

*Lin Sun*

## WRITING AN EMPIRE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MANCHU ORIGIN MYTH AND THE DYNAMICS OF MANCHU IDENTITY\*

### Abstract

The first known record of the Manchu origin myth is found in Qing documents dating from 1636. These documents provide an official account of the origin of the Aisin Gioro lineage, including the story of the ancestor Bukūri Yongšon, who is depicted as the Manchu primogenitor, from his birth to his ascension to the throne. This article argues that the Manchu origin myth reflected the dynamics of Manchu identity, which shifted from constructing a Manchu group to securing Manchu rule during the period from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. By tracing the development of this myth from its earliest version in the seventeenth century to four different versions that appeared by the mid-eighteenth century, written in both Manchu and Chinese, this article endeavors to shed new light on how the Manchus saw themselves, their ancestor, and their empire.

### Keywords

Manchu origin myth, Manchu identity, Qing Empire

Ethnicity is dynamic and produces “centers” and “peripheries,” or to put this another way, ethnic groups can be created and ethnic boundaries are flexible.<sup>1</sup> Ethnicity in the Qing period is complicated, not only because there were several ethnic groups at the periphery of the empire, but also because the Manchus as the conquest elite were a core ethnic group. This article uses successive versions of the Manchu origin myth recorded in Manchu and Chinese to investigate what the Manchu rulers thought of themselves, how they reshaped Manchu identity once the concept was created, and thus how they constructed their history—or more abstractly, how Manchu identity was constructed and reshaped over the course of the Qing dynasty.

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Doctorate of Philosophy Candidate, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, e-mail: [lin.sun@orinst.ox.ac.uk](mailto:lin.sun@orinst.ox.ac.uk)

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<sup>1</sup>Pamela Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., “Introduction,” in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 1.

The traditional Chinese interpretation of the Manchus stresses their sinification, the ways adopting Chinese ways enabled them to rule China for centuries. Pamela Crossley challenges this view and argues that “boundaries of ethnicity in China will be found to be far more porous than has previously been suggested, but no less historically significant for that.”<sup>2</sup> Not only can the boundary of ethnic groups be changed, but also ethnic groups can borrow from each other. In *A Translucent Mirror*, Crossley shows how Manchu identity (together with identities of Chinese and Mongols) was ideologically constructed in the process of imperial unification and centralization.<sup>3</sup> Mark Elliott makes similar arguments. To him, the “Manchu way” answers the question of how the Manchus could maintain an “ethnic coherence” in the face of “cultural incoherence.”<sup>4</sup> He shows how Manchu identity was constructed through language, primarily in the banner system (the military system of Manchus). In a co-authored work, he, Cameron Campbell, and James Lee explore the ways that Manchu identity helped the Qing government self-consciously construct the multiethnic empire and maintain the integrity of ethnic groups, making the point that, in theory, ethnic identity was not hereditary but subject to individual and family choice.<sup>5</sup> Elliott elsewhere argues that the term “Manchu” elided differences among the Jurchens in the banner system, which subsequently promoted unity among them.<sup>6</sup>

One of the ways Manchu identity was constructed was through the Manchu Origin Myth, which scholars have long noted served political purposes and evolved over time.<sup>7</sup> The oldest layer of the myth recounts the story of the Manchu primogenitor, Bukūri Yongšon, from his birth to his ascension to the throne. As the myth was modified in both Chinese and Manchu versions, details concerning the Changbai Mountain and the child Fanca were introduced. Based on the Chinese version in the *Draft History of Qing* (*qingshi gao* 清史稿), Pamela Crossley shows how the myth establishes Bukūri Yongšon (Man., Ch. *bukuli yongshun* 布庫里雍順) as the personification of the Aisin Gioro clan, simultaneously drawing attention to the newly-unified Manchu people while also singling out those of Aisin Gioro origin from the ordinary Jurchen peoples.<sup>8</sup> Mark Elliott, examining the 1635 version in Manchu, agrees that the myth was “one way the past was put to use in the creation of Manchu identity.”<sup>9</sup>

The task of this article is to examine more closely the changes over time in the Manchu and Chinese versions of the Manchu Origin Myth and their connections to the formation

<sup>2</sup>Pamela Crossley, “Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China,” *Late Imperial China* 11:1 (1990), 30.

<sup>3</sup>Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>4</sup>Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>5</sup>Cameron Campbell, James Z. Lee, and Mark Elliott, “Identity Construction and Reconstruction: Naming and Manchu Ethnicity in Northeast China, 1749–1909,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 35:3 (2002), 101.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>7</sup>Besides the sources noted above, see Cheng, Xun 程迅, “Sanxiannü shi nūzhenzu gulao shenhua ma” 三仙女是女真族古老神話嗎, *Minzu wenxue yanjiu* 4 (1985), 115.

<sup>8</sup>Pamela Crossley, “An Introduction to the Qing Foundation Myth,” *Late Imperial China* 6:2 (1985), 21–23; Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 192–205, 296–306.

<sup>9</sup>Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 46.

of Manchu identity.<sup>10</sup> It first identifies four “stem” versions written in Manchu and Chinese ranging from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. A careful analysis of these stem version, considered in chronological order, shows how a shift in Manchu identity was generated, gradually revised, and eventually solidified. Like political myths elsewhere, these myths contributed to the construction of community by “drawing members of the group into a network of shared meanings and political hierarchy,” to borrow Christopher Flood’s words.<sup>11</sup> In the case of the Manchus, their origin myths authorized the establishment of a “Manchu” rather than a Chinese empire.

#### CHONGDE VERSION, 1635

The first version of the Manchu origin myth, known as the Chongde version, was recorded in *Documents of the Palace Historiographic Academy* (*Nei guoshiyuan dang* 內國史院檔),<sup>12</sup> and written in the second half of 1635. This version answered the question of how Jurchens became Manchus. Hong Taiji, the second ruler of the Qing dynasty, meant to provide “a new identity that could superscribe the tribal identities of the Jurchen and other northeastern tribes,”<sup>13</sup> in order to rewrite lineage history to bolster legitimacy, stressing their ethnic identity.

The version recounts that the tale of Bukūri Yongšon, from his birth to his ascension to the throne, in Manchu as follows:

In the beginning, in order to govern the fighting people of the three clans, the Emperor of Heaven decided to send a god to the Jurchen country (Man. *jušen gūrun*). He turned one god into a red fruit and another into a magpie, who then carried the red fruit to Bulhūri Lake at the root of Bukūri Mountain. And then three immortals descended from heaven to bathe in the lake. After eating the red fruit, the youngest immortal became pregnant. Her two sisters comforted her and said “we have taken the drug of immortality,<sup>14</sup> so it can be assumed that you will not die. This must be the will of Heaven.” Thereupon, they left her and departed. Later she gave birth to a boy who was able to talk as soon as he was born

<sup>10</sup>On the importance of using both Chinese and Manchu versions of Qing documents, see Crossley, Siu, and Sutton, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>11</sup>Christopher Flood, *Political Myth* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 37.

<sup>12</sup>This version quoted from Sun Jianbing and Song Lili’s paper, in which the full text of the Chongde version is reprinted. See Sun and Song, “Cong manwen wenxian kan sanxiannü chuanshuo de yanbian,” 50. There has been considerable debate among scholars concerning the date of the version, because the documents themselves do not contain any information about the date. The Veritable Records of Taizu and Taihou was not handed down, because of a fire in the tenth lunar month of 1797, but its draft, the Old Manchu Chronicles, had been finished earlier than the fifteenth day of the eleventh lunar month (Dec. 11) of 1636. Moreover, use of the term Jurchen (Man. *jušen*), which appears in this text was prohibited after the thirteenth day of the tenth lunar month (Nov. 10) of 1635, suggesting that the date of version two must be earlier than that date and later than the sixth day of the fifth lunar month (June 20) of 1635, the date of Muksik’s narration. For more details of the date of the *Veritable Records of Taizu and Taihou*, see Chen Jiexian 陳捷先, *Manwen qingshilu yanjiu* 滿文清實錄研究 (Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1978), 10.

<sup>13</sup>Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>14</sup>“*Dan yao* 丹藥” literally “cinnabar medicine.” In Chinese culture cinnabar was traditionally associated with immortality and the elixir of life.

and rapidly grew into adulthood. His mother, therefore, said to her son, “Heaven gave life to you. Truly you have been instructed to bring order to the Jurchen country. You may go to that place. When they ask you where you come from, who your parents are, and what your family name is, you should say ‘I was born in the Bulhūri Lake that is at the foot of Bukūri Mountain; my first name is Bukūri Yongšon, and my family name is Aisin Gioro, descending from heaven (Man. *abka ci wasika aisin gioro*). I do not have a father and Fukulen, who is one of three immortal girls, is my mother. So I am a god as well, because the Emperor of Heaven turned my spirit into a red fruit, and allowed another god who was turned into a magpie to take the red fruit to Fukulen. So I was born.” Then she gave him a boat and allowed him to go to the Jurchen country. The son took the boat and followed the current downstream until he arrived at a place where there was human habitation. He disembarked from the boat and went ashore. He broke willow twigs to make a seat, which took the form of a chair. He sat on it alone. It happened that someone came to draw water and saw the young son’s exceptional bearing and his singular appearance. He went back to the place where they were fighting, and said to the people, “Stop fighting, all of you. I encountered a special and unusual man at the place where I was drawing water. Why not go and see him?” Together they went to look at the man. When they saw him, he was indeed an unusual man. So they asked him some questions, and then he recounted his mother’s words to them in detail. All the people were startled and said, “This man should not have to go on foot.” So they linked their hands to make a sedan chair, and carried him back. In the end, the three clans stopped fighting and crowned him ruler (Man. *beile*).<sup>15</sup>

Bukūri Yongšon is depicted through lexical repetition and syntactic repetition as a special person who had a heavenly mission. The frequent use of “the heavenly mandate” (Man. *abkai fulingga(i)*, *tianming* 天命) clearly shows that Bukūri Yongšon was destined to govern the Jurchen country, a notion which is reinforced by the use of “Heavenly Mandate” as the reign name of Nurhaci, the first ruler of the Qing dynasty. Although his reign name was not used until the Tiancong period (1626–36), it was significantly incorporated into the compilation of the *Veritable Records of Taizu and Taihou* (*Taizu Taihou shilu* 太祖太后實錄) in late 1636, and after that, the name began to be frequently used in the subsequent Veritable Records.<sup>16</sup> The term “the heavenly mandate” thus functions to legitimize Bukūri Yongšon’s governance, especially when coupled with the Manchu term “*gūrun*.”

It is worth noting the meaning of “*gūrun*.” “*Gūrun*” signifies country, state or nation because “*gūrun*” in Manchu carries various meanings and may be translated as people, tribe, nation, or state. Pamela Crossley thinks that “*gūrun*” in this context should be understood as state or tribe.<sup>17</sup> For Mark Elliott, “*gūrun*” is people, as the term showed “the ethnic unity of the Jurchen *gūrun*.”<sup>18</sup> This article will from time to time use the term

<sup>15</sup>Sun and Song, “Cong Manwen wenxian kan sanxiannü chuanshuo de yanbian,” 50.

<sup>16</sup>Cai Meibiao 蔡美彪, “Da Qingguo jianhao qian de guohao, zuming yu jinian” 大清國建號前的國號、族名與紀年, *Lishi yanjiu* 3 (1987), 144.

<sup>17</sup>Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 92, 96, 207.

<sup>18</sup>Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 71.

*gurun* to reflect the ambiguity of the primary source. By contrast, Chinese versions invariably read *gurun* as *guo* 國.

The Manchu family name of Bukūri Yongšon, *abka ci wasika aisin gioro*, also indicated his mission. *Abka ci wasika* is an adjective denoting descent from heaven while *aisin gioro* is the family name. The appearance of the surname can be traced back to 1612,<sup>19</sup> when Nurhaci first proclaimed that his family name was Aisin Gioro, not Tong (Ch. 童 or 佟), in diplomatic messages to Ming China and Chosŏn Korea.<sup>20</sup> Both the term “heavenly mandate” and his surname reveal that Bukūri Yongšon is portrayed in the myth as a special and unusual man with heavenly destiny. The myth also shows that his uniqueness was immediately apparent to the common people: After he had recounted his mother’s words, Bukūri Yongšon was seated on a sedan chair—a vehicle reserved for leaders—linked by hands and elevated above the ordinary people. The very actions associated with Bukūri Yongšon were selected to emphasize his singularity and destiny to rule.

Bukūri Yongšon is shown within the story to have Heaven’s blessing. When Bukūri Yongšon became the ruler of the Jurchen tribes in the story, he did so without any resort to force. The three warring clans simply stopped fighting and crowned him *beile*, Lord of the Banner, solely because of his divine designation to rule. In a war-torn border society, however, it would have been particularly unusual for power to be assumed without violence or conflict. This is in striking contrast to the creation myth of Goguryeo Korea, in which the hero, Jumong, experiences numerous difficulties before he becomes king, including battles and wars, illustrating that in the eyes of Koreans only the capacity to overcome challenges denotes a ruler’s legitimacy.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Han Pu 函普, the ancestor of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234), became the leader of the Jurchen Wanyan tribe after having dealt with military conflict between two clans.<sup>22</sup> Bukūri Yongšon, on the other hand, had no need to prove himself or his legitimacy through violence because he was selected, or indeed sent by Heaven.

Besides depicting Bukūri Yongšon as a special man possessing Heaven’s blessing, the Manchu origin myth draws on common cultural elements found in this region of the world, which would not only have been understood, but also very familiar to the peoples Hong Taiji sought to address and unite, despite their distinct cultural backgrounds. By combining these elements in a new way, the myth created its unique narrative. It is commonly noted that the figure “three” is very important in myths, possibly because in ancient times “three” was considered to be a mysterious or spiritual number in Northeast Asia. The “three clans” of the story is not a geographic name but probably denotes the three main Jurchen tribes of the Ming period. This links the myth to a particular time and place, albeit without imparting specific identification.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Kanda Nobuo 神田信夫 et al., trans., *Mambun rōtō* 滿文老檔 (Tōkyō: Tōyō Bunko, 1955), “Taiso” 1:20.

<sup>20</sup>童 or 佟, both of which he used frequently. For more details, see Pamela Crossley, “The Tong in Two Worlds: Cultural Identities in Liaodong and Nurgan during the 13th-17th Centuries,” *Ch’ing-Shih Wen-T’i* 4:9 (1983), 21–46.

<sup>21</sup>Jin Yiling 金藝玲, “Chaoxian yu Manzu shenhua zhi bijiao: Yi zhuzheng shenhua yu bukuli yongshun wei zhongxin” 朝鮮與滿族神話之比較：以朱蒙神話與布庫裡雍順為中心, *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao (renwen sheke ban)* 4 (2008), 154.

<sup>22</sup>*Jinshi* 金史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1:2.

<sup>23</sup>Namely, the Haixi, Jianzhou, and Yeren Jurchen tribes, who dwelt in this region of present-day Northeast China during the early and middle Ming period.

Another notable example is the presence of the three immortal girls in the Manchu origin myth, which is similarly echoed in the Korean origin myth. In the Korean counterpart the hero's mother has two sisters, while in the Jin origin myth, Han Pu, the ancestor of the Jin dynasty, has two brothers.<sup>24</sup> In addition to its generally mysterious qualities, Yang Ximei suggests that the number "three" was also associated with new life among peoples of the Northeast Asian region.<sup>25</sup>

The Manchu origin myth also features a lake and a magpie, which were both pervasively employed symbols among Northeast Asian cultures. Fukulen eats a red fruit obtained from a spirit magpie and becomes pregnant after she has bathed in the lake. As local people were highly dependent on water as a life-source for crops and herds, it is perhaps not surprising that water contains unique powers, specifically fertility, in the Manchu myth. The magpie serves as the bearer of Heavenly Will in its carrying of the seed, or fruit of life, to Fukulen, who then gives birth to Bukūri Yongšon. Zhang Bibo has noted a common association among the peoples of Northeast Asia that identifies the sun and/or magpie with the father, water with the mother, and the new-born child with a new community or "ethnic" group.<sup>26</sup> The myth thus preserved the Manchu cultural elements and also drew upon common elements shared in Northeast Asia.

However, it is important to ask what meanings are associated with the emphasis on the chair and seat that are mentioned in the myth at this particular point? Such emphasis is influenced by historical events that occurred prior to the myth's construction. After Nurhaci's death and Hong Taiji's attempt to centralize power and weaken the power of other *beiles*, a power struggle broke out. Nurhaci had created a system in which he shared his power with the conquest elite, and what drove later generations of Manchu rulers and their advisers to construct a myth was the need for centralization. During his reign, Nurhaci did not distinguish the political interests of the Manchu conquest elite from his power as emperor. The conquest elite emerged as a class when Nurhaci began unifying the Jurchen tribes in 1583. It comprised members of Nurhaci's family—namely, his sons and brothers—and the first Manchu bannermen. In the early period of Nurhaci's rule, he shared power with these family members, which worked well when Nurhaci controlled only a relatively small region. Nurhaci set up an administrative and military system in 1601 based on four units, with each represented by a colored flag—yellow, white, red, and blue—and, accordingly, referred to them as "banners."<sup>27</sup> He appointed his sons, Daišan, Manggoyltai and Hong Taiji, and his nephew Amin to each lead one of the four banners. Such banner lords were referred to as senior *beile*.<sup>28</sup> In 1615, having just executed Cuyen, Nurhaci diffused power among eight *beiles* by halving the number of troops under each of the original banners. The color scheme was retained, there was a plain and a bordered banner in each color making a total of eight, thus diluting

<sup>24</sup>Despite the fact that one of these is not a blood-brother. See *Jinshi*, 1:2.

<sup>25</sup>Yang Ximei 楊希枚, "Lun shenmi shuzi qishier" 論神秘數字七十二, in *Xianqi wenhuashi lunji* 先秦文化史論集 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995), 710.

<sup>26</sup>Zhang Bibo 張碧波, "Yinshang, Gaogouli, Manzu xianxiannü zuyuan shenhua de bijiao yanjiu" 殷商、高句麗、滿族三仙女族源神話的比較研究, *Manyu yanjiu* 1 (2000), 50–51.

<sup>27</sup>For more details of the Eight Banner system, see Elliott, *The Manchu Way*.

<sup>28</sup>The four senior *beiles* during the Nurhaci's reign were Daišan 代善, Amin 阿敏, Hong Taiji 皇太極 and Manggoyltai 莽古爾泰. These names are written in Manchu.

the power of the four original senior *beiles*. Below the Aisin Gioro clan were the Manchu bannermen, the military commanders, and supporters who had joined Nurhaci's troops before 1616. In 1616, the newly established ruler ridded himself of cooperative governance and forced his family members and supporters into subordinate positions. However, this did not mean that Nurhaci had moved to centralize his power.

Hong Taiji ascended to the throne in 1626 and his strategies to centralize power involved the removal of the three senior *beiles*, the introduction of Han Chinese officials into his court, and the building of a new community. In his will, Nurhaci had proposed that the court should be governed by a council that would conduct state affairs by consensus. The council consisted of four senior *beiles* and four junior *beiles*.<sup>29</sup> They met regularly and made decisions collectively, with each *beile* taking turns to be the council leader. This council had been in existence after 1621, but, when Nurhaci was firmly in power, he maintained complete control over the council. In 1626, Hong Taiji had no choice but to share power with the other *beiles*, in accordance with Nurhaci's dying will. He even invited the senior *beiles*, Daišan, Amin and Manggoyltai, to sit with him as co-rulers, in order to show respect to them and obtain their support. In the following years, however, Hong Taiji took action to weaken the political power of the senior *beiles*. In order to balance power between the Manchu conquest elite and himself, he created a Chinese banner in 1630. Hereafter the Chinese conquest elite owed their loyalty to Hong Taiji, not to the *beiles*. On the first day of the first lunar month (Feb. 20) of 1632, he finally abolished the old system of governance and confirmed that he alone was to be seated on the chair on the south side of the hall.<sup>30</sup> Hong Taiji had succeeded in centralizing power, which in the long run prevented the Jurchen Federation from fragmenting after Nurhaci's death. This then is the reason that the chair and seat are emphasized in the myth.

Centralization secured Hong Taiji's rule over the *gūrun*, and he then began constructing a new community to integrate the Manchu and Chinese conquest elite. On the third day of the tenth lunar month (Nov. 12) of 1635, Hong Taiji announced and confirmed that the name of his people would be "Manchu" (Man. *manju*), and other terms, such as Jurchen (Man. *jušen*), were no longer to be used. From the time of Nurhaci to the first half of the Tiancong period, the terms Jurchen and Manchu had both been used apparently interchangeably in official documents; however, the meaning of Jurchen gradually assumed negative connotations, ultimately collapsing into a derogatory term such that during the Jin period it frequently referred to a commoner or a slave.<sup>31</sup> The term Jurchen also had negative connotations among the Han Chinese people, not least because the story of Yue Fei was so well-known within Chinese society.<sup>32</sup> Obviously,

<sup>29</sup>The four junior *beiles* were Jirgalang 濟爾哈朗, Ajige 阿濟格, Dodo 多鐸, and Dorgon 多爾袞. These names are written in Manchu.

<sup>30</sup>"Taizong wen huangdi shilu" 太宗文皇帝實錄, in *Qing shilu* 清實錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 11:2b.

<sup>31</sup>Guan Jialu 關嘉祿 and Tong Yonggong 佟永功, "Manzu mingming chuyi 滿族命名芻議," in *Manzu lishi yu wenhua* 滿族歷史與文化 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 5–6.

<sup>32</sup>Yue Fei (1103–42) was a Han Chinese military general during the Southern Song dynasty. In 1126, the Jurchen-led Jin dynasty invaded northern China, captured Emperor Qinzong, and forced the Song dynasty to move out of its capital, Kaifeng. This marked the end of the Northern Song dynasty, and the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty under Emperor Gaozong. Yue Fei led a northern expedition to recapture the

it became unsuitable to persist in using the term Jurchen if Hong Taiji had ambitions to conquer China. Mark Elliott argues that the new term helped Hong Taiji to “match the affective contours of an emerging pan-Jurchen identity with a single name evocative of an ascriptive unity.”<sup>33</sup> More importantly, he shows that “by framing matters as he did, Hong Taiji was able to avoid the impression that he was ‘creating’ or inventing anything. Instead, he appeared to be engaged in a rectification of names, reclaiming a pre-existing Manchu identity from the errors of ‘ignorant people.’”<sup>34</sup> Pamela Crossley argues that “unlike Jurchen, Manchu was not an identity that was subject to the cultural ambiguities of the northeast. On the contrary, it was to be fixed by criteria that were enunciated by the state and were as permanent as the state itself.”<sup>35</sup> On the first day of the first lunar month (Feb. 7) of 1636, Hong Taiji changed his reign title from Tiancong to Chongde (1636–43); and a few months later, on the eleventh day of the fourth lunar month (May 15) of 1636, he changed his *gurun*’s name from Jin to Qing. By means of these measures, a new Manchu community was established.

For Hong Taiji and his advisors, it is clear that there was a keenly felt need at this juncture to shore up Manchu identity, and as part of this endeavor, the development and endorsement of the Manchu origin myth now assumed other important political functions. As early as the 1630s, Hong Taiji recognized the significance of preserving the identity of his followers and was determined to consolidate it further. This can be seen in his response to memorials from his officials in 1634, when he was faced with the request to adopt Chinese titles: “I have heard that among the nations that have accepted Heaven’s charge and founded an enterprise [i.e., established a dynasty for ruling China], none has abandoned their own language and turned instead to use the language of another nation. No nations that have abandoned their language and taken up another nation’s language have prospered.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Chongde version satisfied the need of Manchu identity construction, and showed that the Qing rulers created, from the top down, an identity to enforce the image that the Qing was united as a group.

#### *Inspiration behind the Chongde Version*

Folklore provided the inspiration for Hong Taiji and his advisors to construct the Manchu origin myth. In early 1635, following in Nurhaci’s footsteps, Hong Taiji continued to unify the rest of the Yeren Jurchen tribes in the upper Amur River region. Before engaging in battle, he emphasized that one of the main priorities of military action was to persuade the enemy to submit themselves to the Jin state, and not to exterminate the enemy.

On the tenth day of the twelfth lunar month (Jan. 28) of 1635, the *Documents of the Palace Historiographic Academy* claims that Hong Taiji informed his followers: “The people in Heilongjiang region speak the same language as us. We should allow them

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places the Jin state had conquered. During this campaign, however, Yue Fei obeyed the emperor’s orders recalling him to the capital, where he was imprisoned and executed on false charges. After his death, Yue Fei was depicted as a patriot and a personification of loyalty in folklore.

<sup>33</sup>Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” 39.

<sup>34</sup>Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” 39.

<sup>35</sup>Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 194.

<sup>36</sup>Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 9.



to submit themselves to us so they can work for me.”<sup>37</sup> When launching the offensive, he instructed his officers to address their opponents as follows,

According to the record, your ancestors [the people who live in the Heilongjiang area] came from our *gūrun* (i.e. later Jin *gūrun*), but many of you are unaware of it, because you live in this remote area. Our *wise Khan* (Man. *sure han*, i.e. Hong Taiji) wished to inform you of this, but he has not had time to do so, so he has instructed us to inform you of the fact.<sup>38</sup>

Hong Taiji is also reported to have instructed his followers, “Although we attack them, all of you must send my good wishes to them, and not take the path of blood and destruction.”<sup>39</sup> On the sixth day of the fifth lunar month (June 20) of 1635, Hong Taiji had a feast for the generals who had returned in triumph.<sup>40</sup> It was on this occasion that a certain Muksik, who had been taken captive from among the Hurha tribe in the Amur River region, was brought before Hong Taiji. In identifying himself, Muksik recounted the story of his ancestor.

According to Muksik as described in *Kyū manshūtō* 舊滿洲檔, his family had for many generations lived close to Bulhūri Lake, at the foot of Bukūri Mountain, and approximately 120 *li* from the Amur River.<sup>41</sup> However, he asserted, “There is no written document recording our history, only oral narration.” He then proceeded to recount the myth that “once upon a time, three immortal girls descended from heaven and bathed in Bulhūri Lake. While they were bathing, a spirit magpie placed a red fruit on the clothes of youngest girl, Fukulen; and after eating it, she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy who was Bukūri Yongšon. He and his relatives were *manju gūrun*.”<sup>42</sup>

The narrative attributed to Muksik (of whom nothing else is recorded) is very short, but it conveys three important points. Muksik claims that the legend was handed down from his ancestors orally and had not previously been recorded. Although it is impossible to prove if this was definitely the case, it does indicate that the story and quite probably different versions of the story (oral or even recorded) pre-dated the extant written form. This is the first written reference to the name Bukūri Yongšon (in Manchu) before the Chongde version was published. Moreover, the last and arguably most significant sentence of Muksik’s narrative is the statement that the hero and his relatives were “*manju gūrun*.” This lies at the heart of the much-debated meaning of *manju* (Man.), which remains unresolved. Taken in isolation, it does not prove that the term existed before Nurhaci’s era, but research shows that as early as 1583, the term “*manju*” had begun to appear occasionally in written documents, and from 1627 with increasing regularity. According to findings in the *Old Manchu Chronicles* (*Manwen laodang* 滿文老檔), the term “*manju gūrun*” was frequently found in Manchu documents, for example, on the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth days of the second lunar month (Apr. 12–13) of

<sup>37</sup>Kusunoki Yoshimichi 楠木賢道 et al., trans., *Naikokushiin tō:tenchō hachinen* 內國史院檔天聰八年 (Tōkyō: Tōyō Bunko, 2009), 380.

<sup>38</sup>Kusunoki et al., trans., *Naikokushiin tō:tenchō hachinen*, 380.

<sup>39</sup>Kusunoki et al., trans., *Naikokushiin tō:tenchō hachinen*, 380.

<sup>40</sup>Kanda Nobuo 神田信夫, Matsumura Jun 松村潤, and Okada Hidehiro 岡田英弘, trans., *Kyū manshūtō: tenchō kunen* 舊滿洲檔天聰九年 (Tōkyō: Tōyō Bunko, 1972), 124.

<sup>41</sup>One *li* is c. one-third of a mile.

<sup>42</sup>Kanda et al., trans., *Kyū manshūtō: tenchō kunen*, 124–25.

1635.<sup>43</sup> It can be deduced therefore that the term “Manchu” in Manchu was regularly used in official documents between 1627 and 1636 to indicate unity in group identity.

It is clear the Chongde version is more heavily fabricated when compared with Muksik’s narration. It had been carefully made up under the command of Hong Taiji and his advisors whose primary concerns were to portray Bukūri Yongšon as a special man with a heavenly mission, in order to create an identity for the conquest elite to promote identification among them. It also connects Bukūri Yongšon obscurely to Nurhaci, thus linking the royal family and the so-called heavenly mission and, in turn, legitimizing the rule of the Aisin Gioro. The carefully constructed content reveals the decision of the Manchu ruling class to confer special significance to the character of Bukūri Yongšon. It is, however, difficult to assert that Bukūri Yongšon was already regarded as the ancestor of the Manchus merely based on the content of this version, as no sentence specifically claims that he is the Manchus’ ancestor. However, he is positioned so as to be useful to the elite group and it is evident Muksik’s narration influenced the Chongde version.

#### SHUNZHI VERSION, 1655

The Shunzhi version is extracted from the *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi* (*Wu Huangdi shilu* 武皇帝實錄) in Manchu.<sup>44</sup> This version served the needs of stressing the homeland where the Manchus came from and of strengthening Manchu identity by cutting off any connections to the Jin and Ming. It was thus clearly influenced by the changes in the political environment. In late 1643, Hong Taiji died suddenly and his son, the Shunzhi emperor, inherited the throne. Thirteen months later, Shunzhi achieved his father’s dream of capturing Beijing and proclaiming himself the “Son of Heaven” and ruler of all China. However, the task of actually conquering the rest of China and eliminating the Ming loyalists, pretenders, and rebels was not going to be easy. The question for the ruling class became twofold: how to preserve the memories of the homeland they had left while simultaneously remaining steadfast in their goal of taking control of the entire country. Shunzhi and his advisors responded to these questions on one level through revision of the myth in an attempt to further consolidate a sense of identity among the newly united conquest elite.

The Changbai Mountain is introduced in this version, marking the first time the geographical origin of the Manchus was specifically identified and incorporated into the myth:

The height of the mountain was two hundred *li* and it stretched in an unbroken chain for thousands of *li*. There was a pool named Tamen at the top of the mountain, and its circumference was eighty *li*. The Yalu River, Huntong River, and Aihu River all originated from the pool. The Yalu River flowed westwards from south of the mountain to the south sea of Liaodong. The Huntong River flowed from the north of the mountain to the North Sea. The Aihu River flowed eastward. The

<sup>43</sup>*Neige cangben Manwen laodang* 內閣藏本滿文老檔 (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 2009), “Taizong” 1.1; Kanda et al., trans., *Kyū manshūto: tenchō kunen*, 82–83. For more details of various versions of the Old Manchu Chronicle, see Mark Elliott’s Note on the English translation of *The Old Manchu Chronicles* at <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~mnch210a/tomc.cgi?t=intro>.

<sup>44</sup>The text is extracted from Matsumura Jun’s article in which a full text of the Shunzhi version is reprinted. See Matsumura Jun 松村潤, “Qing Taizu shilu yanjiu” 清太祖實錄研究, trans. Ayula 敖拉, *Mengxue xinji* 3 (2002), 23–25.

three rivers were fertile. The wind on the mountain was strong, and the air was cold. Every summer, animals find rest on the mountain.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that the intention here is to stress the fertility of the mountain and emphasize its natural powers. However, the question remains, why was the mountain so important? As this is the first time the Manchus' ancestral home is mentioned within its myth, it is clearly connected to the fact that the Manchus, having now left their homeland, felt an urgent need to establish a spiritual geographical basis. Changbai Mountain was an obvious choice because it was already an important place in the affections of the people from the northeast, and a place of worship for the Manchus. As early as 1172, the Jurchen elite had identified Changbai Mountain as the place where "the rulers always come from,"<sup>46</sup> and they regularly sacrificed to the mountain to show their respect. It also lent itself well to the myth because there is a lake at the foot of the mountain. It is worth noting, though, that in Muksik's narration, Bulhūri Lake was close to the Amur River, which suggests that both Bukūri Mountain and Bulhūri Lake were near the Amur River, but the river is, in fact, distant from the Changbai Mountain. The incorporation of the Changbai Mountain into the origin myth thus enabled the preservation of the homeland the Manchus had left, at least in memory.

The Shunzhi version not only maintains the suggestion that Bukūri Yongšon was a special and unique man, destined by Heaven to be a ruler, but makes this even more explicit by adding the sentence "Heaven would not have given life to such a person for no reason." In this version, the *gūrun* was given the name "Manchu, and so he [Bukūri Yongšon] was the primogenitor." Thus, this version officially proclaims the rise of Manchu *gūrun* with Bukūri Yongšon as its ancestor for the first time.

The term "Jurchen *gūrun*" used in the Chongde version to refer to the fighting clans is, however, removed and replaced with "chaotic tribes" (Man. *facuhūn gūrun*, Ch. *luanguo* 亂國) in the Manchu edition and "barbarian tribes or states" (Ch. *yiguo* 夷國) in the Chinese edition respectively. This suggests that following in the footsteps of Hong Taiji, Shunzhi and his advisors wished to minimize the association and the memory of their relations with the Jurchens. It is also worth noting that the Manchu and Chinese editions of the version adopted a different adjective to describe the disordered tribes, denoting entirely different concepts, i.e. chaotic and barbarian respectively. Before the Yongzheng period (1722–35), the tradition of compiling the *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qing shilu* 清實錄) was linked to the translation of Manchu into Chinese.<sup>47</sup> It is, therefore, possible that this is simply an "innocent" case of something being "lost in translation"; but in the process of translation, the influence of a Sinocentric worldview can be observed, and a misunderstanding (conscious or otherwise) of the fact can be sensed. While distancing themselves from the Jurchens, the Manchus could not logically deny that the three unruly tribes gathered by Nurhaci (the Chinese term *sanxing* 三姓 of the myth) were their ancestors, and they should not, therefore, be denoted as "barbarians."!

<sup>45</sup>Matsumura, "Qing taizu shilu yanjiu," 23–25. The Shunzhi version appeared in 1655 in Manchu and was entitled the *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi*. There were two editions of the Shunzhi version, one in Manchu and the other in Chinese, with almost the same content.

<sup>46</sup>The Chinese text is "*longxing zhidi*" (The Land of Dragon Rising). See *Jinshi*, 35:819.

<sup>47</sup>Chen, *Manwen qingshilu yanjiu*, 36.

This version, therefore, marks the turning point between the “inheritors of the Jin dynasty” and the making of the Manchus, resultant on the enlarging of the sphere of the Manchus. Shunzhi wished not only to expunge any connections between the Manchu *gurun* and the Jin dynasty but also to deny that they had ever served as Ming officials. Even though Nurhaci had viewed himself as the inheritor of the Jin dynasty, the primary concern of Hong Taiji was to establish the Manchu *gurun*. In the process of this, it became clear, however, that all connections with the Jin dynasty must be cut off. It is interesting to note that on the twenty-seventh day of the tenth lunar month (Dec. 11) of 1629, Hong Taiji was proud to be viewed as a successor of the Jin dynasty,<sup>48</sup> but he quickly changed his mind and by 1633 denied any such connection. By the time the Shunzhi version of the myth was published, Shunzhi, as the new ruler of China, and his advisors felt that this connection with the Jin dynasty was undignified and preferred that it be forgotten.

The last paragraph of this version of the myth introduces the story of the child Fanca.

After several generations, his [Bukūri Yongšon’s] offspring had become brutal and cruel, and so the tribes and subordinates thereupon rebelled. Within six months, the city of Odoli had fallen. All the offspring of his clan were being killed. Among them was a young boy named Fanca, who escaped into the wilds. The soldiers chased after him. It happened that a spirit magpie perched on the boy’s head. The soldiers who were pursuing him said that there was no reason for a magpie to perch on a man’s head and suspected that the magpie mistook him for the trunk of a dead tree. Thereupon they returned. Thus, Fanca escaped. Finally, he hid himself for the rest of his life. Later generations of the Manchu *gurun* all viewed the magpie as a spirit and would not harm it.<sup>49</sup>

The role of the child Fanca and the story about him are problematic. Pamela Crossley suggests that there was a historical Fanca who was the younger brother of Dudu Mentemu (Man.; Ch. *Dudu Mengtemu* 都督孟特穆) and who later became the leader of the Jianzhou right guard in 1442. However, there is no conclusive evidence that the historical Fanca and the Fanca of the myth were one and the same, not least because in the Manchu text (unlike the Chinese text which Crossley used) it is clearly indicated that Fanca is a child.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in the *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*, the Fanca story clearly plays a bridging function, connecting Bukūri Yongšon and Fanca to Dudu Mentemu and then to Nurhaci, which again suggests that the Fanca in the myth and Dudu Mentemu’s younger brother were probably not the same person.<sup>51</sup> In addition, if we look at the historical events of the mid-Ming dynasty, we find that Dongshan, Dudu Mentemu’s son, who united all the tribes of Jurchen, was a more likely candidate for Fanca. The Chenghua Emperor of the Ming (r. 1464–87) worried that he would be successful and sent someone to kill him. From then on, all the Jurchen tribes fell into chaos again

<sup>48</sup>“Taizong wen huangdi shilu,” 5:32b, 15:14b.

<sup>49</sup>Matsumura, “Qing taizu shilu yanjiu,” 23–25.

<sup>50</sup>Crossley, “An Introduction to the Qing Foundation Myth,” 13–18.

<sup>51</sup>Dudu Mentemu (1370–1433) was the Jurchen chieftain of the Odoli tribe that later became the Jianzhou Jurchens. He was considered as the successor of Bukūri Yongšon, see “Taizu gao huangdi shilu” 太祖高皇帝實錄, in *Qing shilu*, 1:3b. In the *Veritable Records of Manchus*, Dudu Mentemu’s name appears; see “Manzhou shilu” 滿洲實錄, in *Qing shilu*, 1:9a.

until Nurhaci's appearance. It seems possible that it is, in fact, these historical events that were now being reflected in the myth. Another feature of the Fanca story that cannot be omitted is that it again stresses the importance of the magpie.

During the Shunzhi reign, the advancement of centralization meant that the new version of the myth was responding to the question of how to maintain a steady hold on state power. When chosen to succeed Hong Taiji, Shunzhi was still a child. Dorgon as regent was the power behind the throne, and he worked continuously to strengthen centralization. When Shunzhi began to rule in his own right in 1651, the Qing court became more bureaucratic, distancing itself from the earlier tribal tradition of cooperative ruling. Shunzhi became an emperor who was able to maintain power and manipulate the forces within the court. However, he still felt an urgent need to shore up the sense of unity among both the Manchu and Chinese elite to defeat the enduring Ming resistance. Shunzhi thus favored the Chinese conquest elite for improving efficiency in bureaucratic government. Meanwhile, he defended the privileges of the Manchu conquest elite who still had an influence on the court, because he understood that running a dual system could not rely solely on Chinese officials' support.

In this way, the Manchu origin myth fulfilled its role of serving to help Manchu policy-makers "deal with the twofold question of what can be done and what should be done."<sup>52</sup> The creation of the origin myth was thus a response to unfinished business. It started to shape Manchu identity by tracing it back to aboriginal inhabitants who had already lived in the north-east for many generations, such as native Jurchens. On the other hand, with the expansion of the *gūrun* to realize yet greater ambitions, it was necessary to bring more and more people into the group. How could the new members be integrated into the Manchu ruling class and be given a sense of Manchu identity? This dilemma was solved by the introduction of the Changbai Mountain, denying any connections with the Jin and Ming dynasties and strengthening Manchu identity. In altering the myth in this way, Shunzhi and his advisors re-emphasized and reworked the origin myth, which was now aimed towards a broader audience of both old and new followers. It intended to nurture a sense of unity and loyalty among the conquest elite and the new members of the burgeoning Manchu empire.

#### KANGXI VERSION, 1686

The Kangxi version of the myth was included in the *Veritable Records of Gao Huangdi* (*Gao Huangdi shilu* 高皇帝實錄; i.e. the revised *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi*) and completed in 1686.<sup>53</sup> This version continues to redefine Manchu identity and broadens the notion of it by extending it to all the members of the Manchu ruling class, thus validating and legitimizing the identity of the Manchus as rulers because the Manchu *gūrun* became the Qing Empire.

<sup>52</sup>Flood, *Political Myth*, 24.

<sup>53</sup>Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, *Taizu Gao huangdi shilu gaoben sanzong* 太祖高皇帝實錄稿本三種 (Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1973), 3273–78. The Kangxi version was finished in 1686; the title of the *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi* was revised to *The Veritable Records of Gao Huangdi*. However, the Chinese edition of the version was lost, so this article makes reference to three drafts of the Chinese version which were published. For more information on these draft, see Luo, *Taizu Gao huangdi shilu gaoben sanzong*, 2862–66, 3052–56, 3273–78.

The Kangxi version revises the expression “barbarian country” which appears in the Shunzhi version and uses instead the term “chaotic country.” Indeed, in 1667 an official named Ledehong memorialized the emperor, suggesting that parts of the *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi* were inappropriate.<sup>54</sup> With the expansion of the *gurun*, an increasing number of Han officials with traditional Chinese education had entered the government, and Ledehong suggested that a revised *Veritable Records of Wu Huangdi* in the Chinese language would serve to satisfy their needs and promote the Manchu origin myth more effectively among a wider elite audience.

The most significant adaptation of this version is its hint to the origin of the *gurun* in Bukūri Yongšon’s time by stating “so Bukūri Yongšon lived in Odoli city, the outskirts of Omohoi, to the east of Changbai Mountain. The name of the *gurun* was Manchu, and since that time, the Manchu *gurun* has been established.” The origin myth was now clearly extended to validate and legitimize both the identity of the Manchus and their *gurun*. It is not difficult to conclude that given the political instability that plagued the ruling class until 1685, Kangxi and his advisors felt an urgent need to construct legitimacy for the *gurun*. From 1616 to the time of the Kangxi emperor, it took the Manchus nearly seventy years to build up a Manchu *gurun*, suppress all military threats and complete the conquest of China in 1685. Though Kangxi continued the process of centralizing power, the Manchu conquest elite still played an important role in the empire, and Kangxi needed their military assistance.

As the population of the *gurun* and the nation within the *gurun* increased, the problem of how to integrate the newly-joined Chinese elite and Han officials into the whole Manchu ruling class and develop a common Manchu identity that embraced the elite became more pressing. Moreover, the elite at the time faced a new problem—not only how to disassociate themselves from the unruly Jurchens, but how to keep themselves distinct from the numerous highly cultured Chinese of the empire. Therefore, in order to respond to this shifting situation and to propagandize the political idea that “we are Manchus,” the Kangxi version of the myth endeavors to embellish the Shunzi/Chongde myth to provide more detailed answers to its audience. The answers came in the form of mythically validating the Manchus as rulers because the Manchu *gurun* had become the Qing Empire.

#### QIANLONG VERSION, 1736–39

The Qianlong version emphasizes that as the rulers of the Qing Empire, the Manchus were at the top of the dominant class, and the Aisin Gioro clan was at the core of the Manchus. It consists of two editions: one written in Manchu appeared in 1736<sup>55</sup> and one written in Manchu and Chinese appeared in 1739.<sup>56</sup> The two editions will be

<sup>54</sup>Chen, *Manwen qingshilu yanjiu*, 39.

<sup>55</sup>The 1736 edition written in Manchu is found in *Taizu Gao Huangdi benji* (Man. *Daizu Gegi Hūwangdi i ben gi bithe debtelin dergi*), which appeared in 1736. The document itself does not contain any information about the date, which is suggested by Chen Jiexian. See Chen Jiexian 陳捷先, *Manwen qingbenji yanjiu* 滿文清本紀研究 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1981), 7.

<sup>56</sup>The 1739 edition appears in the *Taizu Gao Huangdi shilu*, which was revised in 1739. This article refers to both the Chinese and Manchu editions. For the Chinese edition, see “Taizu gao huangdi shilu,” 1:1b–3b. For the Manchu edition, see Sun and Song, “Cong Manwen wenxian kan sanxiannü chuanshuo de yanbian,” 54–55.

analyzed together and considered as a single version of the story because their content is very similar. Compared with the previous versions, the Qianlong version may be considered “the most developed official version” in terms of narrative, content, message and language. Because of continuous modification, the structure and language of the text in the version appears considerably more refined when compared to earlier versions.

The myth at this stage is well-organized. It starts by describing the beauty of Changbai Mountain, implying that it held an important place in the hearts of Manchus, before telling how Fukulen descended from heaven and gave birth to a boy after eating a red fruit. Through his mother’s narrative, the boy learned that his name was Aisin Gioro Bukūri Yongṣon, and his heavenly mission was to unify the chaotic *gūrun* and become ruler. The chaotic *gūrun* was later renamed the Manchu *gūrun*, and thus, Bukūri Yongṣon is depicted as the primogenitor of the *gūrun* as well as the ancestor of the royal family. It is clearly shown that with the expansion of the *gūrun*, Manchu identity was reflected in the myth; that is to say, the myth separates the so-called Manchus from the mass of Jurchens and forms a new Manchu community. It also establishes Bukūri Yongṣon as the symbol of the Manchus as well as primogenitor of the Aisin Gioro clan. The 1736 edition points out for the first time that Nurhaci was a direct descendent of Bukūri Yongṣon, rather than simply hinting at the relationship as in previous versions. The beginning of the edition of 1736 states that

Nurhaci’s ancestor came from the Changbai Mountain. The people, with insight, seeing his manner, said that a sage has emerged here and that he will cause the various *gūrun* to submit.

Thus, the Aisin Gioro clan is the ruler of the newly united Manchu *gūrun* and representative of the entire Manchu population. All this ensures the dominance of the royal family and political stability in the Manchu *gūrun*.

Compared to the previous versions, the myth at this stage is well polished, the language more refined and sophisticated. As discussed above, translation “errors,” like “barbarians,” have been ironed out to ensure that all versions in Manchu and Chinese appropriately express the political purpose of the myth. In addition, from the Chongde to Qianlong versions, we can see a clear shift in the narrative form, mirroring the transition from oral to written narrative style. In the versions of Chongde and Shunzhi in Manchu, the story is colloquial and rather lengthy, clearly in its initial stages of construction. In contrast, the Kangxi and Qianlong versions in the same language are well written in a succinct literary style in order to appeal to the Chinese elite. For example, Bukūri Yongṣon narrates his mission briefly to the three clans instead of repeating his mother’s narrative in its entirety as would be expected in the oral tradition. The Chinese versions, which in the earliest versions assumed a much more sophisticated literary style, showed little change in this respect. Furthermore, there is no agreement on how to represent geographic and personal names in Chinese until the Qianlong period. For example, Lake Tamen, previously transliterated as 他們 in Chinese, became 闖們; Bukūri Yongṣon 布庫裡英雄 changed into 布庫裡雍順; while Fukulen’s name changed from 佛古倫 to 佛庫倫. Unlike the Chinese editions, the Manchu editions are consistent from the Chongde to the Qianlong version in terms of geographic and personal names.

What must be asked is why the Qianlong emperor ordered the revision of the Manchu origin myth and circulated it nationwide. It is perhaps because, as the Qing Empire

reached its zenith and the power of the Manchu conquest elite had been weakened, Manchu identity faced a crisis in the eighteenth century? Pamela Crossley finds that “cultural distinctions between Manchus and Chinese in many regions had blurred.”<sup>57</sup> It is easy to find that the Qianlong emperor introduced a series of reforms to emphasize the Manchu traditions and relieved the financial burden on the banner system during this period. At the same time, he ordered the compilation of works on Manchu history and ancestors, such as the revision of the Manchu origin myth and *Research on Manchu Origins* (*Manzhou yuanliu kao* 滿洲源流考).<sup>58</sup> Elliott argues that financial reform within the banner system should be understood as “a reinforcement of ethnic boundaries,”<sup>59</sup> as behind the court’s determined effort to “purify” the banners and preserve Manchu privileges for “real Manchus” loomed matters of identity linked closely with political concerns.<sup>60</sup> Crossley argues that ethnic essentialism was characteristic of eighteenth-century official ideology for “the Qianlong emperor, [as] the classification of cultural differences, and subsequent proof of the universal competence of the ruler is the mission of the emperor.”<sup>61</sup> I think that the eighteenth-century crisis reveals that the conquest elite, regardless of whether they were Manchu or Han bannermen, Chinese, or Han Chinese officials, had to recognize the status of the Aisin Gioro clan and the Qianlong emperor as its head.

The Qianlong version reflects that the Qing emperors encapsulated Manchu identity in a highly embellished and politically sophisticated myth of the origins of a nation. On the one hand, it emphasizes how a new Manchu community was formed by disconnecting itself from the Jurchens. On the other hand, it promotes the dominance of the Aisin Gioro clan among all the Manchus and Han people of the *gūrun*. This eighteenth-century version represents the culmination of the process of carefully constructing a new political heritage and reflects a new, clearly defined sense of the Manchus and Manchu identity among all conquest elite and Han Chinese officials. It therefore reflects “the dynastic view at maturity on the nature of Manchu identity and its relationship to the universalism that was fundamental to the emperorship.”<sup>62</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Through analysis of the Manchu origin myth, the history of the Manchus can be traced as they moved from being conquerors to rulers of a vast empire. The myth that had originally served to underpin the unity of the ruling elite and to legitimate a dominant clan in order to prevent future divisions from the 1640s, disseminated among the wider group of Manchu, Mongol, and Han bannermen, all of whom were invited to claim a Manchu identity based on the origin myth. In the early Qing period, the myth had

<sup>57</sup>Pamela Crossley, “Manzhou Yuanliu Kao and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46:4 (1987), 779.

<sup>58</sup>For more information on *Manzhou yuanliu kao*, see Crossley, “Manzhou Yuanliu Kao and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage.”

<sup>59</sup>Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” 48.

<sup>60</sup>Elliott, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners,” 48.

<sup>61</sup>Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 270.

<sup>62</sup>Crossley, “Manzhou Yuanliu Kao and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage,” 762.



originally served to unite both the Manchu and Chinese conquest elite and to legitimize the dominant clan, Aisin Gioro clan, among the Manchu group to prevent future divisions. From the mid-Qing onwards, the primary purpose of the myth became, gradually and intensively, to communicate the importance of Manchu identity to a broader public, mainly Han Chinese officials.

It is clear that the Manchu origin myth has its roots in the oral tradition and is based on a common legend that was probably passed on from person to person in the region known as Northeast China. Subsequently it was endowed with meaning and symbolism for political purposes. The Manchu origin myth narrates the circumstances alleged to have given rise to a new community by marking out the borders of that community. Therefore, under the influence of political ideology, the Manchus formed an identifiable group that by its very existence laid claim to a particular right to political power. It is, therefore, irrelevant to discuss whether the Manchu origin myth is true or not because its purpose is “not to bring science to Manchu origins, but authority.”<sup>63</sup> That is to say, through examining the Manchu origin myth, it is possible to gain insight into how the Manchus saw themselves, their empire, their ancestors and their mission at various stages of their history, but not their origin. Yet in proclaiming their timeless origins and stressing the antiquity of their imperial roots, emperors and their advisors were, in fact, doing what ethnic groups and ruling elites have always done.

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<sup>63</sup>Crossley, “Manzhou Yuanliu Kao and the Formalization of the Manchu Heritage,” 781.