elite of other ethnic groups. See the second major section of this essay, “Imperial Daughters.”

40. Female infanticide in Manchu society and the tradition that banner women married at a relatively late age or stayed unmarried in their natal families caused a shortage of available women in the marriage pool. If female exogamy were allowed, bannermen would find it difficult to marry within the banners. Moreover, if a banner woman married a Chinese, she would be expelled from the banner and her children were considered Chinese. Such customs would directly reduce the Manchu population.

41. Zhang 1990, p. 749.

42. Rawski 1998, p. 238. See also Jiang 1995, p. 63.

43. Wang Shuqing 1982, pp. 31–38.

44. Der Ling (1884–1944) was daughter of Lord Yu Keng, a high-ranking Manchu official. From 1903 to 1905 she held the position of first lady-in-waiting to Empress Dowager Cixi, and she was granted the title of princess as a special favor (see Der Ling 1929, p. 312). In some unusual cases, daughters of Chinese officials were also granted the title of princess. For example, the Ming general Kong Youde's daughter Kong Sizhen was granted the title of second-rank princess (see Liu 1987, pp. 109–11).

45. During Nurhaci's time, before the title of princess was adopted by Hongtaiji in 1636, all imperial daughters were called *gege* (see Wang Shuqing 1982, p. 31).

46. There were some exceptions regarding the titles granted to imperial daughters. The tenth and twelfth daughter of Hongtaiji bore only the title *xianjun* and *xiangjun*, respectively, four or five ranks lower than what they apparently were qualified to hold. In other cases, some princesses borne by imperial concubines were granted the title *gurun gongzhu* because either they or their mothers were favored by the emperor; still others were granted a higher title for political purposes when they married someone important to Qing rule. Here too we see a fondness for distinguishing people according to rank that goes far beyond what is common in other hierarchically structured societies. That even daughters and concubines had to be classified speaks to Confucian norms deemed necessary for regulating the household (Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5274–75).

47. Rawski 1998, p. 144.

48. Wang Shuqing 1982, p. 31.

49. Rawski 1998, p. 128.

50. Rawski 1998, p. 145.

51. *Manwen laodang* 1990, 1:57; Zhao Erxun 1976–77, p. 9327.

p. 157 52. *(Qinding) Baqi tongzhi* [1739] 1986, 3:1590; *(Qinding) Baqi tongzhi xubian* [1799] 1986, 47: 19403–4.

53. *Da Qing Taizong shilu* 1964, 11:5b–6a.

54. Sheng 1901, 25:3.

55. *Da Qing Shizu shilu* 1964, 77:15b, 92:3a, 136:22b. See also Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5276–80; Ding 1997, p. 326.

56. Rawski 1991, p. 175.

57. Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5276–85.

58. Rawski 1998, p. 147.

59. *Manwen laodang* 1990, 1:119.

60. *Manzhou shilu* 1986, 4:192.

61. Zhao Yuntian 1984, pp. 28–37.

62. *Manwen laodang* 1990, 65:632.

63. This figure includes one foster daughter (Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5266–69).

64. Hua 1983, p. 47. Hongtaiji had sixteen daughters (including two foster daughters), and twelve married Mongols. See also Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5267–77.

65. Hua 1983, pp. 47–48. See also Zhao Erxun 1976–77, p. 5270.

66. Zhao Yuntian 1984, p. 30.

67. Zhao Erxun 1976–77, p. 5282.

68. Rawski 1991, pp. 177–78.

69. Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 5283–84. Tsereng's descendants were closely related to the imperial house through marriage: his grandson married the Qianlong emperor's seventh daughter.

70. For details, see Rawski 1998, pp. 70–71.

71. Rawski 1998, p. 148, table 10, based on the Tang *Qing huangshi sipu*.

72. Zhao Yuntian 1984, p. 36.

73. This tradition of selecting grooms was developed into the *beizhi efu* system in the early nineteenth century. The seven tribes—Khorchin, Tumet, Ongnirod, Aokhan, Naiman, Bairin, and Aro-Khorchin—were incorporated into the banner organization in 1636.

74. Ding 1999, p. 199.

75. Zhao Erxun 1976–77, pp. 9183–85.

76. Rawski 1998, p. 65.

77. Huang 1986, pp. 637–39.

78. Out of seventy-seven marriages between Aisin Gioro daughters and Niohuru males, sixty-three were in the Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns (Ding 1999, p. 198).

79. *(Qinding) Zongrenfu zeli* [1908] 2004, 2:6.

80. *Da Qing Renzong shilu* 1964, 8:9a

p. 158 81. In their social status, *linghu* bannermen fell between the regular bannermen and servants (*[Qinding] Zongrenfu zeli* 1908, 31:19).

82. Rawski 1998, p. 150; Zhao Yuntian 1984, p. 34.

83. Rawski 1998, p. 159.

84. Watson 1991, p. 359.

85. Many cases of intermarriage between bannermen and non-banner women can be found in the Qing archives (see Ding 1999, pp. 337–40, table 14).

86. Elliott 1999, p. 70.