

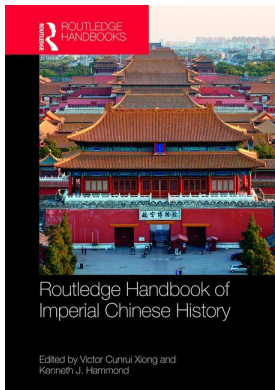
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Qing culture

*Richard Smith***Introduction**

Interpretations of Qing dynasty culture, like broader interpretations of the Qing dynasty's place in Chinese and world history, tend to revolve around the issue of “sinicization” (*Hanhua* 漢化 or 華化)—that is, the process by which non-Chinese conquest regimes adopted and assimilated certain aspects of traditional Chinese culture.¹ By “traditional Chinese culture,” I mean the basic institutions, linguistic practices, philosophies, religions, artistic and literary traditions, and social customs of the self-styled “Han people” or *Hanren* 漢人, who comprised approximately 95 percent of the population in China Proper (*neidi* 內地; i.e. the agricultural area below the Great Wall) during most of the imperial era. The best known of these dynasties of conquest are the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–534 CE), the Liao 遼 (907–1125), the Xi Xia 西夏 (1038–1227), the Jin 金 (1115–1234), the Yuan 元 (1206–1368), and the Qing 清 1636–1912. In each case, to varying degrees under varying circumstances, these regimes appropriated certain features of Chinese culture—especially the classical written script, rituals, institutions, religious practices, and artistic and literary traditions.

The Qing is generally considered to be the largest consolidated empire in Chinese history and by far the most successful dynasty of conquest. But what were the reasons for its phenomenal success? Some scholars, notably Ping-ti Ho and Pei Huang, have argued that the principal reason was the dynasty's self-conscious adoption and promotion of traditional Chinese culture, which appealed to both local and national elites. Others, identified as the “New Qing Historians,” and including scholars such as Pamela Crossley and Mark Elliott, maintain that the key to the political success of the Manchus was their hierarchically conceived multiculturalism—in particular, their ability to exploit cultural links with the non-Han peoples of Inner Asia and to differentiate the administration of the non-Han regions from the administration of China Proper. Obviously, there is a productive middle ground between these interpretive poles, which this essay seeks to identify.

In the following discussion, I shall devote comparatively little attention to Qing politics and economics, since they have already been ably discussed by my colleagues, Yang-wen Zheng and Nancy Park.

Language

The “official” written languages of the Qing dynasty were Manchu, Chinese, and Mongolian (and to a degree, Tibetan). Each of these languages became a political instrument, a convenient and effective means of communicating with different constituencies in a vast and diverse empire. The use of multiple languages also enabled the Qing rulers to gain access to different cultural traditions, thus enhancing their cultural repertoire without diminishing their own strong sense of ethnic identity. This is one place where arguments about “sinicization” often go awry. The Manchus did not become “Chinese” in any simple sense; they did, however, readily draw upon aspects of Chinese tradition that they found useful and/or appealing. It is true that over time, most Manchus in Banner garrisons eventually lost their ability to speak or write Manchu, but this does not mean that they abandoned all other aspects of their own culture.

Comparatively little research has been done on exactly how Chinese and the other languages of the empire evolved under the Qing, but we do know that, as in earlier periods of Chinese history, the Han people under foreign rule borrowed a number of words and expressions from other languages, both within and outside of China’s borders. Similarly, transliterations of Chinese words and terms became a part of spoken and written Manchu, especially in places affected by Chinese commerce and/or settlement. This latter process was facilitated by the early work of the famous translator Dahai 達海 (d. 1632), who, prior to the Qing conquest, modified the Manchu written script in order to take into account certain prevalent Chinese sounds.

The importance of the Chinese script to the unity and continuity of traditional Chinese culture can scarcely be overestimated. Although the spoken Chinese language was fragmented into at least a half dozen mutually unintelligible regional dialects (*diqu fangyan* 地區方言), each of which had any number of local variants (*difang hua* 地方話 or *tuhua* 土話), the standard written language could be understood by anyone who had mastered it, regardless of the dialect he or she spoke. Thus, there was no linguistic development in China comparable to the decline of Latin and the rise of national vernaculars in early modern Europe. Moreover, since the ancient classics and contemporary documents were all written in the same basic classical script (see the following), a Qing scholar had complete and essentially unmediated intellectual access to anything written in China during the past 2,000 years.

The most prestigious form of written Chinese was the classical script (*wenyan wen* 文言文; lit. “patterned words”), also known as “literary Chinese.” The other major form of Chinese writing, known as the vernacular script (*baihua wen* 白話文), was much easier to learn than classical Chinese—primarily because it replicated, to greater or lesser degrees, the words and grammatical structures of the spoken language. Although the written vernacular was employed primarily in works designed for literate non-elites—in particular, certain kinds of short stories, plays, and novels—many of these “popular” writings were enjoyed by all literate sectors of Chinese society, including scholars (see “Literature”).

As indicated earlier, the great prestige of the classical language throughout the imperial era derived primarily from the fact that it was not accessible through everyday speech. Learning it, in other words, was not simply a matter of replacing spoken sounds with written characters; classical texts had to be memorized. Students of classical Chinese began with specially designed Confucian primers such as the *Sanzi jing* 三字經 (Three-character classic), reciting passages aloud in rhythmic fashion, with no initial understanding of their meaning. These rudimentary texts were then carefully explained by individual tutors or classroom

teachers, and, by stages, students advanced to more complicated and difficult materials. The process of memorization, regurgitation, and explication eventually culminated in a complete mastery of the hallowed Four Books (*Sishu* 四書) and Five Classics (*Wujing* 五經) of Confucianism—a total of about 430,000 characters. These works, together with state-approved commentaries on them, were the foundation on which the Chinese civil service examination system was based.

By memorizing enormous amounts of classical literature in this way, Chinese children (and the children of many Manchu and Mongol Bannermen) attained the necessary skills to pass the exams, provided, of course, that they also had excellent calligraphy and had mastered a variety of poetic forms and the notoriously demanding eight-legged essay (*baqu wenzhang* 八股文章). To be sure, the memorization of Chinese texts was facilitated by the rhythm and balance of the classical script. Each character, when pronounced, was monosyllabic, and each occupied the same amount of space in a text, regardless of the number of strokes it contained. Thus, each character became a convenient rhythmic unit. This naturally encouraged the Chinese, perhaps more than any other culture group, to think and write in terms of polarities. In the words of the world-famous linguist Y. R. Chao (Zhao Yuanren), “I venture to think that if the Chinese language had words of such incommensurable rhythm as *male* and *female*, *heaven* and *earth*, *rational* and *[ab]surd*, there would never be such far-reaching conceptions as *yin* [and] *yang*.”

The terms *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 were used in three main ways in imperial China: (1) as cosmic forces that produced and animated all natural phenomena; (2) as terms used to identify recurrent, cyclical patterns of rise (*yang*) and decline (*yin*), waxing and waning; and (3) as comparative categories, describing dualistic relationships that were inherently unequal but almost invariably complementary. Virtually any aspect of Chinese experience could be explained in terms of these paired concepts, ranging from such mundane sensory perceptions as dark (*yin*) and light (*yang*), wet (*yin*) and dry (*yang*), to abstractions such as unreal (*yin*) and real (*yang*), non-being (*yin*) and being (*yang*). *Yinyang* relationships involved the notion of mutual dependence and harmony based on hierarchical difference. *Yin* qualities were generally considered inferior to *yang* qualities, but unity of opposites was always the Chinese cultural ideal. Moreover, the logic of *yinyang* thinking included the relativistic idea that something that was *yin* in one set of relationships could be *yang* in another. Thus, for instance, a wife might be considered *yin* in relation to her husband but *yang* in relation to her children.

Much that is most distinctive about traditional Chinese culture can be explained by reference to *yinyang* conceptions and to the elaborate correlative thinking associated with these ideas. *Yinyang* polarities and their many linguistic equivalents appear explicitly or implicitly in the description or evaluation of nearly every area of traditional Chinese life, from politics, cosmology, aesthetics, symbolism, and mythology to ancestor worship, divination, medicine, science, and sex. All classes of traditional Chinese literature employed *yinyang* terminology and/or symbolism, from the exalted Confucian classics to popular proverbs. In fact, good poetry and prose could not be written without them.

Two things seem especially significant about *yinyang*-style polarities. The first is that for most of them, descriptions such as antithesis, contradiction, and dichotomy are misleading, since the terms involved usually imply either complementary opposition or cyclical alternation. The second is that the widespread use of such polarities—especially in classical prose and formal philosophy—suggests a distinctive attitude toward abstraction—one in which abstract ideas tend to be expressed in concrete terms, without dialectical resolution into a new abstract term, as in the Indo-European linguistic tradition.

One other point about the classical Chinese language is worthy of note. Because written characters had the same basic set of meanings, regardless of how they might be pronounced, the classical Chinese script became a convenient medium for expressing ideas not only in China but also in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Thus, well into the nineteenth century (and in some cases beyond), Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese elites all continued to use classical Chinese as their principal means of written communication. This, of course, only fed China's already well-nourished sense of cultural superiority.

Philosophy

As in previous periods of late imperial China, Confucianism (sometimes identified as Ruxue 儒學 or the Learning of the Scholars) was the dominant philosophy in Qing times. Although the boundaries of Qing Confucianism shifted significantly under Manchu rule, we can identify several basic patterns of affiliation within which these shifts took place. As had been the case during much of the Ming dynasty, the Qing emperors generally supported Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200 CE) School of Principle (*lixue* 理學)—also known as the Cheng-Zhu 程朱 School—as their official orthodoxy. Emphasizing loyalty to the sovereign, moral cultivation, and the power of positive example, Cheng-Zhu Learning was distilled in the highly influential examination syllabus known as the *Xingli jingyi* 性理精義 (essential ideas of nature and principle), commissioned by the Kangxi emperor in the early eighteenth century.

The so-called Tongcheng 桐城 School, centered on a county by this name in Anhui province, embraced Zhu Xi's moral idealism, but placed particular emphasis on ancient prose literature as a “vehicle of Confucian faith.” Proponents of this approach, like other less literarily inclined advocates of Cheng-Zhu Confucianism, were suspicious of, if not actively hostile toward, the School of Evidential Research (*kaozheng xue* 考證學), whose iconoclastic advocates emerged as a “national elite” from the prosperous Yangzi River delta during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

These imaginative *kaozheng* scholars—armed with sophisticated philological techniques and passionately committed to “seeking truth from facts” (*shishi qiú shì* 實事求是)—devoted themselves primarily to textual criticism, although a number of them also engaged in broader scientific inquiry as well. Their research challenged certain orthodox interpretations of the Confucian classics, and even called into question the authenticity of some received texts. Although the overall “subversive” effect of *kaozheng* scholarship is a matter of debate, there can be no doubt that this school transformed Qing intellectual life in significant ways.

During the eighteenth century, Qing scholars routinely identified the School of Evidential Research with Han Learning—so named because its intellectual progenitors rejected Song-Ming sources in favor of earlier materials dating from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). These writings from the Song and Ming eras—identified by most Western scholars as “Neo-Confucian”—included not only the Cheng-Zhu School of Principle but also the far more intuitive “School of the Mind” (*Xinxue* 心學), associated with Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1192) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529). Strictly speaking, however, Han Learning refers to a separate intellectual movement identified with individuals who focused primarily on materials from the latter part of the Han. Those who gravitated to sources from the earlier Han came to be identified as members of the New Text School (*Jinwen xue* 今文學).

The New Text School, also called the Gongyang 公羊 School, stood on the intellectual frontier between Song and Han Learning. It grew out of a late eighteenth-century revival of a much earlier controversy over the authenticity of certain versions of the Confucian classics written in an ancient form of Chinese characters known as *guwen* 古文 (“old-style script”).

These “old text” versions had been considered orthodox since the Later Han dynasty, when they replaced a set of the classics written in the “new-style script” (*jimwen*) of the Early Han. But Qing *kaozheng* scholars began to uncover systematic evidence of forgeries in some of these Old Text versions of the classics, leading to a fierce debate over issues such as the place of Confucius in Chinese history and the role of institutional change within the Confucian tradition.

The School of Statecraft (Jingshi xue 經世學), as its name implies, took practical administration as its central concern, avoiding the moralistic extremes of Song Learning as well as the scholastic extremes of Han Learning. Although already an active intellectual force in the eighteenth century, Statecraft Learning rapidly gained momentum in the nineteenth century, as dynastic decline underscored the need for practical solutions to China’s pressing problems. Some statecraft-oriented scholars, including Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1856) and Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), also had a deep and abiding interest in New Text scholarship, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that the progressive potential of New Text Confucianism became fully apparent. At that time, reform-minded exponents of New Text learning—notably Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) and his able student, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929)—moved to center stage in Qing political and intellectual life. A central feature of Kang’s spiritually inspired New Text approach was a “socio-moral pragmatism,” which favored a free “ideological” interpretation of Confucianism over a literal and prosaic understanding.

Many other schools of Confucian thought arose during the Qing dynasty. Some were inspired by idiosyncratic individualists such as the avowedly anti-scholastic Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704) and his famous disciple, Li Gong 李塉 (1659–1733). Other schools developed from the eclectic thought of renowned scholars such as Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1848) and Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–72). The syncretic tendencies of Chinese thought made it possible for a scholar-official like Zeng to esteem the literary and moral concerns of the Tongcheng School, and yet at the same time to recognize the merits of Han Learning, to gravitate toward the School of Statecraft in seeking solutions to the dynasty’s administrative problems, and even to employ essentially Legalist (Fajia 法家) methods in order to achieve the idealistic aims of Mencius 孟子 (372–289 BCE). A distinctive feature of Zeng’s thought, like that of many *kaozheng* scholars of his time and earlier, was an emphasis on *li* 禮—by which he meant not only rules of social usage, rituals, and ceremonies, but also laws and institutions—as the common denominator of China’s complex Confucian tradition.

During the Qing period, as in earlier times, one’s intellectual posture was ordinarily a function of several major variables: (1) personality and family background, (2) educational experience, (3) personal and dynastic fortunes, and (4) career concerns. Political factors were especially important in determining the popularity of a certain school of thought at a particular time, but the attachment of any individual to a given point of view might well hinge on career concerns. Thus, for example, young students and gentry awaiting official appointment could be expected to emphasize Song idealism, if only because a mastery of Zhu Xi’s thought brought the possibility of personal advancement. Officials, on the other hand, might publicly espouse Neo-Confucian moral principles only to seek administrative guidance from the School of Statecraft. And retired officials might find satisfaction in pure scholarship and the contemplative life, studying the *Yijing* and perhaps also investigating the officially disparaged but still attractive ideas of Wang Yangming, the Daoists, and even the Buddhists.

For the Qing elite, the *yang* of Confucian social responsibility was balanced by the *yin* of Daoist escape into nature. Unlike Confucianism, which for virtually all Qing scholars was a way of life, if not a living faith, Daoism—at least in its philosophical form—was essentially a

state of mind. It provided an emotional and intellectual escape valve for world-weary Confucians, trammled by social responsibility. The writings of Daoist philosophers such as Laozi 老子 (tradit. sixth century BCE) and Zhuangzi 莊子 (tradit. fourth century BCE) were fresh and poetic, often playful, and almost always paradoxical. They admired the weak, accepted the relativity of things, advocated spiritual release, and above all sought communion with nature. The concrete symbols of Daoism were yin: water, the female, the child, the emptiness of the valley, and the uncarved block of wood (*pu* 樸).

For the most part, Chinese scholars have distinguished sharply between “philosophical” Daoism (Daojia 道家) and “religious” Daoism (Daojiao 道教). A number of Western scholars have resisted this dichotomy, arguing that Daoist thought is part of a continuum that encompasses both orientations, and there is, of course, a point to their arguments. Certainly the corpus of “Daoist” texts known as the *Daozang* 道藏 (Repository of the Dao) makes no clear distinctions of this sort. Moreover, practices such as Daoist “alchemy” (see next section), which were directed toward achieving longevity and immortality, have antecedents in early Daoist philosophical texts. These alchemical works involve what might be described as “magic,” but they also involve meditation and moral cultivation—not unlike Confucianism and Buddhism. Nonetheless, there are, I believe, valid heuristic reasons for separating “philosophy” (as thought) and “religion” (as practice), as long as we recognize that religion embodies thought and philosophy may entail practice.

The essence of philosophical Daoism is reflected in two famous early works: the *Daode jing* 道德經 (The Way and its power) and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 ([The words of] Master Zhuang). The basic Daoist idea is simply to do what comes naturally—no striving and no over-exerting (*wuwei* 無為; lit. “doing nothing”). “No action is taken,” Laozi asserts, “and yet nothing is left undone.” Sustained by this viewpoint, the Daoist “sage” declares:

I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed. I love tranquility and the people themselves become correct. I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous. I have no desires and the people of themselves become simple.

Daoist notions of relativity also undermined the seemingly absolute value system of Confucianism. Listen, for example, to Zhuangzi discussing “right” and “wrong:”

It is because there is right, that there is wrong; it is because there is wrong, that there is right. . . . According to the other, there is one kind of right and wrong. According to the self there is another kind of right and wrong. But really are there such distinctions as the self and the other, or are there no such distinctions? When the self and the other [or the “this” and the “that”] lose their contrariness [mutually exclusive opposition] we have the very essence of the *dao* 道.

In many ways, then, Confucianism and Daoism were at odds. Where Confucianism stressed others, Daoism tended to stress self. Where Confucians sought wisdom, Daoists sought blissful ignorance. Where Confucians esteemed ritual and self-control, Daoists valued spontaneity and freedom from artificial constraints. Where Confucianism stressed hierarchy, Daoists emphasized equality; and where Confucians valued refinement (*wen*), Daoists prized primitivity. What to Confucians were cosmic virtues were to Daoists simply arbitrary labels. And yet there was just enough affinity between Confucianism and Daoism to ensure an enduring philosophical partnership. Both schools of thought cherished the ideal of harmony and oneness with nature (although one posited a moral universe and the other, an amoral

one); each shared a sense of the interrelatedness of all things; and each, in its own way, advocated humility, passivity, simplicity, and, above all, the avoidance of selfish desires. In short, Confucianism gave Chinese life structure and purpose, while Daoism encouraged freedom of expression and artistic creativity.

Religion

Religious life in the Qing period was especially rich and varied, owing in part to the multiculturalism of the Manchus. Probably at no other time since the Mongol-dominated Yuan dynasty had China's rulers evinced such a wide-open and tolerant attitude toward religion. Evelyn Rawski has discussed at length the various forms of religious activity engaged in by the Manchus, from official state sacrifices modeled on Ming practices, to imperially sponsored state shamanism and patronage of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism, to "private rituals" within the Qing inner court, which combined "shamanic, Daoist, Chinese Buddhist, Tibetan Buddhist, and popular religious traditions." These three forms of worship had different but related purposes. In Rawski's apt formulation: "If sacrifices at the state altars were about rulership, and Qing religious patronage was about politics, the private rituals were about the court as a household, a family writ large."

Arthur Wolf has written: "Assessed in terms of its long-range impact on the people, . . . [the Chinese government] appears to have been one of the most potent governments ever known, for it created a religion in its own image. Its firm grip on the popular imagination may be one reason the imperial government survived so long despite its failings." There is much to commend this view. To a remarkable extent, the organization of traditional Chinese religion mirrored the fundamental assumptions of Chinese bureaucratic behavior. This was true not only of official state sacrifices (*sidian* 祀典), as might well be expected, but also of institutional Buddhism, religious Daoism, and even popular religion.

Aside from the exclusively Manchu shamanistic observances undertaken by the Imperial Household Department (Chinese: *neiwu fu* 內務府; Manchu: *dorgi baita be uheri kadalara yamun*), official state sacrifices took place at three administrative levels—Beijing, provincial capitals, and county seats. They were designated, respectively, great sacrifices (*dasi* 大祀), middle sacrifices (*zhongsi* 中祀), and common sacrifices (*qunsi* 群祀 or *xiaosi* 小祀). At each administrative level, designated civil officials performed elaborate ceremonies in accordance with long-standing ritual prescriptions. These included ritual bathing, fasting, prostrations, prayers, and thanksgiving offerings of incense, lighted candles, precious objects, fruits, and food and wine together with music and ritual posturing or dancing.

According to the Collected Statutes of the Qing (Da Qing huidian 大清會典), official religious ceremonies had several specific purposes. Some deities were worshipped for the simple purpose of expressing gratitude and veneration, others for the beneficial or protective influences the deities were supposed to exert, and still others for their outstanding civil virtues and/or military services. Some spirits were worshipped for fear that they would bring calamities to the people if not suitably appeased. But behind these rather specific purposes lay a more general goal: to undergird the prestige and political authority of the state.

Of the two major non-governmental religions of imperial China—Buddhism and Religious Daoism—Buddhism had by far the greater intellectual appeal, as well as a greater institutional visibility and a larger number of both clerics and identifiable lay adherents. Although Religious Daoism enjoyed substantial imperial patronage in the late Ming period, it suffered some discrimination at the hands of the Qing emperors, who were ardent advocates of Tibetan Buddhism as well as traditional Chinese Buddhism. Under the patronage

of the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong emperors, a total of thirty-two Tibetan Buddhist temples were renovated or built in Beijing, and, in other parts of the empire, dozens of Chinese Buddhist monasteries were converted into Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. In addition, the Manchus established more than 1,000 monasteries and temples in Mongolia, Xinjiang, and other areas on the Chinese periphery. These religious sites became the *de facto* centralized state institutions of a decentralized nomadic society. According to some estimates, more than 30 percent of the males in Mongolia during the Qianlong reign (1735–96) were lamas living in monasteries.

The school of Tibetan Buddhism patronized by the Manchus was known as the dGe lugs pa (aka Gelukpa) or “Yellow Hat” sect. This sect, which developed in Tibet during the fifteenth century, focused in particular on Mādhyamika or “Middle Doctrine” Buddhist teachings. Philosophically speaking, the goal of this school was to reconcile notions of “conventional reality” (*suti* 俗體) and “ultimate reality” (Chinese: *zhenti* 真體) by denying, in effect, any meaningful distinction between them. In practice, Tibetan Buddhism entailed not only the worship of deities in shrines, but also the use of Vajrayāna (Tantric) rituals. These esoteric exercises, which involved meditation and deity-visualization techniques, were designed to allow adherents to gain access to cosmic powers, and to achieve mental and physical transformation, thus providing a direct route to Nirvana. Under Qing imperial sponsorship, elements of Mongol and Chinese religious practice were added to Tibetan Buddhism over time; thus, for instance, the Chinese God of War (the deified historical hero known as Guan Yu 關羽) came to be added to Tibetan Buddhist altars during the Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns.

The four main sects associated with Chinese (as opposed to Tibetan) Buddhism in Qing times were: (1) the Tiantai 天台 or Lotus (Fahua 法華) School; (2) the Huayan 華嚴 (lit., Flowery Splendor) School; (3) the Pure Land School (Jingtu 淨土); and (4) the Chan 禪 or Meditation School, known also as Zen (the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character *chan*, meditation). Indicative of both the syncretic capacity of traditional Chinese thought and the accommodating outlook of Mahayana Buddhism, the Chinese had a common saying: “The Tiantai and Huayan Schools for [metaphysical] doctrine and the Jingtu and Chan Schools for practice.” The scriptural common denominator of most Chinese Buddhist schools was the so-called Lotus Sutra (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經), a fascinating dramatic work blending elements of philosophy, theology, pageantry, and popular fable. In the fashion of the *Yijing*, the ideas of the Lotus Sutra were presented not in abstract terms but in concrete images and living symbols.

The most popular school of Chinese Buddhism in Qing times was the Pure Land School. On the whole, this eclectic teaching avoided both the intense mental discipline of Chan and the scriptural and doctrinal emphasis of Tiantai and Huayan. The central focus of the Pure Land School was on salvation through faith and good works. The reward was rebirth in the Western Paradise (Xitian 西天), presided over by Amitabha (Chinese: Amituo Fo 阿彌陀佛)—the “Buddha of Immeasurable Radiance” (Wuliang guang Fo 無量光佛). Chinese descriptions of this beautiful, enchanting, and serene land are as enticing as the descriptions of the bureaucratic purgatory known as the Courts of Judgment (*diju* 地獄) are terrifying. These “courts” are sometimes described as “hells,” since the “soul” of the departed is subject to various tortures before being reborn, depending on the sins committed in the previous life (for instance, lack of filial piety and/or lack of respect for elders).

As is well known, Religious Daoism owed much to institutional Buddhism. Wing-tsit Chan goes so far as to describe it as “a wholesale imitation of Buddhism, notably in its clergy, temples, images, ceremonies and canon.” But despite Religious Daoism’s profound cultural debt to

Buddhism, it was not simply a pale reflection of the “sinicized” Indian import. Not only did formal Daoist ritual and symbolism differ significantly from that of institutional Buddhism, but the major thrust of Daoist religion ran counter to the conventional Buddhist emphasis on reincarnation. For all the diversity of Religious Daoist beliefs and practices, the aim was not primarily to break the chain of causation through the elimination of consciousness, but rather to achieve a special kind of transcendence, manifest in the ability to know and manipulate the supernatural environment. And although Religious Daoism shared with philosophical Daoism an organic view of man and the universe, the goal of Religious Daoist ritual and personal regimen (meditative, dietary, pharmacological, gymnastic, and sexual) was not merely to find one’s niche in the cosmic order, but to acquire a form of cosmic power. Religious Daoism offered more than psychic release; it held the promise of longevity, invulnerability, and perhaps immortality.

Two main schools of Religious Daoism flourished in late imperial times: the so-called Northern School, or Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Reality) Sect, and the Southern School, or Zhengyi 正一 (True Unity) Sect. The Complete Reality Sect arose during the Song dynasty in response to Chan Buddhism. Like devotees of Chan, members of this Northern School preferred the rigors of monastic discipline. There was a life of celibacy, vegetarianism, and abstention from alcoholic drinks. The spiritual headquarters of the Complete Reality Sect were located in Beijing, at the White Cloud Monastery 白雲觀. The True Unity Sect, which traced its spiritual origins to the late Han period, had its headquarters in Lunghua Mountain 龍華山, Jiangxi province. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the True Unity Sect enjoyed what amounted to “liturgical hegemony” among the various schools of Religious Daoism in Qing times, and continued to receive a measure of support from the imperial court.

The Qing government’s approach to Buddhism and Religious Daoism was at once supportive and suspicious. On the one hand, the state recognized that Buddhist and Daoist monasteries and temples provided social services and gave local communities a sense of religious solidarity that transcended local cults. Moreover, the value systems of both Buddhism and Religious Daoism reflected heavy Confucian influence. Indeed, all orthodox religious sects in China, and a good number of countercultural groups as well, admired the Confucian virtues of loyalty, faithfulness, integrity, duty, and filial piety. The curriculum in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries often included works from the classical canon, and Confucian values found their way to the popular masses in the form of vernacular religious tracts such as *shan-shu* 善書 (“morality books”) and *baojuan* 寶卷 (“precious scrolls”).

On the other hand, the Qing government remained suspicious of all organizations outside the system of official sacrifices, including monasteries and temples. As a result, the state imposed legal limits on the size of the Buddhist and Daoist clergy, the number of officially sanctioned monasteries and temples, and the scope of their regular religious activities. Abbots, priests, and nuns were always subject to indirect state supervision and remained at the beck and call of the emperor and his agents.

Yet state control of religion in China was never complete. At the community level in particular, members of the Buddhist and Daoist establishment, as well as ritual specialists of all types, played a major role in local festivals and related rituals virtually independent of the state. In Chinese villages, towns, and cities, unauthorized popular sacrifices (*minsi* 民祀) often competed successfully with official sacrifices (*guansi* 官祀), much to the dismay of bureaucrats and the throne.

Popular religious temples (*miao* 廟, *ci* 祠, etc.) in urban and rural areas were often linked with corporate common-interest organizations, including neighborhoods, guilds, and societies (*hui* 會 or *tang* 堂) based on ties of kinship, common surname, home area, profession, scholarly interest, religious outlook, or simple mutual aid. Like Buddhist monasteries, Daoist

temples, and lineage organizations, many of these ritually cohesive units performed valuable social services, including education and welfare; but from the Qing government's standpoint (and often in fact), a thin line separated "legitimate" associations and lodges from the subversive "secret societies" that went by the same generic names. Even clan and lineage ritual activities were cause for concern. Although the state recognized the positive role of kin groups in promoting orthodox values, providing social services, and maintaining local control, it feared all well-organized, but non-official, corporate entities, especially those with particularistic loyalties and substantial economic resources and manpower.

From the Qing government's standpoint, heresy was less a matter of ideology per se than of practice. Although some officially sanctioned sources defined "heretical teachings" (*xiejiao* 邪教) as anything "outside the Five Classics and Four Books" (that is, outside of Confucianism), what the state feared most was the usurpation of its prerogatives through the manipulation of orthodox ceremonial forms and symbols. Hence, we find that Qing law prescribed severe penalties for activities deemed subversive (or potentially subversive) of the existing ritual system, including destroying sacred altars or shrines, publishing unauthorized calendars, privately worshiping Heaven or the North Star (the exclusive prerogatives of the emperor), keeping at home astronomical instruments and charts, and so forth. *Yinyang* fortune-tellers (*yinyang shushi* 陰陽術士) were prohibited from entering the houses of civil and military officers and "falsely" (*wangyan* 妄言) prophesying fortune or misfortune. Magicians, shamans, and other ritual specialists were forbidden to summon "heretical spirits" (*xieshen* 邪神), write charms, carry idols, pray to saints, offer incense, hold night meetings, perform "heretical arts" (*xieshu* 邪術), write books on sorcery (*yaoshu* 妖書), or promote "heretical formulas" (*xieyan* 邪言). Although these and other heretical crimes were seldom rigorously defined and the laws not always enforced, their statutory existence, together with evidence from other sources, suggests the state's preoccupation with matters of ritual legitimacy.

Art

One of the most important themes in the history of Qing visual and material culture is the role of the state. In the first place, the Manchus saw patronage of Chinese art as a means of demonstrating their cultural legitimacy, and as a way to "glorify" the dynasty. Hence, most Qing emperors became avid collectors of Chinese-style arts and crafts (according to one estimate, the Qianlong emperor owned "more than a million objects"), as well as practitioners of traditionally esteemed Chinese artistic activities such as painting and calligraphy. They also used Buddhist art and architecture to sustain their image as Cakravartin ("universal") rulers, and commissioned an enormous number of art works and craft productions to decorate their palaces and to present as gifts to officials, loyal subjects, and foreign emissaries. Furthermore, they employed court painters to produce impressive imperial portraits, and to document their court-sponsored civil and military activities—from campaigns against rebels and other enemies, to imperial tours and the receipt of tributary envoys and products.

Traditionally, Chinese scholars considered two types of art worthwhile: that which they enjoyed but did not create, and that which they created and therefore esteemed most. The former included the work of skilled craftsmen, from elegant ancient bronzes to colorful contemporary ceramics; the latter embraced the refined arts of the brush—painting and calligraphy. Occupying a fluid middle ground were decorative textiles, often executed in exquisite detail by talented elite women. Popular art—from temple paintings and religious icons to folk crafts such as basketwork, fans, umbrellas, toys, and paper cuts—flourished throughout the Qing period, but Chinese connoisseurs seldom took it seriously.

The Qing dynasty has been characterized as “an antiquarian age when, as never before, men looked back into the past.” This impulse was known as *fugu* 復古—lit., “the restoration of antiquity.” But during the first century and a half of Manchu rule, there was, in fact, considerable experimentation in the arts. Part of the impetus may have been the traumatic effect of the Qing conquest, which provided loyalist painters such as Gong Xian 龔賢 (1620–1689) with the tortured artistic theme of “a world gone corrupt.” Another factor, unsettling in a different way but also encouraging innovation, was the rapid growth of commercial wealth, particularly in the lower Yangzi region. There, the blending of literati and merchant culture produced new fashions. The result was an enormous demand among consumers for innovative forms, colors, styles, and textures. Finally, there was the expanding foreign market for Chinese arts and crafts, especially porcelain. Although many of these goods came to be designed explicitly for export to the West, their production unquestionably influenced Chinese tastes.

Among the most accomplished painters of the early Qing were the so-called Six Masters (Qing liujia 清六家): Wang Shihmin 王時敏 (1592–1680), Wang Hui 王翬 (1632–1717), Wang Jian 王鑾 (1598–1677), Wang Yuanqi 王原祁 (1642–1715), Wu Li 吳歷 (1632–1718), and Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633–1690). The works of each artist reveal great skill, decorum, and a deep knowledge about both their subject matter and the complex history of literati painting (*wenren hua* 文人畫). Although the Kangxi emperor patronized two of the painters—Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi—the others remained loyal to the memory of the Ming dynasty and refused to serve the throne. In any case, identification with the “orthodoxy” of the Qing imperial court did not stifle creativity. Indeed, Wang Yuanqi was probably the most original of the Six Masters. His brilliant interpretations of past models and styles, and his “passion for pure form” put Wang on a plane with the best “Individualist” painters of the Qing period.

The most famous and creative of the early “Individualist” painters were Zhu Da 朱耷 (also known as Bada Shanren 八大山人, 1626–c. 1705), Kuncan 髡殘 (also known as Shixi 石谿, c. 1610–c. 1670), Shitao 石濤 (also known as Yuanji 原濟, 1641–c. 1710), and Gong Xian. Sherman Lee summarizes the distinctiveness of their work:

Kuncan’s hairy and tangled landscapes; Zhu Da’s abbreviated but firm brushwork recalling that of another, earlier eccentric, Xu Wei; Yuanji’s brilliant usage of wash, unusual compositions, and directly observed images, recalling the approach of Zhang Hong; and Gong Xian’s deep and somber ink-play of light and shade; all justify their unusually high place in Chinese art history. The most various of the four was certainly Yuanji and that variety endears him particularly to modern critics and collectors.

These “free spirits”—like the Six Masters and virtually all other Qing painters—acknowledged a debt to tradition. Shitao, for example, in his *Huayu lu* 畫語錄 (record of talks on painting) admits that for many years he had painted and written, declaring his independence of orthodox methods, only to discover that the way he thought was his own, was actually “the *dao* 道 of the ancients.”

The Qing period may well have been the heyday of women painters and calligraphers in China. Most of them were the literate wives or concubines of Chinese scholars, and a number made their mark in poetry as well as painting. Some sold their artwork, while others gave instruction to friends and family or to empresses, princesses, and concubines at court. Among many distinguished women painters of the Qing period was Chen Shu 陳書 (1660–1736), who was once described as surpassing the renowned male painter from Suzhou, Chen Chun 陳淳 (1483–1544), in the vigor and originality of her brushstrokes.

The Qing court's patronage of painters, calligraphers, and craftsmen naturally affected Chinese artistic developments, usually for the better. But the acquisition of artworks from previous periods by the Qing monarchs—particularly the Qianlong emperor—had the negative effect of depriving artists in the provinces of the opportunity to study them. Financial strains during the latter part of the Qianlong reign caused the emperor to cut back on his sponsorship and collection of artwork, however, and by the end of the eighteenth century at the latest, the dominant influence on Chinese art was private patronage, together with the ever greater commercialization of production.

Meanwhile, so-called vernacular painting flourished. It was produced primarily by urban-based Chinese artists for everyday domestic and other uses. These works, including a new genre called “beautiful women paintings” (*meiren hua* 美人畫), were executed in the “academic” manner of fine-line drawing and colors known generally as *gongbi* 工筆, as opposed to the more calligraphic style of painting known as *xieyi* 寫意 (lit., “the writing of ideas”). Vernacular paintings of this sort, which often drew upon Western elements of style and devices of representation, have been misguidedly underappreciated by Chinese connoisseurs and collectors, both now and in the past.

During the nineteenth century, Qing painting and calligraphy seem to have lost a considerable amount of vigor and vitality. Part of the problem was lack of inspiration, an unfortunate consequence of the Qianlong emperor's aggressive campaign to acquire local artworks for his imperial collection. Another difficulty was financial exigency, which diminished the court's support for painting, calligraphy, and craft production. Meanwhile, many “independent” Chinese artists and calligraphers went to one of two extremes—either they surrendered to the demands of patrons and other customers for hastily produced paintings, or they became overly academic in their artistic approach. Increasingly, we find late Qing works that were simply paintings about painting, “art-historical art.” Too often the artists' inspiration was not nature but the tradition itself. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that the late Qing was not nearly as artistically sterile as it has often been portrayed. During the nineteenth century, for example, several bold regional styles either emerged for the first time or acquired new life, and cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton) became centers of vibrant artistic activity.

Literature

The Chinese literary tradition shared with the Chinese artistic tradition many fundamental assumptions about past models, aesthetics, ethics, and cosmology. Chinese literature was, however, much more wide-ranging in its subject matter, and, by Ming–Qing times at least, more obviously the province of women writers than it had been in previous periods. As was the case during the Ming, the majority of woman writers in Qing times wrote poetry in classical Chinese. The reason is that poetry was viewed as an exalted literary form, deemed appropriate for elite women, whereas vernacular fiction of almost any sort was socially disesteemed. It should be noted, however, that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, a number of talented women writers created popular and influential works of fiction using a special form of rhymed narrative known as *tanci* 彈詞.

Although a great stylistic gap separated popular vernacular literature from more orthodox classical-style writings, there were certain affinities. In the first place, both kinds of literature tended to reflect elite values. Second, popular equivalents existed for nearly every kind of elite literature. Third, in truth, the elite enjoyed certain types of popular literature (such as novels) as much as, if not more than, the less privileged masses. Thus, from the standpoint

of both content and appeal, vernacular literature provides us with a valuable perspective on life in late imperial China—and not just for the Han people. It is clear that the Manchus and Mongols also enjoyed vernacular Chinese literature in translation—novels in particular. In fact, all major Ming–Qing novels, several major plays, and a large number of more minor fictional works were rendered into Manchu. Manchu culture found its way into Chinese vernacular literature not only through borrowed terms and borrowed historical motifs but also in the form of a genre known as “youth books” (*zidi shu* 子弟書), which flourished in the Beijing area from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth.

In literature, as in art, the Qing was a period of considerable vitality, especially in genres such as song lyrics, classical poetry, parallel prose, classical prose, classical tales, and novels. Material prosperity, the expansion of mass printing, and the growth of popular literacy under the Manchus produced an unprecedented demand for, and supply of, books. At the same time, a consuming interest in all aspects of traditional Chinese culture led Qing scholars (including some Manchus and Mongols) to produce great numbers of antiquarian studies, critical essays, histories, biographies, and gazetteers. More ambitious projects, such as encyclopedias, collections of essays, and literary anthologies, were also undertaken, both by the throne and by energetic private individuals. In theory, these works were designed to provide inspired guidance for the present and the future based on a glorious past; but in practice, they often betrayed narrow scholarly prejudices and sometimes led to destructive factional rivalries.

An outstanding feature of many Chinese scholars in late imperial times was their astonishing productivity and literary versatility. Take, for example, Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), a famous Jiangsu literatus “not untypical” of the Ming–Qing transition era, who had a preliminary version of his collected works published in 1643 in 110 *juan*. This collection included poetry (21 *juan*), prefaces and postfaces (17), biographical and genealogical sketches (10), obituaries and epitaphs (20), funeral odes and eulogies (2), essays (6), historical annotations (5), critiques of poetry (5), memorials (2), other official documents (13), and letters and miscellany (9). To this corpus, Qian eventually added a supplement in 50 *juan*. In addition, he produced an anthology of Ming poetry in 81 *juan*, a draft history of the Ming dynasty in 100 *juan*, and annotated editions of several Buddhist texts. The Qing monarchs also aspired to such productivity and versatility—most notably the prolific, but at times rather pedestrian, Qianlong emperor.

Poetry was the highest achievement in Qing literary life. As indicated earlier, the classical Chinese language was for poetic expression. Even ordinary prose had an evocative, ambiguous, rhythmic quality. Poetry—which as a generic category should include not only the various types of *shi* 詩 and lyric verse (*ci* 詞) but also “song-poems” (*qu* 曲) and rhyme prose or “rhapsody” (*fu* 賦)—gave full scope to the creative potential of the language. The grammatical flexibility of classical Chinese, as well as the multiple meanings and subtle ambiguities of each character, allowed Chinese poets to express a wide range of ideas and emotions with vividness, economy, grace, and power.

Although the Qing was not, on the whole, known as a period of poetic invention, there were a number of talented male poet-critics of the era who kept previous traditions alive and well. In the early years of the dynasty, Ming loyalists such as Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–95), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82), and Wang Fuzhi (1619–92) performed this function. Later, during the Kangxi era, individuals such as Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) and Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) exerted enormous influence in Chinese poetic circles. In the High Qing, Shen Deqian 沈德潛 (1673–1769), Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693–1765), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798), Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818), and Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1732–1815) did the same. And in the late Qing period, poets such as Gong Zizhen 龔自珍 (1792–1841), Wei

Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), Jin He 金和 (1819–1885), Huang Zunxian 黃遵憲 (1848–1905), and Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927) developed substantial reputations.

On the whole, Qing women poets (whether Chinese, Manchou, or Mongol), like their counterparts in art, found it necessary to employ the tools and techniques of the dominant male culture. It has therefore been said that women writers in the Qing dynasty were largely dependent on a language they did not create. But the more we find out about these women, the more evident it is that they commanded the language rather than simply submitting to it. They wrote powerfully in a wide variety of genres, including not only verse of all sorts (their principle focus), but also parallel prose, plays, *tanci*, and even novels. Moreover, the subject matter of these writings ranged broadly and had wide appeal. It may be true, as some have claimed, that Chinese women writers found their most important audience in each other.

But the biographical material included in works such as Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China* (1999) and Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, eds., *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (2004) indicates clearly that many women authors reached a wider appreciative audience. Several of these authors are worth mentioning by name here: Xu Can 徐燦 (c. 1610–c. 1677), Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–c. 1706), Li Yin 李因 (1616–85); Wu Qi 吳琪 (mid-17th century), Lin Yining 林以寧 (1655–c. 1730), Mao Xiuhui 毛秀惠 (fl. 1735), Wang Yuzhen 汪玉軫 (late 18th century), Wu Guichen 吳規臣 (eighteenth century), Sun Yunhe 孫雲鶴 (late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries), Wang Duan 汪端 (1793–1839), Gu Taiqing 顧太清 (1799–c. 1876), and Wu Zao 吳藻 (1799–1863). I have singled out these individuals not only because they were excellent poets, but also because—with the partial exceptions of Wang Duan and Wu Zao, who had particularly spectacular literary gifts—they were well known for their painting and/or calligraphy as well as their poetry.

Although no major literary figure in China after the first century CE attempted to write his or her principal works in a language consonant with the spoken language, the written vernacular still enjoyed considerable popularity throughout much of the imperial era—especially from the Tang period onward. During the Qing dynasty, a variety of vernacular works circulated widely, reflecting, as well as contributing to, the growth of basic literacy in China—estimated by some to be as high as 45 percent for males and 10 percent for females. Although not as succinct, exalted, or aesthetically pleasing as classical Chinese, the vernacular was comparatively easy to learn, direct, colorful, and often extremely forceful.

The vast majority of vernacular writings in Qing China, including short stories, plays, and novels, reflected conventional elite values, including such popular Buddhist and Religious Daoist tracts as the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Tract of Taishang on action and response) and the *Bu feiqian gongde lu* 不費錢功德錄 (Meritorious deeds at no cost). Although based on the idea of divine retribution and buttressed by other religious notions, these works employed a great deal of elite symbolism and had a decidedly ethical, this-worldly cast.

Perhaps the most famous play of the Qing period is *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (*Peach blossom fan*; 1708). Written by a descendant of Confucius named Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718), *Peach Blossom Fan* ranks as one of the greatest plays in the Chinese language by virtue of its historical vision, dramatic construction, and literary quality. Among the several outstanding novels of the Qing period are *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 (The scholars) by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701–1754), *Rou putuan* 肉蒲團 (Carnal prayer mat), attributed by some to the idiosyncratic dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80), *Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣 (Flowers in the mirror) by Li Ruzhen 李如珍 (c. 1763–1830), *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記 (The travels of Lao Can) by Liu E 劉鶚 (1857–1909), *Ershi nian mudu guai xianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀 (Bizarre happenings eye-witnessed over two decades) by Wu Woyao 吳沃堯 (1867–1910), and, of course, the supreme

achievement of vernacular literature in the Qing period, *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber; aka Dream of red mansions).

The first 80 chapters of this massive and elegant work, commonly known as *Shiitou ji* 石頭記 (Story of the Stone), were written by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (c. 1715–1763), a Chinese bondservant in the Banner organization and a talented painter; the last 40 chapters are generally attributed to Gao E 高鶚 (fl. 1791), a full-fledged Bannerman and a degree-holding scholar. Some versions of the full 120-chapter work consist of nearly 1,300 pages and about 700,000 words. The novel contains at least thirty major figures and some 400 minor ones, ranged all along the Chinese social spectrum. Yet, as numerous as these characters are, Fang Chao-ying rightly observes that

they intermingle in a wonderful unity, each individual constituting an integral member of a large family group, sharing its glory and its shame, contributing to its prosperity or its ruin. Some, taking it for granted that the family fortune is irreversible, spend their days in emotional excesses or in sensual pleasures. Some, who are avaricious, contrive to profit by mismanagement of the family estate. Some foresee the dangers and so plan for their own futures; others voice warnings, but their words go unheeded. Such a panorama of complex human emotions, involving tens of masters and hundreds of servants, constitutes source-material of supreme value for a study of the social conditions in affluent households of the early Qing period.

As this summary suggests, the major story line of the novel revolves around the fortunes of the Jia 賈 family and a complex love affair involving various individuals living in the family compound—notably Jia Baoyu 寶玉, the “hero” (one might say anti-hero) of the book, and his talented female cousins, Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 and Xue Baochai 薛寶釵. Much of the novel is strongly autobiographical, for like Baoyu, Cao Xueqin was a sensitive, well-educated individual whose wealthy and established family experienced financial reverses and other difficulties during his lifetime. The book has several different layers of meaning, and it is written in several different literary modes—realistic, allegorical, and narrative. Like *The Scholars*, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is in part a critique of early Qing political and social life, and like *Flowers in the Mirror*, which was heavily influenced by Cao’s brilliant narrative, it can be seen as a celebration of women.

Chinese and Western scholars alike have identified *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a microcosm of traditional Chinese culture. In both its elaborate structure and its exquisite detail, the novel evokes a mood of completeness and authenticity. Furthermore, in a very real sense it represents the culmination of China’s entire premodern literary tradition. The novel includes every major type of Chinese literature—including philosophy, history, poetry, and fiction. We find in it quotations from Confucius and Zhuangzi, Tang poets, and Yuan dramatists. Throughout the Qing period and up to the present, *Dream of the Red Chamber* has inspired countless plays, poems, games, and sequels, as well as a huge body of critical scholarship.

The cultural breadth of the novel is perhaps most evident in its vivid portrayal of Chinese society. In both its psychological realism and encyclopedic scope, it is unparalleled in the history of traditional Chinese literature. As Fang Chao-ying has indicated, *Dream of the Red Chamber* sheds light on virtually every aspect of Chinese life and covers a vast social spectrum. It highlights the importance of popular religion and family ritual, the values of filial piety and respect for age and authority, and the tensions and conflicts of role fulfillment at various levels of society. In addition, it provides a wealth of detail on Chinese aesthetics,

housing, clothing, food, amusements, festivals, sexual life, and popular customs. Perhaps most important, it illustrates the gap between social theory and social practice so often neglected or downplayed in official documents and other orthodox sources.

Concluding Remarks

Returning to the issue of Sinicization, it is evident that a significant gap separated the Manchu, Mongol, and Chinese Bannermen from the non-Banner Han majority in China Proper. The Banners lived in special walled compounds with Manchu-style decorations in their homes (for example, bows and arrows on display); they celebrated their own martial traditions and common legends, engaged in shamanistic religious practices, and, for much of the Qing period, spoke the same non-Han language. They observed different forms of greeting, and they wore distinctive clothing (Qing official and non-officials styles both reflected this sartorial influence). Elite Manchu women were especially unlike their Han counterparts: they did not generally bind their feet, wore their hair differently, and had different styles of clothing and jewelry. They enjoyed more substantial property rights than Han women, and they had a generally higher status in the Banner world than Han women had in theirs. Manchu policy toward the remarriage of women was also more forgiving than in the dominant Han culture.

Nonetheless, prolonged interaction with the Chinese had an effect on many Manchus, both men and women—particularly after the Qianlong emperor sanctioned the policy of allowing permanent Banner residence in the provinces (1756). By stages, first, it seems, in Beijing and then later in the provinces, the Manchus succumbed to certain so-called “evil Chinese habits.” Apparently, Chinese Bannermen often took the lead in these activities, which included an early attraction to Chinese-style entertainments and a growing neglect of their military heritage. The process also involved the increasing use of the Chinese language as opposed to Manchu; by 1800 at the latest, the Qing court had lost its battle to preserve Manchu as the spoken language among the majority of Bannermen. From that time onward, even the “jottings” (*biji* 筆記) designed to celebrate Manchu culture “were written, not in workaday Manchu, but in elegant literary Chinese.”

In other ways, too, Chinese culture proved alluring. As we have seen, many Manchus, and certainly all of the Qing emperors from Kangxi onward, found Chinese art and literature attractive. In terms of life-cycle rituals, the Manchus at all levels celebrated a number of Han Chinese festivals, including the lunar New Year. Manchu cities, although clearly distinguishable from their Chinese counterparts, had Chinese-style religious temples, including those for the City God, the God of Literature, the God of War, and the Gods of Wealth and Fire. And although foot binding was discouraged among Banner women, some engaged in the practice, and a large number surrendered to the idea that a “horse-hoof” extension on their shoes (*matidi xie* 馬蹄底鞋) might look as if their feet had been bound, or at least produce an apparently attractive foot-bound type of gait. An additional problem over time was declining financial support for the Banner garrisons, which encouraged Banner families to interact more substantially with Han Chinese in an effort to enhance their economic prospects—increasingly by investing in Chinese commercial enterprises.

In all, then, the political success of the Manchus can be explained by their multicultural flexibility—in particular their ability to exploit cultural links with the non-Han peoples of Inner Asia (Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria, and Xinjiang), and at the same time to present themselves as the protectors of China’s cultural heritage to their Han subjects below the Great Wall. In so doing they created a continuum between the sedentary agricultural world

of China Proper and the pastoral world of Inner Asia. In the process, the Manchus managed to keep far more of their ethnic identity than many early accounts of Sinicization have suggested, despite their genuine admiration for many aspects of traditional Chinese culture. These ethnic differences would become all too obvious in the waning years of the Qing, when claims to be the protectors of Chinese culture rang hollow in the face of modern Chinese nationalism.

Note

- 1 Much of the material in this essay has been drawn from my book, *The Qing Dynasty and Traditional Chinese Culture* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015) with the permission of the publisher.