Introduction

I am honored and flattered by the invitation extended to me by the new editors of *Saksaha*, Benjamin Levey and Matthew Mosca, to write a short introduction to the new electronic reissue of *Saksaha*. I am excited by the prospect of *Saksaha* appearing in electronic form under their capable direction. I feel that this will not only breathe new life into the old bird but also allow it a much larger territory, reaching Manchuists from all over in a more convenient and interactive way.

Manchu Studies had a late start in the United States and has always been a tiny field. Manchu Studies in Europe was primarily an extension of Chinese Studies and began during the time of the Qing Dynasty when the Manchus still were in control of a large chunk of Asia. Many Sinologists routinely studied Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Uighur as part of their Sinological training. And in fact, Manchu was sometimes used as a gateway to philological study of Chinese since the Manchus had translated so many Chinese documents into Manchu and it was considered a much easier language to read. But by the time Chinese studies really got started in the United States, the Qing Dynasty had come to an end, so scholars felt less of a need to study Manchu. And in fact, not long after that there was a sea change in academia itself. Scholars shifted away from philology, feeling that the more pressing need was to study currently spoken languages. And later there was a shift away from language study altogether, the new emphasis being on something called Area Studies, which surprisingly rarely included any language study at all.

Early Manchu Studies in the United States was limited to three institutions. Francis Cleaves at Harvard had spent a number of years in China in the old Manchu capital of Beijing and brought a number of Manchu manuscripts back with him when he returned to the United States. He and his student Joseph Fletcher were responsible for establishing Harvard as a center for Manchu Studies, as it continues to be today under the direction of Mark Elliott. It may have been Ferdinand Lessing or Peter Boodberg who introduced Manchu Studies to UC Berkeley, but it was James Bosson who was the driving force behind it becoming a center for Manchu Studies for all the years he taught there. And between Harvard and Berkeley, in the center of the country, Denis Sinor established a fine center for Altaic Studies at Indiana University, where Manchu was taught on and off for a number of years by Larry Clark, Nicola DiCosmo, and György Kara. Later, James Bosson's student Jerry Norman established a regular class in Manchu at University of Washington, though it is possible Hidehiro Okada had offered a class

when he was a visiting professor there prior to Jerry Norman's arrival. Though sometimes offered on an *ad hoc* basis elsewhere, these are the only institutions in the United States that have offered Manchu as a regular part of their curriculum.

Larry Clark at Indiana first produced an informal newsletter to be circulated to Manchuists in the United States to provide an outlet for scholarly work on Manchu. Though the newsletter was simply a stapled Xerox copy with a very limited circulation, there were a number of important articles produced in its pages and, though difficult to find copies now, it is well worth the effort if they can be had. The Manchu Studies Newsletter only came out four times and then ceased publication. Larry Clark had numerous and varied interests, and he essentially left the field of Manchu Studies to pursue other interests after a time. The editorship was given over to Stephen Durrant and Jerry Norman, but they did not produce any further issues, being busy with other projects themselves. So for a number of years there was no forum for Manchu Studies in the United States. Meanwhile, students who had attended Joseph Fletcher's classes at Harvard, James Bosson's classes at Berkeley, and Jerry Norman's classes at University of Washington were finishing their programs of study and beginning to produce important works in fields such as Altaic Linguistics and particularly in Qing-dynasty history. These works were appearing here and there in journals devoted to Asia as well as in book form. It seemed that the time was ripe for some sort of journal devoted exclusively to Manchu Studies, perhaps along the lines of the Manchu Studies Newsletter.

In the autumn of 1993, there was a conference held at UC Berkeley where a panel was organized around Manchu philology. There were to be five papers given at the panel. This conference was more generally concerned with Asian Studies, and there were concurrent panels throughout the day. It seems that a very popular panel was held at the same time the Manchu philology panel was held, and other than the five panelists who were presenting papers, there were only two people in the audience, one of whom left halfway through the panel. The other seemed to be dozing and left immediately after the papers had been read. We who were on the panel were then left to ourselves for the question-answer period. It was perhaps the best panel I have ever participated in, and we had an extremely interesting and lively discussion. At the end of the discussion, Jerry Norman, one of the panelists, suggested to the group that we ought to produce a journal of Manchu Studies, one where Manchu scholars would be able to publish articles that were perhaps not quite ready for major journals but could be published in this journal and receive feedback from other scholars in the field. I believe he envisioned it to be something like the by-then defunct Manchu Studies Newsletter. Jerry said he could probably manage to get a grant for a small amount of money to start the publication and from there we could obtain subscriptions to pay for the costs of future issues.

The five panelists at the conference were Jerry Norman, James Bosson, Mark Elliott, Laura Hess, and myself. Laura offered to be the secretary-treasurer for the enterprise,

and the rest of us agreed to alternate as editors. I was selected to be the first one. We chose the name *Saksaha* because the magpie had figured so prominently in the Manchu origin myth, and Mark suggested we add “A Journal of Manchu Studies” to the title.

Though we left that panel with a lot of enthusiasm and determination, the actual launching of *Saksaha* was not entirely smooth. Jerry was able to persuade the famous Sibe calligrapher Getuken to donate the calligraphy found on the cover of the journal. He kindly provided several possibilities from which we selected one, which I understand will continue to be used for the new publication. We put together a list of as many Manchu scholars and people interested in Manchu as we could think of and sent out a notice that the journal was going to be produced and asked for submissions. Then we waited . . . and waited. After a year, we had yet to receive a single submission. I sent out another call for submissions, but this time Mark Elliott and Laura Hess came to my aid by asking colleagues for contributions and writing articles themselves. Finally, after another year’s delay, the inaugural issue of *Saksaha* appeared in the spring of 1996. Scholars both in the United States and throughout the world were encouraging and supportive of the enterprise. Notes came in from all over expressing best wishes for our success. And submissions began to appear fairly regularly, many from scholars outside of the United States. *Saksaha* was international from the beginning, with more subscribers outside of the United States than there were inside.

Saksaha was always produced on a shoestring budget. Perhaps in more experienced hands it would have become a more prestigious journal with a much wider subscription base, and I have high hopes this may yet prove to be the case with the new editorship and sponsor. But I am extremely grateful for the help and encouragement I received from scholars around the world who allowed *Saksaha* to continue for eleven publication cycles and disseminate nearly 100 articles on a variety of topics by some of the finest scholars in the field of Manchu Studies. We ended up not trading off on editorship for the journal, but my co-founders were crucial in helping *Saksaha* survive in numerous ways. Mark Elliott in particular worked hard in contributing articles, translating articles, and encouraging colleagues to contribute. He also sponsored a world-class conference on Manchu Studies at Harvard a few years back.

I am grateful to Michigan Publishing for taking on *Saksaha* and am happy it will have a chance to continue on. I hope it may help to reinvigorate Manchu Studies in the United States and throughout the world. I would encourage all to contribute articles and give your support to the new editors in this endeavor.

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Portland, Oregon
August 14, 2014