

Parties and Scandals: State and Literary Discourse on the Lingguan Convent Case of 1838

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Abstract: This article examines the 1838 Lingguan Convent scandal, an infamous affair in which several prominent members of the Eight Banners were caught engaging in debauchery with nuns. It studies how the state and other bannermen respectively responded and interpreted this event, highlighting the contrasting perspectives that caused them to come to diverging conclusions on its implications. The state feared that such scandals signified a larger trend among all bannermen toward degenerate conduct unbefitting of their ideal image of the Manchu people. Yet among the Eight Banners, many lower down in the social pyramid showed disdain toward the behavior of those they viewed as out-of-touch elites, expressing their views through recording and reimagining this affair in their writings and ballads.

盛筵與醜聞：分析清朝政府與一般旗人對 1838 年靈官廟事件的論述

1838 年的靈官廟事件為一時流傳京畿的醜聞，此案因涉及八旗王公與官員在佛寺內與尼姑縱欲作樂，故備受各方注視。本文從清朝政府與普通北京旗人的兩個視角，討論此兩方對這一事件的不同反應與判斷。清政府視這一醜聞為八旗整體墮落的又一個例子，認為上梁不正下梁歪，如果上層八旗子弟風俗敗壞，則下層八旗子弟亦會仿效其行為。然而從當時北京旗人所著的筆記和子弟書對此事件的描述與分析來看，一般旗人對這些王公和高官的行為甚為鄙視。這些記述毫無保留地批評和諷刺王公高官的醜態惡習，對他們奢華的生活方式毫無共鳴之處。

In 1808, the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796–1820) penned an admonishment to all members of the Eight Banners, the elite military and administrative system that the Qing court saw as the foundation of Manchu society. The emperor reminded the bannermen of the glorious deeds of their ancestors in their original homeland Manchuria, from supporting the Qing founder Nurhaci in establishing their first capital in Shenyang, to crossing the Shanhai Pass with the Shunzhi Emperor in 1644 to begin their conquest of China. Jiaqing noted that, in the intervening generations, numerous talented ministers and generals had continued to emerge from the Eight Banner ranks to help expand the empire and secure the reign of the dynasty. Yet as the population of the Eight Banners grew exponentially, it was unavoidable that a few individuals who could not live up to the standards of their inimitable forebears would appear here and there (生齒日眾，間有莠良 *damu banjiha fusekengge ulhiyen i geren ofi, esei dorgi sain ehe adali aku*). Jiaqing hence exhorted all bannermen to follow the “Manchu Way” and focus on maintaining their ability and knowledge in horsemanship, archery, and the Manchu language, while forsaking the vices of alcohol, gambling, extravagant spending, and prostitution. The emperor concluded on an optimistic note, exclaiming that as long as all his intended audience could heed his words and “recover the old customs in time” (期復舊俗 *fe tacin be dahūbufi*), the Eight Banners would be able to continue to secure the legacy of the Qing founders in perpetuity.¹

1. Jiaqing Emperor, *Baqi zhen* 八旗箴 (Reprint, Beijing, 1832).

Unfortunately for the Jiaqing Emperor and his successors, the trend of banner-men straying from the Manchu Way appeared to become exacerbated over time. It became a central issue in the problem of the “Eight Banners livelihood” 八旗生計, an increasingly frequent topic of public policy debates throughout the nineteenth century. From the perspective of the Qing rulers, the predominant image of the banner-men was becoming less and less that of “talented ministers and generals,” and more and more that of spoiled, indolent aristocrats who engrossed themselves in every vice that Jiaqing had ordered them to eschew. A number of high-profile cases and scandals involving bannermen absconding from their official responsibilities and indulging in shameful activities during the Daoguang reign (1820–1850) increasingly convinced the court that moral decline had set in within the Eight Banners ranks. The Qing rulers tried to establish a clear standard of acceptable behavior through repeatedly promulgating exhortations similar to the one above and harshly punishing the bad apples, yet a longer-term solution to this problem would continue to prove elusive to them.

Not all bannermen at that time, however, followed this path toward depravity and decadence. In fact, such a way of life was completely out of reach for most of them. For the common soldiers, government clerks, and unemployed (閒散, *sula*) bannermen that comprised the majority of the Eight Banners population, an extravagant lifestyle was financially infeasible, as they did not earn enough income from the state or otherwise to sustain it. It was the high-ranking nobility, government officials, and military officers, relatively few in number, who could actually afford to lavish their wealth to organize large parties and indulge in debauchery. The large chasm of wealth and privilege between these two groups of people meant that despite both being registered under the same administrative system, they did not share the same values and mores. The former often found the latter’s lifestyle to be bizarre and out of touch, just as the poor would usually be estranged from the lives of the rich in any other society at any other time in history.

This article focuses on one of these infamous scandals, the 1838 Lingguan Convent 靈官廟 affair, in which prominent Manchu princes and officials were caught red-handed by the Qing government engaging in “perverse” activities inside a Buddhist monastery. While the sordid details of the misdeeds of these Eight Banners elites would already attract a lot of attention in themselves, this incident gained further political relevance because the bannermen were caught smoking opium in the convent while the state was engaged in monumental debates on the opium trade. After the official case was resolved, this affair continued to live on as a popular subject matter for literati and storytellers in the Eight Banners in their writings and compositions, which magnified, sensationalized, or exaggerated actions and motives of the incriminated individuals. Although the Qing rulers were fearful that this scandal exemplified an irreversible drift away from the “old customs” of their Manchu ancestors among the Eight Banners, these

writers and storytellers disputed that the comportment and conduct of these wealthy, powerful elites were in anyway representative of all bannermen.

To provide historical context to the discourse on the Lingguan Convent Scandal, this article will first discuss in general the hierarchy that existed within the Eight Banners system. In particular, I will highlight the contrast in income and wealth between those at the top of the pyramid and those at the bottom. Then, this article will illustrate the historical event of the scandal, reconstructed from state investigations of the case as recorded in official reports and imperial edicts. Finally, this article will examine subsequent literary and dramatic interpretations of the scandal, including an anecdotal account in a work of “jottings” (*biji* 筆記) and two popular “bannermen tales” (*zidishu* 子弟書). Through analyzing the contrasting perspectives between the state and individual bannermen regarding this event, this article argues that the Eight Banners had become such a stratified system by the eighteenth century that there was very little in the way of shared values or solidarity between those at the top and those at the bottom, despite the state’s assumption and hope otherwise.

The Haves and Have-nots: Hierarchy and Inequality in the Eight Banners

The general perception of the Eight Banners system, both among the general populace during the Qing and often today among contemporary Chinese historians, is that it was a monolithic entity. The Qing rulers themselves contributed significantly to shaping this assumption, constantly reminding the bannermen that they all belonged to a single *gurun*. The meaning of this Manchu term ranged from “people” to “country” to “dynasty.” It signified that the bannermen were all part of a single collective that stood apart from those who did not belong within this *gurun*, most significantly the *nikan* or the Chinese civilians. One of the primary characteristics that distinguished the bannermen from the civilians was that they were people who “ate the emperor’s rice.”² In the same admonishment to the Eight Banners mentioned earlier, the Jiaqing Emperor writes:

[We] bestowed to you your abodes and your fields,
Granted you silver and rice every month,
So that you can eat food without having to cultivate it,
And can wear clothes without having to weave them.³

2. Mark Elliott, *Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 192.

3. Jiaqing, *Baqi zhen*.

suwende boo usin šangnafi.
biyadari menggun bele buhe.
tarirakū bime jererengge baha.
jodorakū bime eturengge baha.

This kind of rhetoric perpetuated the common belief that every bannermen was guaranteed an “iron rice bowl” and had all their daily needs taken care of by the Qing government. From outside of the Eight Banners system looking in, it appeared that all bannermen were born into privilege.

Yet within the Eight Banners system, members of the *gurun* were not all treated equally. In fact, the Eight Banners functioned as a clearly delineated sociopolitical hierarchy, such that those at the very top of the pyramid earned a much higher income from the state and enjoyed many more privileges than those at the very bottom. By the nineteenth century, the wealth disparity between the top and bottom became further accentuated, as the salary structure of the Eight Banners had been fixed since the beginning of the dynasty and would not respond at all to inflation.⁴ While many lower-class members of the Eight Banners lived in destitution and had to shoulder heavy debts, those at the other end of the social spectrum could use their much higher state salaries and various other sources of income to find ways to overcome or circumvent any deleterious economic trends and maintain their luxurious living standard.

To examine this wealth disparity in detail, we can start by looking at the contrast in stipends earned by those at the bottom and those at the top. The bannermen's stipends had two components, a monetary salary remunerated in silver and a grain salary received in rice.⁵ For common Eight Banners soldiers, in the capital Beijing, a cavalryman received 36 taels of silver and around 23 piculs of rice annually, while a foot soldier received 18 taels and around 11 piculs annually.⁶ Garrison bannermen outside of the capital received less silver salary, but they were given a higher grain provision. At the very bottom of the Eight Banners social pyramid were the *sula* or “idle bannermen,” who did not hold any permanent position within the official or military bureaucracy. These men might find transient jobs in the Qing state apparatus, such as seasonal labor in the inner palace, and earn around one to two taels of silver annually. They had no

4. Elliott, *Manchu Way*, 305–7.

5. For common banner soldiers, their stipend was collectively called *qianliang* 錢糧 *ciyanliyang*. Individually, the silver salary was called *bingxiang* 兵餉, while the grain salary was called *xingliang* 行糧 when the soldiers were on campaign and *zuoliang* 坐糧 when they were not. For officers and ranked officials, the silver salary was referred to as *fengyin* 俸銀, and the grain salary was referred to as *fengliang* 俸糧.

6. During the Shunzhi reign, the silver salary for a cavalryman and a foot soldier were initially set at two taels and one tael respectively. Their salaries were increased to the amount listed here during the Kangxi reign (*BQTZCJ*, 29:1a-4a, 6: 2029–35; Liu Xiaomeng, *Qingdai Beijing qiren shehui* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), 44–45; Elliott, *Manchu Way*, 192).

financial security and would often have to look for employment opportunities elsewhere, or else feed off other members of their household who did receive salary from the court to survive.⁷

Meanwhile, at the very top of the food chain were the “main line” imperial nobles (*zongshi* 宗室, *uksun*), who were the direct descendants of Manchu founder Nurhaci’s father Taksi and bore the surname Aisin Gioro. During the Qianlong period, among the main line nobles, there were twelve main ranked hereditary titles, and each ranked title was further divided into various classes. Nobles with the highest title, the “prince of blood of the first degree” (*heshuo qinwang* 和碩親王, *hošoi cin wang*), received 10,000 taels of silver and 5,000 piculs of rice every year. These numbers would decrease by order of the grade of the title, such that those who held the lowest title, the “noble of the imperial lineage of the twelfth rank” (*feng’en jiangjun* 奉恩將軍, *kesi be tuwakiyara janggin*), received 110 taels of silver and 55 piculs of rice every year.⁸ There were also a considerable number of clansmen who did not inherit any title, called “unemployed imperial nobles” (*xiansan zongshi* 閒散宗室, *sula uksun*), but they should not be confused with the “unemployed bannermen” (*sula*). These people were still guaranteed remunerations from the court, even if at a lower annual rate than those who were ranked.⁹ As for Banner nobility who were not part of the main imperial lineage, those who held the highest regular title, “duke of the first degree” (*gong* 公, *gung*), received 700 taels of silver and 350 piculs of rice per year, while those who held the lowest regular title, the *yunqiwei* (雲騎尉, *tuwašara hafan*) received 85 taels and 42.5 piculs annually.¹⁰

These income gaps, stark as they already were, still did not paint the full picture of the wealth stratification in the Eight Banners. Those at the top of the pyramid could use their larger and more secure state income to invest in assets and resources that those at the bottom had much less access to, such as maintaining and expanding their land

7. For reference, in the period between the twenty-second and thirtieth years of the Qianlong reign, the number of seasonal workers employed by the Imperial Household Department (*neiwufu* 內務府), could number as high as 13,022 (Qianlong 22.8) and as low as 1,732 (Qianlong 28.6). See memorials from the Chancery of the Imperial Household Department (*Zongguan neiwu fu* 總管內務府), First Historical Archive of China, Beijing, China.

8. For a complete list of the amount of stipend earned by each level of nobility, see Guo Songyi, “Qing zongshi de dengji jiegou yu jingji diwei,” in Li Zongqing and Guo Songyi, eds., *Qingdai huangzu renkou xingwei he shehui huanjing* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1994), 116–17; and Lai Hui-min, *Tianhuang guizhou: Qing huangzu de jieceng jiegou yu jingji shenghuo* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2009 [1997]), 268. Lai’s source for these figures is the *Statutes of the Imperial Clan Court* (*Zongrenfu zeli* 宗人府則例) from the Guangxu reign.

9. In 1782, Qianlong decreed that all *sula uksun* who were direct descendants of Kangxi were to be dressed in the official regalia of fourth-ranked officials, even though they did not hold any actual titles. They were known as the “fourth rank imperial nobles” (*sipin zongshi* 四品宗室), distinguishing them from imperial nobles from other lineages who continued to be just called *sula uksun*. The amount of financial support both groups received fell from 85 taels of silver and 42.5 piculs of rice per year in 1671 down to 36 taels and 22.5 piculs annually in 1703 (Lai, *Tianhuang guizhou*, 275–77).

10. Liu, *Qingdai Beijing qiren shehui*, 22.

estates. In this respect, they would often receive backing and protection from the Qing government, as shown in Shuang Chen's study on the state allocation of reclaimed land in Jilin, in which transplanted wealthy bannermen from Beijing were favored over the "rural bannermen" (*tunding* 屯丁) from Manchuria, while the "floating bannermen" (*fuding* 浮丁) who were not listed in banner registers, and many of whom were relatives of the rural bannermen, were completely shunned.¹¹ The banner elites could also invest heavily in education, so that their descendants could enter officialdom through the examination system. For example, the Wanggiya (Wanyan 完顏) clan hired prominent Chinese scholars to serve as private tutors for its scions and built a large library for them to use. This investment paid off spectacularly, as the Wanggiyans were able to achieve sustained success in the imperial examinations and attain high-ranking positions in the officialdom in nearly every generation.¹² For the common bannermen who did not come from such privileged background, it might not have been impossible for them to purchase land or attempt to take the imperial examinations, but their chances of success were significantly reduced.

Hence, in nineteenth-century Beijing, even though members of Manchu nobility and the *sula/xiansan* might all fall under the same general umbrella of the Eight Banners, the livelihoods of these two groups were very distinct. For the latter, their day-to-day existence focused around providing basic sustenance for themselves and their families. Given that their stipends, should they even have one, were often insufficient to cover their daily expenses, and that they were obstructed by the Qing court from finding employment outside of the state bureaucracy, they had to exhaust their efforts to find alternative sources of income. They frequently had to accrue various debts and creatively maneuver around them to survive.¹³ The former did not concern themselves with such matters, and they had plenty of disposable income to spend on whatever luxuries and indulgences that satisfied their fancy. The banquets and gatherings that the Eight Banner elites were involved in, such as the one that will be discussed below in 1838, would usually only include those who shared similar elevated social stature. They were off-limits not just to the Chinese civilians in Beijing, but to most of their brethren in the Eight Banners as well.

11. Shuang Chen, *State-Sponsored Inequality: The Banner System and Social Stratification in Northeast China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 64–88.

12. Liu Xiaomeng, "Manren jiazhong de hanren: yi Wanyan Linqing jia wei li," *Manxue luncong* 2 (2012): 395–430.

13. This is illustrated in the diary of Mucihyan 穆齊賢, a "separate register household" *booi* ("bondservant") living in Beijing during the Daoguang era (Süngyun, *Siyan cuwang lu meng*, translated by Zhao Lingzhi and Guan Kang [Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2011]).

Party at the Nunnery: The 1838 Lingguan Convent Scandal and the Imperial Response

Among the various public scandals involving misbehaving Eight Banner elites in Beijing throughout the nineteenth century, what happened in Lingguan Convent in year 1838 (Daoguang 18) would become particularly notorious. In terms of the activities that the offenders engaged in, they were rather par for the course for the sorts of debauchery such privileged banner “scions” (*zidi* 子弟) would be attracted to: excessive drinking, cavorting with prostitutes, and smoking opium. It was the location of this party, the identity of a few of the individuals involved, and, perhaps most significantly, the timing of this event, that would make news of it particularly galling for the Qing court.

That a Buddhist temple was not just a place of religious worship but also a site of secular leisure and merriment was not in itself a shocking idea at that time. As scholars such as Susan Naquin and Cui Yunhua have pointed out, Beijing’s temple grounds often functioned as public parks that attracted both local denizens and tourists for recreational reasons that had little to do with the original purpose of these institutions. During the Qing, visitors from all walks of life would not be starved for entertainment options at temple fairs and markets; they could enjoy many different genres of street acts, listen to story tellers and singers, spectate and gamble on horse racing, patronize organized theatrical performances, or simply relax and socialize with friends or family on their own. Beijing’s privileged position as the capital of the empire meant that performers from all over China were attracted to congregate there, leading to the formation of a popular culture that blended styles and tastes that crossed regional and ethnic lines.¹⁴ Precisely because they were public sites where social boundaries often blurred and heterodox ideas and activities could potentially flourish, the state tended to observe temples with caution and suspicion.¹⁵ For the Qing rulers, the Lingguan Convent scandal was an abominable event that not only polluted the sanctity of this institution, but, more significantly, exhibited moral corruption within the ranks of the Eight Banners.

According to the records of Yigeng 奕賡, a bannerman who was living in Beijing during the time of this scandal and whose close relationship with one of those involved in this case will be discussed later, the Lingguan Convent was located just outside of Chaoyang Gate (*Chaoyang men* 朝陽門) in the eastern suburbs of the capital.¹⁶ In 1838, the head abbess of the convent was an infamous nun whose dharma name was

14. Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 632–38; Cui Yunhua, “Siguan neiwai: Qingdai zidishu zhongde Beijing simiao yu wenhua jiyi,” *Liyun xuekan* 勵耘學刊 31, no. 1 (2020): 57–71.

15. Naquin, *Peking*, 104–5.

16. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhuzhu* (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1994), 109. From what I can find, this convent no longer exists today.

Guangzhen 廣真. Yigeng claims that Guangzhen held absolutely no regard for any Buddhist disciplinary regulation, as she operated her monastery like a brothel. She not only freely engaged in illicit relations with many of her patrons herself, but she also “harbored young courtesans in her establishment and trained them in singing” (*xuyang chuji jian jiao gechang* 畜養雛姬，兼教歌唱). Many noblemen and high officials in the capital would frequent the convent and pay Guangzhen to spend the night with her charges, and some of them even invested in her establishment. This was explicitly illegal according to Eight Banners regulations, as bannermen were not allowed to stay overnight outside of the walls of the Inner City without the state’s permission, and certainly not permitted to engage in such indecent business. With the support of these powerful backers, Guangzhen became increasingly brazen in her actions, and the affairs of Lingguan Convent would become an open secret for the wealthy banner elites in the Inner City.

In August–September 1838 (Daoguang 18.7), Guangzhen decided to hold a large birthday party for herself at the convent. The guests that she invited numbered several dozen, including the following: Yiyu 奕譽, prince Zhuang of the first rank 莊親王; Puxi 溥禧, duke of the fourth rank 不入八分輔國公; Mianshun 綿順, duke of the third rank 不入八分鎮國公; Wenliang 文亮, a director in the Imperial Household Department 內務府郎中; Songjie 松傑, a director in the Court of Colonial Affairs 理藩院郎中; Jiqing 吉清, Wenqi 文奇, and Qingqi 慶啟, deputy ministers in the Ministry of Punishment 刑部員外郎; Kuiying 奎英, a secretary in the Board for the Administration of Outlying Regions 理藩院主事; and Tonggui 通桂, a clerk (*bitieshi* 筆貼士, *bithesi*) in the Imperial Household Department.¹⁷ The significant majority of this group were Manchu or Mongol bannermen who held high-ranking noble titles or central government positions. According to official reports recorded in the *Qing Veritable Records*, these individuals not only engaged in depraved acts with members of the convent, but some of them even brought prostitutes from other brothels with them to the feast. The party lasted from dusk till dawn, as the guests sang songs and performed lines from plays with their consorts, an activity that all bannermen had been banned from doing since the Yongzeng reign.

Unfortunately for these merry carousers, a state inspector (*yushi* 御使) was notified of their activities while they were still partying. While the Qing government quickly responded, the subsequent actions of the officers and officials responsible for capturing the offenders and inspecting their crimes caused this case to become even more farcical. When ordered to investigate this incident, Wang Yu 王珏, the commander of the Chaoyang Gate (*Dongmen zheng zhihui* 東門正指揮), was hesitant at first to seize

17. *Qing shilu*, *Xuanzong Chenghuangdi shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.4 and 18.9.8, 314:889.a–b, 314:894.a–b.

everyone involved, which allowed some of them the opportunity to escape. When he finally ascertained the identities of these individuals and put them under arrest, he was apparently so negligent in watching over them that Guangzhen somehow managed to escape back to her convent.¹⁸ Even the interrogations would descend into absurdity at times. According to Yigeng, after she was recaptured, Guangzhen maintained a defiant attitude towards the authorities, boasting that “many Princes and Dukes frequently come to my convent to play” (*buzhi shuren, ji wangye gongye yi chang chu wo miao wanshua* 不止數人，即王爺公爺亦常赴我廟玩耍).¹⁹ The first official report of this event did not touch on Guangzhen’s trial, but it did mention that two of the merry-makers, Wenliang and Tonggui, were foolish enough to try to give fake names to their interrogators.²⁰ All such fumbling and bumbling would cause the Daoguang Emperor, already irate at the scandal itself, to become further incensed.

The details of this case were already embarrassing enough for the Qing court, but the timing of this scandal would make things even worse. From 1836 to 1838, the Qing government was embroiled in contentious political debates on how to respond to the British trade of opium to China, with some officials favoring legalizing it, while others exhorted the emperor to crack down on it aggressively. The fact that his own kin were caught abusing the drug at a religious site particularly rankled the Daoguang Emperor, leading him to make the following proclamation a day after the sentencing of the offenders on October 26, 1838 (Daoguang 18.9.9):²¹

It is extremely abhorrent that the toxic spread of opium has reached the interior lands. The capital is the most exemplary territory of the nation, yet the Princes and Dukes have also been corrupted by this vile practice, and besides them, it can also be assumed that many officials and civilians are also consuming this drug. This is all because the authorities have been lax in cracking down on this behavior, causing this problem to grow day by day. Now that the case of individuals smoking opium in the convent of the nun Guangzhen has been uncovered, how can it be safely assumed that we cannot find other similar places that illicitly provide shelter for opium smokers? As for the streets and marketplaces where many people congregate, there are even more nooks and crannies where such criminals can be concealed. This matter must be carefully investigated, so that the root of the problem can be eradicated.

鴉片煙流毒內地，實堪痛恨。京師為首善之區，王公等亦復沾染惡習，此外官民人等吸食者，諒亦不少。皆由平日查緝不嚴，以致日甚一日。現在尼僧廣

18. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.4, 314:889.a-b.

19. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhuan*, 109.

20. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.4, 314:889.a-b.

21. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.9, 314:895.a.

真廟內，既有吸食鴉片之案，其餘窩藏吸煙處所，安能保其必無。至於通衢廣市，人煙稠密，五方雜處更易藏奸。尤當認真查察，以絕根株。

This pronouncement would herald the emperor's official decree to eradicate opium and the appointment of Lin Zexu (林則徐, 1785–1850) as a special imperial commissioner to carry out this order only a few months later, in March 1839 (Daoguang 19.1). Whether the Lingguan Convent scandal had any influence in hardening the emperor's resolve to make that fateful decision or not, the public profile of this case would only be further heightened by its entanglement in this much more significant political discourse.

Whatever the greater political implications of this event might have been, with regard to policymaking related to the “Eight Banners livelihood problem,” the 1838 Lingguan Convent scandal might not have had that much impact if it had been an isolated case. Yet just a year later in October 1839 (Daoguang 19.9), several other imperial clansmen were caught engaging in various unsavory activities. Among them, Ruizhu 瑞珠 and Hui'en 惠恩 were discovered to have been involved in gambling on cricket fights held in teashops in the marketplaces of the Outer City, with the former accused of being a chief organizer of such events. Even more contemptible in the eyes of the emperor, Yiqi 奕綺 was found performing songs on stage in public theaters in the Outer City, an act that Daoguang highlighted as just as bad as whatever Yiyu, Puxi, and Mianshun were doing with the nuns.²² All these misdemeanors would appear utterly frivolous, however, in comparison to the crimes of Miankai 綿愷, who was prince dun of the first rank and Daoguang's younger brother. Besides throwing extravagant banquets, Miankai also found pleasure in imprisoning and torturing his subordinates and servants, and he would eventually be demoted to become a second-rank prince when his excesses were revealed a couple of months before the Lingguan Convent scandal.²³ With all these cases occurring within the span of one year, it would be difficult for the emperor to think that they did not represent some kind of overall trend of moral decline among the bannermen.

The eventual judgement handed down by the Qing court on those involved in the scandal was quite harsh. The abbess Guangzhen was sentenced to exile to Xinjiang, and several other nuns and servants in the convent who escaped immediate arrest were ordered to be captured and punished.²⁴ Yiyu, Puxi, and Mianshun were stripped of their noble titles by the Imperial Clan Court, with the former two further fined two

22. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 19.9.26, 326:1129.a.

23. “Dun Qinqwang Miankai fudi yuyuan jiu jin duoren an” 惇親王綿愷府第寓園囚禁多人案 (The case of Miankai, prince dun of the first rank, imprisoning many people in his compounds and garden), in *Qingdai dang'an shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2010), 359.

24. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.4, 314:889.a-b.

years of their stipends because they were caught red-handed smoking opium.²⁵ Regarding Yiyu, instead of having one of his siblings inherit his title, as would be the more standard practice, the court transferred it to another branch in the Aisin Gioro clan instead.²⁶ Yiyu was eventually exiled to Jilin in 1840 (Daoguang 20) and then Heilongjiang in 1843 (Daoguang 23), before finally being allowed to return to the capital in 1850 (Daoguang 30). Wenliang, Tonggui, and Songjie were originally only cashiered of their respective official positions, but the Daoguang Emperor felt that was not enough and added the further penalty of exile to Rehe. Even Qingqi 慶啓, another deputy minister in the Ministry of Punishment, suffered a penalty, even though he was not a guest at the birthday party and apparently only stopped by the convent coincidentally to dry off from the rain.²⁷ These forceful punishments might have shown that the Daoguang Emperor took the offences committed by these Manchu elites in this specific case very seriously, but they ultimately did not do much to help “exterminate the root of the problem” as the emperor hoped to accomplish. It only furthered the impression among the Qing rulers that there was a general trend of bannermen adopting twisted values and profligate behavior, leading them to blame whatever problems that emerged regarding “Eight Banners livelihood” on personal moral failures rather than any structural breakdown in the institution of the Eight Banners as a whole.

Discussions and Dramatizations of the Lingguan Convent Scandal Among the Eight Banners

Given the salacious nature of a licentious party that involved esteemed Manchu princes and officials frolicking with dissolute nuns, it is not difficult to understand why it attracted the attention of many members of the Eight Banners community. The ascendance of the 1838 Lingguan Convent scandal from an interesting news item to an urban legend did not happen immediately, however. While the Beijing masses could learn about this event when it happened in general terms from reading the gazettes posted by the state, many of the sensational details of the scandal, such as Guangzhen’s background and connections, would at first only be shared through gossip and hearsay by those who had intimate links to individuals involved in the scandal. As Nathan Vedal has highlighted, by the nineteenth century, an Eight Banners literary culture had developed that diverged from the Qing state’s “Manchu Way.”²⁸ Despite being a subject

25. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.8, 314:894.b.

26. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhu*, 109.

27. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 18.9.4, 314:889.a-b.

28. Nathan Vedal, “Literati of the Garrisons: The Civil Service Translation Examination and Manchu Literary-Intellectual Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 82, no. 3 (August 2023): 341–42.

matter that would be considered politically sensitive from the perspective of the Qing state, bannermen literati became enthralled with the scandalous nature of this story, leading them to retelling it in their literary jottings or even reimagining it into songs and plays that were performed and published in the Inner City. In both the immediate accounts and the later dramatizations, there was little sympathy or camaraderie shown to those implicated in this case. Their authors and composers did not need the exhortations of the Jiaqing and Daoguang Emperor, for they were just as harsh in their criticism and mockery of the elite bannermen.

In the previous section, the main primary source I used to reconstruct the Lingguan Convent case, besides the *Veritable Records*, was the account of the bannerman Yigeng. He was one of the few who had access to first-hand knowledge of this event, given that one of the chief offenders in the case, Yiyu, was his brother. Their father, the original Prince Zhuang Mianke 綿課, was posthumously demoted in 1828 when the Daoguang Emperor held him responsible for allowing the tomb of his deceased empress to be flooded during its construction. Both Yiyu and Yigeng suffered collective punishment for their father's sin. While Yiyu was only temporarily demoted, and he eventually recovered his father's prince zhuang title, at least until the 1838 incident, Yigeng would not be able to reclaim his noble status. He settled for a brief five-year career as an imperial bodyguard before choosing to retire and becoming an "idle imperial clansman."²⁹ Yigeng would describe the Lingguan Convent scandal in his work of jottings *My Additional Humble Views* (*Guanjian suoji buyi* 管見所及補遺). He did not, however, speak about his relationship with Yiyu at all. He only mentions that, after Yiyu had his nobility revoked, the prince zhuang title was not inherited by any of his brothers and nephews, but it was instead bestowed upon a clansman from a distant lineage.³⁰ Yigeng's record was one of the first private accounts of this event, and his version of the story would be repeated in other jottings later in the dynasty, such as the *Anthology of Petty Matters in the Qing* (*Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔).

Despite being born as an imperial clansman, Yigeng was someone who quickly stumbled down the Eight Banners hierarchy. Although as a *sula uksun* he was still entitled to much higher state stipends than those at the bottom of the system, nevertheless he saw his political ambitions quickly dashed in his youth and suffered financial hardships as he got older.³¹ His unsympathetic view of the behavior of his brother in Lingguan Convent was not simply bore out of personal grudge, for he was equally ruthless

29. *Qing shilu*, Daoguang 8.9.26, 143:198a. For more on Yigeng's experiences as an imperial bodyguard, see Elena Suet-Ying Chiu, *Bannermen Tales (Zidishu): Manchu Storytelling and Cultural Hybridity in the Qing Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018), 236–38.

30. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhū*, 109.

31. See Yigeng, *Helü zì tàn* 鶴侶自嘆 (Crane Companion's self-lament), 2a, reproduced in *Zidishu quanji*, edited by Huang Shizhong, Li Fang, and Guan Jinhua (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), volume 9, 3,595.

in the way he described the misdeeds and failings of other elite bannermen in his *biji*. In another *biji* *Guanjian suoji* 管見所及 (My humble views), he opined that, while the imperial clan was not currently lacking in talented and honorable individuals, there were many depraved clansmen whose words and deeds were “disdained and reviled by their contemporaries.” They were so dissolute, he wrote, yet considered themselves so invincible that when they found any activity that was against the law, they would enthusiastically do it and boast, “if not me, then who else could do this?”³² What rankled Yigeng about clansmen such as his brother was not just their lack of moral character and self-respect, but even more so the sheer arrogance that led them to believe that they could somehow get away with doing things like smoking opium in a nunnery on account of their nobility and wealth. Yigeng did not uphold himself as someone of superior talent who deserved political success. To the contrary, he was quite critical of his own shortcomings and even gave himself the nickname “the world’s number one good-for-nothing” (*Tianxia diyi feiwu dongxi* 天下第一廢物東西).³³ Yet he still found it unfortunate that he had to live among people who gleefully spat on the legacy of their honorable ancestors through their depravity.

These “random jottings” were not the only literary pursuits that Yigeng engaged in. He was also a prolific composer of *zidishu*, a popular storytelling genre that emerged from within the Eight Banners community in the capital starting in the late eighteenth century. Under the pseudonym “Crane’s Companion” (*Helüshi* 鶴侶氏), Yigeng is credited as the author of over a dozen *zidishu*, and he likely produced many others anonymously. In particular, he composed a series of *zidishu* that revolved around the daily activities and musings of various kinds of imperial bodyguard, such as “Lamenting the Old Imperial Bodyguard” (*Lao shiwei tan* 老侍衛歎), “Lamenting the Young Imperial Bodyguard” (*Shao shiwei tan* 少侍衛歎), “Lamenting the Female Imperial Bodyguard” (*Nü shiwei tan* 女侍衛歎), and finally, “Crane Companion’s Self-Lament” (*Helü zi tan* 鶴侶自嘆). The works in this series share a common theme of the moral decay of Eight Banners community, especially among the privileged elites, and the sense that people such as Yigeng were “born at the wrong time.”³⁴

Zidishu was sung with the musical accompaniment of the *sanxian*, a three-stringed lute, either with one person singing and another playing the instrument, or with a single person accomplishing both roles. While the origin of this genre is still debated among modern scholars, it was clearly influenced by a wide variety of Chinese oral performance styles that were popular in the capital during the nineteenth century.³⁵

32. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhū*, 84.

33. Yigeng, *Jiamengxuan congzhū*, 78.

34. For further study on this series of reflections on the lives of bodyguards, see Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 240–57.

35. Scholars have suggested various theories on the origins of *zidishu*, including that it descended from old Manchu folk songs, drum songs (*guci* 鼓詞), wooden fish songs (*muyushu* 木魚書), or a mixture of many different storytelling genres

Although the bannermen were banned by the court from engaging with professional performances of songs and operas, they could compose and sing *zidishu* within their gated communities as amateurs without fearing any state reprisals. They perpetrated the ideal that their musical traditions were inherently more elegant and sophisticated than other popular genres, often associating their artistic products and performances with the word “pure” (*qing* 清).³⁶ While earlier *zidishu* that are extant from the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns tended to be adaptations of stories from existing literature, by the Daoguang reign, we find more and more works that focus on contemporary events or subjects such as the quotidian lives of the bannermen, as seen in Yigeng’s “imperial bodyguard” series.³⁷ These types of *zidishu* served as memory capsules of the stories and issues that captured the imagination of nineteenth-century bannermen, albeit with aspects and details hyperbolized or even altered through artistic license.

There exist two *zidishu* that dramatized the Lingguan Convent scandal, one simply titled *Lingguan Convent* (*Lingguan miao* 靈官廟) and the other *Lingguan Convent Continued* (*Xu Lingguan miao* 續靈官廟). Despite the title of the latter, these are two accounts of the same story with different perspectives. No name is given for the author of the first tale, while the pseudonym “Hidden Casket” (*Yunguishi* 韞匱氏) is indicated in the main text of the latter as its storyteller. Both pieces show fundamental knowledge of the basic course of events of the scandal as well as the main players involved, especially the abbess and her protégées, but their authors added different degrees of dramatic flair in their descriptions of the characters and events to please their respective audiences.³⁸ In addition to these two *zidishu*, the story of Lingguan Convent was also retold in works of other performative genres, including drum songs (*dagu shu* 大鼓書), *matou* tunes (*matou diao* 馬頭調), and *paizi* tunes (*paizi diao* 牌子調).³⁹

(Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 38–56; Cui Yunhua, *Shuzhai yu shufang zhi jian: Qingdai zidishu yanjiu* [Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005], 14–19; Guo Xiaoting, *Zidishu yu Qingdai qiren shehui yanjiu* [Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2013], 42–54; Chen Jinzhao, “Zidishu zhi tici lai yuan ji qi zonghe yanjiu” [PhD dissertation, National Chengchi University of Taiwan, 1977], 179–80).

36. One of the alternative names of *zidishu* was *qingyin zidishu* 清音子弟書, or “pure sound bannermen tales.” They also distinguished their own methods of performing the natively Chinese musical genre *shibuxian* from how it was performed in the Outer City’s commercial theaters, calling their ways the “pure style” (*qingmen* 清門), and the other ways the “muddled style” (*hunmen* 渾門) (Li Jiarui, *Beiping suqu lue* [Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990], 17; Nilü guoke, *Dushi congcan* [Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1995], 115).

37. Other *zidishu* that focused on contemporary issues include a couple that celebrated Qing defeat of Jahangir Khoja (*Zhangge'er* 張格爾) in 1828 and those that described and commentated on the performances of popular nineteenth-century storytellers Shi Yukun 石玉崑 and Suiyuanle 隨緣樂.

38. These two *zidishu*, along with others that describe other temples in Beijing such as Huguo Temple 護國寺 and Biyun Temple 碧雲寺, were the central subject of Cui Yunhua’s study of the use of temple grounds as public spaces of entertainment by Beijing bannermen (“Siguan neiwai”). These two works are also brought up by Guo Xiaoting as examples of *zidishu* that illustrate the overall moral degeneration of the bannermen, particularly in their indulgence in prostitution (Guo, *Zidishu yu Qingdai qiren shehui yanjiu*, 98–101).

39. Chen “Zidishu yanjiu,” 123.

Lingguan Convent, which we can infer was the earlier work on the basis of the titles, focuses mainly on what happened at the party itself and follows a more straightforward approach in its storytelling. The story opens with general pontifications of how “the land of the Buddha was transformed into the site of songs and dances, and the Gate of Emptiness changed into the gate to dissipation” (*Fodi fancheng gewudi, kongmen bian jiu shifeimen* 佛地翻成歌舞地，空門變就是非門), then introduces the main subject.⁴⁰ It clearly prioritizes the perspective of the Manchu guests, as it spends several verses depicting how they traveled with great fanfare and large entourages that included their family members (including supposedly some of their female relatives), servants, courtesans, and actors across the main roads of the Inner City, utterly without any concern that they could get in trouble by going to Guangzhen’s birthday party. Once they arrive at Lingguan Convent, their interactions with their hosts are vividly described as follows:⁴¹

They arrived at Lingguan Convent in no time,
 And they are all warmly greeted by Guangzhen.
 The young nuns each found guests they fancied and intimately held their hands,
 Coquettishly throwing tantrums and making angry faces.
 They all say I did not do anything to cause offence,
 “So is it not too cruel that you have not even shown your shadow here all this time.
 We are disciples of Buddha, yet we must long for you like estranged partners,
 Our Amitabha, if they could see from heaven, would surely not bless someone so
 heartless.”
 霎時來至靈官廟，廣真接進各道寒溫。
 那小尼姑各貼著相熱的先拉手，故意兒撒嬌面代嗔。
 說怎的了人家並無得罪處，這些時連影兒不傍太狠心。
 我們是佛門弟子到替你等活寡，我彌陀佛上天有眼菩薩也不佑負心的人。

Such lurid portrayal of the relationship between the nuns and their esteemed guests would not be found in any official reports or even private historical accounts, but they are added here to entice and excite the audience.

Descriptions of the feast include vulgar dialogues between the hosts and the guests, such as Guangzhen luring the nobles and officials to stay overnight by boasting of her disciples’ techniques in bed, as well as numerous scenes of the men flirting with the

40. *Lingguan miao* 靈官廟, 1a. For a modern reproduction, see *Qing Menggu Chewangfu cang zidishu* (Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubans gongsi, 1994), vol. 1, 169.

41. *Lingguan miao*, 2b, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu cang zidishu*, vol. 1, 169.

nuns. Finally, deep into the night, all the inhabitants of the convent fully surrendered themselves to their desires:⁴²

Those who enjoyed peace and quiet smoked opium in the meditation hall to satisfy their craving,

Or they found a young nun to be intimate with in a private room.

Those who wanted more excitement would cavort among the guests to engage in more idle chatter,

While those who were playful would grab ahold of courtesans to ask for kisses while staring at other guests.

Those who were interested in male love would lead young actors to an intimate place to engage in sodomy,

While those who could not handle their drinks are already deep in slumber on the dharma beds.

The female relatives found it convenient that the eyesores are out of the way,

So they hurried to Old Guang's outer chambers to meet their lovers.

那好靜的或在禪堂吸煙過癮，或携著年少的尼兒在蜜室相親。

又有那充熱的混在堂客裡面說說笑笑，好攬的抱著妓女眼望堂客叫親親。

那好男風的領著優童幽蜜之處把後庭戲，那不勝酒撿包早向禪床盹睡沉。

這女眷們見無人礙眼得了便，忙至到老廣的外室去會情人。

Unfortunately for these revelers, at the crack of dawn, they found that guardsmen led by the imperial inspector had besieged the convent, ready to put them all under arrest. The story ends with the following admonishment:⁴³

They cared not for tarnishing the Pure Land and inciting the wrath of the Divine Guardians;

They cared not for disgracing their family and incurring the anger of their ancestors.

They only cared about seeking immediate pleasures, forgetting that their shame would wound their spouses.

They only cared for instant gratification, forgetting that their odious reputation would be passed down to their descendants.

那管穢污了佛地揭諦怨，

那管玷辱了家門祖父嗔。

42. *Lingguan miao*, 5b, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 170.

43. *Lingguan miao*, 6a, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 170.

只顧了眼 下追歡忘卻了有傷結髮，
只顧了目時快樂忘卻了遺臭子孫。

Here, the author directly addresses these bannermen, reprimanding them on how their devotion to momentary pleasure has brought irreparable harm to not just themselves, but also their entire clans from their ancestors to their descendants.

Lingguan Convent Continued, meanwhile, focuses much more on the nunnery and Guangzhen. It is split into two parts, with the first chapter narrating Guangzhen's backstory and describing the architecture and scenery at Lingguan Convent, and the second chapter describing the 1838 scandal. While the first title does contain religious messages here and there, *Lingguan Convent Continued* is much more thoroughly infused with Buddhist terminology and constantly inserts religious admonitions throughout the text. There is much less direct portrayal of the actions of the revelers deep in the night, especially any direct mention of sex, and *Hidden Casket* generally shies away from sensationalizing this story through titillation. Instead, it contains much more detailed descriptions of the birthday feast itself, including the various drinking games that were played and the perverse conversations that the hosts and the guests shared. Rather than focusing on reprimanding the bannermen for the shame they would bring to their families, *Lingguan Convent Continued* was more concerned about how this party demonstrated the breakdown of the religious and social order beyond the Eight Banners.

The composer begins their tale by lamenting that the majority of Buddhist clergy of their time have become “foolish people that indulges in earthly desires” (*sengni daban shi jiurou yuren* 僧尼大半是酒肉愚人). After decrying the falling moral standards of Buddhist communities, the composer then excoriates the bannermen that became intimately involved with such dissolute monks and nuns:⁴⁴

Lamenting the degeneration of the vast seas of sufferers,
One could only think of their frequent descent into dreams of Yangtai.
When saving those in trouble and supporting those in need, they are especially stingy,
Yet when pursuing pleasure and seeking amusement, they will freely toss away money.
To be intimate with performers and actors, they waste their fortunes and ruin their families,
To smoke opium, they break the law and injure their bodies.
Hidden Casket in leisure composed a new ballad of *Lingguan Convent*,
So as to sketch out these seas of sins, skies of passions, and forests of temptations.

44. Xu *Lingguan miao* 緒靈官廟, 1a–1b, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 306.

茫茫遇害嘆沈淪，惟有陽台入夢頻。
拯患扶危偏吝嗇，追歡索笑願揮金。
狎近優伶傾家敗產，吸食鴉片犯法傷身。
韞匱氏間中新譜靈官廟，寫出那孽海情天紅粉的叢林。

After this opening, the ballad gives an ornate description of the monastery, intentionally highlighting the elegant scenery and refined décor of the establishment to set it in contrast with the vulgar and blasphemous activities that its denizens frequently engaged in. It then highlights the young girls and boys raised by Guangzhen in the monastery, describing them in ways typically reserved for courtesans, not religious acolytes. Hidden Casket also uses several stanzas emphasizing the monastery's large storage of imported opium as well as its collection of high-quality oil lamps and pipes. By the end of the first chapter, the readers are painted a perfect picture of a high-class brothel and opium den that was wearing the skin of a holy sanctuary.

In the second chapter, the composer introduces the scenario of the day of Guangzhen's birthday with a few more Buddhist didactive verses, then commences his retelling of the party:⁴⁵

Among them, there is no distinction between the noble and the base, nor between the
fragrant and the pungent.
The philistine and the noble, the refined and the vulgar, are all mixed together.
There are those who came from imperial lineage and regal upbringing,
And those who shared noble background and standing.
Yet they willingly suppress their superiority and subject themselves to the inferior,
Debasing their transcendent kinship.
They have forgotten their hereditary titles and pristine lineage,
Willingly degrading themselves in depravity.
這其間貴賤無分薰蕕莫辨，
魚龍相混玉石相雜。
也有那派衍天潢金枝玉葉，
系連楓陞五侯家。
抑尊就卑視不為異，
自將玉樹近蒹葭。
忘卻了奕世藩封剪桐舊譜，
甘心淪落狗狹邪。

45. Xu Lingguan miao, 9a, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 308.

The Manchu nobles are not the only participants put under the spotlight in this ballad, however, as *Hidden Casket* also highlights the presence of all sorts of other people, including degree-holders, wealthy townspeople, and idle hangers-on of the rich and powerful, as well as a monk who broke Buddhist regulations to come pay his respect to his “aunt” Guangzhen.⁴⁶ Hence, according to this second ballad, it was not only what the bannermen were doing in the convent that brought them disgrace, but also the sorts of people they willingly degraded themselves to carouse with. The ballad also ends with the imperial guards crashing the party at the convent. However, *Hidden Casket* was not interested in the fate of the revelers after they were arrested, but rather on how this religious institution was cleansed of the filth that had infested it.⁴⁷

Yigeng merely reported on the scandal and its aftermath matter-of-factly in his *biji*. In contrast, these two *zidishu* magnified and sensationalized the depraved behaviors of the Manchu nobles and officials involved in this scandal. While the readership of Yigeng’s *biji* was unlikely to be that high at that time, both *zidishu*, as well as all of Yigeng’s works, were much more widely disseminated and collected in the Inner City and possibly even beyond. The performances of *zidishu* usually occurred in private settings such as amateur clubs (*piaofang* 票房 and *shushe* 書社) and salons (*tanghui* 堂會), but this genre could also be enjoyed in more public stages in teahouses and temple fairs alongside other popular styles.⁴⁸ Although the main audience of *zidishu* came from the Eight Banners community, Chinese civilians could also enjoy the public performances, and there were even anecdotal cases of Chinese people who lived or often entered the Inner City, especially government officials and their scions, who became members of amateur clubs and learned to sing *zidishu*.⁴⁹ The libretti of the *zidishu* would have even more reach, as they were cheaply reproduced as hand-copied small booklets by proprietors such as “Hundred Books Zhang” (*Baiben Zhang* 百本張) and sold at affordable prices of around 300–600 *wen* to local consumers in Beijing.⁵⁰ Both *Lingguan Convent* and *Lingguan Convent Continued* appear on the extant catalogue of “Hundred Books Zhang,” and copies of both eventually found their way to the private collection of the Mongol noble Prince Che 蒙古車王.⁵¹ Most of the customers for these texts were likely

46. Xu *Lingguan miao*, 9a–10a, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 308.

47. Xu *Lingguan miao*, 12b–13a, in *Qing Menggu Chewangfu zidishu*, vol. 1, 309.

48. Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 63–103. For more information on these different types of venues where *zidishu* performances happened, see also Cui, *Shuzhai yu shufang zhi jian*, 113–15, and Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 97–98.

49. Zhichaozi, *Jiujing suoji* (Taipei: Chun wenxue chubanshe, 1972), 96–97.

50. Zhenzhen Lu, “The Production of *Zidishu* in Manuscript and Print during the Qing and Republican Eras: A Survey of Extant Corpus,” *CHINOPERL: Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature*, 37, no. 2 (December 2018): 95–127; Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 270–85.

51. Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 283–84. Notably, neither of these libretti appear in the catalogue of another notable *zidishu* seller, Leshantang 樂善堂, which suggests the possibility that both were composed after 1830 when that catalogue was produced

bannermen, but they were also easily obtainable by any other denizen of the capital, especially when they were sold by these proprietors at temple fairs.⁵² Through the process of literary reimagination, awareness of the Lingguan Convent Scandal expanded from an interesting but ephemeral news anecdote to a sensational story that was preserved long in the minds of many who consumed this genre of popular performance, which included bannermen from top to bottom of the Eight Banners pyramid.

What these two *zidishu* did share with Yigeng's jottings was a clear expression of disdain towards the actions of the Manchu nobles and high officials in this affair. As much as these two works may play up certain sordid details to tantalize the readers and listeners, their composers nevertheless made their positions on the conduct of the merry-makers quite transparent. There was no hint of sympathy toward the fate of the arrested bannermen nor any attempt to rationalize their behavior. The harsh tones they adopted in their condemnations of these individuals are no less sharp than that of the Daoguang Emperor in his edicts. Yet the method in which they chose to deliver their criticisms of these elite bannermen took the form of operatic ballads that did not have a place in the state's definition of Manchu identity. Although the Qing court might have tacitly allowed the bannermen to engage with *zidishu*, provided they were not doing so at a professional level, composing, performing, and consuming frivolous songs was still clearly not part of the "Manchu Way." Nevertheless, the authors of these two ballads managed to use them as vehicles of edification, impressing their messages in the minds of their audience in a way that the emperor's edicts never could.

Conclusion

There are many similarities between the way the state viewed the 1838 scandal of Lingguan Convent and the way individual bannermen such as Yigeng and the two *zidishu* composers described and reimagined this event. Both sides held the position that the behavior of the Manchu princes and officials who participated in this party was reprehensible and shameful. The former dealt with the offenders with harsh punishments, and the latter found the punishments to be well-deserved and even karmic, even if, in the case of Yigeng, the one who received the toughest penalty happened to be his brother. Both sides agreed with the idea that these individuals' actions betrayed the values and ideals established by their ancestors, bringing shame to their clans and lineages.

(Chen Jinzhao, "Xiancun Qing chaoben zidishu mulu yanjiu" in *2003 nian liang'an shuochang yishu xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*, edited by Shi Deyu and Wang Youlan [Taipei: Guoli chuantong yishu zhongxin, 2003], 49–51).

52. Chiu, *Bannermen Tales*, 278.

Yet where their perspectives diverged was how each side interpreted the implications of such scandals. The Qing rulers saw the Eight Banners as an indivisible system, and they sought to impose a singular, monolithic identity on all its members, asking them to conform to a specific set of characteristics and values. If the Lingguan Convent scandal was an isolated phenomenon, the Daoguang Emperor might have been able to dismiss it as an isolated case of a few rotten eggs acting cavalierly. Yet because it happened together with many other cases of bannermen misconduct, as well as in context of the larger intensifying political discourse on Eight Banners livelihood and especially on opium, it is not hard to see why the emperor and his court scrutinized this case with much more attention and came to the conclusion that it signified a snowballing trend of bannermen abandoning the Manchu Way and sinking themselves into decadence and delinquency.

The way that Yigeng and the composers of the two *zidishu* portrayed the actions of Eight Banners nobles and elites, however, clearly showed that there were very few shared values or beliefs between themselves and their literary subjects. To them and many of their audience, the world they lived in was drastically different from the world of elite nobles such as Yiyu. What the princes and dukes were able to lavish their wealth and waste their time on, the common Manchu soldier (or even low-ranking imperial clansman) could and would never do. By emphasizing their perspective, we can see that the Eight Banners system was never as monolithic as the state wished it would be and often assumed it to be. The identity of “bannerman” could not be simplified into a small set of skills, beliefs, and customs, as it was too large, too hierarchical, and too complex to allow for it.

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