

Civil Administration at the Beginning of the Manchu Dynasty*

A note on the establishment of the Six Ministries (*Liu-pu*)^[1]

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In the constitutional history of the Manchu during the period which preceded the invasion and occupation of China (1644), we may distinguish three stages, viz. the original feudal stage, that of military administration based on the Banner system and that of civil administration on the Chinese pattern.

The passage from the first to the second stage, culminating in 1606 when Nurhaci (T'ai-tsu 1559—1626) set up the first four Banners (*ch'i*)^[2] and hereditary command disappeared almost completely, has been thoroughly studied by Michael¹. According to him, Nurhaci did nothing but re-model his people's organisation upon the pattern, offered by the Ming administration in the frontier areas, based on the *wei*^[3], which were administrative and military units at the same time².

After the formation of the Banners, power passed automatically from the ancient feudal lord into the hands of the *Aisin Gioro* imperial clan (Chin. *ai-hsin chiao-lo*)^[4] to which belonged the princes or *Beile*^[5] placed at the head of every Banner with the rank of *gūsai ejen* (Chin. *ku-shan ê-chên*)^[6]³.

However, when in 1615 the number of the Banners was brought from four to eight, at the same time there was established what might be called

* I deeply regret not to have been able to consult the Japanese studies bearing on this subject. Most of it is contained in periodicals or "Festschriften" that are not available to me at present.

¹ F. MICHAEL, *The Origin of Manchu rule in China*, Baltimore 1942.

² Cf. MICHAEL, *op. cit.*, pages 64—65.

³ The organisation of the Banners, as set up by Nurhaci, was the following: three hundred men formed a *niru* (Chin. *niu-lu*)^[7] headed by a *niru-ejen* (Chin. *niu-lu ê-chên*); five *niru* formed a *jalan* (Chin. *cha-lan*)^[8] headed by a *jalan-ejen*; five *jalan* formed a *gūsai* (Chin. *ku-shan*), i. e. a Banner, commanded by a *gūsai ejen*. The model-banner was thus made up of 7500 men. Cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao* (*Shih T'ung* edition) ch. 77, p. 5569 a.

[1] 六部

[2] 旗

[3] 衛

[4] 愛新覺羅

[5] 貝勒

[6] 固山額真

[7] 牛錄

[8] 扎蘭

the first civil magistracy of the Manchu State, viz. the "five high officials" (*wu ta-ch'ên*)^[9] and the "ten assistants" (*shih cha-erh-ku-ch'i*)^[10], Manchu: *jargûci*). As to the duties and nature of this new organism, the only two writers, who down to this day have dealt with the question, are in open contradiction with each other, nor does it seem to us that either of them is really right. According to Gibert, *ta-ch'ên* and *jargûci* were the same thing, and he identifies them with the commanders of the Banners, who were thus called because they carried out the duties of ministers (*ta-ch'ên*) or of State Councillors (*jargûci*)⁴.

According to Michael, they were the technical advisers of Nurhaci⁵, whom he consulted merely for administrative matters, and not for any political decisions which were reserved to the Council of the *Beile*. In reality, however, things were entirely different. Basing ourselves upon the *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao*, an authoritative source, being a reference work compiled in the second half of the 18th century⁶, we may assert that these officials were not at all directly subordinate to Nurhaci, but rather to the *Beile*, or rather to all the *Beile* collegiately.

The text, in fact, runs as follows:

"[After bringing to eight the number of the Banners, Nurhaci] established also five *ta-ch'ên* and ten *cha-erh-ku-ch'i*, for the purpose of taking charge of administration and hearing and deciding all disputes. All business, where there was a dispute to be heard and decided, was first examined by the ten *cha-erh-ku-ch'i*.

After being heard and studied by them this business was transmitted to the five *ta-ch'ên* and, therefore, after being dealt with by the latter, it was passed on to the *Beile* to be discussed thoroughly.

These were the three stages through which passed a memorial to the throne for its formation⁷."

This passage is clear and shows, in no doubtful manner, that those officials were directly subordinate to the Council of the *Beile* and not to the ruler. Moreover, the very establishment of such an organism provokes some remarks. First of all, we notice that they are two collegiate organs, one at a lower and the other at a higher level, meant simply to supply information on the business at hand and not empowered to take decisions⁸, the latter being reserved to the *Beile* and in the last instance to the sovereign; there was no specialisation nor were particular tasks assigned to any of its components. Secondly, we notice that both the number of members

⁴ Cf. L. GIBERT, *Dictionnaire historique et géographique de la Mandchourie*, Nazareth-Hongkong 1934, p. 720.

⁵ Cf. MICHAEL, *op. cit.*, p. 86: "They were his technical advisers".

⁶ Cf. S. Y. TENG — K. BIGGERSTAFF, *An annotated bibliography of selected Chinese reference works*, Cambridge Mass. 1950, pages 155—156.

⁷ Cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao*, Ch. 77 p. 5569 b.

⁸ Only the important ones, of course. Concerning minor decisions, one may clearly infer, from the text, that they were authorized to take them.

and the procedure followed by this organism ignored completely the Banner organisation, which from that time began to be considered more and more only as army corps, having an exclusively military character.

The *Beile* themselves thus appear to us in a new light, viz., each being the chief of a Banner and in their collective capacity forming the most important governing body, the only one empowered to refer directly to the sovereign. Theirs was, therefore, a double function, both civil and military, which virtually placed all power in their hands.

With Nurhaci's death, which occurred in 1626, and the accession of Abahai (T'ai-tsung 1626—1643) this power threatened to come to a climax and to deprive completely of authority the new emperor who lacked Nurhaci's prestige and was practically a "primus inter pares".

On the very year of his accession to the throne, on the day *ting-chou* of the ninth month of the eleventh year of T'ien-ming⁹, Abahai took away from the *Beile* the direct government of the Banners, granting the rank of *gú sai ejen* to eight officers (*pa ta-ch'ên*)^[11], one for each banner, who had, in turn, as subordinates, two civil and two military officers¹⁰. According to the "Veritable Records" (*Shih-lu*)^[12], of the dynasty¹¹, this was established following a consultation with the *Beile*. Are we to believe this assertion? To be sure, decisions of a certain importance, above all those of a constitutional character, were taken by Abahai, only after hearing his advisers' opinion¹². There is no knowing, however, how he actually succeeded in snatching such an assent from them. It is really not likely that the *Beile* would have willingly consented to a similar reform if, as Michael too asserts¹³, it was actually addressed against their power.

These eight new dignitaries, who by the same decree had the right to sit with the *Beile* in the Imperial Council¹⁴ secured a majority, to use a modern expression, for the Emperor and gave him a free hand to proceed to other reforms, to the detriment of the influential members of the *Aisin Gioro* clan.

The importance of this transition stage, a veritable bridge, leading from the military framework of the Banners to the bureaucratic organisation of the ministries, has been till now undervalued, but it didn't escape the attention of the compiler of the *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao*, who, at the beginning of the treaty on administration (*chih-kuan kao*)^[13], after the very short preface on Chinese administrative institutions from ancient

⁹ Corresponding to 27th October 1626.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao*, ch. 77, p. 5569 b. The decree that set them up may be seen in *T'ai-tsung Shih-lu*, ch. 1, pp. 11a—12a.

¹¹ Cf. *T'ai-tsung Shih-lu*, ch. 1, p. 11 a.

¹² Also see later on, concerning the procedure followed in setting up the Six Ministries.

¹³ Cf. MICHAEL, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁴ Cf. *T'ai-tsung Shih-lu*, Ch. 1, p. 11 b.

times to the Ming dynasty, has outlined the evolution of those of the Ch'ing dynasty as follows:

"At the beginning of the [present] dynasty, first of all the Eight Banners were established; in the 11th year of T'ien-ming, the eight high officials and the sixteen high officials¹⁵ were established; after that, the administrative organisation was set up and the Six Ministries were established, together with the main external and internal civilian and military posts¹⁶."

In the fifth year of Abahai's reign (1631) the reform was brought to completion and the Eight Banners definitely lost all civil powers and remained organisms of a purely military character¹⁷.

This took place through the establishment of the Six Ministers (*Liu-pu*), which followed the Chinese pattern, but not too faithfully, as we shall see later on.

The setting up of the Six Ministries too occurred after Abahai had expressly consulted his advisers. The *Shih-lu* of the dynasty are most explicit as to this:

"The Emperor summoned the *Beile* and the *Ta-ch'ên* to consult with them as to how to organize the government¹⁸."

Following this meeting, Abahai set up the Six Ministries, which had the same names as the corresponding Chinese Ministries, viz., *Li-pu* (Ministry of Personnel), *Hu-pu*^[16] (Finance Ministry), *Li-pu*^[17] (Ministry of Rites), *P'ing-pu*^[18] (War Ministry), *Hsing-pu*^[19] (Ministry of Justice) and *Kung-pu*^[20] (Ministry of Public Works).

One may note: this is the first time the Manchu adopted Chinese names for their administrative institutions, for, with the exception of the generic *Ta-ch'ên*, all the titles and styles previously granted were in their own language, as we have seen.

The names of the ministries were the same as the Chinese, but not so their internal organisation; we find no trace of *shang-shu*^[21], nor any subdivision in departments headed by *shih-lang*^[22].

The administrative problems, which the young Manchu Monarchy had to face, were, in fact, quite different from those of the Ming Empire. In

¹⁵ As the discourse is about civil administration, the compiler doesn't refer to the sixteen military collaborators.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao*, Ch. 77, p. 5569 a.

¹⁷ Almost exclusively military or, anyhow, extraordinary duties were assigned to the three members of every Banner, appointed to take part in the *Yi-ch'eng-ch'u*^[14] or Council of Administrative Affairs, established in 1637 (cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao* Ch. 77, p. 5570 a and b), which was later replaced by the *Chün-chi-ch'u*^[15], the Grand Council.

¹⁸ Thus begins the edict establishing the Six Ministries (*T'ai-tsung Shih-lu*, Ch. 9, pp. 11b—12b). The date of the edict is *keng-ch'en* of the 7th month of the 5th year of T'ien-tsung, corresponding to the 5th of August 1631.

[14] 議政處

[15] 軍機處

[16] 戶部

[17] 禮部

[18] 兵部

[19] 刑部

[20] 工部

[21] 尚書

[22] 侍郎

Manchuria, Abahai had to take continually into account the imperial princes, who, although their power had greatly diminished, were still very influential.

Thus, a *Beile* was placed at the head of every Ministry, viz. Dorgon¹⁹ at the *Li-pu* (Personnel), Degelei²⁰ at the *Hu-pu*, Sahaliyen²¹ at the *Li-pu* (Rites), Yoto²² at the *P'ing-pu*, Jirgalang²³ at the *Hsing-pu* and Abatai²⁴ at the *Kung-pu*.

At this point, it would almost seem that the establishment of the ministries had done nothing but strengthen the *Beile's* position, placing them once more in direct charge of the government. But a careful study of the biographies of these "ministers"²⁵ leads to an altogether different conclusion: these positions were, at least at first, purely nominal and the actual administrative power was in the hands of the lower officials, appointed by the Emperor.

We see in fact that while the establishment of these ministries with the ensuing appointments of the *Beile* took place in the 7th month of the 5th year of T'ien-tsung, already in the 8th month of that same year Dorgon left for an expedition against the Ming army²⁶, and so did Degelei²⁷, Yoto²⁸, Jirgalang²⁹ and Abatai³⁰; Sahaliyen had even left on the very month of his appointment³¹. Practically, barely a month after the new organs were set up, it was materially impossible for their appointed heads to carry out their duties, and this seems to support our opinion previously expressed.

Another interesting aspect is met with in the internal organisation of these various ministries; here, in fact, the pluri-national character of the Manchu State is recognised for the first time. In the schedule of civil officers contained in the edict of establishment we see that both Mongol and Chinese were represented, even if at a somewhat reduced rate; and this fact is the more worthy of consideration if we recall that at that time neither the Mongol³², nor the Chinese³³ Banners had yet been set up.

¹⁹ Cf. A.W. HUMMEL, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, Washington 1943—44, pp. 215—219.

²⁰ Cf. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 562—563.

²¹ Cf. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 631—632.

²² Cf. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, p. 935.

²³ Cf. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 397—398.

²⁴ Cf. HUMMEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 3—4.

²⁵ Note that, on that occasion, no new title was conferred on them. The edict of establishment, mentioned above, uses the expression "*kuan . . . pu shih*"^[23], for each of them, viz. "let him be in charge of the affairs of the Ministry".

²⁶ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Shanghai 1928, Ch. 2, p. 1 a.

²⁷ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Ch. 3, p. 44 b.

²⁸ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Ch. 3, p. 1 b.

²⁹ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Ch. 2, p. 26 b.

³⁰ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Ch. 2, p. 42 b.

³¹ Cf. *Ch'ing-shih lieh-chuan*, Ch. 2, p. 37 b.

³² Established in 1634 (cf. *Ch'ing-ch'ao Wen-hsien T'ung-k'ao* ch. 77, p. 5569 c.

³³ Established in 1642, ch. *ibidem*, p. 5570 b.

Alongside of the *Beile*, nominal heads of each ministry, we find a number of Government Assistants (*ch'êng-chêng*)^[24] variable from three to five, some of whom simply thus named and therefore presumably Manchus, others called officially Mongol Assistants (*mêng-ku ch'êng-chêng*)^[25] and Chinese Assistants (*han ch'êng-chêng*)^[26].

Subordinate to them were eight Participants³⁴ (*ts'an-chêng*)^[27] and one Secretary³⁵ (*ch'i-hsin-lang*)^[28].

The first bureaucratic organisation of the Six Ministries of the Ch'ing, excluding the *Beile*, who were supposed to head them, was, therefore, the following:

MINISTRY	Ch'êng-chêng	Mêng-ku ch'êng-chêng	Han ch'êng-chêng	Ts'an chêng	Mêng-ku ts'an chêng	Han ts'an chêng	Ch'i-hsin-lang	Han ch'i-hsin-lang
<i>Li-pu</i>	1	1	1	8	—	—	1	—
<i>Hu-pu</i>	2	1	1	8	—	—	1	—
<i>Li-pu</i>	2	1	1	8	—	—	1	—
<i>P'ing-pu</i>	2	1	1	8	—	—	1	—
<i>Hsing-pu</i>	2	1	2	8	—	—	1	—
<i>Kung-pu</i>	2	1	1	8	2	2	1	2

As one may see, the Mongols and the Chinese, even though a minority, were rather strongly represented in each of the ministries.

Besides, the case of the Ministries of *Hsing-pu* (Justice) and of *Kung-pu* (Public Works) deserves a little attention.

It concerns two departments in which the Chinese element (and also the Mongol one in the case of the *Kung-pu*) is emphasized, to the detriment of the Manchus, whose number remains fixed as in the other ministries. Very likely we are here confronted with a first yielding of the Manchus in front of the Chinese, who are more skilful in the administration of justice and, above all, quite necessary for solving the technical problems connected with public works.

And this — namely the recognition of the pluri-national character of the Manchu State and the importance the Chinese began to assume, specially where, owing to their technical and administrative skill, they could not be replaced — seems to us to be the most important result we may obtain from the examination of how civil administration was set up by the Ch'ing dynasty, prior to the conquest of China. The later practice of placing at the side of every Manchu official a Chinese one, finds its precedent in the very first organisation of the Six Ministries.

³⁴ With the exception of the *Kung-pu*, where the Participants were twelve: eight Manchus, two Mongols and two Chinese.

³⁵ With the exception of the *Kung-pu*, which had three Secretaries, one Manchu and two Chinese.

[24] 丞政

[25] 蒙古丞政

[26] 漢丞政

[27] 參政

[28] 啓心郎