

Inside the World of the Eunuch

A Social History of the Emperor's Servants in Qing China

Melissa S. Dale

Hong Kong University Press
The University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam Road
Hong Kong
www.hkupress.hku.hk

© 2018 Hong Kong University Press

ISBN 978-988-8455-75-1 (*Hardback*)

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Paramount Printing Co. Ltd., Hong Kong, China

Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgments	ix
Conventions	xi
Introduction: The Other Side of Eunuch History	1
1. The Palace Eunuch System	14
2. Routes to the Palace	28
3. Unrobing the Emasculated Body	48
4. Entering the Emperor's Realm	66
5. The Parallel World of the Eunuch: Eunuch Society	89
6. Running away from the Palace	107
7. Eunuch Suicide: Punishment, Not Compassion	126
8. Authorized Exits from the System: Sick Leave, Retirement, Discharge, and Death	145
9. Surviving the Fall of the Qing: Chinese Eunuchs Post 1911	170
10. Conclusion	194
Appendix 1: Reign Titles and Dates of the Qing Emperors	201
Appendix 2: Eunuch Suicide Regulations	202
Appendix 3: Eunuch Temples	203
Appendix 4: Eunuch Cemeteries	204
Bibliography	205
Index	215

Illustrations

Figure 3.1	Eunuch in front of Baohua Hall, 1900	49
Figure 4.1	Eunuchs serving	69
Figure 4.2	Group photo of eunuchs	71
Figure 4.3	Zhang Qianhe 張謙和, <i>Chuxiugong zongguan taijian</i> 儲秀宮總管太監	76
Figure 4.4	Empress Dowager Cixi attended by eunuchs, 1903	76
Figure 5.1	Eunuch with dog	96
Figure 8.1	Group of former palace eunuchs at Gang Tie Miao	161
Figure 9.1	Eunuchs scuffling with police, September 1, 1923	183
Figure 9.2	Eunuch of the Imperial Court, Peking	188
Figure 9.3	Eunuchs waiting in front of the palace, ca. 1924	190

Conventions

As will be seen a Chinese eunuch was more than just an emasculated boy or man, he was a servant of the imperial court. Throughout this study, due to the entrenched nature of the term “eunuch” in the English language, the Chinese term *taijian* 太監 will retain its customary translation.

The hereditary professionals that performed emasculations during the Qing were known as *daozijiang* 刀子匠. While late Qing contemporaries such as George Carter Stent translated this term as “knifers,” I have chosen to use the less pejorative term, “knife experts.”

I have chosen to use the term “emasculatation” rather than “castration,” due to its medical accuracy. The medical definition of “emasculatation” is the removal of the external male genitalia (scrotum, testes, and penis), whereas “castration” is defined as the removal of the testes. The use of the term is not without its problems, as some might assume that “emasculatation” carries the connotation of feminization. Within this work, the “emasculatation” is not meant to suggest feminization. Rather, when feminization is meant, that term will be used specifically. When referring to eunuchs during previous dynasties, I have chosen to follow the convention of authors who specialize during those periods and use the term, “castration.”

Ages in *sui* 歲 are traditionally calculated using the Chinese lunar calendar, beginning with one year at birth and increasing at the Lunar New Year (not birthdays). Here, *sui* is translated as “years old.”

I refer to palaces, buildings, and administrative departments by their romanized Chinese names unless they are well known by their English translation.

Last, throughout this work, I have made every effort to include the Chinese characters for eunuchs’ names in order to ensure that they are finally given a voice in the historical record.

Introduction: The Other Side of Eunuch History

Throughout history, eunuchs have been defined by their lack of body parts. Genitally mutilating *one* group to keep *another* pure,¹ rulers have relied on eunuchs as “keepers of the harem,” servants who ensured the sexual purity of the palace women, and the legitimacy of the imperial lineage. Societies throughout the world have also castrated or emasculated young boys and men for religious, political, or cultural purposes. While oftentimes labeled erroneously as an exoticism unique to imperial China, eunuchs played roles in the histories of the Roman and Ottoman Empires, served in the Korean imperial court, and continue to exist in contemporary Indian society. In China, the practice of utilizing eunuchs as imperial servants dates back thousands of years to ancient dynasties such as the Shang (1766–1122 BCE)² and Qin (221–206 BCE).³ However, eunuchs are most often associated with dynasties such as the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), Tang (618–907), and Ming (1368–1644), when they served in greater numbers and wielded more political influence.

Emasculating males to become servants for the Chinese emperor was intended to produce a submissive and loyal workforce. Eunuchs were considered to be “ideal servants,”⁴ loyal to their masters due to the act’s marking of the body and its stigma. In China, emasculation was intended to sever more than body parts. Beyond the physical act of genital mutilation, emasculation carried important social implications for the eunuch. The colloquial term for emasculation, *chu jia* (出家 leaving home) symbolized the act’s intention—with the cut of a knife—to destroy former

-
1. This phrase is a slightly modified version of George Carter Stent’s comment that eunuchs were symbolic of the lowly position of women in what he termed “eastern despotic countries” as exemplified by “when their husbands or masters conceive it necessary to resort to such horrible mutilations of *one* sex to keep the *other* pure.” See George Carter Stent, “Chinese Eunuchs,” *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, no. 11 (1877): 143.
 2. Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 11.
 3. Du Wanyan notes that scholars locate the origins of eunuchs in either the Zhou dynasty or the Qin and Han periods. Both Du and Tsai mention the reference to palace eunuchs on oracle bones from the Shang dynasty. See Du Wanyan, *Zhongguo huanguan shi* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1996), 9–18 and Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 11.
 4. Preston Torbert as cited in Evelyn Rawski. See Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 163.

familial and social bonds.⁵ The stigma of physical disfigurement from emasculation was considered so powerful that it would lead society to ostracize eunuchs and cause their families to disown them, thereby increasing the dependency of the eunuch upon his master(s).⁶

Emasculation placed eunuchs in direct opposition to the Confucian philosophy that served as the source of accepted values and norms for the Chinese government and society. First, the “reproductive death” resulting from emasculation contributed to the categorization of eunuchs as “other” due to their inability to uphold the Confucian tenet of filial piety through procreation. Second, the physical act of marking the body stood as an affront to the belief that one should not harm one’s body as it is given by one’s parents. Despite these negative social implications, many candidates viewed the potential gains associated with service as a palace eunuch (especially the hope of escaping poverty) as outweighing any conflict with Confucian philosophy or social norms.

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), volunteers rather than prisoners supplied the imperial court with the majority of candidates for service as palace eunuchs. Preferring to distance itself from the genital mutilation of young boys and men, the Qing imperial court relied on licensed professionals to secure and emasculate candidates for service within the Forbidden City. Those unable or unwilling to pay a professional to perform the procedure often underwent emasculation at home at the hands of a family member. While an application prerequisite, emasculation alone did not ensure selection as a palace eunuch. As a result, some young boys and men who had their genitalia excised in the hopes of becoming a palace eunuch found themselves disfigured and rejected.

Despite eunuchs’ intended purpose, histories clearly show that eunuchs were oftentimes far from the “ideal servants.” Histories of eunuchs are full of portrayals of eunuchs as conniving, corrupt, and selfish individuals who interfered in politics and amassed personal wealth. Contemporary scholars have been captivated by the political machinations of powerful eunuchs during the Tang and Ming dynasties, when eunuchs served in greater numbers and managed to wield power within the government. As a result, studies on eunuchs during these dynasties have formed the basis of knowledge for the eunuch population as a whole. This preoccupation with Tang and Ming eunuchs has led scholars to overlook the histories of eunuchs during dynasties such as the Qing, when their numbers were reduced and their political activity was highly restricted, yet their lives were equally as fascinating.

When scholars and authors do include Qing dynasty eunuchs in their studies, many tend to write about eunuch interference in politics and the corrupt practices of a small number of notorious eunuchs such as Li Lianying 李蓮英 or An Dehai

5. This term is also used to refer to the process of becoming a monk.

6. Preston Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household Department: A Study of Its Organization and Principal Functions, 1662–1796* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 2.

安德海.⁷ This narrow focus has perpetuated the stereotypical representation of *all* eunuchs as corrupt, political manipulators.⁸ Among the Qing eunuch population, those who held positions of power such as Li or An were few. In reality, only those at the top of the eunuch hierarchy enjoyed such wealth and power. Studies focusing primarily on a small number of notorious eunuchs, rather than the remaining eunuch population, have contributed to the misperception that these eunuchs and their political maneuverings represent Qing eunuchs as a whole.⁹ As a result, only one side of eunuch history has been presented. This study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and balanced reconstruction of late imperial eunuch society as a whole and ultimately present the other side of eunuch history.¹⁰

The Qing dynasty's reliance on eunuchs predates the Manchu invasion of China in 1644. In the early 1600s, as the Manchus established their dynasty and prepared to invade China proper, they began to incorporate eunuchs into their household servant system. This was a departure from traditional Manchu practices of staffing their households with bondservants.¹¹ Once inside China proper, the Qing expanded their use of eunuchs, finding them to be essential for the functioning of the palace but only if they were utilized in reduced numbers,¹² kept in menial positions, and managed well. While Manchu reliance on eunuchs increased during this period, in comparison with the practices of their Ming dynasty predecessors, this was ultimately a drastic reduction in the size and responsibilities delegated to the palace eunuch population. Only employing some three to five percent of the number of eunuchs previously in the service of the Ming court, the Manchus sent a clear message that the new conquest government would not be relying on eunuchs in the same capacity as their predecessors.

As will be seen, the number of Qing palace eunuchs would fluctuate as supply and demand rose throughout the dynasty, reaching at its peak approximately 3,300

-
7. Two eunuchs who enjoyed great power under the de facto rule of the Empress Dowager Cixi during the late Qing.
 8. See Mary Anderson, *Hidden Power: The Palace Eunuchs of Imperial China* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1990); Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of Kang-Hsi, 1654–1722* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); and Albert Chan, *Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).
 9. Currently, the principal information on Qing dynasty eunuchs is found in broad institutional histories of the eunuch system, which span dynasties. These works often capitalize on the exoticism of the eunuch and his supposed knowledge of the secret life of the imperial court within the Forbidden City.
 10. Scholars such as Jennifer Jay and Tang Yinian were some of the first to explore the lives of eunuchs. See Jennifer Jay, "Another Side of Chinese Eunuch History: Castration, Marriage, Adoption, and Burial," *Canadian Journal of History* XXVII (Dec. 1993): 459–78. The work of Tang Yinian has been instrumental for the reconstruction of the social history of Qing dynasty eunuchs. This study was inspired in part by several of the topics mentioned in his work (i.e., eunuch runaways and eunuch suicide) and aims to provide further research and analysis on these topics. See Tang Yinian, *Qing gong taijian* (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1993).
 11. Bondservants were basically slaves who attended to the domestic affairs of the imperial household. See Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei* (Zhongjing: Duli chubanshe, 1946), 66.
 12. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) eunuch numbers peaked at 100,000. See Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 11. Viewing eunuchs as one of the reasons for the downfall of their predecessors, the Qing capped eunuch numbers at approximately 3,000–3,300.

eunuchs during the reign of the Kangxi emperor (1662–1722).¹³ Towards the end of the dynasty, these numbers would steadily decline. In the late Qing, as a series of young emperors came to the throne, eunuchs were not needed in such large numbers, as these emperors were too young to need an empress, imperial consorts, and concubines. During these periods, though, eunuchs continued to be useful, particularly when powerful regents (such as the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后) relied on individuals outside the civil service, such as eunuchs, to facilitate their hold on power.

During the later years of the dynasty, the palace's once strict control over eunuchs would be repeatedly challenged as eunuchs pushed the boundaries of the limitations put in place to ensure their subservience. Without a strong and engaged emperor on the throne, these regulations would be repeatedly ignored or even relaxed by regents who held the real power at court. Such a scenario created opportunities for eunuchs to reassert themselves and to capitalize on their positions of unofficial power and influence to engage in "intimate politics."¹⁴ While the political maneuverings of a select group of infamous eunuchs are well documented, little is known about the life experiences of the remaining eunuch population.

This study's point of departure is to redirect the scholarly gaze away from a small number of powerful eunuchs and onto the majority of palace eunuchs who never rose to the heights of eunuch power. As a social history of Qing palace eunuchs, this work will explore the life experiences of this group of previously silent inhabitants of the palace. The chapters that follow remind us that as servants of the imperial court, the history of eunuchs is intertwined with that of the palace and the Manchu ruling class. Despite working and living within the seat of imperial power, the majority of Qing palace eunuchs held no real political power, and in the broad scheme of the history of the dynasty, only a small percentage managed to influence politics. What is fascinating about the study of Qing palace eunuchs is not their attempts to gain political power and wealth but rather their interactions with society and those in power.

The importance of this work lies beyond just giving voice to a minority population void of direct political power. Eunuchs, as servants, should not be overlooked in the historical record due to their lack of formal power. As Evelyn Rawski has noted, servants "provide rich insight into the discourse of power."¹⁵ This social history of eunuchs places them at the center of the story and views their interactions

13. As Kutcher notes, the Qianlong emperor, in an attempt to not exceed the number of eunuchs held by his grandfather, the Kangxi emperor, set his eunuch quota at less than 3,300. See Norman A. Kutcher, "Unspoken Collusions: The Empowerment of Yuanming yuan Eunuchs in the Qianlong Period," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70, no. 2 (Dec. 2010): 469. In Rawski's table of the number of eunuchs in palace service from 1750 to 1922, she notes that, in 1750 (during the reign of Qianlong), there were 3,107 eunuchs in service. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, Table 1.2, 165.

14. See Mitamura Taisuke, *Chinese Eunuchs: The Structure of Intimate Politics*, trans. Charles A. Pomeroy (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, Co., 1970).

15. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 160.

with society. As will be seen, the study of Qing dynasty eunuchs contributes to the scholarly discourse on gender, sexuality, class, and labor relations during the late imperial and republican periods. Moreover, due to their assignment to the palace, at the seat of imperial power, and their interaction with the ruling elite, the study of eunuchs also adds depth to legal and institutional histories of the Qing and to our understandings of the principles that underlay Manchu rule and labor relations.

The organization of the work that follows is designed to highlight the key events and aspects of Qing palace eunuch life—tracing the important events in eunuchs' lives from the point of emasculation to employment within the palace, to life as a palace eunuch, to discharge, retirement, and death—focusing on the experiences that eunuchs encountered in their lives inside and outside the palace walls. Moving beyond the 1911 divide, this study also examines the abolition of the eunuch system and the reintegration of eunuchs into society in Republican China.

This study challenges the view of eunuchs as an “exotic” other of only fleeting interest in Chinese studies due to their numerical minority and their indirect involvement in politics. Eunuchs were seen as necessary for the functioning of the imperial court but also as a source of anxiety and constant labor challenges. The following chapters address a number of issues central to late imperial Chinese history: social class, the nature of status groups, and the internal workings of the imperial institution. They also shed new light on more recent historiographical concerns such as the intersections between gender and power, Chinese conceptions of masculinity, the nature of indentured status, medical history, and crime and punishment. In sum, this study recasts and reclaims the past of this previously silent and often miscast group so vital to the imperial court.

A eunuch's *raison d'être* was to serve the emperor and his court. Spending the majority of their lives behind the palace walls within the imperial seat of power and the inner sanctum of the emperor meant that eunuchs' lives were highly regulated. As will be seen, despite these measures, eunuchs repeatedly tested the boundaries of their role, challenging the restraints put in place to ensure their subservience and curb their attempts to attain political power. An examination of the many regulations that governed eunuchs' lives and the punishments they faced for infractions reveals a tension between the imperial court's need to trust its servants and the distrust and anxiety that permeated their labor relations.¹⁶ This study shows that eunuchs managed to exert a degree of agency in their lives by creating a parallel realm alongside that of the emperor. This realm was most evident after nightfall, when eunuchs were the only men besides the emperor allowed within the inner court, when they congregated while sitting watch or within their shared housing. It is during these late hours of the day and into the night that eunuchs would strengthen their own

16. This study aims to build on the foundational work of scholars such as Evelyn S. Rawski who have defined eunuch activities under the rubric of master-servant relations and detailed the “tensions” presented by the contradictory low status of eunuchs and the power enjoyed by some due to their proximity to the emperor and members of his family. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*.

social bonds and engage in activities that their imperial masters would perceive as most unbecoming a servant of the emperor.

Qing palace regulations regarding eunuch mobility reveal the complexities of unfree status during the Qing dynasty. Eunuchs were servants but not slaves. A eunuch's service was intended to be for life or until he was too ill or too old to serve. During a eunuch's tenure in the palace, the Imperial Household Department restricted his mobility and behavior. Despite these restrictions, eunuchs did receive salaries, time off when they were too ill to work and bereavement leave to mourn the death of a parent.

During the mid- to late Qing, as regulations became more lax, eunuchs were allowed more freedom of mobility. Nevertheless, labor relations between eunuchs and their masters, members of the imperial court and the bondservants that supervised them on behalf of the imperial court, were often strained and tense as eunuchs pushed the boundaries of acceptable behavior and responded to the often oppressive environment in which they worked and lived. Within the palace, minor infractions were often met with corporal punishment. Eunuchs were subject to frequent beatings by their eunuch superiors as a result of their perceived faults and through collective responsibility for those of their associates. Oral histories of late Qing dynasty eunuchs include stories of eunuchs being beaten for miscommunications and minor infractions. Labor relations between master and servant became defined by a management style reliant on corporal punishment and the use of harsh punishments such as exile and manual labor.

The study of eunuchs' lives also sheds light on understandings of gender and ideas of masculinity during the Qing and republican periods. While some studies have labeled eunuchs as a "third sex," this is an example of presentism that does not reflect Qing categorizations of gender and sexuality. As Jennifer Jay's 1993 article revealed, eunuchs identified as male. Moreover, as my analysis will show, while eunuch gender was certainly questioned by others and even seen as a cause of anxiety among the court, gender was not the primary issue in a eunuch's life. Rather, my work reveals that although gender is an interesting theme to explore in eunuch history, the eunuch story is more concerned with eunuch attempts to insert a degree of agency into servile lives governed by a myriad of rules and regulations.

At the most basic level, the aim of this study is threefold: (1) to present new findings, views, and analysis on aspects of the social history of the Qing palace eunuch masses; (2) to fill the historical gap in eunuch histories by focusing on eunuchs during the Qing and continuing the story past the traditional 1911 termination with the fall of the Qing on into the Republican era (1912–1949); and (3) to highlight and build upon the foundational work of scholars in the field, many whose works were formerly available only in Chinese language publications.

Sources

Researching the life experiences of eunuchs is not without its challenges. The servile role that eunuchs played within the palace is reflected in the available archival documents. With the palace focused on recording the political, fiscal, and diplomatic activities of the emperor and his imperial court, eunuchs were only of peripheral importance to those recording the history of the Qing. Eunuchs usually appear in the palace historical record in relation to staffing needs, records of payment, policies governing their administration, and issues of misconduct. As a result, tracing the life experiences of eunuchs is limited by the availability of archival sources. In studying eunuchs during earlier dynasties, scholars had to rely heavily on tomb inscriptions and imperial pronouncements. However, the Qing dynasty archives have preserved a variety of written sources. Despite not being intended for the preservation of eunuch history, Qing archival sources do provide important insight into the challenges eunuchs faced in their lives both within the palace and when trying to reintegrate into society. Rarely do the sources offer opportunities to provide statistical analysis or the ability to track changes over time. Where this is possible, these statistics are more relevant to topics of concern to eunuch institutional history than to social history and are beyond the scope of this study. With the Qing imperial court limiting eunuch literacy to but a chosen few, for whom reading and writing was an occupational necessity, reconstructing eunuch social history becomes even more challenging. In other words, eunuch history recorded by eunuchs is extremely rare. This relative silence in the historical record among eunuchs has led to a discourse on eunuchs often framed by speculation and the perceptions of others, especially the scholar-officials for whom eunuchism symbolized an affront to Confucian values and an avenue of social mobility operating outside the civil service examination system.¹⁷ This fact necessitates careful consideration of official documents, but it does not negate their usefulness.

Archival evidence in the form of edicts, memorials, depositions, and lists, particularly those from the Imperial Household Department, housed in Beijing at the First Historical Archives and in Taipei at the National Palace Museum, detail the selection, training, duties, management, and punishment of palace eunuchs. Moreover, within these documents the voices of eunuchs often resurface in confessions. When combined with oral histories, autobiographies of the last Qing eunuchs, accounts of Western travelers during the late 1800s, and reminiscences of late Qing

17. During the Qing, eunuchs were limited in their ability to influence politics; however, some were able to attach themselves to powerful people and benefit from the association with members of the imperial court. Nevertheless, few if any Confucian scholar-officials had positive things to say about eunuchs. Gilbert Chen's study of Ming dynasty eunuchs reveals that this animosity towards eunuchs was already apparent in the previous dynasty. According to Chen, "As a consequence, not a few commoners who were unable to afford the expenses of passing the civil examination or purchasing a degree chose to gain access to privilege by means of eunuchism, a phenomenon harshly decried by some Confucian scholar-officials." See Gilbert Chen, "Castration and Connection: Kinship Organization among Ming Eunuchs," *Ming Studies* 74 (2016), 29, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0147037X.2016.1179552>.

palace life by palace maidservants and the last Qing emperor, these sources give voice to this previously silent segment of the palace population. As a result, this study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Qing policies regarding eunuchs but rather insight into the lives of eunuchs during the Qing, how society viewed them, and how they negotiated their identities. While some might see the entire Qing dynasty as too broad a time to adequately cover in one book, in the case of eunuchs one finds that the sporadic nature of archival sources on Qing eunuch social history makes this a necessity. Moreover, limiting this study's focus to the late Qing would preclude the inclusion of interesting cases from the early Qing. As a result, this study has opted to cover the longer time expanse in an effort to build a foundation that others may build on by focusing in future studies on particular time periods.

When the Qing collapsed in 1911, scholars lost an important source of eunuch history. The loss of political power for the Qing also signaled the end of the most abundant source of information on eunuchs and their activities, the palace administration. Due to the illiteracy of most eunuchs, records of the Qing government provide one of the few sources from which scholars can glean information about eunuchs' life experiences. With the birth of the republic, and the Qing court reduced to the maintenance of the palace rather than an empire, the availability of sources on eunuch drops drastically. Hereafter, eunuchs only appear periodically in the historical record, most often in police reports associated with a criminal case. These records, while rare, provide important insight into the fate of eunuchs post 1911. Diaries and autobiographies of the last emperor, Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi 愛新覺羅溥儀 and his relatives, and the writings of Sir Reginald Johnston, Pu Yi's imperial tutor, also shed light on key events leading to the end of the eunuch system and its aftermath. Newspaper accounts from Chinese- and Western-language newspapers published in China during the mid- to late 1920s also reveal what the expulsion of the eunuchs looked like to those outside the palace as well as society's thoughts on how to deal with the problem of unemployed eunuchs. Last, thanks to the notoriety of the last surviving eunuchs in the mid- to late 1980s, biographies and oral histories provide a means by which eunuchs can finally tell their stories in their own words.¹⁸

Terminology

In order to understand the life experiences of the Qing palace eunuch, one must become familiar with the terminology used to refer to eunuchs. While in English,

18. The majority of eunuchs were illiterate during the Qing dynasty. Oral histories and biographies of some of the last remaining eunuchs have provided eunuchs with a voice in the historical record. See Ma Deqing et al., "Qing gong taijian huiyi," in *Wanqing gongting shenghuo jianwen*, ed. Zhang Wenhui (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1982), 173–97; and Jia Yinghua, *Modai taijian miwen: Sun Yaoting zhuan* (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993). Late Qing eunuch Xin Xiuming gathered his memories of late Qing palace eunuch life as well as those of his fellow eunuchs in Xin Xiuming et al., *Lao taijian de huiyi* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2010).

the convention is to translate Chinese terms referring to castrated or emasculated males as “eunuchs,” historical records reveal that the Chinese relied on a variety of terms to refer to eunuchs. At his most basic level, a eunuch was defined by his physical body: terms such as *yan* 閹 and *yange* 閹割 described a person who had undergone castration. In Chinese, the following four terms are commonly used to refer to eunuchs: *taijian* 太監, *xiaojian* 小監, *huanjian* 宦監, and *huanguan* 宦官. According to He Guanbiao, the Manchus used *taijian* to refer to their eunuchs.¹⁹ Traditionally, the Chinese term *taijian* has been translated into English as “eunuch.” However, this translation obscures the fact that *taijian* refers to more than just an emasculated male; it signifies the title of a eunuch working in the palace or a princely household. As will be seen, this distinction highlights the fact that not all emasculated males obtained employment as eunuchs. Eunuchs without an assignment as an imperial servant were often referred to as *jingshen* 淨身, a term that expressed the purification and release from sexual desire that was believed to follow emasculation. Due to the entrenched nature of the English translation, within this study, *taijian* will retain its traditional translation of “eunuch.”

Terminology is also important for understanding the eunuch body. I have chosen to use “emasclation” rather than “castration” to refer to the genital mutilation experienced by eunuchs during the Qing dynasty. According to Drs. Wu Chieh Ping and Gu Fang-Liu, “castration” refers solely to the removal of the testes, whereas “emasclation” indicates removal of both the testes and the penis.²⁰ In English “emasclation” also implies feminization, but the reader should note that no such inference is made here. At present, for lack of a better medical term that accurately describes the removal of the testes, scrotum, and penis, “emasclation” will be used throughout to refer to the process by which young boys and men became eunuchs. When referencing the procedure during earlier dynasties, I will follow the convention of scholars writing on these periods and use the term “castration.”

Before proceeding to a social history of the eunuch, a brief examination of the institutional history of the Qing palace eunuch system is in order. In an effort to provide a basic understanding of the institutional history of the eunuch system, **Chapter 1** traces the beginnings of eunuchs serving in the palace and the rise of eunuch power during the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the evolution of the eunuch system from its “embryonic” state before the Qing established its rule over China proper to its initial growth during the reign of Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661) to its maturation during the mid-Qing, and finally its gradual decline after the 1850s.

19. For information on the derivation and use of the term, *taijian*, see He Guanbiao, “Huanguan tongcheng ‘taijian’ gao,” *Hanxue yanjiu* 8, no. 2 (1990): 201–20.

20. See Wu Chieh Ping and Gu Fang-Liu, “The Prostate in Eunuchs,” *EROTC Genitourinary Group Monograph 10—Urological Ontology: Reconstructive Surgery, Organ Conservation and Restoration of Function* (New York: Wiley-Liss, Inc., 1991), 254–55.

Chapter 2 traces the variety of routes that eunuchs took to reach the palace. Despite the different routes taken to the palace, all eunuchs started their journey with the singular act of emasculation. Genital mutilation alone, however, did not ensure the attainment of a position as a palace eunuch. While the government distanced itself from the genital mutilation and sale of young boys and adult men into servitude, the government licensed emasculation professionals and was directly involved in regulating the supply and demand that fueled the eunuch system and determined the fate of these new emasculated. Coercion by family members and the sale of boys does not explain the emasculation of all eunuchs. Many destitute Chinese men, viewing emasculation and employment as a palace eunuch as the remedy to their own and by extension their families' financial problems, volunteered for service. Nevertheless, the irreversible act of emasculation, a prerequisite for even being presented as a candidate for service within the palace, did not ensure employment as an imperial court eunuch. Even if they managed to enter the palace walls, not all eunuch candidates received an invitation to stay. A myriad of palace eunuch prerequisites concerning ethnicity, age, and form of emasculation allowed the Qing to control the selection process.

Chapter 3 aims to unrobe the emasculated body by examining how this form of genital mutilation affected eunuchs both physically and psychologically and by exploring multiple perspectives on how the Chinese eunuch body has been read by others. In addition, eunuchs' self-perceptions of their bodies will be revealed through oral histories and inferred through eunuch practices. As will be seen, despite common knowledge regarding what made one a eunuch, very little appears in the historical record about what this looked like. Emasculation physically marked the eunuch body and caused society to read it as different from that of non-emasculated Chinese males. How the body was read, though, depended upon who was reading it (Han Chinese, the Manchu imperial court, Westerners, or eunuchs themselves). While genital mutilation was intended to subjugate and neuter Chinese men, in reality emasculation rendered eunuchs "sexually and politically charged."²¹ Representing a nexus of gender and political power, eunuchs provide unique insight into late imperial views towards masculinity and political power during the Qing.

In **Chapter 4**, one finds that, even though emasculation was a job prerequisite, it did not ensure that a eunuch would be hired as a palace eunuch. Emasculated would undergo training prior to applying for service in the palace. Designed to be the ideal servants for the emperor and his court, eunuch subservience and proper conduct were expected. While eunuchs were not slaves, they were imperial servants living in an environment defined by strict rules of deportment and protocol. Once inside the palace, new recruits quickly discovered that they were no longer a numerical minority but among the majority in a setting in which they were surrounded by their fellow eunuchs. However, in terms of status, the majority of eunuchs occupied

21. Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females," *Late Imperial China* 9, no. 2 (Dec. 1988): 15.

positions at the bottom of the social hierarchy within the palace. Physical disfigurement now dictated every aspect of the eunuch's life from entry into the eunuch system, to placement in the eunuch hierarchy, to apprenticeship, to employment opportunities.

In **Chapter 5**, palace eunuchs, seeking agency in their restricted lives, tested the boundaries of subservience to the emperor and the imperial eunuch system. Behind the palace walls, eunuchs operated within two parallel realms, one revolving around the emperor and his imperial court and another in which they challenged the restrictions placed on them by the imperial eunuch system. This chapter focuses on the world of the eunuch, where eunuchs recreated the social bonds that emasculation was intended to deny them. An examination of legal cases and directives on eunuch conduct provides insight into this second, more hidden, realm, one in which opium dens and gambling flourished, eunuchs became drunk and got into fights with one another, and forbidden bonds of intimacy defeated one of the main purposes of emasculation.

By exploring cases of runaway eunuchs, **Chapter 6** aims to contribute to the understanding of unfree status during the Qing dynasty and more broadly to the reconstruction of the social history of eunuchs. The abundance of cases in the historical record of palace eunuchs running away, often repeatedly, reflects poorly on the imperial court's treatment of its eunuchs and effectiveness at times in controlling its eunuch population. Confessions from captured eunuchs reveal that, for many, serving as a palace eunuch proved too restrictive and too oppressive to endure. The repeated flight of eunuchs suggests that, for some, the possibility of punishment was preferable to continued service and waiting for an authorized exit from the system due to old age or sickness. Cases of runaway eunuchs reveal: (1) the tensions that characterized labor relations between the imperial household and its eunuch workforce and (2) that eunuch status does not fit neatly into the binary of free or unfree, it is something more complicated that lies on the continuum in between.

Over the course of their often lifelong tenure in the service of the imperial court, palace eunuchs enjoyed few opportunities to escape their oppressive and highly restricted work environment. **Chapter 7** reveals that, for some palace eunuchs, living and working in the Forbidden City could quickly become stifling. Eunuchs who hoped to terminate their employment with the palace had few options. The Imperial Household Department authorized only three types of exit: discharge because of old age or illness, disciplinary problems, and death. Eunuchs desiring to leave the system of their own volition faced two options: flight or suicide. Since running away involved the possibility of capture followed by beatings, wearing the cangue, and forced labor, suicide provided eunuchs with one of the few ways in which they could determine when they would permanently exit the system.

Chapter 8 examines how the Qing viewed its responsibility towards palace eunuchs when they were either too sick or too old to serve. The Qing envisioned that their responsibility for the livelihood of a palace eunuch would end as soon as

he was no longer able to perform his duties. Upon discharge from the system, the government restored the eunuch's commoner status, classifying him as a *weimin taijian* (為民太監 commoner eunuch). Having taken this action, the government attempted to sever all ties and relinquish all responsibility for its former servants. Qing regulations stipulated that retired eunuchs were to return to their native places and support themselves. However, eunuch reintegration into society ran into obstacles upon implementation.

While for many in Chinese society the fall of the Qing and the rise of the republic signaled a new beginning and an interest in all things modern, the end of empire placed eunuchs in a precarious position. **Chapter 9** reveals that, with their *raison d'être* no longer viable, eunuchs struggled to survive. This chapter chronicles the last days of the Qing palace eunuch system after the fall of the Qing and the rise of the republic in 1911 in addition to eunuch survival strategies in the years that followed. For some palace eunuchs, life would continue as usual in the years that followed as they continued to serve the "little court." By 1924, though, the realities of the republic and the calls for modernity would become readily apparent. Pu Yi, the former Xuantong emperor (r. 1909–1912), would abruptly expel the remaining eunuchs from the palace and force them onto the street with their belongings. Now considered remnants of the imperial past, eunuchs faced the challenge of surviving outside the palace walls in a society that no longer needed their services. While some would capitalize on their former knowledge of the imperial court in order to earn money, others found that they would need to reinvent themselves and find alternate career paths in order to survive.

In sum, this study of palace eunuchs in late imperial China recasts and reclaims the past of this previously silent numerical majority within the imperial court. Redirecting the focus away from a few notorious individual eunuchs to the eunuch population as a whole, one finds a lifestyle that differed greatly from that of the stereotypical eunuch in terms of status, power, and wealth. As noted by Shih-shan Henry Tsai in his 1996 study of Ming dynasty eunuchs, the time has come for "a more in-depth study of eunuchs in general"²² to provide a counterbalance to the stereotypical representation of the corrupt eunuch. Now, over twenty years later, the historical lens must be widened beyond the traditionally narrow focus on a small number of corrupt individual eunuchs to encompass the entire palace eunuch population. As a social history of Qing dynasty and Republican era eunuchs, this work examines a complicated social group whose emasculation and employment located them at the center of the empire, closer to the emperor than any other men, yet also subjected them to servile status and marginalization by society. While certainly oppressed, eunuchs were not mere victims, but actively endeavored to have a degree of agency in their lives by either recreating the social bonds that emasculation and eunuch employment denied them or through flight from the palace and at

22. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 9.

times even suicide. Ultimately, with the cut of the knife, emasculation irrevocably altered the eunuch's entire being and rendered him into something other than male in the eyes of the Qing imperial house and Chinese society.

The Palace Eunuch System

China's practice of castrating young boys and men can be traced back to the beginnings of its imperial system. Some scholars, citing references to castration on oracle bones, note the presence of eunuchs in China over 3,000 years ago, during the Shang dynasty (1766–1222 BCE). Despite this early reference to castration,¹ it was not until the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE) that one finds evidence of eunuchs being used within the palace as attendants for imperial women. By the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties, the increasing number of eunuchs in the service of the court had necessitated the creation of an institutionalized palace eunuch system.

The Eunuch System Prior to the Qing Dynasty

The history of the Chinese eunuch system is intertwined with the expansion of imperial political power² and the role of the emperor as the son of heaven. As the political unification of China gave rise to dynasties, so did the emperor's need to exhibit his power symbolically through a lifestyle of lavishness and extravagance. While the building of palaces and a capital city manifested imperial power through architecture, the emperor also projected symbolic power by surrounding himself with a surplus of women and a palace full of servants. Beyond symbolic reasons, the imperial court relied on eunuchs for practical reasons. As palace servants, eunuchs were viewed as essential for the maintenance of the imperial harem and the smooth operation of the imperial household.³

1. Du Wanyan, *Zhongguo huanguan shi* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1996), 9. Kutcher notes that, although the Shang castrated prisoners of war, it was not until the Zhou dynasty that eunuchs were employed by the government. See Norman A. Kutcher, "Unspoken Collusions: The Empowerment of Yuanming yuan Eunuchs in the Qianlong Period," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 70, no. 2 (Dec. 2010): 453.

2. Du, *Zhongguo huanguan shi*, 3.

3. As Evelyn S. Rawski has noted, the emperor needed servants for practical and symbolic reasons. See Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 160.

In the early dynastic period, imperial courts relied on eunuchs who had undergone castration as a form of punishment (*gongxing* 宮刑)⁴ to staff their palaces.⁵ One of the five mutilating punishments (*wuxing* 五刑) mentioned in the *Shujing* 書經,⁶ castration was listed alongside other corporal punishments such as tattooing, cutting off the nose, cutting off the feet, and execution.⁷ Beyond bodily harm, castration punished the individual and his family through the ending of his branch of the patrilineal line. Within the legal system, castration served as an alternative to the death penalty, especially for minors. Many of these eunuchs had not committed any crime but found themselves castrated as a result of the practice of collective responsibility. For instance, in cases of attempted revolt, the guilty party was sentenced to execution. In addition, all male members of the felon's family over the age of fourteen would receive death sentences. Those below the age of fourteen would be castrated and sent to serve as palace eunuchs.⁸ In 547, the Western Wei dynasty abolished castration as a form of punishment. In 581, the Sui dynasty revised their list of corporal punishments and removed castration from among the choices.⁹ While this ruling made clear that the castration of ethnically Han Chinese boys and men was not allowed, the need for eunuchs as servants continued unabated. In later dynasties, castration as a form of punishment would appear again. For example, during the early Ming dynasty, the Hongwu emperor 洪武 (r. 1368–1398) allowed for a variety of corporal punishments, including castration, only later in his reign to prohibit them.

When the penal system was no longer a reliable source of supply, human trafficking in young non-Han Chinese boys filled the void. During the Sui dynasty and even later during the Ming (1368–1644), the courts turned to human trafficking in non-Han Chinese boys and men obtained through raiding expeditions, slave markets, and tribute.¹⁰

Despite official prohibitions against castration and the social stigmatization attached to it, Han Chinese still voluntarily underwent castration to become palace eunuchs. Viewing castration as an avenue for upward mobility, many men and boys willingly chose to become eunuchs, thus enabling dynasties with large eunuch systems such as the Ming to meet their demand.

Over time, as the Chinese dynastic system became more reliant on hereditary succession, emperors came to view eunuchs as uniquely qualified to serve within the court. Physically incapable of both procreation and sexual function, a eunuch's

4. *Xing* 刑 is a general term for punishments involving mutilation.

5. J. K. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty, Part One (618–705), *Asia Major* 1.1 (1949): 54.

6. *The Book of Documents* or *Classic of History*. One of the Five Classics of ancient Chinese literature.

7. Mitamura Taisuke, *Chinese Eunuchs: The Structure of Intimate Politics*, trans. Charles A. Pomeroy (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970), 55.

8. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty," 54.

9. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty," 54 and Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 112.

10. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty," 54.

value for the court became based upon his inability to perform sexually. Within the palace, this physical inability gave eunuchs access to women that was denied to non-emasculated males. Within the *Zhou li* (The Rituals of Zhou), the dynasty's "blueprint of the ideal government," the government's intended role for eunuchs was clearly laid out: eunuchs were to ensure both the purity of the imperial lineage and the chastity of the palace women. A sixteenth-century commentary on the *Zhou li* further explains the government's need for eunuchs. "Women were in the inner quarters of the palace and could not go out. Men [other than the emperor] were in the outer palace and could not go in. Eunuchs could function in both places."¹¹ Beyond their physical impairment, emasculation rendered eunuchs social outcasts and in theory ensured their reliance on their master. An act that both marked the body physically and stigmatized the person socially, emasculation was designed to create a loyal and subservient servant, unfettered by family ties or responsibilities and wholly dependent upon his master for his livelihood. As will be seen, the eunuch system was built upon assumptions that did not meet realities.

This combination of factors, both physical and social, explains the court's preference for eunuchs to perform duties it would not assign to non-emasculated men. One might ask, though, why some of these duties, especially the care of palace women, needed to be assigned to an emasculated male? What value did emasculated servants provide that maidservants could not? First and foremost, maidservants were not social outcasts who had permanently left their families to serve the imperial court. As such, their loyalties and subservience were not absolute. Second, eunuchs were seen as capable of performing tasks that women physically or socially could not. As Du Wanyan, states, a eunuch had a man's strength, without his sexual ability.¹² Beyond physical strength, eunuchs continued to possess much of the social power associated with men in China's Confucian patriarchal society. While Du describes castration as "turning [a man] into 'half woman,'"¹³ as will be seen in Chapter 3, the procedure did not alter the eunuch's gender identity. Eunuchs continued to self-identify as men. Last, as "agents of the imperial will,"¹⁴ eunuchs had access to people and places that others did not. As the commentary from the *Zhou li* points out, eunuchs were able to cross the inner-outer court divide. This access also carried political value for the imperial court; eunuchs facilitated the administration of the palace and acted on behalf of the emperor as a counterbalance to the civil service bureaucracy. Overall, eunuchs' physical and social impairments uniquely qualified them for roles and access denied to others, both men and women.

While deemed essential for the symbolic, political, and administrative needs of the imperial court, eunuchs were also a constant source of anxiety and tension. Throughout history, emperors were well aware of the potential political power of

11. Wang Yingdian, *Zhou li zhuan* as cited in Kutcher, "Unspoken Collusions," 453.

12. Du, *Zhongguo huanguan shi*, 3.

13. Du, *Zhongguo huanguan shi*, 3.

14. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 160.

individual eunuchs and the group as a whole if left unchecked. As early as the Qin dynasty, eunuchs had already become notorious for their involvement in politics. Throughout Chinese history, if eunuchs were involved in politics, scholars reasoned that their interference had weakened the dynasty and ultimately contributed to its downfall.¹⁵ Despite these potential drawbacks, all governments that ruled China throughout three millennia employed eunuchs. Eunuchs are best known, though, for their activities during the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties, when their numbers increased and these courts struggled to maintain a balance between the need for eunuchs and eunuchs' rising power.

An examination of the institutional history of eunuchs throughout China's imperial system reveals a common theme: the link between the rise of eunuch political power and individuals with indirect holds on power. The ability of eunuchs to influence politics can be directly attributed to the rise of "intimate politics." Facilitating the power of those without direct access to power, such as women of the court and their families, eunuchs benefited when their masters/benefactors gained political power and influence at court. During the Han, six dowager empresses promoted eunuchs to positions that allowed them to cross the divide from servile status to influencing politics.¹⁶ By the Later Han (25–220 CE), eunuch factions carried enough influence to assist the emperor in overthrowing a rival faction and in another instance, to help bring an emperor to the throne.¹⁷

When a small number of eunuchs exerted political influence through intimate politics, it created tensions between eunuchs and their masters that resonated throughout the eunuch system. Dynastic histories are replete with instances of eunuchs pushing and oftentimes breaking the boundaries of the servile roles they were intended to play within the court and the attempts of the court to rein eunuchs in. Histories of the eunuchs during the Tang dynasty (618–907) note such tensions between eunuchs and their masters. The Tang imperial court continued to rely on eunuchs in their traditional role as "guardians and servants of the Imperial Harem,"¹⁸ but over time some eunuchs managed to influence politics. Eunuchs were viewed as an "undesirable necessity" for the care of the imperial women. Official historians note that the imperial court managed to keep eunuchs in their "proper place" until the abdication of the Empress Wu 武后 in 705.¹⁹ Hereafter, eunuchs were appointed to positions of command in the palace guard and army that enabled them to "participate in the decision-making process."²⁰ According to Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, eunuchs became "virtual king makers" during the Tang, inserting themselves into the selection of some seven of the last eight Tang emperors and wielding such power

15. Taisuke, *Chinese Eunuchs*, 18. See also Kutcher, "Unspoken Collusions," 454.

16. Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 12.

17. Kutcher, "Unspoken Collusions," 454.

18. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty," 53.

19. Rideout, "The Rise of the Eunuchs during the T'ang Dynasty," 53.

20. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 12.

that officials in the capital and provinces were forced to “ingratiate themselves” to eunuchs.²¹ As with the Han dynasty, scholars have assigned blame to eunuchs for contributing to the fall of the Tang. Eunuchs would “pay a heavy price” for their involvement in politics. In 903, the warlord Zhu Quanzhong executed hundreds of eunuchs and ordered all eunuchs involved in military affairs to commit suicide.²² Well aware of the potential hazards of allowing eunuchs too much political power, succeeding dynasties such as the Song and the Yuan would continue to rely on eunuchs but in a much-diminished capacity.

The eunuch system would reach its “zenith” during the Ming dynasty, a period in which eunuch numbers and power swelled.²³ Rather than attributing the rise of eunuch power solely to the decline in quality of emperors, especially those characterized as young, weak, and/or totally disinterested in government, Robert Crawford argues that the basis for eunuch power lay in their role as a check on the bureaucracy and as a tool to “bolster imperial authority.”²⁴ Despite eunuchs’ role as a “rival power group” that could be used to balance the power of scholar-officials, early rulers such as the Ming founder, Emperor Hongwu, distrusted eunuchs and advised that they should not be allowed to “intervene in governmental affairs.” Those who disobeyed were to be beheaded.²⁵ Despite this admonition, one finds eunuch numbers and power expanding during the Ming, even during Hongwu’s rule, from one hundred at the beginning of the Ming to more than 400 by the end of his reign. After his death, his successors would ignore his warnings about keeping eunuchs out of politics. During periods in which the court faced internal rebellions and foreign invasions, eunuchs repeatedly found opportunities to step in and fill power vacuums.

In the early years of Ming rule, the court established the Directorate of Palace Eunuchs (*Neishijian* 內史監) to handle the administration of eunuchs serving within the inner court. After 1400, the government’s increasing reliance on eunuchs necessitated a reorganization of the eunuch institutional structure into twenty-four offices (*ershisi yamen* 二十四衙門)—all designed to manage aspects of the palace administration ranging from staff supervision, to imperial provisions and food, to gunpowder, to the imperial insignia and tent, to the imperial stables.²⁶ Within the directorates, eunuch hierarchy became stratified with eunuchs being assigned ranks and titles. As Crawford notes, “At this point, they [eunuchs] had ceased to be entirely personal tools used at imperial discretion and became instead an institutionalized bureaucracy with its own inner development and history.”²⁷

21. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 12.

22. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 12.

23. Robert B. Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, vol. 49, livr. 3 (1961): 115.

24. Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 116–17.

25. In 1384, the Hongwu emperor had an iron sign hung over the palace gate that stated this. See Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 119.

26. For a complete list, see Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 122.

27. Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 122.

According to Tsai, during the Ming, eunuchs became a “fully developed third branch of Ming administration that participated in all the most essential matters of the dynasty.”²⁸ Beyond the above-mentioned responsibilities, the government assigned eunuchs to play roles outside the capital city, ranging from guarding and managing imperial tombs to working in supply depots and granaries, to even serving as military commanders.²⁹ Eunuchs holding military assignments defended the northern borders against the Mongols, led an all-eunuch military battalion, and even commanded China’s maritime fleet to the coasts of eastern Africa during the famous maritime missions known for their eunuch commander, Zheng He.

During the Ming, eunuchs were no longer merely servants of the emperor and his family. By the sixteenth century, ranking eunuchs had become “powerful bosses” with their own servants and attendants.³⁰ In addition to political power, Ming eunuchs wielded considerable economic power as they controlled the wealth of the empire via the Palace Treasury.³¹ As might be expected, as the number of offices controlled by eunuchs were increasing so was the number of eunuchs needed to staff them. This number would rise from 10,000 in the fifteenth century to 70,000 in the palace (some 100,000 in total) by the end of the dynasty in 1644.³² Viewing emasculation as a means to achieve wealth and power, many eunuchs volunteered for service, creating a ready supply of emasculates for the government.

The Qing Eunuch System

During the early 1600s, Jurchen tribes rising in the northeast would coalesce into a group known as the Manchus and eventually challenge the Ming dynasty’s control over China. By 1636, the Manchus had established their own dynasty known as the Qing 清 and soon after began to rely on eunuchs as palace servants. Early Qing rulers such as Taizu (Nurhaci) (r. 1616–1626) and Taizong (Hongtaiji) (r. 1627–1643) utilized eunuchs in their service but not in numbers large enough to warrant the creation of an institutionalized eunuch system.³³ At this time, eunuchs also existed in the palaces of the *han* and Jurchen *beile* princes.³⁴ Here, eunuchs performed the role for which they are well known in history, that of ensuring the “purity of the ruling family’s bloodline” by preventing illicit relations between

28. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 221.

29. For a discussion of eunuch assignments during the Ming, see Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming* and Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty.”

30. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 33.

31. Huang Tsung-hsi as cited in Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 140.

32. Crawford, “Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty,” 123–24.

33. *Qingshi* (Taipei: Guofang yanjiuyuan, 1961), 卷 119, 1428.

34. Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 447. Charles Hucker defines *beile* as a “title of imperial nobility (*chueh*), originally a descriptive term for a tribal chief but awarded by the founder of the imperial line, Nurhachi [Nuerhachi], to his own brothers, sons, and nephews.” See Charles A. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 371.

bondservants (*baoyi* 包衣), enslaved captives from battle, and the palace women.³⁵ According to Yu Huaqing, these eunuchs were the forcibly emasculated sons and younger brothers of bondservants.³⁶ During this period, eunuchs, such as those in the service of Nurhaci's eleventh son, Babuhai³⁷ (1596–1743), were male slaves and low servants.³⁸ While the origins and use of these eunuchs differed radically from the majority of those employed by the Qing once inside China proper after 1644, as will be seen, their status did not.

The Manchus' limited use of eunuchs during the early Qing relates directly to their bondservant system. Prior to the creation of the banners³⁹ (1601), the Manchus employed bondservants in private households to provide menial labor and agricultural work.⁴⁰ From 1615 to 1620, the bondservants belonging to the emperor and the Manchu princes were organized into companies similar to the Banner system.⁴¹ Bondservants in private hands eventually became known as household slaves, while those of the imperial household retained the designation of bondservant.⁴² From this point on, bondservants were a hereditary servile people registered in the banners, who attended to the domestic affairs of the imperial court, serving as messengers and runners, and attendants of the imperial household.⁴³ These tasks encompassed those normally attended to by eunuchs in the Han Chinese imperial courts such as the Ming. According to Zheng Tianting, "the bondservant system in reality was the same as the eunuch system."⁴⁴ Zheng overlooks one important difference: the Manchus did not require bondservants to undergo emasculation. According to the *Qingshi* 清史, prior to taking over control of China proper, the Qing "relied on the old Ming system for the private apartments of the emperor."⁴⁵ The Manchu eunuch system, still in its "embryonic form" prior to the Shunzhi reign (1644–1661), utilized eunuchs according to their physical inabilities, specifically their inability to have sexual relations or engage in illicit relations with the women of the palace.

As the Ming dynasty neared collapse, palace eunuchs actively pursued employment with those they perceived as the potential victors in the battle for China. One Ming eunuch who was in charge of Beijing's garrison even facilitated the rebel Li

35. Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi*, 447.

36. Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi*, 447.

37. The eleventh of Nurhaci's sixteen sons. See Fang Chao-ying, "Nurhaci," in *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (1644–1912), ed. Arthur W. Hummel (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943; reprint, New York: Paragon Book Gallery, Ltd, 1967), 598.

38. Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei* (Zhongjing: Duli chubanshe, 1946), 66.

39. "The banners were large civil-military units created from 1601 on to replace the small hunting groups of Nurgaci's [Nurhaci's] early campaigns. Banners were made up of companies, each composed (at least in theory) of three hundred warrior households." See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 61.

40. Jonathan Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the Kang-hsi Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 7.

41. Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the Kang-hsi Emperor*, 8.

42. Spence, *Ts'ao Yin and the Kang-hsi Emperor*, 8.

43. See Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei*, 64 and Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 167.

44. Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei*, 65.

45. *Qingshi*, 卷 119, 1428.

Zicheng's entry into Beijing by opening the gate to the city.⁴⁶ Once inside, Li found a crowd of Ming eunuchs waiting to welcome him at the imperial residences.⁴⁷ Ming eunuchs also greeted the Manchu regent, Dorgon,⁴⁸ as he entered the Shanhai Pass with the Qing imperial carriage.⁴⁹ Well aware of the Ming dynasty's problems with eunuchs and the perception that they had contributed to the weakened state of the dynasty, the Manchus were wary of these eunuchs. Nevertheless, they absorbed many former Ming eunuchs into their system.⁵⁰

Once the Manchus established their dynasty inside China proper in 1644, their reliance on eunuchs increased both in scale and in scope. As the Manchu's rule over China expanded, so did their administrative and symbolic need for palace eunuchs. Ming eunuchs' intimate knowledge of the many facets involved in ruling the Chinese empire and the administration of the palace had the potential to facilitate China's new rulers in their transition to power. For a conquest dynasty such as the Qing, eunuchs would have been important sources of institutional knowledge and a means to balance the power of the Han Chinese bureaucracy. Eunuchs also fulfilled the Manchus' immediate administrative needs of staffing the newly acquired Forbidden City and serving the women of the court. Symbolically, eunuchs also contributed to the emperor's desire to "awe and impress subjects" with symbols of "conspicuous consumption."⁵¹

As a conquest dynasty, the Manchus came to rule with their own traditions concerning the imperial harem and how to administer their palace. The Manchu imperial practice of possessing fewer empresses and concubines than their Han Chinese predecessors initially resulted in the Manchus needing fewer eunuchs to attend to their women. In addition, they relied on their own system of governance to manage their household, the Imperial Household Department (*Neiwufu* 內務府).⁵² This system would place bondservants in positions overseeing palace eunuchs. These factors, combined with an anxiety about the potential of a resurgence of eunuch power, resulted in a drastic reduction in the number of palace eunuchs. The Manchus would make it their policy to keep eunuch numbers low and to relegate eunuchs to menial positions. During the course of the Qing, the Manchus would employ at most 3,300 eunuchs, some three to five percent of the former 70,000 to 100,000 eunuchs.⁵³ While comparatively small, the Qing's reten-

46. Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei*, 65.

47. Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei*, 65.

48. Shunzhi's regent from 1644 to 1650.

49. Zheng Tianting, *Qingshi tanwei*, 65.

50. *Guochao gongshi* as cited in Preston Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household Department: A Study of Its Organization and Principal Functions, 1662-1796* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 48-49.

51. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 181.

52. According to Rawski, the *Neiwufu* (Imperial Household Department) was created in during the 1620s. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 179.

53. Shih-shan Henry Tsai notes that, at the end of the Ming dynasty, there were 100,000 castrated males in the population. See Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming*, 26. According to Ding Yanshi, the overall trend during the Qing suggests a decline in the number of eunuchs from 2,866 during the reign of Qianlong, to 2,638 during the reign of Jiaqing, to 1,989 during the reign of Guangxu, and finally 800-900 during the reign of the last

tion of many former Ming eunuchs represented an enlargement of both the scale and the scope of eunuch employment within the Qing palace.

Initially, the Qing limited eunuchs to their traditional role of keepers of the imperial women. Suspicions concerning the involvement of eunuchs in the downfall of the Ming led the regent, Dorgon, to restrict the influence of eunuchs within the court. Dorgon continued the Manchu tradition of delegating eunuch management to the Imperial Household Department (*Neiwufu*), which was created prior to the establishment of Qing rule within China proper.⁵⁴ Faced with an overabundance of Ming eunuchs, the Qing dynasty attempted to restrict the role and employment requirements for eunuch service within the palace. In the years immediately following the establishment of rule inside the pass, the Qing dynasty issued edicts which “prohibited the eunuchs from handling the income from the imperial estates (1644), from participating in court audiences (1645), . . . from going to the capital to seek employment (1646) [and abolished] . . . eunuch posts, such as those connected with revenue and construction works.”⁵⁵ While these measures succeeded in reducing the eunuch workforce, they did not result in a total reduction of eunuch influence within the court.

In the years immediately following the death of Dorgon in 1650 and Shunzhi's assumption of personal rule, the young emperor utilized the palace eunuchs to “strengthen his own imperial position against the power of the Manchu princes.”⁵⁶ Shunzhi first increased his reliance on eunuchs by allowing their presence in the Throne Hall, “the seat and source of imperial power.”⁵⁷ Later, in 1653, Shunzhi strengthened eunuch power even further by abolishing the Imperial Household Department and establishing the Thirteen Yamen (十三衙門 Thirteen Eunuch Bureaus). This ruling released eunuchs from their subordinate position under a management system controlled by bondservants and replaced it with a system of joint rule by both eunuchs and bondservants. Despite this elevation of eunuch power within the Qing court, palace eunuchs faced regulations that restricted their mobility and influence in governmental affairs.⁵⁸

emperor, Xuantong. See Ding Yanshi, *Wanqing gongting yishi* (Taipei: Shijie wenwu chubanshe, 1984), 186. Evelyn Rawski notes a 1751 edict fixing the number of palace eunuchs at 3,300. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 164. Norman Kutcher's table plotting the annual census of eunuchs for years with records from 1747 to 1806 notes that Qianlong did not exceed the 3,300 quota set by his grandfather, Kangxi. See Kutcher, “Unspoken Collusions,” Fig. 1.

54. Although there is no clear date for the establishment of the Imperial Household Department, Chang Te-ch'ang (Zhang Dechang) prefers the date of 1628 as quoted in the genealogy of a *baoyi* official. See Chang Te-ch'ang, “The Economic Role of the Imperial Household in the Ch'ing Dynasty,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (Feb. 1972): 245.

55. Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household*, 22.

56. Lawrence Kessler, *K'ang-hsi and the Consolidation of Ch'ing Rule, 1661–1684* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 26.

57. Chang Te-ch'ang, “The Economic Role of the Imperial Household in the Ch'ing Dynasty,” 248.

58. Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household*, 23.

The Shunzhi emperor's death from smallpox on February 6, 1661⁵⁹ signaled the reassertion of power by the Manchu princes to the detriment of Qing palace eunuchs. With the heir apparent only seven years old at the time of his father's death, the regency of four Manchu elders (Soni, Suksaha, Ebilun, and Oboi) quickly moved to restrict further eunuch influence within the court. The regents utilized Shunzhi's will,⁶⁰ in which he expressed his regret over having created the Thirteen Yamen, as a pretext for abolishing them and reinstating the Imperial Household Department. As a result, the regents returned eunuchs to their former subordinate position under the management of bondservants.

During the reign of the Kangxi emperor (1662–1722), the Manchus restored the Imperial Household Department to power. In 1677, the Kangxi emperor further consolidated control over the palace eunuchs with the establishment of the *Jingshifang* (敬事房 Office of Eunuch Affairs) as a unit within the Imperial Household Department.⁶¹ This office handled the screening, transfer and appointment, and reward and punishment of imperial palace eunuchs.⁶² In addition to managing eunuch affairs, the *Jingshifang* was responsible for such duties as the recording of the births and deaths of the imperial family.⁶³

Considering eunuchs as basically yin 陰 in nature,⁶⁴ Kangxi kept a watchful eye over their movements and activities. Throughout his sixty-one-year reign, one finds numerous regulations prohibiting eunuchs from “gambling, excessive drinking, fighting,” speaking with outsiders about palace matters, and so forth.⁶⁵ Despite Kangxi's general distrust of eunuchs, the informal and friendly style of his letters to the eunuch Gu Wenxiang reveals the emperor's ability to view individual eunuchs in a positive light.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Kangxi endeavored to keep his personal relations with eunuchs from interfering with governmental affairs, as revealed in his comment: “In my court I never let them [eunuchs] get involved with government—even the few eunuchs-of-the-presence with whom I might chatter or exchange family jokes were never allowed to discuss politics.”⁶⁷ It is also during the reign of Kangxi that the emperor enacted sumptuary laws to govern the employment of eunuchs. From 1701, aside from the palace, only nobles and officials of the first two ranks were allowed to have eunuchs employed within their households.⁶⁸

59. Kessler, 25.

60. This will is now considered by many scholars to be a forgery.

61. Wang Shuqing, “Jingshifang,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, no. 2 (1979): 64.

62. Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huangguan zhidushi*, 451. Hereafter, “imperial palace eunuchs” will refer to eunuchs employed by the emperor within his palaces, as opposed to those employed in the personal residences of princes, marquis, and grand ministers.

63. Wang Shuqing, “Jingshifang,” 64.

64. Jonathan Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-Portrait of K'ang-hsi* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 45. Yin is the principle in Chinese philosophy that is characterized as feminine, passive, negative and weak.

65. Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huangguan zhidushi*, 454.

66. For examples of these letters, see Spence, *Emperor of China*, 156–66.

67. Spence, *Emperor of China*, 45.

68. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 181.

The Yongzheng emperor (1723–1735) also distrusted eunuchs, perhaps due to the involvement of certain eunuchs in the power struggle that broke out over succession following his father's death. Eunuchs loyal to Yongzheng's rivals for the imperial throne such as Zhou Jinchao (loyal to Yinreng) and Wei Zhu (the eunuch in charge of the Inner Chancery of Memorials who was an important player in the Yinsi faction) may have contributed to Yongzheng's desire to restrict the influence and power of palace eunuchs.⁶⁹ Throughout his reign, Yongzheng attempted to reform eunuch behavior as well as curb their influence within the court. Yongzheng's numerous edicts attempting to rectify eunuch conduct such as drinking and gambling, being lazy messengers, complaining, cursing at people on the street, being arrogant, and speaking in a loud voice⁷⁰ suggest that he was frustrated that eunuchs were not acting according to their designated servile role. Torbert argues that, within these edicts that scolded eunuchs for bad conduct, the emperor repeatedly reminded eunuchs of their "moral indebtedness to him."⁷¹ Contrary to the popular characterization of Yongzheng as a despotic ruler who rose to power by killing his brothers, Torbert casts him as a "skillful administrator" who utilized favors and rewards, such as establishing a loan fund to help eunuchs meet unexpected expenses and providing shelter and stipends for elderly eunuchs, to win the allegiance of the eunuch workforce.⁷²

The Yongzheng emperor also endeavored to prevent eunuch families from abusing their sons' positions within the court. In an edict from 1726, he declared that eunuch relatives would "not be able to take advantage of the power of inner palace eunuchs to perform improper and illegal acts."⁷³ Yongzheng also prohibited the fraternization of eunuchs directly serving him with those employed throughout the rest of the palace. In 1730, he ordered that "eunuchs [directly] serving the emperor should also not drink, play chess [or] dominoes (*gupai*) [or] gossip with other eunuchs."⁷⁴ Clearly, the Yongzheng emperor desired to keep the intimate affairs of his household as well as the governmental affairs of the empire beyond the reach of the majority of the outer court eunuch population.

In contrast to his father's management style, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1795) managed eunuchs by directly attacking their routes to power and influence within the palace. As will be seen, Qianlong promoted a policy of eunuch illiteracy, seeing no need for eunuchs to recognize more than a few characters. Qianlong also endeavored to curb eunuch influence in governmental affairs. In an edict from 1745, Qianlong declared that eunuchs "should not engage in conversations with outer court officials, '[nor] should [they] exchange friendly visits with princes,

69. For information on the succession struggle, see Silas H. L. Wu, *Passage to Power: Kang-hsi and His Heir Apparent, 1661–1722* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 156–76.

70. See *Guochao gongshi*, ed. Yu Minzhong (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1965), 史三, 訓諭.

71. Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household*, 50.

72. Torbert, *The Ch'ing Imperial Household*, 51.

73. Edict cited in Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi*, 454.

74. Edict cited in Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi*, 454.

marquis, and men in high places.”⁷⁵ Scholars such as Zheng Tianting and others have characterized Qianlong as a “stern manager of eunuchs” who became more lax in the later years of his reign.⁷⁶ More recent scholarship by Norman Kutcher finds that the Qianlong emperor was not as strict in his management of eunuchs as earlier studies have attempted to show.⁷⁷ Kutcher argues that, in response to shortages in the supply of eunuchs, particularly young eunuchs, the emperor quietly granted them more privileges, especially those serving him at his primary residence, the *Yuanmingyuan*.⁷⁸

In the years that followed, the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820) would not only continue on with the well-known theme of attempting to prevent the resurgence of eunuch power but also the leaking of palace secrets and sensitive information. Eunuch involvement with officials and nobility outside the palace continued to plague the emperor during his reign period. In an effort to prevent the leaking of palace information, Jiaqing prohibited eunuchs previously employed by banner-men from returning to the private households of their former employers.⁷⁹ The rise in the number of eunuchs fleeing the palace in favor of employment in princely households during this period, and Jiaqing’s moves to prevent princes from exceeding their eunuch quotas, suggests that the emperor’s strict control over his eunuch workforce was creating tense labor relations within the palace. Jiaqing’s suspicions of eunuchs would prove well founded in 1813, when, during the Eight Trigrams Uprising, eunuch members of the rebel group facilitated the entry of rebels into the palace.⁸⁰ That same year, Jiaqing became suspicious of requests for eunuch leave from the palace and prohibited eunuchs from going outside the palace alone, requiring that they travel in groups of two or three.⁸¹ Undoubtedly, the possible disastrous results of eunuch involvement with people and groups outside the palace prompted Jiaqing and later his successor, the Daoguang emperor (r. 1821–1850), to further restrict eunuch mobility and eunuch relationships with those outside of the Forbidden City. Throughout his reign, Daoguang continued to work towards severing eunuch connections with those outside the imperial court. In light of the relatively recent attempt to invade the palace during his predecessor’s reign, in 1827, Daoguang also took measures to prevent eunuchs from possessing weapons within the court.⁸²

75. Edict cited in Yu Huaqing, *Zhongguo huanguan zhidushi*, 455.

76. See Kutcher, “Unspoken Collusions,” 450.

77. Kutcher, “Unspoken Collusions,” 451.

78. Kutcher, “Unspoken Collusions,” 451.

79. Kutcher, “Unspoken Collusions,” 455.

80. For information on eunuch involvement in the Eight Trigrams Uprising, see Clara Wing-chung Lau, “Jiaqing jingji ‘guiyou zhi bian’ zhong taijian suo banyan de jiaose” 嘉慶京畿「癸酉之變」中太監所扮演的角色, *Dongfang wenhua* 東方文化 2 (1984): 87–106 and Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 148, 175–83.

81. *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili* 欽定大清會典事例 [Imperially commissioned collected regulations of the Qing dynasty], 卷 1217 as cited in Yu Huaqing, 456.

82. *Qinding Da Qing huidian shili*, 卷 1217 as cited in Yu Huaqing, 456.

From the initial inception of the Qing eunuch system through the reign of Daoguang in 1850, Qing emperors continuously enacted policies aimed at preventing a reassertion of eunuch influence and power within the imperial court and throughout the empire. Countless edicts decreased eunuch numbers, prevented them from handling imperial funds, restricted them from interfering in politics, and lessened their opportunities for involvement with individuals or groups outside the palace by confining them within the palace walls, except when on official business.

After 1850, Qing emperors gradually became laxer in their previously vigilant stand against the reassertion of eunuch influence within the court. As noted by Wang Shuqing, a series of young, weak emperors manipulated by members of the imperial court such as China's last female regent, the Empress Dowager Cixi, contributed to the increased power and political activity enjoyed by late Qing eunuchs.⁸³ Operating outside the traditional power structure, Cixi relied on "intimate politics" through eunuchs to ensure her hold over politics. In 1869, Cixi's favoritism of eunuchs became readily apparent to those outside her inner circle. That year, Cixi sent one of her favorite eunuchs, An Dehai 安德海 (1844–1869), to supervise the Imperial Textile Factory at Nanjing, a post formerly occupied by bondservants. Traveling down the Grand Canal in style, flying imperial insignia with female musicians on board, and demanding bribes from local officials, An attracted the attention of local officials, who assumed that his claim to be on an imperial mission was fraudulent. In response, An and six of his associate eunuchs were executed; others were sent to Heilongjiang to serve as slaves.⁸⁴ In another case of favoritism, Cixi promoted Li Lianying 李蓮英 to rise above the rank of fourth grade, allowing him to obtain the rank of second grade.⁸⁵ Cixi's favoritism of An and Li was a source of rumors and criticism; Chinese and foreign writers even alleged that neither had been emasculated but were in fact fully functional males with whom the empress dowager engaged in illicit relations.⁸⁶

Desiring to keep her eunuch favorites happy, Cixi lapsed into practices common during periods of eunuch power (the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties) such as allowing eunuchs to have sons employed as officials.⁸⁷ This practice blatantly disregarded one of the benefits of employing eunuchs, namely the lack of offspring that might form factions and interfere in the government. During the reign of Tongzhi (1862–1874), eunuchs who facilitated the political influence of Cixi, such as An and Li, and those in the upper echelons of the eunuch hierarchy, enjoyed extravagant lifestyles and positions previously unheard of in the Qing. These eunuchs ate lavish

83. Wan Yi, Wang Shuqing, and Liu Lu, *Qingdai gongtingshi* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1990), 499.

84. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 189–90.

85. Wan Yi et al., *Qingdai gongtingshi*, 498.

86. See Keith McMahon, "The Polyandrous Empress: Imperial Women and Their Male Favorites," in *Wanton Women in Late Imperial Chinese Literature*, ed. Mark Stevenson and Wu Cuncun (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 29 and 47.

87. Wan Yi et al., *Qingdai gongtingshi*, 498. As will be seen, some men became eunuchs after having children; other eunuchs, incapable of fathering their own children, chose to adopt.

meals, wore expensive clothing, and even had their own eunuchs who waited on them.⁸⁸ Overall, eunuchs during the latter period of the Qing dynasty worked in an environment that provided them with opportunities for advancement and power actively denied to earlier generations of Qing palace eunuchs. As this work will show, when eunuchs were in short supply or their assistance was needed to facilitate access to politics, previously strict regulations became relaxed. As a result, by the late Qing, eunuchs were routinely allowed greater freedom of mobility to interact with their families, network with other eunuchs, and live a life beyond the confines of the palace walls.

By the reign of Xuantong (1909–1912), with the Qing's former hold over power clearly waning, eunuchs became bolder in their attempts to subvert the traditional master–servant power structure. While on the surface eunuchs continued the façade of eunuch subservience, planning for their survival after the potential fall of the dynasty became paramount. During the chaotic final years of the dynasty, some eunuchs fled the palace in greater numbers while those who stayed behind looked for ways to fund their future life outside the palace eunuch system. As will be seen, eunuchs were routinely accused of stealing palace treasures during this period. As Chapter 9 will show, while the dynasty would fall in 1911, the eunuch system would not. With the Articles of Favorable Treatment allowing Pu Yi, the former Xuantong emperor, to remain in residence within the Forbidden City and provided with a stipend to maintain some form of his former imperial lifestyle, the eunuch system, albeit in an abbreviated form, persisted. The palace eunuch system would continue for another eleven years until July 1923, when, in a sudden move, Pu Yi would assemble all the eunuchs and inform them that their services were no longer needed. Pu Yi's pronouncement summarily brought to an end the Qing's reliance on eunuchs and abolished the three-millennia-old imperial eunuch system.

88. Wan Yi et al., *Qingdai gongtingshi*, 499.

Conclusion

The Chinese historical record has traditionally cast eunuchs as conniving, corrupt, and selfish individuals who interfered in politics and illegally amassed personal wealth. Eunuchs were seen as a necessary evil, essential for the administration of the palace yet troublesome if not managed properly. Dynasties that did not heed the warning to separate eunuchs and politics were considered doomed to collapse. While dynasties rose and fell, the eunuch system persisted for some three millennia.

The typical eunuch narrative in Chinese history revolves around power and women.¹ For the imperial court, power required symbolic manifestations of power such as a large palace complex and an imperial harem. Eunuchs contributed to the imperial aura by representing a large servile class waiting upon the emperor and assisting with the maintenance of his harem. Eunuchs also served a practical purpose, contributing to the administration of the palace and ensuring the purity of the imperial lineage. The story of palace labor relations with eunuchs also focuses on power, a power that emasculation was intended to deny them. Emasculation was designed to render eunuchs into the ideal servants: loyal, subservient, and free of familial obligations and ties. In reality, eunuchs consistently challenged the systematic measures put in place to ensure their subservience. In sum, the history of eunuchs has been defined by a tension between the role eunuchs were meant to play and the life they intended to live.

Histories of the imperial period in China are replete with stories of eunuchs testing the limits of their subservient status while other eunuchs blatantly stepped outside its boundaries to influence politics and amass wealth. When considering the number of eunuchs serving the imperial courts over the centuries, the reality is that only a select few ever achieved such heights. Nevertheless, the stories of this small number of infamous eunuchs have fascinated scholars and contributed to a one-dimensional, stereotypical representation of eunuchs in the historical record. When scholars broaden their focus to examine the lives of the majority of eunuchs, many of whom did not even hold rank, one finds that eunuchs are a much more complicated social group than has previously been presented.

1. Li Kan, "Tan Qingdai de taijian," *Gujin wenshi yuekan* 古今文史月刊 (March 1942): 29.

Carefully combing through Qing palace archival records reveals another side to eunuch history. These findings present a much more comprehensive understanding of eunuch society and show that Qing palace eunuchs were a complicated social group whose emasculation and subsequent employment located them at the center of the empire yet also subjected them to servile status and marginalization by society. Seeking agency in their restricted lives, palace eunuchs tested the boundaries of subservience to the emperor and the imperial eunuch system and recreated the social bonds and networks that emasculation was intended to deny them. This study has inserted the study of Qing eunuchs into current conversations about labor regimes and unfree labor during the Qing, gender and sexualities, the anxiety produced by unmarried men, and Qing palace life, in an effort to provide a more nuanced understanding of the life experiences and actions of the palace eunuch population.

With the cut of a knife, eunuchs found their lives changed forever. Emasculation was a transformative process both physically and socially. Genital mutilation would define the lives of eunuchs: gaining them entry into the palace, dictating their status and employment opportunities, creating uncertainty about their gender, and causing them to become social outcasts. Unlike earlier dynasties in which many eunuchs received sentences of emasculation as a result of their unfree status as criminals, prisoners of war, or tributes, the majority of Qing palace eunuchs voluntarily underwent genital mutilation as a prerequisite for service. While the Qing attempted to distance itself from this ugly side of the eunuch system by making emasculation an application prerequisite, the government's licensure of *daozijiang* and Qing emperors' preferences for eunuchs who had been emasculated before the onset of puberty contributed to a palace eunuch population peopled with young boys forced to be emasculated by their fathers; others were victims of human trafficking often involving *daozijiang* and other eunuchs. In reality, although termed "voluntary," coercion accounted for the majority of emasculations performed on young boys. The decision to become an emasculate was rarely an individual choice. Poverty among families and the potential for financial gain among human traffickers were powerful motivating factors behind emasculation.

An examination of the life experiences of the palace eunuch population reveals the complexities of unfree status during the Qing. Eunuch status does not fit neatly into the binary of free or unfree. As this study has shown, eunuchs occupied a position on the continuum closer to unfree but not one equivalent to slavery. Human trafficking by *daozijiang* resulted in some eunuchs having ties of servitude to their "creators." This was just the first of many forms of subjugation and servitude for eunuchs. Once inside the Forbidden City, eunuchs lived and worked in an environment in which their lives became restricted and eclipsed by the needs and desires of their imperial masters. The eunuch master-apprentice system also created another layer to the bondage of eunuchs. Eunuch apprentices could find themselves serving

the emperor during the day and their eunuch supervisor at night. In reality, Qing palace eunuchs served under multiple masters.

When a new recruit entered the palace, the harsh reality of having become an imperial palace eunuch confronted him. Recruits found themselves delivered into the surreal world of the palace and the inner sanctum of the imperial court. Among society, limited contact with palace eunuchs and the conspicuous consumption among the eunuch elite may have contributed to the misrepresentation of a eunuch's life as one of opulence and power. Such misrepresentations led many eunuch candidates to envision a life of wealth and power waiting for them if they sacrificed their genitalia. Once a part of the palace eunuch system, though, eunuchs found their identities, activities, and desires eclipsed by those of the emperor and his court.

Eunuch histories have been dominated by the select few eunuchs who attained positions of power and wealth within a system designed to keep them suppressed. Few eunuchs ever attained positions of authority. For the vast majority, dreams of riches and glory quickly faded as they performed their duties in the outer court, far removed from the inner sanctum of the emperor. Relying on a management style based upon strict rules and regulations, beatings and corporal punishment, and collective responsibility, the Qing created an atmosphere of mutual anxiety and distrust. The determination of early and mid-Qing rulers to prevent eunuch interference in politics and a repeat of the problems that contributed to the downfall of the Ming dynasty motivated them to enact a host of edicts designed to control all facets of eunuch life. Restricted leave time and attempts to limit association with family members and fraternization with society revealed the hegemony of the emperor and his court in every aspect of the eunuch's life and showed the true nature of his status.

The act of emasculation also physically altered the eunuch body. Genital mutilation and its accompanying physical changes resulted in a being who shared many physical characteristics more representative of the female sex. Outward physical manifestations of emasculation such as smooth skin, lack of facial hair, wide hips, gynecomastia, and a falsetto voice, combined with social expectations that eunuchs could not fulfill due to their infertility, created confusion about the nature of eunuch gender. Biannual examinations to check for the regeneration of emasculated organs, the transfer of "thoroughly pure" eunuchs out of the inner quarters once they reached maturity, and prohibitions against eunuchs entering into domestic relationships with palace maidservants all suggest that the Qing harbored suspicions and at times even anxiety about the effectiveness of emasculation in eradicating sexual desire. Among eunuchs there was no confusion about their gender identity. Eunuch attempts to recreate a semblance of family life through marriage and adoption support the argument that emasculation did not alter the eunuch's perception of his gender as male. While others may have been confused by a eunuch's gender, eunuchs were not.

As indicated by the colloquial term for emasculation, *chu jia* (出家 leaving home), the act involved more than the physical mutilation of the body. Emasculation was also intended to sever family ties and filial responsibilities. In theory, emasculation and its accompanying social stigmatization and “reproductive death” would segregate the eunuch from society, increase his dependency, and ensure his loyalty to the court. In reality, eunuchs often retained varying degrees of contact with their families. Through monthly visits located at one of the palace gates, or through money sent home to support their families, the exchange of letters and visits during leave from the palace, some eunuchs managed to retain their connections with their families. For some eunuchs, the betrayal of trust and the pain endured at the hands of a *daozi* or their fathers proved too divisive to overcome. What this study has shown is that eunuchs as a group responded to social ostracism and segregation from society by actively recreating the familial and social bonds that emasculation was intended to deny them. Within the palace eunuch system, eunuchs formed social bonds with their fellow eunuchs and servants. The Qing utilization of the master–apprentice system for the training of eunuch novices indirectly encouraged the creation of bonds and networks among eunuchs within departments and even within palaces. Prohibitions against eunuchs forming familial bonds with palace maidservants reveal the ability of eunuchs to form family ties and even amorous relationships within the palace.

Eunuch social groupings, networks, and bonds of loyalty facilitated their efforts to manipulate aspects of eunuch society within the palace. Systematized suppression of eunuch freedoms only induced some eunuchs to create a society in which they could attain wealth and power. In a world parallel to the life of decorum of the imperial house, some eunuchs engaged in prohibited forms of entertainment such as drinking, gambling, and smoking opium. Viewed as a dereliction of duty, acts that subverted the imperial will and placed the individual eunuch's wants and needs above those of their masters such as drinking, gambling and drug use, were met with harsh punishments. The imperial court was well aware of these eunuch infractions. Moreover, the need to have so many specific regulations on the books to address such behavior reveals the frustration and challenges eunuch labor caused their imperial masters. Less rebellious eunuchs relied on relationships formed with coworkers and simple pleasures such as sharing a meal at one of the palace restaurants or raising dogs, to provide a counterbalance to the often oppressive nature of palace servant life.

“Volunteering” to become palace eunuchs, emasculated had essentially signed themselves up for a lifetime of service. Eunuchs who sought an authorized exit from the system might have to wait their entire lives for this chance. The Imperial Household Department only authorized three types of exit: discharge due to old age or illness, disciplinary problems, and death. Eunuchs who desired to leave the system without authorization faced two options: flight or suicide.

The abundance of archival information detailing eunuch flight from the palace reflects poorly on the government's treatment of eunuchs and its effectiveness in managing them. While intended to prevent a resurgence of eunuch political power, restrictions on eunuch freedoms had the unintended result of becoming too oppressive for some eunuchs to bear. Flight from the palace offered eunuchs an escape from the restrictions and oppressive nature of palace life. However, these periods of reprieve were often brief, due to difficulties in evading the authorities and financing their time spent outside the palace. Faced with harsh punishments upon capture, eunuch runaways routinely sought leniency and turned themselves in. However, for some, capture and sentences of cutting grass or serving as a slave on the frontier were preferable to their present term of forced labor within the palace.

Whereas flight from the palace exposed the eunuch to the possibility of capture and punishment, suicide alone gave some desperate eunuchs access to a final exit from the system at a time of their own choosing. During the Qing, suicides among the public rarely involved the authorities unless they directly compromised the security of the empire or resulted from the actions or coercion of another. In contrast, eunuchs who attempted or committed suicide were considered criminals. Eunuch suicide elicited a harsh response from the government, ranging from capital punishment for those who had attempted to end their lives to deprivation of a proper burial for those who were deceased. Eunuch motives for suicide attracted little attention from their masters. Due to high rates of eunuch illiteracy, one can only hypothesize about their motives. Was it desperation, empowerment, and defiance, or simply a desire to choose when and where they would exit the system? Responding to suicides with punishments and exorcisms, the government's actions exemplified the preeminence of the harmony and safety of the palace and its imperial inhabitants. Here again, denied the right to voluntarily terminate his employment and the freedom to determine the fate of his own body, the eunuch was ultimately not the master of his own fate. Qing regulations and punishments concerning suicide clearly reveal the unfree status of eunuchs and the lengths some eunuchs would go to exert a degree of agency in their lives.

The Qing authorized three exits from the palace system: sick leave, retirement due to old age or illness, and natural death. On rare occasions, some eunuchs were dismissed for disciplinary reasons. The Qing's handling of eunuch sick leave and discharge from the system reveals another area in which eunuchs challenged the system. Lacking an understanding of what constituted a serious illness and relying on eunuchs to police themselves in these matters, the palace initially had very liberal sick leave policies. Rather than deal with eunuchs who were not performing up to the required level, and wanting to distance itself from potential causes of disruption or disease, the Qing granted eunuch requests for time off to recuperate from illness. Sick leave allowed the Qing to remove nonperforming eunuchs while avoiding the responsibility of having to care for these sick eunuchs. Upon retirement, the palace also initially hoped to end their responsibility to their former eunuch. Once retired

from service, eunuchs would again have to rely on their own initiative to create the social bonds and networks denied to them by emasculation. Retired from the palace at the age of sixty-five, eunuchs found themselves thrust back into society. In theory, the government viewed retirement as a restoration of the eunuch's commoner status and the severance of all government ties and responsibility with its former employee. In practice, eunuch reintegration into society ran into numerous obstacles. Trained for service within such a specialized and restrictive environment, eunuchs found their skills inapplicable to life among society.

Eunuchs' financial problems were often further compounded by society's rejection of them and the tendency of eunuch families to disown them in order to save face. Early acts of compassion for the welfare of retired eunuchs by Qing emperors such as Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Jiaqing attempted to alleviate many of these and other problems eunuchs encountered in their old age. At different times, the government offered room and board for the sick, land for cemeteries, and funds for offerings for the dead. However, these measures only provided assistance for a small percentage of the retired eunuch population. Aware of the unwelcome reception that awaited them upon their long-awaited retirement, eunuchs planned and saved for their future outside the palace. Retirement associations located in temples provided eunuch retirees with the livelihood and community that life among society often denied them. With access to such associations determined by connections and the ability to pay the required membership fee, a host of uncertainties faced many eunuchs upon their exit from the system.

The expulsion of the majority of the eunuchs from the Forbidden City in 1923 pushed the last of China's eunuchs toward a similar fate. Given little or no warning of their impending termination, these eunuchs found themselves cast out into a society that viewed them not only as social outcasts but also as remnants of an imperial past that they wished to leave behind as they entered the Republican era. As citizens of the republic, unemployed and homeless eunuchs now became society's problem. A topic of discussion in the media, eunuchs became part of the popular discourse as society thought of ways for them to move forward. Society's suggestions, however, revealed that few could think of eunuchs as anything but defined by their lack of genitalia. For the majority of late Qing eunuchs, reintegration into society proved difficult. Like eunuch retirees, many expelled eunuchs sought solace from social ostracism and financial security in voluntary segregation in the form of retirement associations located in temples. Here again, one finds an interesting parallel between eunuchs and monastic life, as temples served as refuges for eunuchs and members of society without family ties. Only when faced with the imminent extinction of palace eunuchs did society actively pursue relationships with these relics of the three-thousand-year-old palace eunuch system.

Index

- actors, eunuch, 81–82, 86
adoption, 33, 94, 106, 196
adultery, 128
age requirements. *See* application process
Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi. *See* Pu Yi. *See also*
 Xuantong, emperor
aliases, 66, 111, 113, 151, 168, 177
An Dehai, 2, 26, 57, 94
An Dexiang, 158
ancestor veneration, 79, 95, 162, 166, 186
application process, eunuchs: age require-
 ments, 10, 29, 35–36, 41–47, 51, 57,
 118; applicants, 28, 32, 35–36, 41, 43,
 45; background checks, 30, 45; person-
 ality profiles, 45; rejected applicants, 46
apprentices, eunuch. *See* master-apprentice
 system
Articles of Favorable Treatment, 27, 172,
 175, 189
Asitan, 73–74

banishment, 98, 120, 136. *See also* exile
banner, 20, 31, 44, 59, 70, 134
bannermen, 25, 44, 47, 70, 103
Bao Desheng, 111
bao, 39, 41, 163
bathhouses, 46, 183, 185–86
beatings, 6, 11, 72, 99, 107, 111, 114–15,
 117, 122–25, 131, 133, 139–40, 149,
 150, 157, 176, 178, 191, 193, 196. *See*
 also corporal punishment
beheading. *See* decapitation
Beijing, 37, 44, 48, 51, 64, 134n30, 136n40,
 147, 162–63, 174, 185, 187–91

beile, 19, 113
Beixiangsuo, 165
Bi Wu, 31–34
Bian Baoxiang, 174–75
biannual physical examination, 57–58, 196
biological eunuchs, 42
blood, 38, 102, 132, 137, 142–43, 146, 163
Board of Rites. *See* *Libu*
Board of Works. *See* *Gongbu*
body, eunuch, 48–65. *See also* emasculation,
 physical effects; gender
bondage, 29, 33, 47, 94, 119, 195. *See also*
 slavery
bondservant, 3, 6, 20–23, 26, 66, 73, 89, 130
bribery, 58
Buddhism, 79, 141n61
burial: 162, 165–66, 169; eunuchs denied
 burial in cemeteries, 162–63; depriva-
 tion (of proper) 126, 130–31, 134, 143,
 198; expenses, 165–66; societies, 166;
 with *bao*, 39, 41. *See also* cemeteries

cangue, 11, 83, 98–105, 116–18, 125,
 140n53, 150, 157
capital punishment. *See* strangulation;
 decapitation
Carl, Katherine, 64, 81, 95, 97, 104
castrati, 51, 60–61, 81
castration: xi, 14, 15, 16, 39n61, 48n1, 51,
 56, 61, 63; definition, 9
catechists, eunuch, 80. *See also* Christianity
catheters, 39, 63
celibacy, 60

- cemetery: 45, 134, 163–64, 166, 168–69, 198; Foreign Studies Scholar and Student Cemetery, 163. *See also* *Enjizhuang*; Appendix 4
- Chancery of Memorials. *See* *Zoushichu*
- Chang Yonggui, 159
- Changchun, 189–91
- Changchunyuan*, 165
- Chao Wuming, 191
- chaperone, 184
- Chen Qitai, 122
- Chenghua, emperor, 40
- chief eunuch. *See also* *Gongdian jiandu lingshi taijian*
- Christianity: 62, 80; Christian eunuchs, 80–81. *See also* catechists, eunuch *chu jia*, 1, 60, 67, 138, 197
- citizenship, 1, 119n60, 174–77, 185, 191, 193, 199
- civil service examination, 4, 7, 54
- Cixi, empress dowager, 4, 26, 57, 59, 62, 70, 74–75, 76 fig. 4.4, 82, 86, 93, 95, 97, 104, 160, 173
- class, 4–5, 54, 97. *See also* slaves; slavery
- Classic of Filial Piety*. *See* *Xiao Jing*
- clothing. *See* eunuch, attire
- collective punishment, 35, 72, 99, 103, 113, 123, 130. *See also* collective responsibility
- collective responsibility, 6, 15, 114, 123, 135–37, 139, 143–44, 157, 196. *See also* collective punishment
- commandery prince, 36, 113
- concubines, 4, 21, 68, 71, 77–78, 82, 85, 171, 184
- Confucian: patriarchy, 16, 60; philosophy, 2, 49; social norms, 52; society, 28, 55–56; teachings, 2, 53, 56, 186; value system, 7, 53, 59, 61, 65
- coroner, 132, 138, 140
- corporal punishment, 6, 15, 98, 104, 120, 123–24, 146, 149, 152, 157, 191, 196. *See also* beatings
- corpse dumping, 134. *See also* burial, deprivation of proper
- corruption, 87, 178
- crematorium, 165
- cross-dressers, 58
- Cui Jinchao, 116
- Cui Zilu, 115
- cutting grass, 102, 113, 116–18, 122, 125, 140, 151, 198
- Dagaodian/Dagaoxuandian*, 68, 115
- Daoguang, emperor, 25, 26
- Daoism, 79
- daozijiang*, xi, 28–35, 37–39, 41, 46–47, 49, 67, 86, 159, 163, 195, 197
- Dasaochu*, 147, 165
- Dasheng Wula, 98, 100, 111, 117–18, 122
- Daxing, 35
- dazongguan*. *See* *Gongdian jiandu lingshi taijian*
- death: of a eunuch, 5, 11, 58, 86, 120, 125–26, 129, 137–40, 142–43, 145, 161–69, 191, 197–98; of a parent, 6; of a sibling, 92; penalty, 15, 33, 39, 98, 103, 105, 130–31, 134, 136, 144; reproductive, 2, 53, 95, 197. *See also* capital punishment; discharge
- debt, 34, 98, 101, 106, 139, 140
- decapitation, 40, 130–32. *See also* capital punishment
- decontamination, 132, 139, 143–44
- deviancy, 63
- discharge, eunuch, 5, 11–12, 32, 85, 116, 118, 120, 145, 150–52, 154, 155 table 8.1, 156–61, 167–68, 197–98. *See also* retirement
- disciplinary problems, 11, 106, 145–46, 157, 197–98. *See also* discharge, eunuch
- discourse of power, 4
- discrimination, 81, 145, 158, 160, 162, 166
- dispersal money, 180
- dogs, 96 fig. 5.1, 97, 106, 123, 135, 138, 156, 176, 185, 197
- Dorgon, 21, 22
- drinking, 11, 23–24, 38, 89–90, 98, 100–102, 106, 121, 139, 140, 144, 158, 197
- drowning, 91; suicide by, 127, 132, 142. *See also* suicide
- drugs, 90. *See also* opium

- Du Ming, 101
duishi, 59, 96
 duties, 78–82, 87
- education, eunuch, 55, 67, 73–74, 87–88
- Eight Trigrams Uprising, 25, 43, 55, 91–92, 121
- emasculatation: death rate, 39; definition, 9, 28; physical effects, 10, 48–51, 65, 196; procedure, 31–34, 37–39; psychological effects, 10, 48, 52; as punishment, 34–35. *See also* self-emasculatation
- employment prerequisites (eunuch), 10, 35–36, 41. *See also* application process, eunuch
- enjiayin*, 160
- Enjizhuang: Cemetery, 45, 163; Lifelong Society, 163; Temple, 166
- enshangyin*, 154
- ethnicity, 10, 36, 41, 43, 47
- eunuch-of-the-presence, 23, 73, 84, 177
- eunuch, attire: 27, 62–63, 70, 75, 77, 85, 109–11, 120; numbers of, 3; sources on, 28–47
- eunuchs, inner court (*neigong taijian*), 18, 32, 77–78, 84, 86–87, 92, 97, 109, 120, 148, 153–54, 156, 168, 173
- eunuchs, outer court (*waiwei taijian*), 54, 77–78, 82, 85, 87, 97, 153n30, 154, 168
- eviction (Pu Yi from palace in 1924), 170
- examination: pre-emasculatation, 32; pre-employment physical, 41–42
- execution, 15, 99, 157
- exile, 6, 40, 59, 83, 98–101, 103, 105, 110–13, 117–20, 122, 125–26, 130, 135–36, 138n47, 140nn52–53, 144, 150, 157. *See also* banishment
- exorcism, 139, 198
- expulsion, eunuchs from palace, 8, 12, 117n13, 119n59, 170, 177–82, 184, 187, 189, 192–93, 199
- extortion, 35–36
- family, eunuch: life, 26, 43, 93–95, 173; ties, 89, 90, 138, 144, 197; relations with father, 39–40, 52, 90–92, 174, 177n27, 187, 195, 197. *See also* collective responsibility
- Fanyichu*, 112n23, 115n40
- Feng Yuxiang, 163, 172, 182
- Fengtian, 117
- filial piety, 2, 28, 53, 90, 127, 131, 142, 156, 186. *See also* Confucian
- filial responsibilities, 90
- fire: 177–79; *Jianfugong*, 178; *Yangxindian*, 178
- five mutilating punishments (*wuxing*), 15
- flight (eunuch). *See* runaway, eunuchs
- foot-binding, 48, 171
- Forbidden City, 48, 170, 172, 175–77, 180–81, 189, 195, 199
- forty-eight departments, 71
- fushouling taijian*, 75, 83
- gambling, 11, 23–24, 90, 97–102, 104–6, 117, 121, 139, 140, 144, 175, 197
- Gang Tie Miao*, 161 fig. 8.1, 162
- Gang Tie Mu*, 187
- Gangbing miao*, 157
- Gao Chengxiang, 149
- Gao Jingrui, 123
- Gao Jinxi, 147
- Gao Sheng, 120
- Gao Yuwang, 138
- gender: 5, 6, 10, 49, 52–57, 60–61, 64–65, 94, 195–96; eunuch self-identity 16, 53, 56, 60, 65, 196; imperial court's perceptions of, 61; Western perceptions of 61–64
- Geng Jinxi, 81, 86, 93
- genital mutilation, 1–2, 9–10, 28, 40, 47–49, 64–65, 95, 107, 158, 195–96
- ghost, 132–33, 141. *See also* *gui*; *po*
- girls' schools, 183–84
- Gongbu*, 77
- Gongdian jiandu lingshi taijian* (chief eunuch), 75
- Grand Council, 34, 107n1
- Gu Wenxiang, 23
- Guangxu, emperor, 173n15
- guarantor, 43–44, 137, 156–57, 167, 175
- gui* (spirit), 132

- gynecomastia, 50–51, 196
- Han Chinese, 44, 47, 73, 74
- Han Fuqing, 147
- Han, dynasty, 1, 9, 17–18, 26, 61n68
- hanging, 101, 127, 131–32, 140, 142. *See also* suicide, modes of
- Hanshu*, 74
- harem, 1, 14, 17, 21, 78–79, 87, 194
- He Rong'er, 84, 90, 123
- Headland, Lady Marion Sinclair, 62
- Headland, Sir Isaac Taylor, 62
- Hebei, 45, 136
- Heilongjiang, 26, 99–100, 103, 112–13, 117–19, 122
- Hejian, 45
- Henan, 117
- hierarchy, 3, 11, 18, 26, 54–55, 66, 75, 77, 85, 87, 91, 107n1, 123, 138, 155 table 8.1, 160, 164–66, 168, 170, 173
- homelessness, 180, 182–83, 186, 193, 199
- homicide, 128
- homosexuality, 94–95; male-male intercourse, 54
- Hongtaiji, 19
- hormone therapy, 61
- hu chun* (palace guards), 176
- Hu Jinyu, 113
- Huang Liu-hung, 127, 135
- huanguan*, 9
- huanjian*, 9
- human trafficking, 10, 15, 28–29, 32, 33, 47, 195. *See also* kidnapping
- hypogonadism, 50–51
- identification (ID) card, eunuch, 115, 180
- illiteracy, 8, 24, 74, 175, 193, 198
- illnesses, eunuch, 11, 145–46, 149–50, 153, 167, 197, 198
- Imperial Garden. *See* *Yuhuayuan*
- Imperial Guards, 54
- Imperial Hospital. *See* *Taiyiuyuan*
- Imperial Household Department, 6–7, 11, 21–23, 30–32, 35, 41, 57, 59, 67, 74, 75, 77–78, 82, 86, 92, 113, 115, 117, 119, 120–24, 126, 130, 132–33, 135, 143, 145, 147, 149–54, 156, 165–66, 175–79, 197
- Imperial Pharmacy. *See* *Yuyaofang*
- imperial prince, 36, 43, 54n33, 113
- Imperial Tea Room. *See* *Yuchafang*
- impotence, 42, 60–61
- Inner City Police, 114
- institutional history, eunuch system, 7, 9, 17
- intimate politics, 4, 17, 26, 59
- Jia Defu, 118
- jian* (sexual and political betrayal), 58
- Jiang Jinyu, 165
- Jiaqing, emperor, 25, 36, 43–44, 92, 166, 168, 199
- Jihua, 121
- Jilin, 83n94, 98n45, 111n19, 117, 119
- Jin Tinglin, 100, 102n59
- Jinghemmen*, 149
- Jingmingyuan*, 151, 166
- Jingshan: 163; park, 181; *xiaonei xue* (palace lower school), 122
- jingshen*, 9
- Jingshifang* (Office of Eunuch Affairs), 23, 77–78, 121–23, 156, 165
- Johnston, Sir Reginald, 8, 43, 177, 180–82
- Judicial Department. *See* *Shenxingsi*
- junwang*, 36, 113, 158, 183n68
- Kangxi, emperor, 4n13, 22n53, 23, 35, 56–57, 73–74, 80, 98, 101–2, 147, 167–68, 199
- ketou*, 69, 102
- kidnapping, 29, 32–33, 47, 159. *See also* human trafficking
- King of Hades, 163
- Korean imperial court, 1
- Korsakow, W., 38
- Kuaijisi* (Office of Accounts), 36n45, 41, 67
- labor relations, 5–6, 11, 25, 61, 89, 107n1, 108, 123–26, 145, 150, 176, 194
- lama: 79, 132, 186; eunuch, 80
- leave: 92, 109; sick, 92, 145–57, 167, 198; comparison with sick leave for

- provincial officials, 148; fraudulent, 150, 157, 168
 Li Chang'an, 189
 Li Chao, 137–38
 Li Dongji, 109
 Li Fang, 111, 117–18
 Li Guangyu, 126, 135
 Li Guoqin, 122
 Li Liandong, 157
 Li Lianying, 2, 3, 26, 59, 64, 93, 158, 164, 188
 Li Shoutong, 118
 Li Tianfu, 35
 Li Yi, 109–10
 Li Yu, 150
 Li Zhu, 32
 Li Zicheng, 20, 21
 libido, 9, 42, 52, 56, 59–61, 65, 95, 185, 196
Libu (Board of Rites), 35–36, 40–41, 45, 77, 148, 158
 literacy, 7, 73–74, 88. *See also* illiteracy
 Liu Decai, 92
 Liu Delu, 191
 Liu Duosheng, 160
 Liu Erqi, 101
 Liu, “Fine Blade,” 32
 Liu Jinxin, 91
 Liu Kuaizui, 102
 Liu Qingyan, 189
 Liu Yourong, 174
 Liu Zhenying, 189
 Liu Zhongtang, 58
 living quarters, eunuch, 84, 109n6, 140. *See also* *tatan*
 Longyu, empress dowager, 172–73
Longfumen, 146

 Ma Deqing, 39, 52
 Ma Feng, 139
 Ma Jinzhong, 151
 Ma Sheng, 122
 Ma Yu, 122
 Ma Yubao, 140
 maidservant, 8, 16, 59, 61, 66, 75, 84, 87, 90, 93–94, 96–97, 129, 175, 179n41, 184n71, 189, 196–97
 male-male intercourse. *See* homosexuality
Manzhouguo, 190–91
 marquis, 23n62, 25, 42
 marriage, eunuch, 56, 59, 60n59, 61, 93–95, 106, 196
 masculinity, 5–6, 10, 49, 54–55
 master-apprentice system, 11, 72, 87, 95–96, 105, 114, 195, 197
 Matignon, J.-J., 38–39, 52, 77, 80, 142
 May Fourth Movement, 184
 medical care, eunuch, 153–54, 168
 medical malpractice, 82, 154
 Meng Zhangxi, 146
 Miao Jinyu, 83
 Ming, dynasty, 1–3, 9, 12, 17–20, 26, 31, 40, 42, 45–47, 54, 58, 89, 95, 128, 148, 160, 165
 missionaries, 62, 80, 171. *See also* Christianity
 monasticism, 46. *See also* monks
 Mongolian, eunuchs, 45
 monks, 46, 58–60, 67, 79, 109n7, 111–12. *See also* *chu jia*; monasticism
 Morache, Georges, 37, 50–51
 Mu Qi, 43

Nanfu (Court Theatrical Bureau). *See* *Shengpingshu*
 native place: 12, 36, 42, 44–45, 70–71, 86, 96, 116–18, 140n53, 146–48, 150–51, 156–58, 162–63, 168, 180, 187; associations, 90, 95, 105
 natural eunuchs. *See* biological eunuchs
Neidabaner (Palace Squad), 115
neigong taijian. *See* eunuchs, inner court
Neishutang, 73
Neiwufu. *See* Imperial Household Department
 New Culture Movement, 184
Niaoqiangersanchu, 146
 Nurhaci, 19–20

 occupations, eunuch, post expulsion, 188–89, 193
 Office of Eunuch Affairs. *See* *Jingshifang*
 Office of General Affairs. *See* *Zongwufu*

- Oirat Mongols, 150
 opium, 11, 103–6, 122, 131, 142, 171, 174–75, 197
 Ottoman Empire, 1
- Palace Eunuchs' Mutual Prosperity Association, 188
 palace gods, 124, 133
 pass: travel, 115; for retired eunuchs, 150, 156
 physician: 79, 153–54, 168; eunuch, 82–83; Western, 31, 37–38, 48, 51–52, 62–63
po (spirit). *See also* *gui*; ghost
 pollution. *See* blood
 polygamy, 63
 poverty, 2, 29–30, 31, 33, 35, 40, 46–47, 113, 127, 159, 182, 187, 193, 195
 Prince Chun, 189
 princely households, 9, 25, 36–37, 43–44, 46–47, 70, 114, 118, 151, 156–57, 174–75, 177
 prostitution, 47, 61, 122
 Pu Jia, 45, 104, 178, 182
 Pu Jie, 45, 114, 177
 Pu Yi, 8, 12, 27, 79, 123–24, 133, 170–72, 174, 176–82, 186, 189, 190–91, 193. *See also* Xuanton, emperor
 punishment, 98, 123, 131. *See also* beatings; cangue; cutting grass; corporal punishment; exile, slavery; strangulation
- Qianlong, emperor, 24–25, 34–36, 40, 45, 68, 73–74, 156n36
Qianqinggong zongguan. *See* *Gongdian jiandu lingshi taijian*
 Qin, dynasty, 1, 17
Qingshu, 74
Qingyiyuan, 166
 queue, 109, 111, 176
- rank, eunuch. *See* social hierarchy
 recruits, eunuch, 35–36, 41, 47, 66–71, 86. *See also* application process, eunuch
 regeneration of genitalia, 58, 65, 196
 Rehe, 40, 122
 reincarnation, 135, 141
 reintegration into society, eunuch, 5, 12, 46, 145, 158–59, 168, 186–89, 199
 rent, allowance, 85
 research subjects, eunuchs as, 185
 restaurants, 86, 97, 106, 197
 retirement associations, eunuch: 60n60, 160–61, 166, 169, 173, 187, 199; Beijing's Eunuch Retirement Association, 160
 retirement: 5, 60, 85, 111, 145, 150–51, 154, 157–60, 162, 166–68, 186, 198–99; assistance, 169. *See also* discharge; retirement associations
 revolution (1911), 5–6, 8, 12, 27, 119, 170, 171–75, 186, 191n99, 192
 Ripa, Matteo, 62
 Roman, empire, 1
 runaway, eunuchs: 11–12, 31, 101, 107–25, 145, 175, 177, 197–98; escape routes, 108–11; notices 109–10
- salary: 85, 113, 159, 168; reduction due to illness, 146, 154, 155 table 8.1, 167; reduction as punishment, 116
 scholar-officials, 7, 18, 54–55
 screening, eunuch. *See* application process
 secondary sexual characteristics, 111. *See also* emasculation, physical effects
 self-emasculation: 39–40, 177; definition, 177n27; prohibitions against, 40, 47
 sexual desire. *See* libido
 Shandong, 36, 44, 47, 95, 117, 127, 148
 Shang, dynasty, 1, 14
 Shanhai Pass, 21, 111
 Shanxi, 102n57, 117, 136, 140n52
 Shao Guoqin, 123
 Shao Ying, 179
 shed, *daozijiang*'s, 32–33, 37
 Sheng Liang, 101
Shengpingshu (Court Theatrical Bureau, *Nanfu*), 81–82, 163, 165
Shenwumen (Shenwu Gate), 90, 180
Shenxingsi (Judicial Department), 67, 112n23, 115n40, 126, 132, 138, 140, 157, 175

- shouling taijian*, 44, 72, 75, 77, 80, 85, 87, 100, 112, 121–23, 137, 140n54, 146–47, 149, 152–54, 155 table 8.1, 156, 163–66
- Shuhede, 136
- Shuntian, 35, 42, 44–45, 148
- Shunzhi, emperor, 9, 20, 22–23, 30, 40, 74
- sick leave. *See* leave, sick
- slavery: 35, 77, 119–20, 125, 130, 144, 195; slave, 3n11, 6, 10, 15, 20, 26, 98–99, 101, 103, 112–113, 117, 119n57, 120, 122, 125–26, 130, 135, 140n52, 140n54, 144, 150, 175, 198, 202. *See also* unfree status
- smallpox, 23, 147
- social hierarchy, 11, 66, 77, 87; eunuch, 75, 77
- social ostracism: 89, 145, 158, 167, 186, 197, 199; social outcasts, 16, 28, 66, 111, 169–70, 186, 192, 195, 199. *See also* stigma
- spirit, 132. *See also* *po*; *gui*
- status. *See* social hierarchy; unfree status
- Stent, George Carter, 1n1, 30, 37, 39, 45, 57–58, 60, 63, 80–81, 94, 104, 115, 157, 159, 162, 166
- stigma, 1, 2, 15–16, 53–55, 60n59, 94, 197. *See also* social ostracism
- strangulation, 98–99, 103, 105, 130–32, 142, 202. *See also* capital punishment
- Su Chang, 150
- Su Wenzhi, 91n8
- suicide: 11, 101, 126–44, 197–98; modes of, 127, 142; purposeful, 141; regulations, 129–30
- sumptuary laws, 23, 36, 46
- Sun Yaoting, 85, 104, 174, 177, 187
- Sun Yirang, 171
- Sun Yong'an, 112, 120
- supply and demand, eunuch, 3, 10, 19, 25, 27–28, 32, 34, 36, 40, 42, 46–47, 93, 99, 118, 124, 152. *See also* application process, eunuch
- taijian*: 67–68, 75; definition 9
- Taiwan, 34
- Taiyiyuan* (Imperial Hospital), 153
- Tancheng, 127
- Tang, dynasty, 1, 2, 9, 17–18, 26
- tatan*: 103, (shop) 109. *See also* living quarters (eunuch)
- temple, 60, 78–79, 81, 111, 159–62, 169, 173, 174n18, 181, 187, 192–93, 199. *See also* *Enjizhuang*, *Gangbing Miao*, *Gang Tie Miao*, *Xinglongsi*, *Yonghegong*; Appendix 3
- testosterone, 50–52, 110, 141
- theft, 94, 98, 121–22, 157, 174, 177–78
- third sex, 6, 53
- Thirteen Yamen (Thirteen Bureaus), 22–23, 74
- Tian Deming, 137–38
- Tianjin, 44–45, 47, 61, 147, 173, 177, 189–91
- Tibetan Buddhism, 79–80, 135
- tongzhen* (thoroughly pure), 57, 60
- Tongzhi, emperor, 26, 118
- Tongzi River (*Tongzi He*), 180
- torture, 178
- tour guides, 187, 193
- training: art, 82; basic, 10, 67–70; medical, 83, religious, 87. *See also* master-apprentice system
- transmigration, 141
- twenty-four offices, 18
- unemployment, eunuch, 185–86
- unfree status, 6, 11, 28–29, 46–47, 108, 119–20, 125–26, 130, 144, 175, 193, 195, 198. *See also* slavery
- urinary incontinence, 39, 158n50. *See also* urological problems
- urological problems, 48, 63, 149–50, 167
- Urumqi, 130, 135–36, 140n54, 202
- violence, eunuch-upon-eunuch, 61, 101–2, 106, 131
- Wagenseil, Ferdinand, 50
- waiwei taijian*. *See* eunuchs, outer court
- Wang Bing, 132, 140–41
- Wang Fu, 92
- Wang Fuxiang, 189

- Wang Guoqin, 164
 Wang Jinchao, 83–84
 Wang Lin, 121
 Wang Shuangxi, 147
 Wang Taiping, 122
 Wang Xi, 147
 Wang Xiangrui, 110
 Wang Xilian, 103
 Wang Zhide, 91n8
 Wanping, 35
 Wanrong, empress, 177, 179, 187n80, 189
Wanshandian, 73–74, 111
Wanyiju (Nursing Home Bureau), 148, 160
 weapons, within the palace, 25, 55, 100,
 131–32
 Wei Zhu, 24
weimin taijian (commoner eunuch), 12,
 120, 145, 152, 154, 155 table 8.1, 156,
 168
wen-wu (literary-martial), 54
 Weng Mountain, 102, 116n43, 117–18, 140
 Western medicine, 39
 widow: 94; suicide, 127, 129n16, 141
 Wu Degui, 118
 Wu, empress, 17
 Wucheng, 148
 Wudian, 116–18, 122, 125, 151
 Wula, 83, 98n45, 120
 Wuqing, 35, 42, 112
wuxing. *See* five mutilating punishments
- Xian Delu, 146
 Xiao Dezhang, 158
Xiao Jing (*The Classic of Filial Piety*), 142
 Xiaodao Liu, 31–32
xiaojian, 9
 Xin Xiuming, 8n18, 86, 97, 109, 183n68
Xinglongsi, 154, 157
 Xinjiang, 59, 103, 136, 140n53
 Xu Jinlu, 147
 Xuantong, emperor, 12, 22n53, 27, 114n32,
 170, 172, 174, 181. *See also* Pu Yi
- yan*, 9
Yanchilou, 180, 182
 Yang Dehai, 122
- Yang Duoquan, 191
yang, 9
Yangxindian: 70, 191; fire, 178
yaopai, 180
 Ye Fu, 121
 Ye Mingliang, 137
Yiheyuan, 172, 189
 Yili, 126, 130, 135–36, 140n52, 150
 yin-yang, 53, 65
 yin, 23, 53–57, 65, 73. *See also* yin-yang
Yingzaosi, 165
Yonghegong, 79–80, 126, 135
 Yongzheng, emperor, 24, 42, 44, 54–55,
 148–49, 156–57, 167–68, 199
 Yu Chunhe, 32–34, 61, 69, 72, 173n15
 Yu Jinzhong, 133
 Yu Jiqing, 43
Yuanmingyuan, 25, 34, 40, 68, 83, 91, 101–2,
 109–10, 118, 121, 132, 140, 150, 152,
 165–66
Yuchafang (Imperial Tea Room), 147
Yuhuayuan (Imperial Garden), 126, 146
Yushufang, 165
Yuyaofang (Imperial Pharmacy), 82–84,
 153–54, 168
- Zhang Delang, 61
 Zhang Feng, 110
 Zhang Fujun, 118
 Zhang Lande, 173
 Zhang Ming, 109
 Zhang Qianhe, 76 fig. 4.3
Zhangfang Guanxue, 74
Zhangyisi (Department of Ceremonial), 41,
 67, 115, 165
 Zhao Ben, 42, 46
 Zhao De, 110
 Zhao Rong, 112, 122
 Zhao San, 164
 Zhao Shijie, 101
 Zhao Yu, 112
 Zheng Furui, 137
 Zheng He, 19
 Zhili, 44, 47, 117, 136, 147, 148n7, 151
Zhongzhengdian, 80
 Zhou Baoshi, 137, 140

- Zhou Jinchao, 24
Zhu Xiang, 111
Ziwuzhong, 156
zongguan taijian, 70, 72, 75, 76 fig. 4.3,
77–78, 85, 87, 100, 137, 151–54, 155
table 8.1, 163–65, 173
Zongwufu (Office of General Affairs), 92
Zoushichu (Chancery of Memorials), 24,
73, 88