

Week 25: Manchu Identity and the Meanings of Minority Rule

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM OF MANCHU IDENTITY

So this is the third of three lectures on the Qing Dynasty, the last of the Imperial dynasties to rule in China. And today's topic is the topic of Manchu identity and the meanings of minority rule during the Qing.

As the preceding lecture has explained, in order to consolidate their hold on power after having completed the military conquest of the Ming, the Manchu rulers devoted considerable attention to addressing general expectations that they would rule in the manner of the previous emperors of China.

That is, they would refer to having received the mandate of heaven. They would couch their philosophy in terms of Neo-Confucian ideology. And they would keep in place the essential institutions of imperial politics, such as the examination system, the structures of the provincial and central bureaucracy, tax collection, ritual sacrifices to Confucius and the ancestors, and so forth. And in short, they would rule more or less as Chinese.

The proclamation of the Sacred Edict, which I talked about last time, the compilation of the Ming history, were further steps taken to secure this aspect of Manchu legitimacy. At least in the eyes of the majority of their subjects, these were the things that really had value. Especially the wealthy and educated stratum of society, the so-called gentry, whose cooperation and working together with the Qing was essential for sustaining the institutions that would keep the Qing going.

But throughout this process of legitimization and consolidation, the Manchus faced a special problem, a problem the Ming had not faced. And that problem arose from the fact that they themselves were not Han Chinese. They were people from outside the Great Wall. In the eyes of many Ming subjects, they were aliens, interlopers, barbarians, to use a not very nice sounding word that has various ways to be expressed in Chinese. The most common is the term *yi*, which is how many Ming people talked about the Manchus when they first came in.

So this adoption of a Chinese mode of rule was very much part of an effort to try to prove to people that they were not, in fact, barbarians, that they could operate according to Confucian norms, and that they could acculturate and behave in a civilized way as rulers of China.

But on the other hand, the Manchus also felt that they needed to hold on to their native institutions and their ancestral ways, which they had developed for a long, long time before conquering China, and which indeed had played a big part in assuring their success in the first place.

So the problem was a fairly simple one. The problem was how to retain the unity and coherence of the Manchus as a distinct people, while living in a Chinese world. Now this was not an unprecedented situation in Chinese history. The Khitans and the Liao, the Jurchens and the Jin, the Mongols and the Yuan all faced a similar challenge, the challenge of minority rule: how to hold onto one's own identity, one's own distinctiveness, while at the same time ruling in a Chinese way.

If we think comparatively for just a moment, we can think about the experience, for instance, of the Normans in England. The Normans under William conquered, of course, at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and for a number of centuries afterward ruled in a hybrid fashion. French remained very much part of Norman bureaucratic practices. And it was only after a very extended period that the Normans were fully acculturated and fully accepted by the peoples who had been in England when they arrived.

A roughly similar comparison might be that of the Turks, when they established their rule in Constantinople in 1453. Both groups were ethnically or culturally distinct, a minority compared to the people over whom they ruled, greatly outnumbered by those people. And they had to make adjustments and compromises in order to secure their position at the head of the political order.

So again, returning to the Qing case, to the Manchu case, to the degree that the power of the ruling group, their success as a minority group, derived from or was believed to derive from the continued integrity and unity of that group, then maintaining that unity, maintaining that integrity, was part of the strategy to hold on to power and keep the dynasty going.

But to the degree that the power of the ruling group, the ruling minority was seen to derive from its ability to adapt to local conditions, to demonstrate an understanding of and ability to operate within the indigenous terms of politics, culture and so on, then acculturating to local ways, the ways of the majority, was also seen as essential to preserving power.

Obviously, these two things are in tension with each other. Managing this tension, achieving a balance between the pull of nativism, what I'll call nativism on the one hand, and the pull of what I'll call cosmopolitanism on the other hand, was a constant preoccupation of the Qing rulers.

Now the Manchus did not operate in a historical vacuum. We are aware of the precedence of the Liao, the Jin and the Yuan for minority rule. And the Manchus were perfectly aware of that, too. In fact, among the earliest books translated into Manchu from Chinese were the histories of the Liao and the Jin and the Yuan dynasties.

And these were translated as a way of providing the Manchus a chance to reflect in a historical mirror and look at the prior experience of those people, the Khitans, the Jurchens, and the Mongols, to see what they had done well and to see what they had not done so well and to model their own rule so as to be able to do better. And they were quite explicit about that in the prefaces that were written which recorded the Emperor's edict ordering these translations in the first place.

So they were aware if the problem in the Jin dynasty, for instance, where the Jin were felt to have gone too far in adopting Chinese ways. There was one ruler of the Jin, for instance, who ordered all of his subjects, all of his Jurchen subjects, to change their names to Chinese names and to adopt Chinese style clothing. And that was regarded, by the Qing anyway, as one of the reasons why Jin rule weakened and eventually fell. And the second emperor of the Jin, Hong Taji, pointed this out quite explicitly to his ministers.

They were also aware of the shortcomings of the Yuan, who, although they conquered, of course, a great extent of territory, were seen to have made too little an accommodation to Chinese ways, which was seen as the main reason why Yuan rule was so short-lived.

So the Manchus decided that they were going to try and strike a different kind of balance between nativism and cosmopolitanism. They were going to accommodate more than the Yuan had, more than the Mongols had, to Chinese ways. But they were not going to go so far as to lose their own identity, the way that the Jurchens were seen to have done.

Now all these issues of identity mattered, of course, for individuals who were living in a Chinese world and, like us today, thought about their place in the world, their place in history, both on a small scale, but

also on a large scale. So that group identity, Manchu identity, mattered tremendously in the Qing as a political issue. It was something that was constantly discussed, both by Manchus, as well as by Chinese, although the Han Chinese, when they talked about this, needed to be pretty careful.

Because as we'll see in a minute, the Manchus were a little sensitive about their so-called barbarian origins. As much as they need to preserve those origins, preserve that sense of who they were, where they had come from, what made them special, what made them unique, at the same time, they did not want to be perceived as somehow inferior to the Chinese over whom they ruled, especially bearing in mind that the Chinese outnumbered them by roughly 250 to 1.

So the rest of this lecture is going to talk about these different aspects of Manchu identity, the political implications for that identity in the Qing, and also into later periods.

SECTION 2: THE MANCHU WAY

As I mentioned, the balance between Manchu Nativism and Confucian Cosmopolitanism was one of the great challenges faced by the Qing rulers as they went about consolidating power and expanding their rule over China and the frontiers around China. For them, preserving native ways turned out to be probably more difficult than figuring out the accommodation to Chinese ideology or Chinese political norms.

Over time, it became clear that more and more Manchus-- more and more members of the Eight Banners-- found a lot to admire in Chinese culture. And there's no surprise there. They began to learn Chinese language more and more, to paint, write poetry, to study philosophy. All the kinds of things that went along with being an educated member of the literate class were things that many Manchu elites-- not all, but many-- found quite attractive.

Living in Chinese cities, of course, offered its own attractions for people. And here the attraction certainly went beyond the literate class to ordinary Bannermen who enjoyed hanging out in tea houses and wine shops and restaurants and theaters and all that sort of thing.

So we find repeated references in the historical record in the 1700s, the later 1700s, and particularly going into then the 1800s, concern about how to preserve Manchu native ways. What were those ways? What are we talking about? What made Manchus Manchu in, say, the late 1600s and the 1700s?

Well, according to the court, being Manchu comprised a set of virtues, a set of practices-- behaviors-- that were identified with a classic canon of Manchuness. They talked about the old Manchu ways, the old ways of our forefathers. These included writing, shooting, shooting both from a stance-- and by shooting, I mean shooting a bow and arrow. And these bows could become very tough to pull. So this was a way of showing how strong you were.

Shooting from horseback was a particular skill. And in the Manchu language, in fact, we have different verbs for shooting from a stance as opposed to shooting from horseback. Both of these skills needed to be mastered by anybody who was to become a soldier. And the proper job of any Manchu man was to be a soldier. And after that maybe he would become an official. But he had to show some martial skills in order to qualify himself in the court's eyes as a true Manchu, a Manchu in body, as it was sometimes talked about in the record.

Manchus were expected to live a simple life. They were expected to be frugal, to dress simply, and not to indulge too much in the excesses of fine clothes, fine food, fine furnishings, and all that sort of thing. They

were supposed to remember their earlier, simpler origins in the Northeast and let that guide them going forward.

One of the most important aspects of being Manchu was, of course, having ability in the Manchu language, both being able to speak the Manchu language and also being able to read and write. And I probably should point out here that Manchu is a language that is totally unrelated to the Chinese language. Its origins are from the central Asian steppes.

Ultimately, linguists are uncertain about its relation to other of the so-called Altaic languages, which include Mongolic and Turkic. But it was pretty clear, in terms of syntax, in terms of grammar, that those languages are all related. And the Manchu script, ultimately derives from a script that came from the Middle East. It has nothing to do with Chinese characters. It's an alphabetical script.

So Manchu was really pretty different. And Manchus were supposed to know it. A lot of the communications around the Empire took place in Manchu certainly through the end of the 18th century. And even into the 19th and early 20th centuries, we still have documents written as late as the 1920s that are in Manchu. So Manchus were supposed to be able to do that.

And finally, the last thing that Manchus were supposed to be was brave. They were supposed to be real men. And we do find the emperor, in fact, talking about people as having true, manly virtue. There was one case, in particular, where the emperor was disgusted by the effeminate walk of one of his guardsmen whom he had dismissed. He said he doesn't walk like a Manchu. And we can think about what that might have meant. But clearly there was an idea in the mind of some people about what that really meant about being brave, being hardy, tough, being able to take the sorts of privations they came with going on long, military campaigns where there was little food and maybe very cold temperatures.

So all of these things, together, constituted the old way of we Manchus, the ways that our ancestors lived and the way that we should continue to live today, even though we are living very comfortable lives compared to the lives that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers and grandmothers led in Manchuria. But still we want to remember the way that they did things. And this is one of the things that's going to keep us together. It's going to keep us separate from the Chinese. It's going to help preserve our sense of who we are as rulers over China.

And this was an attitude that we find probably most pronounced among the very elite-- obviously the emperor. But his top officials, even mid-level officials, though, seem to have imbibed this to some degree. And ordinary Bannermen very often found themselves wanting to learn Manchu. It was something that they identified with. Even if their ability wasn't what they wanted it to be, they were interested in studying. And very often they were interested in studying, because knowing Manchu meant that you had a leg up in the competition for positions in the bureaucracy.

We find, in the record, particularly in the Manchu language records of the Qing, and I might mention in passing here, that about 1/5 of the official documents left over from the Qing are documents that are written in Manchu, not in Chinese. And that major language documents give us a somewhat different angle on Qing rule, on how Manchu officials, high and low, Manchu emperors, how they thought about things and how they viewed things. And, not surprisingly, using a different language, they put things somewhat differently in Manchu.

And using these materials gives us a bit of a not necessarily a more accurate sense-- it's not that they were lying when they wrote in Chinese or spoke in Chinese and telling the truth in Manchu. I don't think it's so simple as that. But they used different words and they said different things in these two languages. And bringing both languages to bear helps us get a more complete sense of what the Qing was about. A lot of what I'm talking about here comes from those Manchu documents.

And here we see a real kind of sense of camaraderie, common pride, sense of purpose, and a devotion to an imperial project that had been begun by their ancestors in which they were continuing. And, in many cases, the ancestors we're talking about-- or that the people in question we're talking about or writing about were literally their own grandfathers or great-grandfathers-- people to whom they had close, personal ties. And the network of relationships among the Qing elite, the Manchu elite, was very, very tight, particularly in Beijing.

As a result of all of this, we find that certainly through the 18th century and throughout the 19th century as well, that a sense of Manchu difference persisted throughout the Qing dynasty. One of the things that helped to shore that up, apart from these cultural markers, was that Manchus retained a disproportionate share of power in the Qing. They were feared very often by Chinese locals. And even in court we have the records, for instance, of the English mission to the court of the Qianlong Emperor in 1793, the Mission of Lord Macartney.

Macartney notes that the Han Chinese officials might be talking among themselves comfortably. But when a Manchu official showed up, they stiffened and their conversation became somewhat less free. And it was clear to him, as somebody who knew no Chinese, and who was coming from the outside, that there was something going on between Manchus and Chinese. And, as I said, this is at the end of the 18th century. So this is something that is still very much alive even well into the Qing period.

The fact is, Manchus had far greater opportunities for employment in the Qing. There were many positions in the bureaucracy that were reserved exclusively for them, or, if not for Manchus, at least for people who were in the Banners. And it was very much easier for them. They did not necessarily have to have examination degrees in order to be able to make it very, very high up in the bureaucracy. They could come up the military route, as many did.

They might begin as translation clerks. And this became a very popular path to office, to just get in, get entree. These exams were exclusive for Manchus. This is one reason as I mentioned a little while ago. Some Manchus were very eager to learn the Manchu language because it would get them a nice job. And, if they were ambitious and particularly talented, that might turn into something far more illustrious than a simple clerk's job.

Even the lowliest Bannerman received a pension. When he retired, he got a regular stipend of grain and silver. When he was active he didn't need to do anything to get paid. He was effectively a government servant, a servant of the emperor really, rather, I should say, than a servant of the government. He owed personal loyalty to the emperor.

Bannermen were subject to lighter penalties under the law. And for any infringements or offenses that were committed within the areas where Bannermen alone lived, they were not subject to Chinese law at all. They were subject to the judgment of their superior officers within the Banner system. And they lived separately from the Chinese in garrisons. They occupied the central part of Beijing. I already talked about the expulsion of the Han from the so-called, what became the Tartar city, Central Beijing.

But many cities around the provinces, also large segments of those, sometimes as much as a quarter or even a half of those cities were sequestered and turned into garrisons for the Eight Banners, for the soldiers, their wives, their parents, their kids, their servants, their horses. And the architecture of those garrisons, in many places, was quite distinctive. And some towns in China today still you can see these buildings.

So these were other ways in which Manchu identity was inscribed, was evident to ordinary Chinese. Manchus wore their hair differently. We've talked about the Manchu queue. So all adult males had to wear their hair that way. But Manchu women wore their hair in a very particular fashion. It was a very large headdress that they would pin to the tops of their heads. That meant that they were immediately distinguishable from Han women. That, plus the fact that they did not bind their feet, made it very easy to tell at a glance that they were not Han.

They also had much more freedom to move about the city. And observers, in the 18th and 19th centuries commented frequently upon how easy it was to spot a Manchu woman moving about on the streets. This was not the kind of freedom that most Han women could expect to have. Manchu women wore different kinds of earrings. They had three piercings in their ears, classically.

Manchu names were different. A Chinese name typically was made up of a surname and then a given name. So, to take the example of the president of China today, for instance, his last name is Xi and his given name is Jinping. Manchu names did not include a surname. So a Manchu name might be something like Mujangga or Fassan or Buyantai, something like that. Maybe two syllables. Maybe three syllables. Sometimes even more.

Manchus practiced different religions. They practice a Shamanic religion. And in many, many Manchu households they continued to practice this religion through the 19th century and into the early 20th century.

And they kept genealogies. They were very aware of their relations with others because these genealogies, these family connections often determined the succession to different sorts of posts in the Banners, whether they be soldiers' posts or posts of different levels of officers, many of which, in the companies of the Banners, were determined by descent, by family.

So all of these things together, along with the court's version of what Manchu identity meant, helped to preserve and to sustain a very distinctive sense of ethnic distinctiveness-- ethnic identity-- among Manchu Bannermen throughout the entire Qing period.

SECTION 3: MANCHU INSECURITY

In these various ways, Manchu identity was created, sustained, and shaped over a period of many decades. Centuries, even. But along with that sense of identity was an abiding insecurity, an insecurity that arose precisely from the tension that I mentioned at the beginning of this lecture. The tension between nativism and cosmopolitanism, the tension between trying to hold onto a sense of what made the Manchus Manchu, and of trying to fit into what was, primarily-- certainly for Manchus living in the garrisons around China and in Beijing-- what was primarily a Chinese world.

The Manchus never quite shook the feeling that they did not quite measure up. That the Han-- some number of them, at least-- never truly accepted them, and that they continued to be regarded by the Han somehow as just a little inferior, as not being quite clear entirely of their barbarian origins.

This dogged Manchu consciousness, and it's evident in a variety of ways. I'm going to focus on the ways in which the emperors themselves seemed to have been particularly sensitive to this. So for instance, to refer to the Kangxi Emperor. The Kangxi Emperor once wrote to one of his officials, urging him to pay attention at work, to strive, to not let up, and to be careful that the Han Chinese around him did not make fun of him, that they not take advantage of, maybe, his lack of learning in some way. Because, he said, the Han do not want us to last for very long. He wrote this near the end of the 17th century.

Another 40 years or so later, the Yongzheng Emperor, around the year 1730, released a very long and detailed defense of Manchu rule called The Record of Great Righteousness to Enlighten the Confused, which was a response to a case that had emerged early in his reign of a Han Chinese, who had lived many years before, who had written a lot of disparaging things about the Manchus as being unfit for rule in China, as being illegitimate usurpers of the Mandate of Heaven.

And this was, of course, a direct threat to Manchu rule. Yongzheng took to the Chinese classics to argue with the Chinese on Chinese terms why it was that the Manchus, having absorbed so much of Confucian culture and absorbed so much of the classics and classical learning, were, in fact, entirely legitimate as rulers.

This tract was quickly withdrawn by his son, the Qianlong Emperor, when he came to power. But we have this text, and it's quite revealing of the extent to which the Manchus felt they had to go into detail explaining why they deserved to rule. And then, finally, we can point to a sensitivity in the writings of the Qianlong Emperor, and in his actions, for instance, in collecting all kinds of books that he felt were not respectful of the Manchus or of other northern peoples to whom the Manchus felt some kind of alliance.

It's hard to say that these insecurities were totally unjustified. There was an undercurrent of Han resentment of the Manchus for two of the observations of the Macartney mission, for example. The Manchu hold on power and privilege did give the Han some reason to be rather unhappy that it was easier to be a Manchu in the Qing, easier to be a Bannerman in the Qing if you wanted power, if you wanted to live an easy life. Life in the Banners was pretty good for a lot of the Qing.

And this resentment against the Manchus, we can see, is strong still in the 19th century. There's a fair amount of anti-Manchu sentiment in the propaganda of the Taiping Rebellion, and anti-Manchu sentiment is even stronger at the end of the dynasty when Chinese nationalism first begins to take shape. A lot of that is directed against the Manchus as Manchus, as people who are not Chinese and should not be the ones who are ruling the modern Chinese nation.

So this sort of feeling did not go away during the Qing. It was kept in check. It was politically dangerous, of course, to come out and say anything openly against the Manchus. But the Manchus themselves were worried about this, and they continued to take efforts to try and deal with it as best they could while, at the same time, holding on to that sense of difference.

SECTION 4: ACCULTURATION AND ITS LIMITS

Ethnic prejudice against the Manchus, then, lasts through to the end of the dynasty. And in fact, when the dynasty fell, the Manchus were blamed for a lot of the things-- not everything-- that had gone wrong in China in the 19th century. You'll learn more about that in later lectures.

A lot of people though, were disturbed by the fact that China as a nation had been under foreign rule, as they saw it. Under Manchu rule for such a long period of time. And they tried to explain this to themselves by saying that well, the Manchus had, in fact, become like us. The secret for Manchu success, the secret of their success, how they had been able to rule over such a large group of people who outnumbered them by such a great proportion lay in the fact that they had taken on Chinese ways. They had assimilated and essentially become like us. And the fact that the Qing had been a Manchu dynasty was forgotten and the emphasis was placed instead on Manchu acculturation, on that pull toward cosmopolitanism.

And this fit very well with an old Chinese adage that China may be conquered by people from the outside, but China in the end always will conquer its conquerors. This idea is a very old idea that's been talked about in previous lectures by Professor Bol. And the idea is that China is able to take in and transform the barbarian and bring him into the sphere of the civilized. This part of a larger classical Chinese worldview. And it helped to explain, in this case, how the minority Manchus managed to rule in China for such a long time.

Now there is something to this view. The truth is that although a sense of difference among the Manchus persisted, as I suggested, throughout the Qing, and although their share of power at least until the middle of the 19th century was disproportionate to their numbers, they did adopt a lot of Chinese ways. They definitely did acculturate. They abandoned their language for the most part. Manchu ceased to be a regular language spoken on the streets of Beijing by the 1800s. People forgot how to ride. They could no longer shoot-- at least they couldn't shoot straight-- a bow and arrow. They lived above their means. They were always in debt. They took up Chinese names, abandoned their own native ways in some cases. And they emphasized not the martial arts but cultural arts, like painting and poetry. And in fact, some of the greatest poets and novelists of the Qing period were people in the Banners.

So they became great champions, like converts, in many parts of the world. Great champions of the culture that they had adopted. There wasn't a lot of intermarriage. This seems to have been one area in which we don't get a lot of crossover. Some, but not a lot. So the question arises, then, if the Manchus acculturated, when did they-- did they stop being Manchu? Were they still Manchus at the end of the Qing? And how could we tell that they were still Manchus if they had taken up so many Chinese customs?

And this is a problem for historians. We do have plenty of evidence of anti-Manchu sentiment, as I've already mentioned. But if the Manchus had been acculturated, again, how could people know who they were? There had to have been some way to tell them apart, or people would not have known for instance at the fall of the dynasty whom to address their anti-Manchu tracts or whom to attack. There was bloodletting at the fall of the dynasty directed against the Manchus. So how then was this difference preserved? How were the Manchu people as an other people perceived by the Han, how were they recognized by the Han at the end.

And here we can think about other aspects of Manchu identity that did not conform to court-prescribed notions of what the ideal Manchu ought to be. Those ideals of frugality, martiality, Manchu language, and so on. Manchus remain Manchus because they were in the Banners, to put it very simply. They lived in Banner garrisons in their own compounds. Their interaction with Chinese was limited primarily to commercial transactions in which, if we believe the records, they were typically the unwitting victims of sharper businessmen. They continued to practice their Shamanic religion. Their women did not bind their feet and their women wore very distinctive kinds of headware and pierced their ears and wore three earrings in each ear. It was one way that you could tell a woman was Manchu. But the large feet was definitely one of the key ways. And Manchu women wore particular kinds of shoes that made it very obvious who they were.

They continued to hold onto their economic privileges and their political and legal privileges until very near the end of the dynasty. And I should say that even though they learned to speak Chinese and they mostly spoke Chinese, in the provincial garrisons when they spoke Chinese, the Chinese they spoke was northern Chinese. They spoke with a very distinctive Peking accent. They did not learn to speak local dialect. So for the garrisons in places like Chengdu or Guangzhou. You could immediately tell a Bannerman just by the way he talked. Even though he spoke Chinese, he wasn't local. He was still a Bannerman or she still was still a Bannerwoman.

So we can readily acknowledge that the court ideals of Manchu identity were not lived up to. But although they were not lived up to, this did not mean that Manchu identity died out. Manchu identity continued to be expressed despite acculturation in various ways in the lives that ordinary Bannermen and Bannerwomen lived in the cities of China.

SECTION 5: SINICIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

[MUSIC PLAYING]

The Manchu experience in the Qing gives us a lot to think about in terms of ethnic identity and politics and the circumstances surrounding minority rule in China, both in the Qing and in preceding dynasties, such as we've already mentioned.

Now, certain questions I've already answered. Why did it matter to the Manchus that they remain distinct and apart from the majority Han? How did they remain distinct and apart? And how did they balance that urge, that pull to hold onto native ways with the need to acculturate or the desire to acculturate also among many on the other hand?

What I want to talk about in this last part is the historical implications of the the sustained nature of Manchu identity in the Qing, implications for the Qing, and also for China today. I see two main things that I'll point out here. One is that we're presented with a somewhat different explanation for the success of Manchu rule over China. And the other is that we are presented with a rather different view of the Qing empire as a whole.

Now, as for the reasons for Manchu success, we've already raised some questions-- or I've raised some questions about the persuasiveness of the sinicization model-- the model of complete assimilation of the Manchus-- which doesn't seem to tally with the reality on the ground that we see.

The Manchus were acculturated, yes, but no Han Chinese mistook a Manchu for a Chinese. And the Manchus themselves did not think of themselves-- as a group, certainly not-- as Han. So the sinicization model as a way of explaining Manchu success-- that they succeeded by becoming like us-- only goes so far.

And what we find is another explanation, which is that the Manchus succeeded in large measure because they did not acculturate. They did not assimilate. They were able to maintain, successfully, a balance between their own native identity and native traditions-- inner-Asian political as well as cultural traditions-- and the Chinese ways that were required, particularly for ruling within China proper.

In the next lecture, I'll talk more about the ways in which the Manchus' inner-Asian identity aided them in their project to expand the empire and essentially doubled in size over the course of the Ming dynasty. Sometimes, there are objections to this view that, well, but the Manchus really became Chinese. They started speaking Chinese, and so on. We talked about that already. They weren't really Manchu anymore. So on what grounds can we really talk about them as being Manchu, if they didn't speak Manchu and if they lived more or less like Chinese?

And here, I think that it's useful for us to think again about ethnic identity as a phenomenon generally, both in China and in other places around the world. Rather than think of ethnicity as something that's primordial and that we're born with and that it's fixed forever, we might think instead of ethnicity as the social organization and political assertion of difference-- many kinds of difference-- that is perceived to adhere in culturally-bounded and descent-based categories.

Remember that being in the banners was something you had to be born to. You couldn't just join. This was a descent group. There were genetic markers or genealogical markers. They were frequently compromised, but they were understood to be there in principle. And that mattered a lot.

So what comes out of this is that we see ethnic categories, ethnic identity as historical constructions, as social phenomenon that have their own histories and that change, change over time. They arise in particular contexts. And as those contexts change, ethnic identity and its meanings and its definitions also change.

So with this definition, then, we can find ethnic phenomena all over the place and not simply in the modern world and certainly not simply in the modern West. And there's a fair amount of work that has been built up in recent years to show evidence of ethnic types of behavior, ethnic thinking in the antique world, both in the Mediterranean and in other parts of the world. So ethnic categories, ethnic formations themselves do not constitute unchanging or essentialized social facts, despite the frequent assertions we see to the contrary-- that we have always been this way or these people have always lived in this land. It's very, very rare, if ever, that those kinds of claims are actually borne out, although it's important for those claims to be made. Making those claims is a part of ethnicity.

Another important point to make about this is that ethnicity is transactional in nature. It requires two to tango. I can say, "I am one thing," but unless you recognize that I am that thing, my claim doesn't really have much meaning or much value. And this mutual recognition of distinctiveness depends upon our awareness of the existence of certain kinds of boundaries, certain kinds of practices that mark you as who you are and me is who I am.

So if, in the early Qing, for instance, being Manchu meant that you were a big tough guy who was knocking things over in the market and taking whatever you felt like, and I didn't do anything because you were above the law. In the later Qing, it might be something very different where you weren't such a big tough guy anymore. But you were still in the market, but you were able to buy whatever you wanted on credit because I knew that the-- say, I'm the Chinese merchant, I might know that you would be getting your salary from the company captain who was in charge of dispersing that salary. And I, in fact, had an arrangement with that company captain that I would get a certain percentage of the money you owed me before you even got your salary paid to you.

And so that was another way of marking Manchu. And it's certainly not the same as in the early Qing, but nonetheless, a very clear way of identifying a certain kind of person, certain category of person, who was defined both by their behavior and by their belonging to a group that was-- membership in which was determined by birth. So in this way, Manchu ethnicity is articulated throughout the Qing in ways that are not consistent, but which, nonetheless, allow us to recognize that kind of behavior wherever it appears.

So what I'm trying to say here is that ethnicity is a relative condition. It depends on historical and social changes, a mutual constitution of difference that seem to matter for political reasons or for economic reasons. And these distinctive behaviors or practices, signs of ethnicity are bound to change over time. And thinking of the Manchus this way, then, allows us to understand how the constitution of Manchu identity could be so different in the late Qing as compared to the early Qing and still yet constitute Manchu identity, Manchu ethnicity. Yes. They were acculturated, bannermen as a whole, Manchus and others. But they were still marked off in these various ways.

Now, the second thing I mentioned in terms of how we look at the Qing differently-- this other implication of the sustained distinctiveness of the Manchus as a group in the Qing-- allows us to think about the empire as, not another Chinese dynasty or not only another Chinese dynasty, but of the Qing Empire as a very distinctive political creation that was a hybrid that brought together Manchu as well as Chinese thinking about politics, about governance, about economics, about the frontier in ways that we haven't really seen very prominently before in Chinese history.

And that aspect of the Qing and the growth of the empire in the 18th century, the tremendous economic, cultural, florescence of the 18th century, the military expansion of the late 17th and 18th centuries is the subject of the next and last lecture in this series on the Qing.

