

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 58 (2004)

Heft: 3: Performing cultures in East Asia : China, Korea, Japan

Artikel: Performed spontaneity : the bureaucratization of shamanic ways in the Qianlong-era

Autor: Mende, Erling von

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147640>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

PERFORMED SPONTANEITY: THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF SHAMANIC WAYS IN THE QIANLONG-ERA

Erling v. Mende, Freie Universität Berlin

Who must be more of a performer than an emperor who has to act multiple roles? And who among Chinese emperors could better fit the role of a multi-talented positionist than the Manchu emperors of late traditional China, who not only ruled a multicultural and multiethnic empire by sheer might at first, but then had to satisfy the ethnically and culturally different peoples of China, principally the Han Chinese, the Mongolians, the Tibetans and the Manchus themselves by convincing them that their emperor were one of their own.¹ And, among the Manchu emperors none tried to fill his different positions as seemingly consciously and successfully as the Qianlong Emperor.²

- 1 On the problem of multiethnicity for nation-building cf. Michael Ng-Quinn, "National Identity in Premodern China: Formation and Role Enactment," in: *China's Quest for National Identity*. Rds. Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1993, pp. 32–61; and James L. Watson, "Rites or Beliefs? The Construction of a Unified Culture in Late Imperial China," *ibid.*, pp. 80–103.
- 2 Still the most comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of this emperor seems to me to be Harold L. Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor's Eyes: Image and Reality in the Ch'ien-lung Reign*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP 1971. An exceptionally readable study on the Qianlong Emperor is Alexander Woodside's chapter on the Ch'ien-lung Reign, in, *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 9. Part 1: *The Ch'ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2002, pp. 230–309, with a very good overview on how this emperor has been seen by his contemporaries and in later historiography, including the changing view on him during the last twenty years or so (e.g. pp. 235–245 et passim). But, to get to know the less Chinese or even non-Chinese roles taken on by this emperor one has to turn *inter alia* to David M. Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38 (1978), pp. 5–34, and Martin Gimm, "Zum mongolischen Mahākāla-Kult zum Beginn der Qing-Dynastie – die Inschrift *Shisheng beiji* von 1638," in: *Oriens Extremus* 42 (2000/01), pp. 69–103 (with earlier research) mostly intended for the Mongols and Tibetans belonging to the Qing-empire. The Manchu stance of the Qianlong Emperor has, except in the narrow field of Manchu studies, only caught the attention of the Sinologists since they have become conscious of how

In the Chinese way, the Manchu emperors had not only to observe the rules connected with Neo-Confucian state ideology centered around the main notion of *tianming* (the mandate of Heaven), but also to act as an arbiter of good taste in everything considered to be emanations of Chinese high culture, most importantly in poetry, painting and calligraphy. To the Mongols, they had to prove themselves worthy and true successors of Chinggis Khan, to the Tibetans, to be the personification of the Wheel of the law, of Buddha-truth, which is able to crush all evil and all opposition.³ To their own social group, consisting of a conglomeration of distinct lineages (*mukôn*) known since about 1635 under the common denomination of the Manchus, they owed the upkeep of the Manchu language and the traditional military training by the battue, the preservation of notable old customs and religious practices, especially of the shamanic ways. All these different roles had to be filled in such a way that they did not collide with each other. None of the Manchu emperors tried to fill these different roles as consciously and energetically as the Qianlong Emperor, although of course, he was not alone in this.

In the following I will confine myself to his attempt at keeping shamanism alive, while at the same time he was trying to convince the others – mainly the Chinese – that the shamanic practices were neither strange nor uncouth. Let me first quote what one of my favourite sinological books says about Manchu shamanism and the Qianlong emperor's significance for its codification, although

important the Manchu aspect of Qing rule actually was. This was brought to the fore first by Chinese Qing history specialists, and has been a persistent theme in American Sinology since the late eighties of the twentieth century. To name only the two foremost protagonists, see Pamela Kyle Crossley with *inter alia* her *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1999 and her slender volume in the Peoples of Asia series *The Manchus*. Oxford: Blackwell 2002 (1st ed. 1997) and Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way. The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford UP 2001 among others. Also conscious of the Manchu importance is Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1998. An explicit theoretical performative approach to the Qianlong Emperor has been attempted by Angela Zito in her *Of Body & Brush*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997 (her Ph.D. thesis from the University of Chicago from 1989 *Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance: Ritual and Writing in Eighteenth-century China*). Regrettably here as in an article "Silk and Skin: Significant Boundaries," in: *Body, Subject & Power in China*. Eds. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1994, pp. 103–130 her contributions, though fascinating, suffer from philological carelessness, with a tendency to make things more esoteric than they are.

3 Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus*, p. 120.

naturally Wittfogel and Feng only touch upon this subject peripherically, since they are not concerned with the Qing. Still, their decision to include the comment seems reasonable, since they are treating another and earlier of those “barbarian” Altaic dynasties that ruled parts or all of China for so many centuries:⁴

The Manchus also continued to practise their native religion. Emperor Kao-tsung, known by the reign-title Ch’ien-lung (1736–1796), carefully observed the ceremonies described in the imperial Chinese code; yet he simultaneously upheld the creed of his Manchu forefathers. In 1747 he ordered the unification of Manchu ritual. A new code, prefaced by his personal introduction, which like the entire work was written in Manchu, prescribed ritualistic procedures that differed little from those of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While it revealed strong Chinese influences (note 219: Besides the use of rice and silk, a conspicuous Chinese feature is the participation of the eunuchs in certain ceremonies),⁵ it continued to emphasize many tribal features. The Manchu deities were conceived as indefinite “spirits,” not as the gods of mountains, rivers, the soil or hearth, so characteristic in Chinese religion. Contact with Manchu spirits was maintained through shamans (note 221: The Chinese transliteration *si zhu zhi ren* 司祝之人 “man in charge of prayers” expresses well the priest-like character of the shaman, but, interestingly, disregards his tribal background), while the Emperor, who was the spearhead of Chinese ritual observance, acted merely as a helper in Manchu ceremonies. Again in contrast to Chinese custom, Manchu procedure permitted the presence and active participation of women (the empress, female shamans, “women” [note 225: Possibly the female helpers mentioned are the female shamans discussed in chapter III of the code.]). Sacrifices and prayers were not only offered in the hope of a good crop, they also asked the welfare of the horse herds and saddle horses. While pork was sacrificed by the Chinese in combination with beef and mutton, the Manchus, firm in their Tungus tradition (and their interest in pig-breeding), continued to make pork their chief offering, even when asking benefits for their horses (note 231: An exception was made for the funeral service; then beef and mutton might be offered instead).⁶

Manchu ritual in the Ch’ing period passed through various phases. The sacrifice of horses and oxen, recorded for the early seventeenth century, is not mentioned in the Ch’ien-lung code. By the twentieth century the shamans had disappeared, but the old deities were still worshipped by nobles and bannermen (note 232: Verbal communication from Mrs. C. Ranong at Harvard, October 29, 1943. Mrs. Ranong is the daughter of a Manchu princess who during the days of the Republic still observed Manchu religious ceremonies. According

4 Karl August Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao (907-1125)*. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society 1949 (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society N.S. 36.1946), p. 14.

5 Charles de Harlez, *La religion nationale des Tartares Orientaux: Mandchous et Mongols, comparée à la religion des anciens Chinois, d’après les textes indigènes, avec le rituel Tartare de l’empereur K’ien-long, traduit pour la première fois*. 1887, pp. 87 and 104.

6 Charles de Harlez (1887), p. 77.

to Mrs. Ranong, noble families held the ceremonies in a room in the rear of their palaces reserved for this purpose. Manchu commoners with less house space available hung a large piece of white cloth on the wall of their main room and held their services there.). After the revolution of 1911–1912 cultural fusion was accelerated. To the casual observer, assimilation now seems complete; actually it is not. The Manchus, while they may explain their traditions by Chinese analogies and frequently recite their prayers in Chinese, still assure the continuance of the ancient forms of some of their social institutions.

Although Wittfogel and Feng, in describing religious customs, go forward in time to show the similarities between different Altaic dynasties, one could go back also and show something of the same religious activities in the almost-Chinese dynasty of the Tang. Let me also quote the one text that seems to me central for our understanding of Qianlong's attempts to bureaucratize Manchu shamanism, that is, the imperial preface to the code of the Manchu shamanic ritual mentioned by Wittfogel and Feng, the *Hesei toktobuha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe* of 1747.⁷ I have dabbled with this text myself for years, but only dabbled I must confess, or, else I would have known about Nicola di Cosmo's splendid article from 1999.⁸ This study has deprived me of my original research interest or, perhaps rather of the turn I wanted to take. Di Cosmo includes an English translation of this text, and I believe the preface, more than the six chapters it introduces, clarifies whether the codification of Manchu rituals was a genuine counterweight to Chinese rituals and established Mongolian conceptions, or whether it announced the ignominious death of a central native tradition after many generations of resistance to a dominant Chinese concept.

Of course, di Cosmo's is not the only translation. There exists in French a complete translation of the code by de Harlez.⁹ Although it has often been criticized, I believe it still useful, or perhaps more than merely useful. The

7 It was completed only in Manchu in manuscript form in this year. It was printed as was the Chinese translation (*Qinding Manzhou jishen jitian dianli*) commissioned in 1777 in 1778 and 1782 respectively. I have used the Manchu copy in the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, and the Chinese one reprinted in the *Liaohai congshu* (reprint Shenyang: Liaoning sheng Xinhua shudian 1985), Vol. 5, pp. 3097–3191.

8 Nicola di Cosmo, "Manchu shamanic ceremonies at the Qing court," in: *State and court ritual in China*, Ed. Joseph P. McDermott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 352–398.

9 Charles de Harlez (1887), pp. 61–63 (imperial preface).

preface too has been translated by Tatiana Pang – and possibly others – from the Russian by Grebenščikov into German, checking it with the Manchu original.¹⁰

Our Manchus from the beginning have been by nature respectful, honest, and truthful. Dutyfully making sacrifices to Heaven, Buddha and the spirits, they have always held the highest consideration for sacrificial and ceremonial rites. Although sacrifices, ceremonies, and offerings among the Manchus of different tribes vary slightly according to different local traditions, in general the difference between them is not significant. They all resemble each other. As for the sacrifices of Our [Aisin] Gioro tribe,¹¹ from the imperial family downwards to the households of Imperial Princes and noblemen, we consider all invocations to be important. The shamans of the past were all people born locally, and because they learned to speak Manchu from childhood, [in] each sacrifice, ceremony, ritual, offering of goods, preparatory offering, propitiatory offering, offering of cakes, offering pigs against evil, and sacrifice for the harvest and sacrifice to the Horse God, they produced the right words, which fully suited the aim and circumstances [of the ritual]. Later, since the shamans learned the Manchu words by passing them down from one to another [without knowing the language], prayers and invocations uttered from mouth to mouth no longer conformed to the original language and the original sound. Presently in the families of the princes who left and became separated from the court, [the rituals,] being transmitted [orally] from generation to generation, no longer mutually correspond, and various differences have arisen [among them]. Even within the words of prayers and invocations pertaining to the various domestic sacrifices and ceremonies there are also small inconsistencies with old words and old sounds. Now if, after having revised, corrected and rectified [them], [we] do not act properly by preserving them in writing, and if they continue to be passed down [orally] for a long time, this cannot but result in their being further neglected and becoming more and more divergent. Therefore, I have appointed to this task princes and ministers, and ordered them to make a respectful and careful examination, to write [a work] dividing [it] into sections and chapters, and make drawings of the sacrificial objects to be shown one after the other. Then they were ordered to submit it to the throne, after which I have personally supervised, corrected, controlled, and definitively sanctioned it. As for the inconsistent words and sounds in the invocations, I have corrected and established them by

- 10 Tatiana Pang, "Materialien zum mandschurischen Schamanismus aus der Sammlung A.V. Grebenščikov," in: *Shamanica Manchurica Collecta* 5, 31-46 (here pp. 34–36). The following translation is quoted from di Cosmo (1999), p. 358.
- 11 Martin Gimm, "Zum Schamanismus des Qing-Kaiserhofes – ein kaiserliches Auftragswerk aus dem Jahre 1747," in: *China in seinen biographischen Dimensionen. Gedenkschrift für Helmut Martin*, eds. Christina Neder, Heiner Roetz and Ines-Susanne Schilling. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2001, pp. 577–588, does not add the "Aisin," as di Cosmo does, possibly following the Chinese translation. Martin Gimm presumes (p. 587) that the ritual described in this work was practiced by all lineages having the Gioro element in their name. According to him it was only later changed to become the ritual of the imperial family. Martin Gimm's article is especially important, if one wants to learn about the different redactions and editions of this text and about supplementary materials.

enquiring either with old men who had recollections or with the local people. Moreover, in the section concerning the objects to employ, there are words like *nanmu* wood and others for which originally there was no Manchu word and which have been transmitted [orally] following the Chinese word. After having received everyone's advice, I have given them a name, translating them into Manchu. Altogether six volumes have been compiled. Since in this [work] the old rituals of the Manchus will last eternally and not reach the point of being lost and neglected, I have been able to realize my desire to show high respect for the sacrificial rituals. Now, following the completion of this work, I name it *The Code of Rituals and Sacrifices of the Manchus*. The names of the commissioned Princes, ministers and officials must be also inserted and appended."

This translation is rather free sometimes, but I believe it conveys most of the Emperor's intentions. Note especially the translator's need to add "orally" several times in brackets, indicating that Manchu culture remained predominantly an oral one, in spite of the creation of a "national" script in 1599 to document state affairs and emulating Chinese literate culture. Another phrase added in brackets, "[without knowing the language]" may be true to facts, although I tend to assume that this is a mere conventional assumption, a relic of our Chinese-influenced view that the Manchu's developed into "better" Chinese than the Chinese themselves. Di Cosmo's assumption holds true, of course, for the late Qing period, but I prefer the more tentative attempt of Ms. Pang "Da später die Schamanen die Mandschusprache nur mehr traditionsbedingt erlernten."¹² Whatever that may mean, it grants more options for interpretation. And finally, although not relevant to this essay, Ms. Pang is more precise in naming the different sacrifices and rituals.

The preponderance of orality in Manchu culture is the main obstacle to a convincing interpretation of the Emperor's intentions in codifying the Manchu shamanic ritual. Nowadays the majority of those who occupy themselves with research on Manchu shamanism tend to assume that the code reflects, with minor adjustments, Manchu orthodox practice and that, therefore, Manchu shamanism belonged to "white shamanism," a kind of priestly community practicing rituals and sacrifices, but lacking the ecstatic communion with the spirits during the shaman's journey through the underworld typical in Siberian shamanism. Following this assumption, the Emperor's aims with the codification could have been only to use this *instrumentum instrumentorum*, religious praxis, to create a feeling of belonging again in the Manchu population, concentrated in Beijing, but also spread in numerous so-called banner-garrisons in an ocean

12 Tatiana Pang (1999), p. 35.

made up of the Chinese people and in a less strange, but still potentially inimical setting in Mongolia and the Western territories, later to become the Province of Xinjiang. Thus they were exposed to countless influences estranging them from their own traditions – real or imagined – and weakening their hold on the Empire created by their forefathers. The argument goes on that the Manchus themselves were an artificial construct, built from the different Tungusic Altaic tribes living in what was once called Manchuria, to the Chinese either just “the Northeast” or later “the three Eastern Provinces.” As the Tungusic tribes – in this also typical of Altaic societies – originally had no stronger ties than the clan- and family-organization the Manchus needed to create a kind of common consciousness. When the earlier unifying euphoria of successful conquest had given way to a parasitic way of life legitimized only by the memories of this conquest, it became especially important to reassure themselves. To a certain degree this was facilitated by the overpowering personalities of the three emperors of the mid-Qing-period, namely Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong. To counteract the gradual loss of Manchuness there was invented something called *Manju doro* or *fe doro* – the Manchu or old customs or way, and to which belonged the vindication of such things as everyday habits, dress, language, the invention or usurpation of a creation myth, and the adulteration of parts of their history.¹³

A tendency to create or maintain a Manchu way was there almost from the beginning. When the Qing dynasty was proclaimed and the earlier roots documented by the name “Later Jin” were negated, Hong Taiji, the Emperor Taizong – often wrongly called Abahai in the West – in 1636, chose – we do not really know why and how – the name *Manju* for those Tungusic or perhaps rather Jurchen-Tungusic tribes,¹⁴ who had participated in the conquest of Man-

13 Cf. especially Mark Elliott (2002), pp. 8–13 *et passim*.

14 These decisions, too, belong to the Manchus’ attempts to position themselves anew in the East Asian world. They dropped the slightly pejorative designation “Jurchen” (meaning something like “menials”, “people kept in bondage”) in favour of a new untainted name, which has not yet been explained satisfactorily. It is tempting to follow Gerhard Doerfer, who believes it may denote the geographical origin of the Manchus, but it may also be part of a kind of multiple performative act. This would be the case if we follow the explanation of the *Manzhou yuanliu kao* (Research on the origins of the Manchus) completed in 1783 (cf. Pamela Kyle Crossley, “*Manzhou yuanliu kao* and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage,” in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987), pp. 761–790). The *Manzhou yuanliu kao* itself belongs to that corpus of texts for which we normally have both a Manchu language original and a Chinese translation, which was created under the auspices of the Qianlong Emperor to ensure a specific Manchu consciousness among the ruling Manchu elite. At the beginning it says that Manchu was the name of a tribe, which then is explained as deriving

churia and Eastern Mongolia either voluntarily, as in the case of the Jianzhou-Jürčed north of the mouth of the Tumen River, or by force as the more civilized – at least by Chinese standards – Yehe, the Haixi-Jürčed. He is supposed to have created or rather adopted a foundation myth for the imperial clan.¹⁵ He caused the almost forty-year old Manchu script to be improved, while at the same time he built an East-Asian state based on centuries-old experience of the Chinese and earlier “barbarian” empires, assisted by Chinese, Mongolian, and Korean allies and collaborators.¹⁶ This meant that besides being the Manchu conqueror, from the beginning the Manchu emperors tried to perform different roles imposed upon them by their self-chosen fate as rulers of the East Asian world, being accepted as Bodhisattva by the Tibetans and Mongols, while simultaneously fulfilling the tasks of a Chinese Emperor as go-between between man and the numinous powers.

from a Mohe and Shiwei word for “chieftain” (cf. W. Gorski, “Ueber die Herkunft des Stammvaters der jetzt in China herrschenden Dynastie Zin und vom Ursprunge des Namens der Mantschu,” in: *Arbeiten der Kaiserlichen Russischen Gesandtschaft zu Peking über China, sein Volk, seine Religion, seine Institutionen, socialen Verhältnisse etc.* Vol. 1, Berlin: F. Heinicke 1858, pp. 383–385). The Mohe can be identified almost with certainty as the predecessors of the Jurchen and Manchus; the Shiwei, probably so. Therefore, this late attempt at explanation, right or wrong, seems to fit very well into the strategies to put the Manchus on an equal footing with the overpowering Chinese and Mongol civilizations.

- 15 Cf. the articles by Matsumura Jun, “The Ancestral Legend of the Manchu Imperial House,” in: *Proceedings of the Fourth East Asian Altaistic Conference, December 26-31 1971, Taipei, China*, ed. Ch’ên Chieh-hsien. Tainan: National Ch’engkung University, Department of History s.a., pp. 192–195; “On the Founding Legend of the Ch’ing Dynasty,” in: *Acta Asiatica* 53 (1988), pp. 1–23; “The Founding Legend of the Qing Reconsidered,” in: *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Tôyô Bunko* 55 (1997), pp. 41–60. Stephen W. Durrant, “Repetition in the Manchu Origin Myth as a Feature of Oral Narrative,” in: *Central Asiatic Journal* 22 (1978), pp. 32–43 (reprinted in, *Central Asiatic Journal* 23 (1979), pp. 72–83), suggests for stylistic reasons that the founding myth told by the Hôrha-tribesman Muksike and recorded in the *Jiu Manzhoudang* under the date June 20 1635 must not necessarily be the source of the more elaborate version written down in the *Manju-i yargiyan kooli*, the Manchu-language *shilu* compiled under Qianlong in 1782. He goes on to argue that it may have been a foundation myth common to several distinct Manchu groups and that Muksike told the story only to stress the common origin of the Manchu and the Hôrha.

- 16 Cf. Bernd-Michael Linke, *Zur Entwicklung des mandjurischen Khanats zum Beamtenstaat. Sinisierung und Bürokratisierung der Mandjuren während der Eroberungszeit*. Wiesbaden: Steiner 1982.

In this context, we need not discuss Hong Taiji's successor, his ninth son, Fulin, better known by his era-name Shunzhi (1644–1660), though he strengthened the Manchu claim on the Mongols, for his mother was a descendant of Chinggis Khan.¹⁷ When he ascended the throne at the age of six, the Manchus were still consolidating their power in China, and until the latter's death in 1651, he was under the regency of Prince Dorgon. In the beginning he knew no Chinese, but he soon got such a good grasp of this language that he read Chinese novels and opera libretti avidly, could judge Chinese examination-papers and could handle state papers in Chinese. He was religiously inclined, interested in Christianity and immersed in Buddhism. At the end of his reign he seems to have put greater trust in his Chinese officials than in his Manchu compatriots. At this time internecine rivalry among the chief Manchu clans and even inside the imperial clan may have seemed a greater peril for the establishment of Manchu rule in China than Chinese resistance.

Xuanye, the Kangxi Emperor (1661–1722), still drew his Manchu strength from the successful conquest and from his own consolidation of Manchu power against the futile attempts of Chinese and Mongolian pretenders and Manchu nativist movements. For him, his grandfather's measures to create or perhaps merely strengthen Manchu self-consciousness were enough. He was still primarily a Manchu – and, of course the most important member of the leading Manchu clan, the imperial Aisin Gioro. He was conscious of his need to reconcile the subjugated by assuming the different roles required to achieve this end. He did not have to fight for Manchuness. Instead, at his time it was more important to learn about the Chinese.¹⁸ The same holds true for his son and successor, for Yinzhen, the Yongzheng Emperor (1723–1735). Despite his persistent complaints about the decline of the Manchu language, we do not know for certain whether they reflect an actual problem among the banner-people – actually, most often Chinese bannermen – or simply his own reportedly punctilious character.¹⁹

It is his successor, Hongli, the Qianlong Emperor (1736–1796), who really felt the need to attempt putting Manchuness on a par with being Chinese or Mongolian. He consciously tried to revive things Manchu or rather to enlarge them to more than lifesize. He did the same though, with things Chinese,

17 Martin Gimm (2000/2001), p. 71, note 13.

18 Cf. Jonathan D. Spence, "The K'ang-hsi Reign," in: *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 9. Part 1: *The Ch'ing Empire to 1800*, ed. Willard J. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2002, pp. 147–150.

19 Mark Elliott (2002), p. 300.

conspicuously showing off filial piety for example when caring for his mother and emulating his grandfather. He even abdicated in 1796 three years before his death in 1799, not to rule longer than him.²⁰ But, as much as he honoured his grandfather, he cannot have thought too well of the Manchu translations of the Chinese classics mostly initiated by him. Already in the early years of his reign he started to have them grammatically and lexically revised and purged of what he regarded as too much Chinese syntax and too many Chinese words. Instead he ordered the creation of many rather artificial neologisms.²¹ It was he who had the early Manchu *shilu* revised early in his reign, allegedly to make them readable again – the same argument that was used in the preface to the code – although in reality at least part of his motive was to expurgate everything seemingly uncouth.²² It was he, who later during his reign in 1774 commissioned the *Huang Qing kaiguo fanglüe/Daicing gurun-i fukjin doro neihe bodogon-i bithe*, an expurgated – again – and seemingly innocent history of the Manchu conquest of China. And it was also he, who ordered the compilation of the *Manzhou yuanliu kao/Manjusai da sekiyen-i kimcin* completed in 1777, a work creating, or rather fabricating, a Manchu genealogy back to early imperial China, incorporating from the Chinese annals what was believed could serve as proof of an ancient Manchu origin, quoting Chinese ethnographic observations on the states on the Korean peninsula, on the Wei in northeastern Korea and parts of Manchuria, and, especially, on the Fuyu in today's Jilin Province among others.²³ Though I have not found an explicit statement that he wanted to emulate Emperor Shizong of the Jurchen dynasty Jin, who was one – or the only – “barbarian” emperor to be likened to the paragons of Chinese emperors, namely Yao and Shun, his acts in promoting things Manchu seem to be similar

20 This was not really a very exceptional decision, as such resignations, though sometimes forced, are also found with earlier Chinese emperors, though, more often perhaps with barbarian ones, cf. Peter A. Boodberg, “Marginalia to the Histories of the Northern Dynasties,” in: *Selected Works of Peter A. Boodberg*, ed. Alvin P. Cohen. Berkeley: University of California Press 1979, pp. 277–279 [published originally in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3 (1938)].

21 Cf. the pioneering short article by Walter Fuchs, “Eine unbeachtete Mandju-Übersetzung der Vier Bücher von 1741,” in: *Collectanea Mongolica. Festschrift für Professor Dr. Rintchen zum 60. Geburtstag*. (Asiatische Forschungen 17). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1966, pp. 59–64.

22 For shamanic rituals dropped from historical records compiled during the Qianlong reign, cf. Nicola di Cosmo (1999), pp. 366–368.

23 Pamela Kyle Crossley, *Manzhou yuanliu kao* (1987).

to Shizong's attempts at reviving Jurchen customs and thereby opening the way to their final destruction.²⁴

And now let me return to the code of shamanic sacrifices and rituals, the *Hesei toktobuha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe/Qinding Manzhou jishen jitian dianli*. As already mentioned, mainstream research today tends to regard the code as genuinely Manchu in spite of recognizable Chinese influences. Furthermore it is stated that Manchu shamanism was "white shamanism", supposedly widespread among the Altaic people, though, difficult to grasp. It is compared to Buriat "white shamanism"²⁵ still noted in the 1820's and 1830's by the Scottish member of the Selenginsk mission of the London Missionary Society, William Swan, among others. Sometimes, however, it seems to me that Buddhist influence on the Southern Siberian tribes since proto-Mongol and proto-Tungusic times is apt to be overlooked. Even Qianlong in his preface includes Buddha to be part of the Manchu pantheon. How influential Buddhism was in Manchu shamanism can best be shown in the admittedly late transcriptions of the now justly famous Nišan-cycle,²⁶ which also proves the vitality of ecstatic shamanism among the Manchus.

The orality of Manchu culture makes it difficult, if not impossible, to put the development of Manchu shamanism into historical context. It is also difficult to weigh the importance of codified "white shamanism" and ecstatic shamanism, whether one of these was predominant or whether – as seems probable – they existed along side each other. What we have are small snippets of information from Chinese written sources and Chinese historiography from the time before the Qing conquest exclusively, I think, by Chinese or at least outside observers. As ecstatic shamanism was a clan- or family-event, like all core-religious acts closed for outsiders, this information can at its best be only fragmentary. This holds true too for the Manchu shamanic court ritual codified by the Qianlong Emperor. Only Manchus were admitted to the rituals, which were first performed in Shenyang and later in Beijing in the Tangse/Tangzi (until 1905 just outside the Forbidden City on the southside of the Dong Chang'an jie) and the

24 Tao Jing-sheng, *The Jurchen in Twelfth Century China: A Study of Sinicization*. Seattle: University of Washington Press 1976.

25 Lawrence Krader, "The Shamanist Tradition of the Buriats (Siberia)," in, *Anthropos* 70 (1975), pp. 105–144.

26 The Buddhist elements in the Nišan-cycle are not equally visible in all versions. They seem to me to be strongest in the versions published by Giovanni Stary in 1985 *Three Unedited Manuscripts of the Manchu Epic Tale „Nišan saman-i bithe“*. Facsimile Edition with Transcription and Introduction. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Kunninggong (near the North Gate inside the Forbidden City) respectively. This seems to have aroused the predictable suspicions raised when only insiders may congregate. In this way the formulaic text describing the Manchu sacrificial rites becomes the only means to position the emperor in one of his Manchu roles. Not only did the emperor not attend most of the sacrifices, the performative aspect was also reduced to the text.²⁷

Jörg Bäcker²⁸ has, I believe, shown with the help of modern Chinese scholarship that the Qianlong code actually is the termination of a development that had started much earlier, in pre-imperial days. He does not refer back to the Qidan since the tenth century, treated by Wittfogel and Feng, a federation of different tribes and a possible mixture of Uiguric and proto-Mongol ethnic elements, where we already find the same phenomenon, but he notes the “templification” (*miaotanghua* 廟堂化 of Manchu or rather Jurchen shamanism since early Ming times under Chinese and Buddhist influence. So, the domestication of parts of the shamanic rituals and sacrifices is not necessarily the result of Sinification after 1644 or imperial scheming, but rather a long-term process of adopting originally foreign religious beliefs into a system predominantly of ritual praxis.

Any attempt at finding a convincing solution is complicated again and again by the problem of orality. One of the suspicions raised in connection with the creation of the code is that the Qianlong Emperor tried to use it to impose the ritual of the imperial clan on all other Manchu clans. For a long time, this could not be either confirmed or disproven, as we only knew of the official code, but that judgement became still more difficult after a manuscript (Tôyôbunka kenkyûsho, No. 2774) of the shamanic rituals of the Šušu Gioro clan became known through a long article by Mitamura Taisuke in 1958 or another one of the Gôwalgiya clan in 1991 through a Chinese/Manchu publication by Jiang Xiangshun and others.²⁹ The first is dated 1771, the second is probably from 1852, and

27 James Laidlaw, “On Theatre and Theory: Reflections on Ritual in Imperial Chinese Politics,” in, *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1999, pp. 399–416, musing about theatre without an audience, shows that this is the case very often, and I suppose not only, in Chinese state ritual. The prompt-book was made available to the contemporaries but they were not permitted to attend the performance.

28 Jörg Bäcker, “The Domesticated Shaman: Social and Religious Aspects of Manchu Shamanism in Comparison with Those of the Siberian Peoples,” in: *Shamanica Manchurica Collecta* 5.1998, pp. 1–9.

29 Jiang Xiangshun 姜相順, Tong Yue 佟悅, and Wang Jun 王俊, *Liao Binta Manzu jiaji* 遼濱塔滿家族祭. Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe 1991; Alessandra Pozzi, *Manchu-*

they are very similar to the imperial code, albeit somewhat shorter. Still, they may both have been influenced by it. Or, perhaps, the differences were not that big from the start.

Bäcker differentiates between the domesticated shaman (*boigon saman*) and the “wild” powerful shaman (*amba saman*), the latter also being the Siberian type, which he discovers among the Manchus in the already mentioned Nišan cycle. And again it is orality that makes it difficult to pinpoint its origins. No texts were recorded before the end of the nineteenth century, and then, though with the help of Manchus, by Russian scholars like the already named Grebenščikov or Krotkov.

Some of the “Nišanologists” discuss the beginning of the earliest Nišan version, which starts: “During the Ming dynasty there was [...]” While Mark Elliott takes this as the date of origin, other Nišanologists think this date may be politically motivated. Since the codification of shamanic sacrifices and rituals excluded “wild” shamanism from Manchu religious usage, this innocuous date was interpolated to save “wild” shamanism from persecution.

What I have not found, is a statement that “white shamanism,” the codified Manchu ritual, is no shamanism at all. Of course, everybody is free to define what he believes it to be. In the frame of a rather narrow definition including only the special way of becoming a shaman because of unique properties, ecstasy, and the ability to journey through the netherworld, the Manchu ritual and sacrificial code does not seem to fit. Rather, it seems, this is an early adaption of Buddhism on one hand and Chinese ancestor-worship on the other, admittedly fused with some Manchu peculiarities originating in religious beliefs or social experiences.

Let me give one last quotation, this time from Bäcker:³⁰

Another salient feature of Manchu shamanism is the great number of female deities and the predominance of female shamans. Moreover, we do not find so many female goddesses (about 300) as in Manchu tradition in any form of Siberian shamanism, nor are female shamans so predominant anywhere. Judging from the historical legends and female dominance in many Manchu shamanic cults, it seems probable that matrilineal shamanism has at least been the rule among the tribes of the north-eastern Donghai Nüzhen (East Sea Jurchen), maybe until the late Ming dynasty.

Shamanica Illustrata. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1992 (*Shamanica Manchurica Collecta* 3).

30 Jörg Bäcker, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

In this connection one may ask whether it has not been the female predominance in Manchu shamanism which has given rise to the typically Manchu house shamans with their mild, serene, priestly functions? It has also been argued that the boigon saman originated from the institution of the shaman's assistants (jari). Shaman's assistants, however, are widespread in Siberia, too, without having given rise to anything similar to the Manchu boigon saman.

I agree with Bäckér about the strong female element both on the side of the spirits and on the side of the shamans, though I am not so sure whether this is a Manchu peculiarity. Shamanism is very much dominated by women also among other Altaic and neighbouring peoples too. The second paragraph quoted seems to me to be a misunderstanding borne out of political correctness. The Manchu code retained a strong female shamanic element, albeit one that was also bureaucratized.³¹ The mildness and serenity of the Manchu house shaman (boigon saman) surely is grounded more in his or her (since members of either sex could be shamans) functions in a modified ancestor worship. The Nišan shamaness endowed with incredible strength and almost Dionysian qualities seems hardly to be the source of this bureaucratic official.

31 Nicola di Cosmo (1999), pp. 378–379.