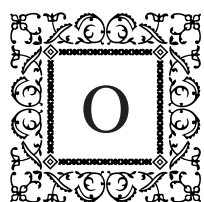


# Disease and Its Impact on Politics, Diplomacy, and the Military: The Case of Smallpox and the Manchus (1613–1795)

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ONE of the most dramatic events in Chinese history was the rise of the Qing dynasty in 1644. Scholars have suggested various reasons why the Manchus successfully conquered Ming China, but one important reason has long been neglected. An infectious disease, smallpox, played a key role in the story. Smallpox might have served as a barrier, preventing the success of the susceptible Manchus, both during the time of military conquest and in the years that followed. In this essay I explore how the Manchus responded to the danger of smallpox and how smallpox shaped the Manchu military, political, and diplomatic structures during the conquest and the first half of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

In the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) smallpox was rare among the peoples who lived beyond the northern borders of China, including the Manchus. For example, Zhang Jiebin (1563–1640), an eminent physician, stated that the northern peoples did not develop the disease.<sup>1</sup> A government official of the time, Xie Zhaozhe, also remarked that the Tartars did not suffer from smallpox.<sup>2</sup> As late as the Qing

1. Zhang Jiebin (1563–1640), *Jingyue quanshu* (*Zhang Jingyue's Collected Treatise*) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubun Gongsì [rprt.], 1976), *juan* 43, p. 744.

2. Xie Zhaozhe was an official in the Wanli period (1573–1620). At that time, Tartar (Dada) was widely used as the name for the peoples who lived in the north and northwest

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dynasty, Zhu Chungu (1634–1718?), who was appointed to practice variolation amongst the Mongols during the Kangxi period (1662–1722), asserted that it was their nomadic lifestyle which protected them.<sup>3</sup> However, the Manchus did not totally escape smallpox. In 1613, the first large-scale smallpox outbreak amongst the Manchu tribes occurred, affecting 300 households of the Yehe Manchu.<sup>4</sup>

As contacts between the northern peoples and the Chinese increased, so did reports of smallpox. In 1544, Lu Shen noted that many northern peoples coming across the Great Wall contracted smallpox and most sufferers died.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, according to the *Mingshi* (*History of the Ming Dynasty*), the Mongols had not had smallpox in their territories, but they contracted it after trading with the Chinese in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Xie Zhaozhe also stated that when the Tartars traded with the Chinese in the late Ming period, they were no longer exempt from smallpox.<sup>7</sup> Because of economic, political, military, and cross-ethnic contacts, the broad border north of China became a hotbed for transmitting smallpox in the late Ming and early Qing period, and entering China heightened the northern peoples' exposure to the disease. Not only did the incidence increase, but so

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of China. See Xie Zhaozhe, *Wuzazu* (*Five Sundry Bands*) (1618) (Shanghai: Zhongyang Shudian, 1935), *juan* 5, p.193.

3. Variolation was a sophisticated technique developed in China during the sixteenth century. Practitioners used this technique in five ways, all of which were designed to expose a child to the smallpox virus and to produce a mild case of smallpox. One favored method was to take the scabs from a child with a mild case of smallpox, to grind the scabs into powder, to mix the powder with water or wine, to use cotton balls to dip in the wet scabs, and to place cotton balls into the nasal passages. Initially, this technique was practiced by a marginal group of healers outside the orthodox medical system. See Chia-Feng Chang, *Aspects of Smallpox and Its Significance in Chinese History* (Ph.D. diss., SDAS, University of London, 1996), pp. 124–59. The Kangxi Emperor started to introduce variolation in the Qing Imperial Family in the end of the seventh year of the Kangxi reign (1679). He later expanded this technique to the Mongols. See Chia-Feng Chang, “Qing Kangxi Huangdi caiyong rendoufa de shijian yu yuanyin shitan” (Time frame and reasons of Kangxi Emperor adopted variolation), *Zhonghua yishi zazhi* (*The Chinese Journal of History of Medicine*), 1996, 26, 30–32; Zhu Chungu, *Douzen dinglun* (*Final Conclusion on Smallpox*) (1713) (Gusu: Qixi Tang, 1767), pp. 1–3.

4. Guang Lu and Li Xuezhi, trans., *Qing Taizu chao lao manwen yuandang* (*The Old Original Manchu Archive for the Qing Taizu Reign*), 2 vols. (Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1970), I, 31–32.

5. Wenren Gui, *Wenren shi douzheng lun* (*Wenren Gui's Treatise on Smallpox*) (Liu Shangyi reprinted edition, 1544), Lu Shen's preface. This text was composed approximately c.e. 1228–1236.

6. Zhang Tingyu et al., *Ming shi* (*History of the Ming Dynasty*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), *juan* 239, pp. 6216–17.

7. Xie Zhaozhe, (n. 2) *Wuzazu*, *juan* 5, p. 193.

did the mortality rate from subsequent infection. Unlike most of their Chinese neighbors who had had smallpox during childhood, those northern peoples who most often fell ill with smallpox were adults, and this increased their chances of death.

From the early seventeenth century onward, Nurhaci (1559–1626), who united the Manchu tribes and laid the foundation for the Qing dynasty, and his successors enthusiastically expanded their power. They conquered Korea, Mongolia, and China, establishing a vast empire throughout Asia. One might wonder, then, whether during the Manchu invasion of China smallpox ever played a determinate role as it did in the case of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the Mexicans, for whom smallpox was a completely new disease, the Manchus already knew about smallpox and its contagiousness by the time they devised their ambitious scheme of conquest. When they started to have close contacts with China, how did the Manchus protect themselves from this disease and defeat the Chinese troops at the same time? After they took over China, how did they wage their long and intense campaign against smallpox? What role did smallpox play in the early Qing history? These are the questions I answer in this essay.

#### THE GREAT FEAR OF SMALLPOX

The Manchus originally lived in the northeast of China where smallpox was rare. Therefore, the majority of the population was not immune to the disease. A great variety of Chinese documents indicate that the Manchus lived in constant fear of smallpox. This was especially true of the imperial family. In 1631, Prince Balam died of smallpox at the age of twenty-four. His father, the Great Beile (Prince) Daishan (1583–1648), Emperor Abahai (1592–1643), and other princes did not attend his funeral due to their terror of contracting the disease.<sup>9</sup> In fact, any sign of smallpox infection caused enormous anxiety. For instance, during a prince's funeral in 1633, when the royal members heard of a smallpox outbreak, they immediately returned home, and only those who had had smallpox stayed to pay their last respects.<sup>10</sup>

8. William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1976), pp. 1–5.

9. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Emperor Abahai of the Great Qing Dynasty*) (Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishe, n.d.), *juan* 9, pp. 8–9.

10. The First Historical Archives of China, ed., *Manwen Laodang* (*The Old Manchu Archives*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1990), pp. 1353–56.

To provide adequate protection against smallpox, at Emperor Abahai's funeral in 1643, those royal members who had not yet had smallpox and those who had been affected gathered separately to practice different rituals.<sup>11</sup> It was the fear of smallpox that kept these two groups apart on such an important occasion.

The Manchus were more concerned with smallpox than with other diseases. The Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722) noted, for example, that his ancestors were particularly afraid of smallpox. His impression that the Manchus had a long history of anxiety about the disease is supported by much evidence. In 1635, a Manchu troop won a battle and was on their way to the capital when an official read a welcome edict from the Emperor Abahai to them. In this edict, Abahai started by expressing his gratitude to heaven that the Manchus had not been affected by smallpox.<sup>12</sup> In the same year, Abahai commanded troops to attack China. Those princes who guarded the Manchu territory sent a report to Abahai in which they first thanked heaven for the harvest, then for the fact that they did not contract smallpox.<sup>13</sup> Insofar as it was the only disease repeatedly mentioned in these imperial accounts, there can be no doubt that the Manchus regarded smallpox as the most dreadful illness and were afraid of it more than any other.

Most important, the Manchus were more concerned with smallpox than were previous dynasties. Before conquering China, the Manchus established a smallpox investigation agency to avoid contagion, at least as early as 1622.<sup>14</sup> This agency continued its work after the conquest. No other dynasties in Chinese history had ever created such an agency, and this one lasted for more than two centuries. Any suspected smallpox patients in the early stages of the disease had to report to the officials. The officials would then quickly decide if the person had indeed contracted smallpox. If so, they would immediately send the patient away from the main population in an attempt to stop the disease from spreading. Any case of disobedience or miscon-

11. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Shizu Emperor of the Great Qing Dynasty*) (Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishe, n.d.), *juan* 2, p. 6. Aisin Guovuo XX (1592–1643), posthumously honored as Emperor Abahai by his son, the Shunzhi Emperor (1638–1661). Abahai, known in official accounts as Huangtaiji, was Nurhaci's eighth son.

12. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 23, p. 24.

13. The First Historical Archives of China, ed., *Qing chu neiguoshiyuan manwen dang'an yibian* (*Translation on the Manchu Archives of the Inner National History Bureau in the Early Qing Dynasty*), 3 vols. (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 1989), I, 108.

14. The First Historical Archives, (n. 10) *Manwen Laodang*, pp. 282–83.

duct was severely punished.<sup>15</sup> This system was initially applied in the army and the Eight Banners; later it was expanded to all subjects. At the beginning of the Qing dynasty, this investigation system continued and even became more strict in the capital.

To further protect their important figures, the Manchus also established *bidousuo* (shelters for keeping smallpox at bay).<sup>16</sup> These shelters, which were located either in remote places or in a quiet corner of peoples' lodgings, were designed to facilitate segregation from those who were ill or potentially ill.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the Manchu idea of segregation was to quarantine and protect those royalty who had not had smallpox rather than to isolate the sufferers. In case of any smallpox alert, the Manchu emperor and royal family members immediately escaped to their respective shelters. Functioning as a quarantine shelter, the *bidousuo*, which was also called *jidi* (taboo place) or *jingdi* (purified place), needed careful supervision, and caution was thus required with visitors.<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1638, an officer was fined and flagellated because he carelessly allowed a Mongol to call at the emperor's *bidousuo*.<sup>19</sup> If this Mongol had had any contact with smallpox sufferers or if he himself had been developing smallpox, his visit would have endangered the emperor's life.

After the Manchu conquest, the leaders were still terrified by smallpox contagion. The most remarkable example is the case of the Shunzhi Emperor (1644–1661). He was only six years old when he came to power, and therefore more at risk for smallpox. He was also the first Manchu emperor to live in China, where smallpox was much more common. During the Shunzhi reign (1644–1661), at least nine smallpox outbreaks were recorded in Beijing.<sup>20</sup> Anytime there was

15. The First Historical Archives, (n. 13) *Qing chu neiguoshiyuan manwen dang'an yibian*, II, 19.

16. See Chia-Feng Chang, "Strategies of dealing with smallpox in the early Qing Imperial Family," in Hashimoto Keizo, Catherine Jami, and Lowell Skar, eds., *East Asian Science: Tradition and Beyond* (Osaka: Kansai University Press, 1995), pp. 199–205.

17. When there was no smallpox alarm, the imperial family used to entertain guests in the *bidousuo*. See *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 53, p. 3.

18. The First Historical Archives, (n. 10) *Manwen Laodang*, p. 1231; *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 61, p. 13; The First Historical Archives, (n. 13) *Qing chu neiguoshiyuan manwen dang'an yibian*, III, 246.

19. Ji Yonghai and Liu Jingxian, trans., *Chongde san'nian manwen dang'an yibian* (*The Chinese Translation of the Manchu Archive of the Third Year of the Chongde Reign [1638]*) (Shenyang: Liaoshen Shushe, 1988), p. 93.

20. Chia-Feng Chang, "Qing chu de bidou yu chadou zhidu (The smallpox quarantine and investigation system in the early Qing dynasty)," *Hanxue Yanjiu* (*Chinese Studies*), 1996, 14.1, 135–156.

information regarding a smallpox outbreak or someone in the palace was developing smallpox, the emperor immediately confined himself to his *bidousuo*. He had at least two *bidousuo* in the capital, which were both surrounded by water and thus ideal for quarantine purposes.<sup>21</sup> In addition, one summer he even headed across the border with the intention of escaping exposure to the disease.<sup>22</sup> Whenever the Shunzhi Emperor stayed in the *bidousuo*, he set strict rules. These rules, however, produced increased fear of smallpox among the population.

Ironically, although his great fear of smallpox drove the Shunzhi Emperor to make great efforts to avoid the disease, he died of it. Nevertheless, just prior to his death, the Shunzhi Emperor decreed that those who had not had smallpox could not succeed to the throne.<sup>23</sup> He believed that limiting the reign to smallpox survivors would prolong the Manchus' rule over China. This was one of the main reasons, then, that the Kangxi Emperor came to the throne at the age of eight. This emperor used to stay in a temple outside the Forbidden City for protection from smallpox; his segregation meant he could not see his parents. He was later quoted as having felt deep sorrow over this for sixty years.<sup>24</sup>

Smallpox was the only disease to receive so much attention from the Qing Imperial Family. When two sons of the Kangxi Emperor, including the crown prince, contracted smallpox in 1675 and 1678, the emperor was so concerned that he temporarily did not perform his royal duties.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, to avoid bringing ill fortune to the princes, the emperor had the funeral rituals of two empresses altered.<sup>26</sup> Despite precautions, both before and after the Manchu conquest,

21. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 72, p. 6; *juan* 90, p. 22. For detailed discussion about these two *bidousuo*, see Chia-Feng Chang, (n. 20), pp. 141–42.

22. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 90, p. 22.

23. Alfons Văth, *Tang Ruowang zhuan* (*Biography of Johann Adam Schall von Bell*) (1933), trans. Yang Bingchen, (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1949), pp. 325–26; Fan Xingzhun, *Zhongguo yufang yixue sixiang shi* (*A History of Preventive Medicine in China*) (Beijing: Renmin Weisheng Chubanshe, 1953), p. 128. Yet the fact that the Tongzhi Emperor (1856–1875) died of smallpox shows that this regulation was not strictly obeyed in his case, probably because he was the only surviving son of the former ruler, the Xianfeng Emperor (1831–1861).

24. Yu Zhengxie (1775–1840), *Guisi cunghao* (*Preserve Manuscripts of the 1833*) (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1937; 1957), *juan* 9, p. 250.

25. The First Historical Archives, *Kangxi qiju zhu* (*Annotated Version of the Kangxi Emperor's Daily Record*), 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984), I, 195, 389–90.

26. *Qinding da Qing huidian shili* (*The Great Qing Official Compilation Cases of the National Code*) (Taipei: Qiwen Chubanshe, 1963), *juan* 478, pp. 13, 19.

many members of the royalty died of smallpox.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it was not only his sons' welfare that concerned the emperor, but also the potential life-threatening danger that worried him. While the crown prince, Yinreng (1674–1725), was recovering from smallpox, the Kangxi Emperor held rites to thank heaven, the altar of grain and their ancestors; the physicians were also rewarded.<sup>28</sup>

The Manchus were so afraid of smallpox that they used only auspicious words when referring to smallpox patients. They adopted terms such as *tianhua zhixi* (the auspicious heavenly flower) or *xidou* (auspicious smallpox) to describe smallpox sufferers in the hope of avoiding bad luck.<sup>29</sup> When the Shunzhi Emperor contracted smallpox in 1661, any words pronounced like *dou* (smallpox), such as bean (*dou*), were strictly prohibited; nor were frying beans or lighting candles allowed, because the flames of candles were shaped like beans.<sup>30</sup> Further, in the Qing dynasty all subjects were requested to wear mourning clothes to express condolence to the bereaved emperor and empress. Only those officials who served in Manchu temples and those who had a family member suffering from smallpox were exempted.<sup>31</sup> No other disease was so cautiously treated in the Qing dynasty.

The Manchus believed that they were vulnerable to smallpox contagion due to the fact that the majority did not acquire immunity. In the late Ming dynasty, the Manchus were a half nomadic and half agricultural people from China's vast northeastern borders. The climatic conditions and lifestyle enabled most of the population to keep their distance from smallpox contagion. However, once a smallpox outbreak struck a Manchu tribe, it could lead to devastating conse-

27. For example, the Great Beile Daishan's sons, Prince Yuetuo and Prince Mazhan, died of smallpox on their way to conquer the Ming China; Prince Dodo (1614–1649) died of smallpox at the age of thirty-six in 1649; Prince Ajige's (1605–1651) two wives died of this disease at the same year, and so did Jianzhu. See *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 45, pp. 21–22; *juan* 46, pp. 2–4; *juan* 47, p. 2; *juan* 47, p. 14; *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 43, p. 4; p. 7; The First Historical Archives, (n. 13) *Qing chu neiguoshiyuan manwen dang'an yibian*, III, 18.

28. Kangxi Emperor, *Kangxi yuzhi wenji* (*His Majesty Kangxi Emperor's Treatise*) (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju [rprt.], 1966), *juan* 8, pp. 3–4.

29. *Da Qing Muzong Yi Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Tongzhi Emperor of the Great Qing Dynasty*; Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishi, n.d.), *juan* 373, pp. 13–14; Chen Keji, ed., *Qinggong yi'an yanjiu* (*Research on the Medical Cases of the Qing Imperial Palace*) (Beijing: Zhongyi Guji Chubanshe, 1990), pp. 494–97, 783–85, 799.

30. Xie Jingfang, "Tianhua yu Qing chu shishi pingyi" (On smallpox and historical events during the early period of Qing dynasty), *Minzu Yanjiu* (*Ethno-national Studies*) 1995, 69–74.

31. *Qinding da Qing huidian shili* (n. 26), *juan* 477, p. 3.

quences. Unlike their Chinese counterparts whose smallpox sufferers were mainly children, all Manchu adults and children were potential victims. Adult smallpox patients usually have less chance of survival. No wonder that when Prince Haoge (1609–1648) was sent to fight a war, he complained that this could put him in the hand of death, for he had not yet had smallpox.<sup>32</sup> Even ordinary Manchu soldiers worried about smallpox during wars. Many of them excused themselves for leaving the army by claiming that they had not yet contracted smallpox.<sup>33</sup>

Because the Manchus did not develop feasible and efficient methods to treat smallpox, they abandoned smallpox victims like many other peoples in the north of China. Smallpox sufferers were banished from their tribes and lived alone. This practice caused even deeper social anxiety about smallpox. During the Manchu expansion, to protect the majority who had not had smallpox, the Manchus institutionalized a strict investigation system to search for smallpox patients and immediately send them away from the frontier.<sup>34</sup> Those smallpox victims who were driven away without proper treatment and care may well have died. Such a cruel custom and policy not only built up the actual fear of smallpox but also helped create an atmosphere of anxiety about the disease. This horrible atmosphere was reinforced especially when the Shunzhi Emperor escaped to his *bidousuo* and set rigorous rules against smallpox contagion. Those royal members who had not had smallpox frequently visited their isolation shelters, practicing special and intense caution. Such frequent withdrawals from court, though, could jeopardize their social and political connections.

Furthermore, during and after the Manchu conquest, as a minority ethnic group the Manchus had to keep themselves physically healthy and strong to fight wars and to rule the Han Chinese majority. Although the Chinese had developed various methods to treat smallpox before the conquest, the Manchu people were considered intruders and enemies and thus had less chance to learn or benefit from the Chinese medical wisdom. Because the Manchus believed that they were vulnerable to smallpox, fighting with and settling in China where smallpox was common caused great anxiety. Many Chinese

32. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 4, pp. 1–3.

33. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 36, pp. 27, 32–34.

34. For details of smallpox investigation system, see Chia-Feng Chang, (n. 20), pp. 145–151.



noted the fact that those northern peoples who entered China were often affected by smallpox and died of it.<sup>35</sup> This fact made the Manchus wary and escalated their fear of smallpox contagion.

Before they conquered China, however, the Manchus also knew that anyone who survived smallpox would never be affected again. Therefore, those who had recovered from smallpox were called *shou-shen* (the cooked body); those who had not yet contracted smallpox were referred as *shengshen* (the raw body).<sup>36</sup> Once the body was “cooked” by the fever and rash of smallpox, it became mature and was free from this disease. Therefore, the Manchus conceived of the contraction of smallpox as a watershed moment in life.

The idea that the Manchus considered smallpox a life-threatening force that could also mature the body was embodied in their worship of the smallpox goddess. The Manchus begged the Zisun Niangniang (Offspring Goddess) for the protection of smallpox patients by offering her willow branches. According to a folk collection about the Manchu legend of Nishan Shaman during the Ming dynasty, Zisun Niangniang was surrounded by a number of women who were busy carrying or holding children and doing other things connected with child care. If people used willows that had been bitten by horses and cattle as their offering to the goddess, the condition of their child with smallpox would worsen.<sup>37</sup> Zisun Niangniang was also named Fodo Mama or Omosi Mama. “Fodo” meant the sacrificial willows used for blessing. The Manchus believed that willows embodied the inexhaustible vitality of life, and that its sprouts were the cradle of human beings. “Omosi” means descendants, and “Omosi Mama” therefore was regarded as symbolic of fertility. The association of smallpox with willows indicates that the Manchu deemed smallpox as a potentially fatal affliction but also as a turning point of life. Once they safely passed through the point, they were no longer bothered by smallpox and reached their maturity. Having this thought in mind, however, the Manchus were still overwhelmed by great fear of the physical

35. Xie Zhaozhe, (n. 2) *Wuzazu*, juan 5, p. 193; Wenren Gui, (n. 5) *Wenren shi douzheng lun*, Lu Shen's preface; Huang Biao's preface; Zhang Tingyu et al., (n. 6) *Ming shi*, juan 239, pp. 6216–17.

36. Ji Yonghai and Liu Jingxian trans., (n. 19) *Chongde san'nian manwen dang'an yibian*, p. 88; Wu Zhenyu (?–1866), *Yangjizhai yulu* (*Wu Zhenyu's Complementary Treatise*) (Beijing: Beijing Guji Chubanshe, 1983), juan 5, p. 322.

37. Zhuang Jifa trans., *Nishan Saman zhuan* (*Biography of the Nishan Saman*) (Taipei: Wenshizhe Chubanshe, 1977), pp. 139–147.

suffering of smallpox and the unspeakable fear of being physically abandoned, socially disconnected, and politically dispossessed.

#### SMALLPOX AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

The Manchus perceived smallpox as the most dreadful disease and were extremely anxious about it, and their fear framed this disease and shaped their assessment of its dangers as well as their response to it. During the Manchu expansion, in addition to establishing new organizational structures to change the balance of power in the north-east and conquering Ming China, the Manchus also had to combat smallpox. In 1613, 300 families of Usu, a city belonging to the Yehe Manchus, were suffering from smallpox when Nurhaci attacked the borders of the kingdom. In response, the Yehe Manchus drew their military forces from everywhere except Usu because they were afraid of being infected by their own troops. Usu later surrendered to Nurhaci, who eventually captured nineteen cities and then took further steps to unite the Manchu tribes.<sup>38</sup> This episode not only demonstrates that the Manchus would abandon sick people to avoid the further spread of smallpox, but also that smallpox played a crucial role in this Manchu intertribal war. In 1757, General Zhaohui conducted a military operation against the Elute Mongol. He soon won the battle mainly because the Mongols were suffering smallpox. Even their leader died of the disease.<sup>39</sup>

Yet similar cases are not found during the Manchu-China wars in the early seventeenth century. Being practical and cautious warriors, the Manchus were by then better prepared to win the battle against smallpox. From 1622 onward, Nurhaci appointed officials to be in charge of smallpox investigation in the army, which was strictly implemented.<sup>40</sup> Those patients who failed to make a prompt report or who left the army received severe punishment, as did their smallpox investigation officials. For example, during the Manchu-Korea war in 1637, Bohetuo was accused of carelessly allowing a smallpox patient to stay in a military camp where he was close to the emperor's tent.<sup>41</sup> The smallpox investigation officials were also responsible for smallpox

38. Guang Lu and Li Xuezhi, trans., (n. 4) *Qing Taizu chao lao manwen yuandang*, pp. 31–32.

39. Wei Yuan (1794–1856), *Shengwujiji* (*The Sacred Military Records*) (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1973), *juan* 4, p. 7.

40. The First Historical Archives, (n. 10) *Manwen laodang*, pp. 382–83.

41. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 36, p. 24.

affairs on the battlefield. In 1636, when the Manchus attacked Jinzhou, Abahai ordered the generals to determine whether smallpox was raging along the battlefield. The responsible officials checked and reported that smallpox was rampant beyond the Houhen River. The Manchus then avoided passing through that dangerous area.<sup>42</sup> During the military confrontation, information regarding smallpox was highly valuable for the Manchus in adjusting their strategy to achieve success.

The Manchus took special actions to protect noble warriors from smallpox during wartime. It was often recommended that higher ranking nobles not stay too long in the battlefield nor be in the vanguard of the army.<sup>43</sup> Shi Tingzhu (1599–1661), a Manchurian who had served the Chinese, was concerned about smallpox when he made a military suggestion to Abahai in 1641. He recommended that the princes divide into two groups; those who had had smallpox were to command troops in the invasion of China, and those who had not had smallpox were to guard a nearby city. According to this suggestion, those *shengshen* princes and generals could decrease their chances of contracting the disease, while those who had already developed smallpox would have more opportunity to participate in the invasion. Thus the risk of smallpox became an obstacle for the *shengshen* on the battlefield, where Manchu noble warriors could win glory and achieve higher rank and power. However, in pursuit of honor and military exploits, some brave Manchu *shengshen* nobles, such as Yuetuo and Mazhan, insisted on fighting in the first line. They were, unfortunately, infected by smallpox as a result.<sup>44</sup>

When smallpox outbreaks occurred on the battlefield, *shengshen* nobles would soon be sent back. In 1627, Prince Amin (1586–1640) took command of a regiment to attack Korea. After capturing several cities, Amin suggested to Abahai that Mongols who had not had smallpox should not be forced to participate in this battle. Abahai replied that if smallpox was rampant in the battlefield, those Manchu and Mongol *shengshen* princes should be immediately sent back. Later there was a smallpox outbreak in Korea, and the princes promptly retreated.<sup>45</sup> Of course, ordinary Manchu soldiers did not have the same privilege, but they sometimes took matters into their own hands.

42. The First Historical Archives, (n. 10) *Manwen laodang*, pp. 1601–2.

43. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 14, pp. 18–29.

44. *Ibid.*, *juan* 46 pp. 2–3.

45. The First Historical Archives, (n. 10) *Manwen laodang*, pp. 810, 839.

In 1637, four officers were charged with delinquency during the war in Korea and Pidao because they had failed to learn that some of their soldiers had evaded military obligations due to the fear of smallpox.<sup>46</sup> Common soldiers had to comply with orders and were not given priority for protection in battle, regardless of whether they had had smallpox.

The Manchu military commanders considered smallpox whenever they made any move. In a crucial meeting in 1633, Abahai consulted with high-ranking officials about the order of conquering his opponents, China, Korea, and Chahaer Mongol. More than half of his consultants stressed the smallpox situation in China as a primary consideration. Jierhalang (1599–1655) and Yangguli (1571–1637) suggested that the emperor should keep his stay in China short so as to avoid the disease and that those princes who were immune to smallpox should guard the newly captured cities. Similarly, when considering an invasion of China through the Great Wall, Yuetuo (1599–1639) argued that the emperor and princes who had not had smallpox should not take part. Sahalian (1603–1636) proposed that the emperor and princes who had not contracted smallpox should join the first battle, and at the second stage, only princes and generals who were immune should be selected to make a further attack.<sup>47</sup> That smallpox was frequently mentioned in such a crucial military meeting confirms the great concern and anxiety of the Manchus to avoid it during their invasions, and also shows that the constant fear of smallpox shaped their military strategy.

Because the Manchus took many precautionary measures to prevent the spread of smallpox in the army, they managed to remove this obstacle from the path to victory. As a result, during the Manchu conquest, no large-scale smallpox outbreak was ever reported. Unlike the Spanish conquerors of Mexico, it was the susceptible intruders who managed to vanquish the dreadful contagious disease.

#### SMALLPOX AND POLITICS

After the conquest, the Manchus immediately faced the difficult task of constructing a dynasty that would be acceptable to the Chinese

46. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 36, pp. 20–34.

47. *Ibid.*, *juan* 14, pp. 18–29.

majority but would be based on the rule of a minority ethnic group.<sup>48</sup> From the very beginning, the Manchu rulers encountered various difficulties, including the continuing threat of smallpox. To maintain the political supremacy of the Manchu minority, protecting them from smallpox became an urgent issue, especially with regard to members of the royal family. The Manchus thus extended the smallpox investigative system throughout the capital. Because the Manchu emperor was exceedingly strict in implementing this system, severe social, political, and ethnic conflicts arose.

In the early Shunzhi reign (1644–1661), smallpox patients were forced to remain at a certain distance from Beijing City. In 1645, the *yushi* (censor) of the southern section of Beijing City, Zhao Kaixin (?–1662), reported that the decree which forced smallpox patients and their families to move 40 *li* (approximately 22.2 kilometers) away from the capital was being improperly executed. The authorities were too quick to force those with fever or scabies to leave without ascertaining whether their condition was due to smallpox.<sup>49</sup> The weak smallpox patients and their families had to move a long way to find places to stay. Many poor people could not afford to leave, so they abandoned their sick children on the streets. Some poor parents even killed their sick children to avoid moving.<sup>50</sup> At that time, Manchu occupation of large areas of land in the capital had already caused political tension between the minority rulers and their majority Chinese subjects. This strict expulsion regulation not only generated social problems but also increased ethnic resentment against the Manchu rulers.

The smallpox investigative establishment had been altered several times to cope with varying demands and because of the different people in charge of it. The investigation decree became somewhat lax after the Prince-Regent Dorgon (1612–1650) died in 1650. Thereafter, smallpox patients were only required to report to the Bingmasi (Warden Office), and officials who lived within an 80-pace square range of the sufferers were not allowed to go to their offices. However, this situation did not last long; when the emperor was

48. F. Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of the Imperial Order in Seventeenth Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

49. *Da Qing Shizhu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), juan 14, pp. 13–14.

50. Tan Qian (1594–1657), *Beiyoulu* (*Notes of Traveling to the North*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1981), p. 355.

again under segregation in his Nanyuan (Southern Park) *bidousuo* in the spring of 1655, he forbade people to pass through the south of the capital. In November of that year, because the empress contracted smallpox, the emperor immediately fled to the Nanyuan *bidousuo* again. At that time, the Xixinsi (Firewood Office) delivered coal to Nanyuan everyday. The emperor gave strict orders to expel residents within 500 *zhang* (approximately 1790.5 meters) of the Xixinsi if they did not have pockmarks on their faces.<sup>51</sup> These urgent and harsh measures further increased the tension between the Manchus and the Han Chinese. To make matters worse, when the Shunzhi Emperor was in the Nanyuan *bidousuo* in 1651, he ordered that all subjects who had suffered from a miscarriage of justice and wanted to appeal it should go to the proper authority, but that those who dared to disturb the emperor would be executed. Any case requiring final review or a reopening by the emperor had to wait until he returned from the *bidousuo*.<sup>52</sup> This temporary decree affected those who desperately needed help from the emperor and thus aroused widespread condemnation.

Apart from the social, political, and ethnic disturbances caused by the great fear of smallpox and the strict investigation system in Beijing, smallpox also played an important part in political affairs in the early Qing dynasty. In political intrigue it was often the case that when a political figure had fallen from favor, his past actions might be twisted to strengthen the case for his dismissal. The abuse of smallpox regulations was a pretext used in this way. This kind of intrigue originated with the Manchu regime. For example, in 1639, Abahai announced Dodo's (1614–1649) seven crimes in public, one of which was related to smallpox. It was said that when Dorgon was leading the troops who were about to invade China, Dodo had used segregation from smallpox as an excuse not to send Dorgon to the battle. Moreover, Dodo had taken prostitutes with him, enjoyed music, and even disguised himself as an actor while he stayed in his *bidousuo*.<sup>53</sup> Dodo's behavior was all the more unacceptable because he was in charge of the administration of rites. After the verdict, six of the charges against him were forgiven, but the charge relating to smallpox cost him a large fine. He was finally demoted and deprived of his property, and

51. *Ibid.*, p. 413.

52. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 61, p.13.

53. *Da Qing Taizong Wen Huangdi shilu* (n. 9), *juan* 46, pp. 20–27.

his political power was accordingly affected. As a result, Abahai was able to consolidate his supreme power.

In the early Qing dynasty, there were also several political intrigues relating to smallpox. When Abahai died in 1643, Prince Haoge (1609–1648), the eldest son of Abahai, had intended to succeed to the throne, but his ambition was obstructed by Dorgon, who soon became the powerful prince-regent, which resulted in mutual hostility. To protect himself, Dorgon immediately incriminated Haoge on charges of “countless crimes.” One of these was the fact that Haoge had said Dorgon was so susceptible to disease that he would not be able to manage his job. This was seen as a challenge to Dorgon’s political power. Another crime was that Haoge had earlier complained that he had been asked to join a war without consideration of the fact that he had not had smallpox. He had regarded it as an enormous danger to his life and had expressed his discontent privately before consulting Dorgon.<sup>54</sup> This previous complaint about smallpox was exploited as another crime to add to the list. As a result of the charges against him, in 1644, Haoge was deprived of his rank and part of his property and made to pay fines. When the Shunzhi Emperor came to the throne, both Dorgon and Jierhalang were appointed as regents, but Jierhalang was deprived of his title in 1647, regaining it only after Dorgon died in 1650. In 1648, Jierhalang was forced to confess to the crime of partitioning off part of Prince Shangshan’s (1620–1678?) house to build a privy for his son’s *bidousuo*. Actually Shangshan had told Jierhalang that he did not like his house, so Jierhalang offered part of his assets to Shangshan and took Shangshan’s house in exchange. When Shangshan went to the south of China to attend battles, Jierhalang partitioned off a part of what had been Shangshan’s house. He was demoted for this and other crimes.<sup>55</sup> The real reason Jierhalang became involved in this trouble, however, was that he had supported Haoge in his ambition to succeed to the throne. Therefore, Dorgon consolidated his position by demoting Jierhalang.

In spite of the fact that Dorgon had, for all intents and purposes, dominated the Qing Empire from 1644 to 1650, his contribution was totally devalued after his death by the Shunzhi Emperor. Dorgon was accused of using money and dispatching officials on errands

54. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 4, pp. 1–3.

55. *Ibid.*, *juan* 37, pp. 3–4.

without permission to build a *bidousuo* in Nanyuan.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, when Dorgon was in power, building a *bidousuo* was treated as an achievement undertaken to protect the young emperor from smallpox. In another incident, Dorgon had accompanied the Shunzhi Emperor to Siratala to escape from smallpox one summer.<sup>57</sup> Because the number of the emperor's bodyguards did not exceed 100, however, Dorgon's intentions were suspected and this event was exposed and condemned after he died.<sup>58</sup> Dorgon was accused not only of exceeding his authority in building the *bidousuo*, but also of harboring the evil intention of harming the emperor when he traveled with him to escape smallpox.

In similar fashion, as soon as the Qianlong Emperor (1711–1799) died in early 1799, the Jiaqing Emperor (1760–1820) began to erode the power of Heshen (1750–1799), the most powerful official of the Qianlong period (1736–1795). Heshen was accused of twenty crimes and sentenced to death in the same year. The tenth crime on the list was that he had altered the emperor's order. The Jiaqing Emperor had given orders to the Mongolian high-ranking officials who had not had smallpox not to attend the Qianlong Emperor's funeral. Yet Heshen ordered all of them not to come, regardless of whether they had had smallpox. He was thus charged with ignoring diplomatic policy and intending to harm the country.<sup>59</sup> Heshen's power was immediately broken, and his property was taken over by the emperor. The deaths of the Qianlong Emperor and Heshen marked the end of the Qianlong reign, leaving the Jiaqing Emperor with complete control over the empire.

These political episodes all have one particular thing in common: they are all related to smallpox. Smallpox was thrust onto the political stage in the Qing dynasty and made a distinct impression upon it. The use of a disease as a pretext in political events such as these finds few parallels in premodern history.

#### SMALLPOX AND DIPLOMACY

One of the most important factors that enabled the Manchus to establish and maintain a great empire was their management of rela-

56. *Ibid.*, *juan* 90, p. 17.

57. *Ibid.*, *juan* 90, p. 17; Tan Qian, (n. 50) *Beiyoulu*, p. 366.

58. *Da Qing Shizun Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), *juan* 90, p. 17.

59. *Da Qing Renzong Rui Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Jiaqing Emperor of the Great Qing Dynasty*) (Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishe, n.d.), *juan* 37, p. 48.



tionships with neighboring peoples. As rulers with a great fear of smallpox, the Manchus paid special attention to this disease when conducting diplomatic affairs.

According to Qing diplomatic regulations, any new foreign leader had to present himself before the Manchu emperor in Beijing. However, to protect the allied leaders from smallpox, adjustments were made. Those *shoushen* leaders who had developed smallpox had to come to Beijing to carry out their obligations; those *shengshen* leaders who had not had smallpox went to Rehe instead, where the Kangxi Emperor had built a hunting park, Mulan Weichang, in 1681 and a summer villa in 1703. These two sites were located near the border, so the newly appointed foreign leaders would not have to travel far or cross areas where smallpox was raging. The emperor regularly went to the hunting park and the summer villa, so the *shengshen* could visit the emperor at these two sites to avoid entering China, where smallpox was widespread.

There was another diplomatic rule set up to protect foreign representatives from smallpox. In 1671, the Kangxi Emperor ordered an investigation of whether the representatives of his allies had had smallpox. Almost all of them claimed they had already recovered from smallpox, yet some of them had not. The emperor tried to persuade them to return immediately, but they insisted on staying to attend the New Year celebration in the next year.<sup>60</sup> Being aware of the risk posed by the diplomatic representatives, the emperor ordered the nonimmune *shengshen* not to present themselves on such occasions, a practice that was carried on by his successors.<sup>61</sup> However, this diplomatic rule was not always obeyed. Many foreign diplomatic personnel died of smallpox on their way to China. For example, six or seven representatives from Heilongjiang contracted smallpox and died in 1762; the same tragedy recurred in 1763, and seven people died.<sup>62</sup> One of the main reasons these officials persisted in coming to Beijing despite the danger of illness and the diplomatic protocols was the emperor's custom of bestowing ample gifts on his foreign guests.

Another purpose of smallpox-related diplomatic decrees was to ensure that smallpox did not become widespread in the court and

60. The First Historical Archives, (n. 25) *Kangxi qijuzhu*, I, 13.

61. *Qinding da Qing huidian shili* (n. 26), juan 984, pp. 10–11; p. 16; juan 985, p. 8; *Menggu luli* (*Mongol Regulations and Cases*) (Taipei: Guangwen Shuju, 1972), juan 1, p. 13.

62. *Qinding da Qing huidian shili* (n. 26), juan 977, p. 3.

capital. If foreign representatives, who were to be presented to the emperor and royal members, developed smallpox on their way to or in the capital, they were likely to spread this disease. Thus, the Manchus never treated such possibilities lightly. In 1796, when the Qianlong Emperor died, foreign alliances had to send representatives to Beijing to pay their respects. At that time, because smallpox was rampant in Taerbahatai, their representatives were ordered not to visit Beijing to offer their condolences, and their tributes were given to the chanting Lama instead.<sup>63</sup>

The basic Manchu diplomatic strategy involved a twofold operation. They used superior military power to control foreign powers, on the one hand, and treated them generously in order to win their loyalty, on the other. In the early Qing dynasty, diplomacy was complex and required delicacy. In this context, smallpox was used as a thinly disguised cover for more politically sensitive issues.

After surrendering to the Manchus in 1637, Korea gave two princes to their conquerors as hostages. In 1640, Korea asked Abahai to let the crown prince come home to visit his sick father. Abahai agreed on the condition that Korea send other hostages in return. The king of Korea, Li Zong, had no choice but to send his third son and the crown prince's son in exchange. As an excuse, he said that the third son had not previously paid a visit to Abahai because he had not had smallpox.<sup>64</sup>

In 1652, the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) paid a visit to the Kangxi Emperor. The emperor recognized him as the leader of Tibet in the following year, bringing Tibet into alliance with the Qing Empire. The fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, but this information was suppressed by his political and religious assistant, Sangjie Jiacao (1653–1705), who controlled Tibet afterward. In 1683, Sangjie Jiacao became involved in the wars between two of the Keerke Mongol tribes. Five years later, Gaerdan (1644–1697), the leader of the Jungaer Mongols, invaded Keerke, supported by Sangjie Jiacao. Gaerdan's real target, however, was the Qing Empire. In 1696, the Kangxi Emperor finally learned of the death of the fifth Dalai Lama and of the attempt by Sangjie Jiacao to undermine the power of the Qing Empire through Gaerdan. He then asked the Panchen Lama to come to Beijing to

63. *Da Qing Renzong Rui Huangdi shilu* (n. 59), juan 44, p. 11.

64. *Da Qing Shizu Zhang Huangdi shilu* (n. 11), juan 50, pp. 9–23.

show his alliance. The Panchen Lama used the fact that he had not had smallpox as a pretext to refuse the emperor's request. He later used the same pretext to avoid the trip to Beijing in 1698 and 1699.<sup>65</sup> The Kangxi Emperor could not force him to come because they both desperately wanted to avoid smallpox.

The sixth Dalai Lama died in 1706. In 1713, a two-year-old child, found by the princes of Qinghai, was thought to be the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. These princes claimed that the person supported by Lazang Han (?–1717), the leader of Tibet, was an impostor and asked the Qing government to recognize their candidate as the seventh Dalai Lama. The Kangxi Emperor thought if this child, Hubier Han (1711–1757), remained in Qinghai, the relationship between China and Tibet would suffer, so he decided to call the child to the capital. But the princes of Qinghai announced that their young Dalai Lama had not yet contracted smallpox so they rejected this proposal.<sup>66</sup> The Kangxi Emperor had no choice but to consent to their decision. Later, however, the Qing government successfully supported Hubier Han as the seventh Dalai Lama and ended Mongol control in Tibet.

The Jungaer Mongols were troublesome neighbours for the Qing Empire. From the Kangxi period on, their relationship was very tense. In 1740, the leader of the Jungaer, Gaerdan Celing, informed the Qianlong Emperor that he was going to Tibet to *aocha* (cook tea, act as a servant for religious purposes), and described the two possible routes he was considering taking. Gaerdan Celing asked the Qing government to advise him because the journey was long and most of his retinue had not had smallpox.<sup>67</sup> The Qianlong Emperor agreed to help him; one of the routes was too difficult to cross, but if they were to pass through China on the easier route, there would be a risk of smallpox infection. Thus the emperor appointed officers to guide them to their destination.<sup>68</sup> It was indeed possible that the Mongols might have suffered from smallpox during the journey. Therefore their request did, to some extent, accurately reflect truth. But they may have been plotting an attack on China; the Qing

65. *Da Qing Shengzu Ren Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Kangxi Emperor of the Great Qing Dynasty*) (Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishe, n.d.), *juan* 171, p. 17; *juan* 188, p. 16; *juan* 192, pp. 7–9.

66. *Ibid.*, *juan* 265, p. 13.

67. *Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi shilu* (*The Memoir of the Qianlong Emperor of the Great Qing Dynasty*) (Tokyo: Dazang Chuban Zhushi Huishe, n.d.), *juan* 121, p. 18.

68. *Ibid.*, *juan* 122, p. 11.

government may have been concerned that their opponent harbored evil intentions. Both sides, then, used smallpox as a pretext either to seek assistance or to assure their own interests and as a means of dispute with each other. In 1780, diplomatic allies sent representatives to Beijing to celebrate the Qianlong Emperor's seventieth birthday. The Panchen Lama, Lobzang Palden Yeshe, went to Rehe and then visited Beijing in summer to attend the celebration, and, most important, to show his loyalty to the Qing government. He contracted smallpox and died in Beijing later that year.<sup>69</sup> Apparently, travelers to China at that time really did risk being infected by smallpox, so the use of smallpox as an excuse for diplomacy by the allies of the Qing Empire had some basis in truth. But at the same time, as we have seen, it was also used as a subtle pretext in diplomatic wrangles.

#### CONCLUSION

In the early seventeenth century, the Manchus successfully conquered China, Mongolia, and Korea and founded a great empire. I have argued here that, apart from other well-known factors, disease played a determinative role in the Manchus' conquest. The achievements of this conquest were twofold. The Manchus established the Qing dynasty and became one of the greatest powers in the world; the Manchus also triumphantly fought against smallpox contagion during and after their conquest.

The Manchus knew that they were susceptible to smallpox and thus greatly feared this disease more than other diseases. This fear helped shape Manchu institutions and operations. They zealously established agencies to regulate its spread and took many practical precautions to protect themselves. Moreover, their fear of smallpox helped shape their military, political, and diplomatic decisions. Therefore, one key to understanding the establishment of the Manchu lies in seeing the fear of smallpox as crucial to their decision-making processes.

As the Manchus entered China and gradually adapted to an environment where smallpox was widespread, they became less vulnerable than they had been. Most of them began to suffer smallpox in their childhood, increasing their chances of survival. Moreover, the Qing

69. The National Historical Institute, ed., *Qingshigao jiaozhu* (*The Annotation on the Manuscript of the History of the Qing Dynasty*) (Taipei: Guoshiguan, 1986), *juan* 14, p. 500, n. 86.

government inherited the Ming medical establishment in the court and therefore benefited from Chinese knowledge. Most important, the Kangxi Emperor started to adopt variolation for the royal family and later advocated and expanded it to the Manchu population as well as the Mongols.<sup>70</sup> Hence, the Manchus gradually overcame their great fear of smallpox, and the severe smallpox investigative system in the capital died out by degrees. By the middle of the Qing dynasty, according to an official, Wu Zhenyu, this system no longer existed.<sup>71</sup>

70. Chia-Feng Chang, (n. 3), pp. 30–32.

71. Wu Zhenyu (?–1866), *Yangjizhai Conglu* (*Wu Zhenyu's Collected Treatise*) (Beijing: Beijing Guji Chubanshe, 1983), *juan* 25, p. 267.