

# Power and identity of Manchu and Mongol Bannermen in the Qing Era: A Study of Household Economies by Means of Confiscation Inventory Lists

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This paper examines the question of cultural distinctiveness and assimilation in Qing China through the material culture of the households of the Manchu and bannermen. It exploits the confiscation inventories of 17 Mongolian and 77 Manchu families, reported in memorials housed in various East Asia archives, to reveal the material identity of the ruling elites in Qing. The cultural identity of the Manchu bannermen is central to our understanding of the nature of the rule of Qing regime: they were the conquering elites, but were they assimilated into Han Chinese society?

The literature on Qing banner identity focusses predominantly on investigating textual evidence. Yet material culture is one of the hallmarks of identity. People, whether literate or illiterate, use material culture as a power channel to express themselves. This paper combines a quantitative analysis of the inventories with research on the cultural resonances of the goods and argues that the bannermen kept a set of distinctive northern consumption habits that sustained their separate political identity as military men. They were not fully assimilated into the Han culture. The Han elites were antiquarians who materialized their imagined past, drawing from classical Chinese texts to create their own cosmos. In a sharp contrast, the Manchu and Mongol bannermen decorated their houses with martial objects, carvings with motifs that linked them to their ancestral ways of living or the imperial power, and ritual goods related to Buddhism and ancestral worship and shamanism.

The bannerman, a Tungusic military organization established by Nurhaci, invaded Ming China.<sup>2</sup> They fulfilled a range of "governmental, administrative, economic, and social functions."<sup>3</sup> Military aristocrats existed in China from antiquity to Ming, but the Qing government controlled and manipulated the identities of bannermen for governance and state-

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<sup>2</sup> Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif., Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2001); Du Jiaji, *Qingdai Baqi Guanzhi yu Xingzheng 清代八旗官制与行政* (Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中国社会科学出版社, 2015); Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus [and] Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861 - 1928*, Studies on Ethnic Groups in China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Kicengge, *Daichin gurun to sono jidai: Teikoku no keisei to hakki shakai (ダイチン・グルンとその時代: 帝国の形成と八旗社会, The Great Qing Empire: founding of the empire and the eight banner society)* (Nagoya (名古屋): Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai (名古屋大学出版会), 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Elliott, "Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners," in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, eds. Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 29.

building.<sup>4</sup> They imposed a series of regulations and cultural projects on them that held them apart from the rest of the population.<sup>5</sup> The state provided benefits to them and constrained other aspects of their life. This organization and identity of the banner Manchus sit at the centre of the debate on whether the Qing was a foreign conquest empire or a Hanified regime. This paper discusses the household decorations found in confiscation inventories of the Manchu and Mongol banner elites and use them to unveil their material identity.

The bannermen were the core elite that ruled the Qing empire. Their identity determined whether we should understand the nature of the empire as being Manchu or Han Chinese, or a mix. It influences the perception of the Chinese region as ruled by a continuous succession of Han dynasties or by other distinct groups. One standard analysis of this - the Han absorption or assimilation theory - traces its roots to the Boas School in anthropology. In 1935, Ralph Linton proposed that if two cultures clash, one of the cultures would be either absorbed or acculturated. He believed that "the type of contact which makes acculturation possible is more likely to arise through conquest and the settlement of the conquering groups among the vanquished."<sup>6</sup> Stevan Harrell theorizes this phenomenon, naming it "civilizing projects", whether Christian projects, Confucian projects, and communist projects.<sup>7</sup> Karl A. Wittfogel, another school of opinion has disagreed strongly with the Boas school's conclusion about assimilation. Wittfogel argued that dualism in governance existed in the conquest dynasties of the Liao Khitans, the Jin Jurchens, the Yuan Mongols and the Qing Manchus. Their ruling strategies contain political dualism – a difference in power between the conquering elites and the rest - and cultural dualism, with rules based on the cultures of different areas.<sup>8</sup> The later generation of Qing historians, including John Fairbank, Mark Elliot and Yao Dali, think in line with this theory and claim that the Manchus kept their identity, language, and ways of living. In short, they kept their Manchu way.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Crossley, Siu, and Sutton, *Empire at the Margins*.

<sup>5</sup> Crossley, Siu, and Sutton, *Empire at the Margins*; Elliott, *The Manchu Way*.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1936), 335.

<sup>7</sup> Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, Studies on Ethnic Groups in China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Karl August Wittfogel, *History of Chinese Society: Liao, 907-1125* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society: distributed by the Macmillan Co, New York, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> Dali Yao and Jing Sun, "Manzhou Ruhe Yanbian Wei Minzu, Lun Qing Zhongye Qian Manzhou Rentong de Lishi "满洲" 如何演变为民族——论清中叶前“满洲”认同的历史变迁 How Manchu Became a Nation, Historical Evolvement of Manchu Identity before Mid Qing Dynasty," *Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 7 (2006): 5–28; Elliott, *The Manchu Way*.

However, Pamela Crossley and Jonathan Lipman see the situation to be more uncertain. The Qing was a multi-national and complex empire.<sup>10</sup> Before the modern ideology of race and nation was imported to China, the boundaries between peoples were often fluid.<sup>11</sup> This vagueness to boundaries can be found in P.R.China's government attempt to assign ethnicity. Taking the Muslim peoples as an example, they are assigned into ten ethnic groups. The first ethnic group, the Hui, refers to Muslims or atheists of Muslim parentage, who speak native Chinese, Tibetan, Utsat and Bai and other languages.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, Bonan, Kazakh, Tajik, Tartar, Dongxiang, Kirghiz, Salar, Uygur, and Uzbek refer to Muslims who live in China in different areas and also speak distinct languages.<sup>13</sup>

This paper moves our understanding of the identity and assimilation of the bannermen forwards by developing a more comprehensive understanding of their material culture. I do this by examining the confiscation inventories of 17 Mongolian and 77 Manchu bannermen, documents housed in the No.1 historical archive, Taipei palace museum, Sichuan Ba county archive, and Liaoning provincial archive (Table A). All Mongolian bannermen and 21 Manchu bannermen confiscated before 1800 and 18 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century came from the inner provinces. The rest of the bannermen were based in Xinjiang or northern Manchurian provinces when they were confiscated, 17 before and 21 after 1800. The lack of a Mongol banner inventory after 1800 could be caused by accidents that happened to the imperial edicts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or because the first archive has not yet catalogued them. The maps below show the locations of the confiscated bannermen.

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Neaman Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China (Studies on Ethnic Groups in China)* (University of Washington Press, 1997); Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Orphan Warriors: Three Manchu Generations and the End of the Qing World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Crossley, Siu, and Sutton, *Empire at the Margins*.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan N. Lipman, "Hui-Hui: An Ethnohistory of the Chinese-Speaking Muslims," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 11, no. 1 (1987): 112.

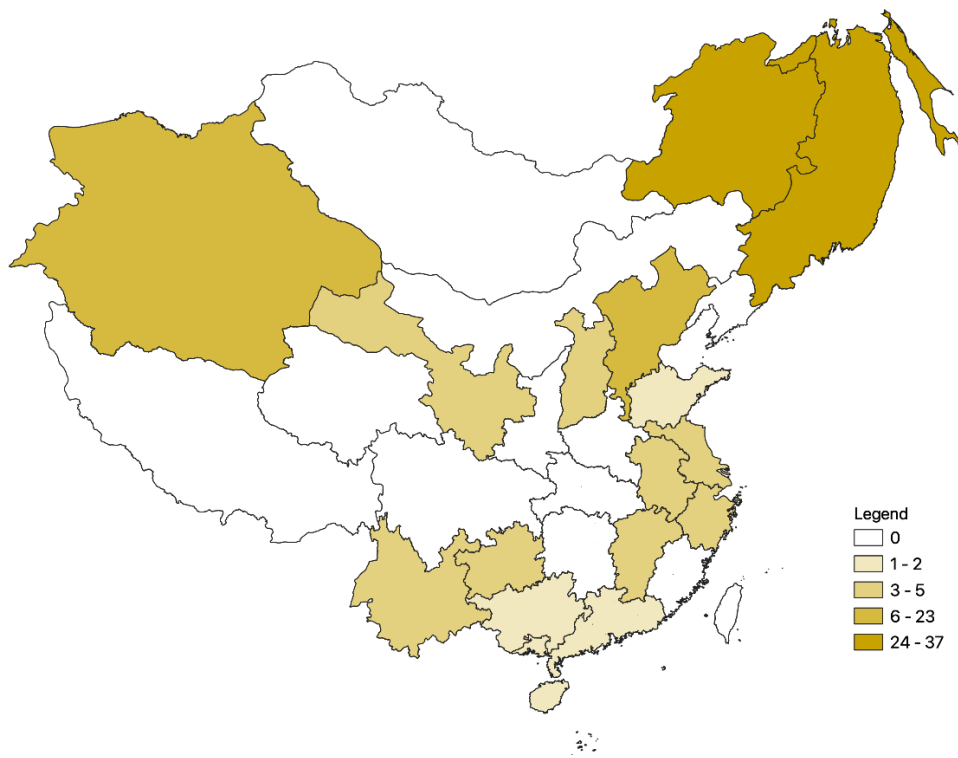
<sup>13</sup> Lipman, Hui-Hui: an Ethnohistory of the Chinese-Speaking Muslims, 112.

Table A. Status & Distribution of Confiscated Manchu and Mongol Bannermen

Time	Area	Proto ethnicity	Wealth	No. Families
1700s	Border	Manchu	<10,000	7
			>10,000	10
	Inner Province	Manchu	<10,000	5
			>10,000	16
1800s	Border	Manchu	<10,000	7
			>10,000	14
	Inner Province	Manchu	<10,000	6
			>10,000	12

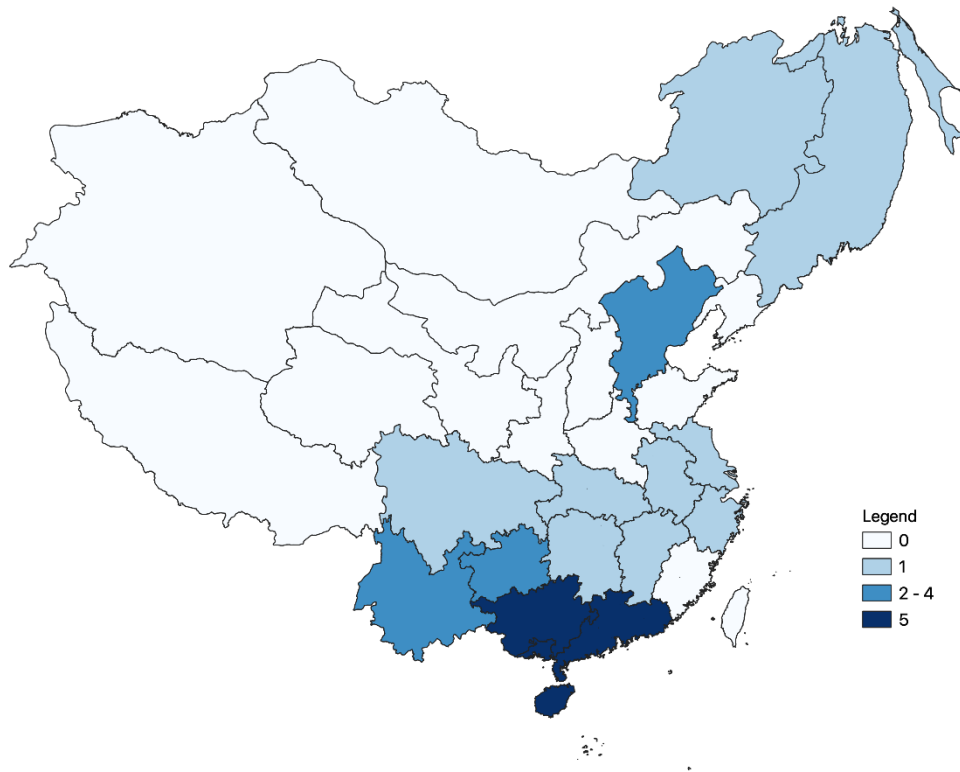
Source: Appendix 1, attached at the end of the thesis not in the writing sample, contains 50 pages of detailed information regarding 632 memorials.

Map 1. Geographic Distribution of Confiscated Manchu Bannermen



Source: Constructed by the author based on Appendix 1 and CHGIS map data set of Qing 1820

Map 2. Geographic Distribution of Confiscated Mongol Bannermen



Source: Constructed by the author based on Appendix 1 and CHGIS map data set of Qing 1820

The inventory lists were reported in memorials of two types as shown in illustration 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. They both list detailed items, one with valuations and the other without. I used 2,600 entries with price information in *Kuping Wenyin* and the taxation currency found in the inventories to approximate the value of the remaining 17,400 entries in the inventories in order to estimate the total wealth of a family. The minimum wealth of the families we observe in the sample was 20 silver taels, the maximum was 2 million silver taels, the median was 15,000 silver taels. The inventories in total listed goods worth approximately 348 million silver taels. Based on the middle-income bracket method (see chapter 2), the families are divided into two wealth groups, below or above 10,000 silver taels. The families investigated in this study were extremely wealthy, had relatively few financial constraints, and thus had consumption choices to express themselves.

Illustration 3.2.1 Inventory List with Price and Quantity

零星綢布小衣二十五件估銀四兩  
 綢布被褥捲毯氈片共四十件估銀三十四兩  
 五分  
 黃白銅器重七十三斤估銀三十二兩七錢二  
 分  
 錫器重三十九斤估銀三兩九錢  
 門簾纓帶靴襪硯畫牙磁器皿箱櫃匣盒一切  
 什物二百四十一件估銀二十九兩八錢三  
 分  
 人參十兩一錢估銀六百九十一兩  
 馬一匹估銀六兩  
 以上共估銀一千二百八十六兩六錢八分  
 一起出劉燠銀二百七十一兩五錢七分  
 又一起出換錢十六千四百文合銀十六兩四錢  
 共銀二百八十七兩九錢七分  
 一起出呂士法銀二十兩  
 一起出呂士法交存王謨緞舖京平九五色銀

Source: Taipei Palace Museum Archive

Illustration 3.2.2 Inventory List with Quantity only

緞衫襪一雙  
 布一疋  
 零布一塊  
 布衣片一件  
 破灰色布衣片一件  
 塔羅布一塊  
 破藍布小褂一件  
 大小布枕頭八箇  
 破紅細棉被一床  
 破布棉褥一床  
 黃綾包袱二箇  
 錢搭襪一箇  
 青細搭包一條  
 宮綉護膝一雙  
 白銅盆四箇  
 黃銅盆大小三箇  
 銅鍋一口  
 銅火鍋一箇

Source: Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Dang'an Guan, *Qianlong Chao Chengban Tanwu Danzan Xuanbian* Vol. 1 - 4 (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1994).

Unlike the probate lists found in Europe, the Qing lists provide extensive details on the goods confiscated. The entry for a piece of silk garment contains information on colour, pattern, make, and style. The confiscators recorded the specific kilns that made luxury porcelain and its colour pattern. I have stratified the inventories into 200 types of raw materials used to manufacture goods and 551 kinds of good<sup>14</sup> based on three sources: a Chinese commercial

<sup>14</sup> Stata Method: Regular expression. The official Stata FAQ on regular expressions: <http://www.stata.com/support/faqs/data/regex.html>; UCLA's Academic Technology Services' page on regular expressions: <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/stata/faq/regex.html>

guide written by Samuel Wells Williams in 1863, a Russian-Shanghai-Chinese dictionary compiled for traders in the 1800s, and the digital database Erudition, which provides a searchable service based on 10,000-12,500 volumes of primary sources published since antiquity.<sup>15</sup> The three sources represent the merchant and literati knowledge network of the three most active groups that dealt with goods: the Russians, English, and Chinese. The sources help to provide a fuller picture when a disparity arises among the sources.

The inventories reveal that the Mongol and Manchu bannermen, in general, kept distinct consumption habits. They preferred hardwood, jade, cotton textiles, hunting related goods, and metalware. A majority of them owned these objects. A few of them, however, were heavily impacted by Han elite material culture. This was particularly the case for those bannermen who held the *jinshi* degree and were extremely wealthy high officials above the third tier. In thinking about the degree of acculturation that we observe among bannermen, education, wealth, and power mattered.

The bannermen who lived after 1800 bowed slightly to Han material culture, but it did not prevent them from owning northern goods still. They held items from both worlds, possessed porcelain and metalware, silk and cotton textiles. After 1800, the bannerman did not need to march to the borders and help the Qing government conquer external regions. They increasingly needed to work with local gentry, who were all Han. The weakening of the central government, especially in financial terms—replacing generous pensions and material benefits with loans and never adjusting salaries according to inflation after the 1650s—fostered this need. Eventually, in the 1850s, the government ordered inner provincial bannermen to settle in their garrisons, so they became permanent residents among the Han people. This change in position was reflected in their material culture.

Although the Manchu bannermen confiscated after 1800 appreciated and possessed Han cultural goods, they remained distinct from their Han counterparts. In particular, they held much less diverse types of Han literary goods. Most of them did not own Chinese language carvings and figures or complete sets of histories and Confucian classics. Even the versatile book owner Gaopu, the nephew of Qianlong's concubine, a Manchu of the bordered yellow banner (originally of a Han banner but later elevated to this banner), primarily possessed books

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Well Williams, *The Chinese Commercial Guide, Containing Treaties, Tariffs, Regulations, Tables* (Andesite Press, 2015); *Словари кяхтинского пиджина (Dictionary of Pidgin in Kiakhta 恰克圖洋涇浜語詞典)* (Moscow: Восточная литература Oriental Literature, 2017); Erudition, *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* (中国基本古籍库 the collection of ancient texts database) (China: Erudition, 2016).

written by Qing authors or histories and dictionaries published in Qing times. That is, he engaged with Qing culture, but Manchu and Mongol bannermen did not fully assimilate into Han culture. Instead, they kept their northern consumption habits and created their own version of banner culture.

Their household decoration provides strong evidence that the core of the Qing elites, the elite Manchu and Mongol bannermen in Qing, were culturally different from the majority Han people. Their household goods show the persistence of northern consumption habits. They used imperial status goods as a way of distinction. The government succeeded in maintaining political and cultural dualism, in short. Acculturation happened to an extent among the top elite group who mastered the Han culture and were governing the Jiangnan area. The rest of the elite Manchu and Mongol bannermen showed little interest in the Han literary culture. The Qing empire should not be categorized as a regime ruled only by the Han. The Manchu way (Ma: Manju Doro) existed side by side with the Han culture.

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