

THE MANCHU NAME SYSTEM: HOW IT'S TRADITION AND DEVELOPMENT EXPRESSES THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE

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The Manchus were originally a tribe belonging to the southern branch of the Altaic speaking peoples, and it was only by the late sixteenth century that they attained a place of note in Chinese history. At that time, the reigning Ming dynasty regarded the Manchus as one of the barbarian peoples, a small group who were, so to speak, "watchmen of the north-east border". Although their population was small the Manchus were particularly apt at warfare, a fact which helped their expansion. They had also developed a cultural tradition of their own which was different from that of the Chinese in many respects, especially after they invented a written language.

After a half-century or so of expansion, in 1636 the Manchus established the Ch'ing dynasty, and in 1644 they succeeded the Ming dynasty as rulers of all China. At that time the Manchu population was only approximately two percent of the Chinese, and the culture of the Manchus was clearly inferior to that of the Chinese. Moreover, in the early Ch'ing period a number of Chinese who surrendered to and co-operated with the Manchus brought along a strong influence from Chinese culture, which proved powerfully attractive to the Manchus. For all these reasons the Manchus shortly found that their own aboriginal culture was undergoing change, and they were even confronted with a crisis of cultural assimilation by the people over whom they ruled.

In order to preserve and protect their own traditions, the Ch'ing government employed various means. Some made use of persuasion, others of more forceful pressures, but all were devoted to the aim of cultural conservation. Despite this, results were disappointing. In fact, in some respects, not only the substance, but the form as well, of certain cultural traits passed out of currency.

The difference in the practices of the Manchus in the period before they entered China proper compared with the period after is quite objectively reflected by the Manchurian name system. The following is a brief description of the traditional name system and the changes which later occurred.

In the past it has been widely believed by the Chinese that the Manchus had no surnames. Actually, this is not correct and we may say that such a belief bears overtones of cultural contempt, unjustified by the facts. Still, there is a reason for existence of this widespread belief among the Chinese, and the reason is that throughout the Ch'ing period, in most of the official and private records where names of Manchus are found, these names are simply personal names, and not surnames. For example, *Nurhaci*, *Dorgon*, *I-hsin* (Prince Kung) and others are cases in point. These names are all given names, and these three Manchu nobles all have a common surname, *Aisiin Gioro*, which is often omitted in the historical records. In the text of the *Pa-ch'i Man-chou shih-tsu t'ung-p'u* (八旗滿洲氏族通譜 the Genealogy of the Manchu Clans), we find over 600 Manchu surnames listed. Among these the more famous include *Gūwalgiya*, *Sumuru*, *Nara*, *Donggo*, *Magiya*, *Niohuru*, *Irgen Gioro*, etc.. But the Manchus, like the Khitan and Jürched, in many cases took their place of residence as a surname. For this reason, many people had the same surname, and hence the surname was considered unimportant for identifying an individual, and was only rarely used. This circumstance occasioned numerous misunderstandings, as when it is erroneously said that the Manchus lack surnames.

According to the most reliable information the Manchus' given names were not prescribed by any fixed formula, but, sometimes, they were freely chosen by parents on the basis of a strong liking for a particular thing, or even because of mother's dreams during pregnancy. It is nevertheless possible to identify several main categories in which most of the given names may be found:

- (1) Names related to the persons' order of birth within a family: *uju* (the first); *duici* (the fourth); *sunjaci* (the fifth); *fiyanggū* (the youngest), etc.
- (2) Names related to animals: *arsalan* (the lion); *isha* (the crane); *garu* (the swan); etc.
- (3) Names related to plants: *orhoda* (ginseng); *sengkule* (leek); *amida* (willow), etc.
- (4) Names related to intimate objects: *cagan* (book); *amin* (saddle); *nicuhe* (pearl); *samara* (big wooden bowl), etc.
- (5) Names related to topographical features, especially to mountains:

alin (mountain); *Namu* (Ocean); *Colhon* (the peak of a mountain), etc.

To judge by official records, this practice remained in use until the end of the dynasty, since we can see that only the given names are entered in the records. But in fact, beginning from an early period in the dynasty, there was gradual change in the nomenclature practice. ⁽¹⁾

In the late years of the Shun-chih reign, the descendants of the imperial family undertook to abandon the traditional practice of using animals or order of birth as names (as for example *Dorgon* or *Fiyanggū*), but rather adopted auspicious sounding Chinese characters for names, as in the case of the K'ang-hsi emperor, whose personal name was Hsuan-yeh 玄燁. ⁽²⁾ After the Shun-chih period, it was decreed even more explicitly that members of the imperial house be assigned names in which all individuals in a given generation would share a common character. And in the same period, in the second character of the name, specific radicals were employed to indicate that generation's degree of consanguinity with the K'ang-hsi emperor. All these regulations were designed so as to apply during the three generations following after the K'ang-hsi reign period. ⁽³⁾ Moreover, taboo names were also an object of concern to the K'ang-hsi emperor, and from his time no person might have any character in his name which appeared in the given name of the reigning emperor. In the K'ang-hsi period, the name of a famous gate in the capital, Hsuan-wu men 玄武門, was changed to Shen-wu men 神武門. Fan Yeh 范曄, author of the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*, became known thereafter by his style-name Fan Wei-tsung 范蔚宗 ⁽⁴⁾. People were punished by death for failing to observe the taboos connected with the personal names of imperial ancestors. During the Yung-cheng period the taboos were particularly strictly enforced. The brothers of the emperor were made to change the character in their given names which they had in common with the emperor. The Yung-cheng emperor's given name was Yin-chen 胤禛. His brothers were originally Yin-hsiang 胤祥, Yin-chi 胤祺, Yin-chih 胤祉, etc., When Yin-chen became emperor, his brothers requested the character Yin 胤 in their given names be changed, but the emperor declined, saying the names given by their father were not to be abolished, out of respect for the father's well. Upon a second request, the emperor referred the decision to their mother. Finally, the Chinese character Yin 胤 was changed to Yün 允 in the emperor's brothers. In addition, many people's names were changed to different characters: Wang Shih-chen 王世禛 changed his name to Wang Shih-cheng 王世正, Chang Yin-chia 張胤佳 became Chang Yün-chia 張允佳. The profoundly sinified Ch'ien-lung emperor was nevertheless vigorous in his attempt to maintain Manchu cultural identity. As we knew, after Ch'ien-lung

succeeded to the throne 0-er-tai 鄂爾泰 memorialized suggesting that the characters which coincided with the emperor's name Hung-li 弘曆 should be changed to 宏歷 for general use. The emperor rejected the suggestion and instead decreed that the characters simply be written with a stroke omitted: 弘曆.⁽⁷⁾ Subsequently, however, the name of the Imperial Calendar *Shih-hsien li* 時憲曆 was changed to *Shih-hsien shu* 時憲書. Also, the reign title Hung-chih 弘治 of Ming Hsiao-tsung was changed to 宏治.

The Ch'ien-lung emperor's attitude toward name taboo is interesting. He considered that since the observance of name taboo was traditional, the emperor could not but follow precedent. Yet he considered that if the emperor's name were made very special with infrequently used characters, the necessity for many people to change their names would be avoided. With this idea in mind he changed the names of his successors in two generations; Yung-yen 永琰 (Chia-ch'ing emperor) was changed to Yung-yen 顒琰, and Mien-ning 綿寧 (Tao-kuang emperor) was changed to Ming-ning 旻寧. Both Yung 顒 and Ming 旻 are rarely used characters.⁽⁸⁾ The names of later emperors of Ch'ing dynasty were written with uncommon characters, such as Chu 訥 and T'ien 活, etc.

Considering that the Manchu emperors had become sinicized to this degree, of course the Manchu bannermen at large had a clear example to follow. During the K'ang-hsi through Ch'ien-lung reign periods, many Manchus took, as a fixed Chinese surname, the first of the several Chinese characters which had earlier been used to transcribe their original Manchu given names. For example, the individual whose given name was *Gūbsai* became known in Chinese as Ku Pa Tai 顧八代. Moreover, the Chinese surname thereby fixed (i.e. according to the Chinese transcription of the first syllable in the original Manchu given name) in fact became hereditary, so that his son became known as Ku Yen 顧儼, and his grandson as Ku Tsung 顧踪, although their original Manchu surname was *Irgen Gioro*. The eminent Manchu of the Yung-cheng and Ch'ien-lung reign periods known by his Manchu given name as 0-er-t'ai also had a three character Chinese surname-given name combination formed by transcription, namely 鄂爾泰, and from these Chinese characters his descendants took the first as a surname in combination with other characters as Chinese given names. Hence, they were known as 鄂容安 (0-jung-an), 鄂實 (0-shih), and 鄂昌 (0-ch'ang). Formerly, the Manchu surname of this family was *Sirin Gioro*. In the Ch'ien-lung period, the Grand Secretary, Yin-chi-shan 尹繼善 was surnamed *Janggiya* in Manchu, but since his father's given name in Manchu had been transcribed into Chinese with Yin 尹 as the first syllable, the son then took that syllable as a surname in Chinese. These

several examples are taken from well known men of the early and middle Ch'ing period, and similar cases among ordinary bannermen must have been legion.

In 1767, the Ch'ien-lung emperor discovered that a distant relative of the imperial clan, originally surnamed *Gioro*, in fact had taken the Chinese character *man* 滿 as a surname, by isolating it from the other two characters 吉善 which had been used in the Chinese trinomial transcription of his Manchu given name. The emperor ordered that this man cease so fracturing his name, in order to preserve consciousness of its belonging to the typical form of Manchu given names. He even decreed: "This must be strictly forbidden, and in future must not occur again".⁽⁹⁾ In 1788, the same emperor again, in reading a genealogy of a Bordered Red Banner family, observed the repeated occurrence of the two characters Ch'i 齊 and Tu 杜 in the first position in the names of members of two different branches of the family. The emperor concluded that these families had simply assimilated completely to the Chinese practice of nomenclature, and he forcefully ordered that this cease. He gave special orders to all Manchu generals throughout the provinces that Manchu names must not be lost, nor could Chinese names be substituted.⁽¹⁰⁾

By the Chia-ch'ing period, prominent Manchus had become so accustomed to this practice that one named Ta-chung-a 達冲阿, when submitting a Chinese script memorial, followed the Chinese conventions of humble usage, whereby the writer refers to himself by given name only, without surname. Accordingly, the official in mention omitted the first character, as if it were a true Chinese surname. The emperor rebuked him, insisting that the three character name constituted an indivisible unit, correlate to a Manchu original.⁽¹¹⁾ In 1814, Chia-ch'ing emperor further decreed that, whereas names transcribed from originals could be any number of Chinese characters in length, on the contrary, names taken directly from Chinese expressions of auspicious meaning could use only two characters, not three.⁽¹²⁾ So he changed the names of two bannermen, who had been formerly known as Ch'ing-yung-t'ai 清永泰 and Ho-shen-pao 和坤保. They were required to change these to Yung-t'ai and Ho-pao, respectively. This was alleged to be in accordance with regulations established by an earlier emperor. However, we know from examples of the Ch'ien-lung period, such as Kuo-to-huan 國多歡 (the sense of which is "manifold joy in the country") and Kuan-yin-pao 觀音保 (means "blessed by the god kuan-yin"), etc., that the practice of taking three character combinations from Chinese had not met with opposition from that emperor. So we may conclude that imperial concern about this matter appears to have become more intense in the Chia-ch'ing period, as we see from his proscrip-

tions on such usage.

Despite the Chia-ch'ing emperor's prohibitions we see that in the Tao-kuang period there were still individuals who took three syllable names in Chinese characters, of which one had to be dropped out, in order to avoid resemblance to the common pattern of trinomial Chinese surname-given name combinations. Thus, we have the example Yung-heng-t'ai 永恒泰, changed to Yung-heng.⁽¹³⁾ Further, an edict of the Tao-kuang period reiterated the Chia-ch'ing prohibition on three syllable names in Chinese, and added a strengthened threat of punishment to the Banner leader himself for any infractions by persons within his authority.

In the period of the middle Ch'ing dynasty other examples are also of particular interest: In the first case it came to the attention of the throne that members of the imperial clan had accepted willingly, as their own surname, the casual though honorific appellations by which vendors in the marketplace customarily hailed them. For example, one branch of the clan had taken the surname Chao 趙 from this source. Now Chao holds first place in the list of surnames included in the book *Pai-chia Hsing* 百家姓 (*Hundred Family Surnames*) which was compiled in the Sung period, when the reigning house's surname was Chao. Due to the influence of that text in Ch'ing times, the name Chao was popularly considered to have somewhat aristocratic overtones, and so Manchus of the ruling family sometimes came to be called Chao honorifically by people in the street. Another character might also be added to indicate the individual's rank among his brothers, as if this were known to the tradesman. For example, one might be called Chao Ta 趙大 or Chao Chi 趙幾 or the like. Or in another typical case, the surname Huang 黃 might be used, since it also means "yellow", and only members of the imperial clan were permitted to wear a yellow sash in public. Hence the names Huang Ta 黃大, Huang Chi 黃幾 et cetera might occur. In time these names were accepted by the persons so addressed, and came to constitute hereditary surnames of the standard Chinese type. The Chia-ch'ing emperor vigorously condemned this vulgar practice, and forbade its further use.⁽¹⁴⁾ Or examples of another kind are to be found from the Chia-ch'ing period. In these cases, true Manchu surnames were first transcribed into Chinese characters without any necessary relation to the Chinese conventions of nomenclature. Hence, *Janggiya* yields 章佳氏, *Ligiya* 李佳氏, and *Borjigit* 博爾濟吉特, Later, the first syllable came to be treated by analogy as a Chinese surname, or might be changed to a commonly used homonymous surname. So *Janggiya* became 張氏, *Ligiya* 李氏, and *Borjigit* changed to 白氏. The resulting surname gives the false appearance of intermarriage with a Han Chinese family, although this was not so. The

emperor therefore ordered that this form of linguistic assimilation not be permitted to continue in future. (15)

Another aspect of the Manchus' sinicization concerns the adoption of the Chinese practice of employing numerals as names. This was not a traditional custom of the Manchus, as we may conclude from the fact that such numerals appear in names written in Manchu script, not as proper Manchu numerals, but as phonetic transliterations from Chinese numerals, which would be meaningless to a Manchu ignorant of Chinese. Examples include *Cisilio* 七十六 or *Liosici* 六十七 which mean 76 and 67, respectively, in Chinese. These numerals either represented the age of the head of the family at the time of the child's birth, or else signified an auspicious omen indicating the age to which the child should live.

From the above we can see that the Manchurian name system was indeed greatly influenced by the traditions of the Chinese people, however during the process of sinicization there were many reactions of opposition and efforts to preserve their own cultural identity as is evidenced by their struggle to retain an individual name system, different from that of the Han Chinese.

My own personal opinion concerning the sinicization of the Manchus is that the following reasons deserve particular attention:

First, when two cultures, each at a different level of development come into contact, the weaker or less developed of the two is likely to imitate and eventually accept the other. And this is what I feel the circumstances were when the Manchu culture came into contact with the Han Chinese culture and what brought about its eventual sinicization. For example, the Manchus originally greatly valued the skills of horse-riding and warfare. Physical conditions in Manchuria were very favourable for the development of these skills. However, climate and topographical conditions in China proper, being significantly different, meant that the opportunity to practice these skills was lessened and so became less widespread.

As far as the Manchu language was concerned, it also was influenced by the change of environment. When the Manchus entered China proper they encountered many things, people and concepts which no words in their language could express. Consequently they "borrowed" words from the Chinese language with the result that, according to the statistics provided by modern linguists, one third to 50 per cent of the terms used in the Manchu language stem originally from Chinese.

As previously mentioned the Manchus mostly chose names according to the order of birth, or names relating to animals and geographical features. However, the Chinese name system was much more sophisticated. Especially

the educated strata of society paid a great deal of attention to the choosing of names. Characters of auspicious nature denoting health, wealth, longevity etc., were often chosen. Characters which indicated the place in line of ancestry, and characters based on the Chinese belief in the "Five Elements" were also chosen for names. All in all, the Chinese name system was a complex and highly developed one. As a result, the Manchus slowly developed the practice of choosing characters for their names more elegant and abstract in meaning than their original Manchurian ones which after being transliterated into Chinese often sounded clumsy and crude.

Secondly, I feel that any culture in order to preserve its existence must be respected by the people and more especially by those in power who set an example to the people. However the Manchu leaders failed to do this. For example, the first Manchu Emperor in China proper, Shun-chih, was very fervent in his belief in Catholicism, discarding the religion of the Manchus, Shamanism. He eventually transferred his religious impulses to a new object, namely Chinese Buddhism, to the degree that he even thought to abdicate his worldly position and enter a monastery.⁽¹⁶⁾ The K'ang-hsi emperor, did support the publication of Manchu-Chinese dictionary, however, he spent the majority of his time studying the Chinese classics and in particular Chinese Neo-Confucianism of the Sung dynasty. Indeed, he showed a particularly high admiration for the writings of the great scholar Chu Hsi 朱熹.⁽¹⁷⁾ Yet there was nothing within the Manchu cultural tradition for which he demonstrated a similar interest and admiration. Nor can we find anything to match his fascination, continuing over a period of decades, for Chinese calligraphy. The Ch'ien-lung emperor, if it can be said, was even more devoted in his admiration for Chinese culture. His poetry written in Chinese reached a lifetime total of 50,000 verses, so he boasted that the 2200 poets of the 300 years of T'ang dynasty altogether did not produce as much poetry as he himself had.⁽¹⁸⁾

With these examples set by the rulers of the Manchus, the preservation of the Manchu culture would have been difficult to accomplish.

NOTES:

- (1). For details, please see my article "On the Romanization of Manchu Names in English Works" (Bulletin of the China Border Area Studies, No. 2, National Chengchi University, Taipei, July, 1971).
- (2). T'ang Peng-chih 唐邦治 Ch'ing huang-shih ssu-p'u 清皇室四譜 (Four Kinds of Imperial genealogies of the Ch'ing dynasty), 1:6-9. (Taipei, 1964).

- (3). Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li 大清會典事例 (Collected statutes and Precedents of the Ch'ing dynasty), 1:7a; 13b.
- (4). Ch'en Yuan 陳垣, Shih-hui chü-li 史諱舉例 (Examples of taboo names in Chinese history)
- (5) Ta-Ch'ing Shih-tsung Hsien-huang-ti Shih-lu 大清世宗憲皇帝實錄 (Veritable Records of Emperor Yung-cheng Reign of the Ch'ing dynasty), 2:34a.
- (6) Ch'en Yuan, Shih-hui Chu-li,
- (7) Ta-Ch'ing Kao-tsung Chun-huang-ti Shih-lu 大清高宗純皇帝實錄 (Veritable Records of Emperor Ch'ien-lung Reign of the Ch'ing dynasty), 3:9a-10a.
- (8) Kuo-ch'ao Kung-shih hsu-pien 國朝宮史續編 (History of Inner Palace of the Ch'ing dynasty, second series), 10:1-2.
- (9) Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li, 1:8a
- (10) Ibid., 1149:20b.
- (11) Ta-Ch'ing Jen-tsung Jui-huang-ti Shih-lu 大清仁宗睿皇帝實錄 (Veritable Records of Emperor Cha-ch'ing Reign of the Ch'ing dynasty), 183:15b.
- (12) Ta-Ch'ing hui-tien shih-li, 1:12a.
- (13) Ibid., 1:13b.
- (14) Ibid., 9:18b.
- (15) Ibid., 9:25a
- (16) See Yang P'ang-ch'en 楊丙辰 translation T'ang Jo-wang chuan 湯若望傳 (Biography of Johann Adam Schall von Bell), p. 323, Shanghai, 1949. Original German edition of Johann Adam Schall von Bell is not available to me at present time.
- (17) Emperor K'ang-hsi was to be sure a most diligent student, and his interests were broad, embracing knowledge of astronomy, geography, medicine, mathematics, law, music, language, etc.
- (18) From original copy of the appendix to Kao-tsung shih-wen yu-chi 高宗詩文餘集 (additional collection of poems by the emperor Ch'ien-lung) at National Palace Museum. Also reprinted in Ku-kung tien-pen shu-k'u hsien-ts'un mu san chuan 故宮殿本書庫現存目三卷 (A catalog of extant titles from the Palace edition holdings of the National Palace Museum) Peiping, 1933. This quotation comes from the section listing works by the emperor. Page, 3.