



DERMATOLOGIC DISQUISITIONS AND OTHER ESSAYS  
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## Frontal pseudoalopecia in history: Part 2—Cultural forms

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### Introduction

In a previous essay (Part 1), I noted that fashion can influence the hairstyle tendencies up to the point of making them close to what is considered pathologic in medicine (alopecias, in this case).

In the current essay, I examine the role that hairstyle may have in the social and political connotations throughout history. A specific haircut style in China during the 1600s equaled “obedience to the emperor.” That was because Manchu invaders imposed the style of a shaved frontal area upon the population as a rule of obedience, as described below.

### Asian culture and frontal hair shaving

The plucking of frontal area hair was common in Asian cultures. For example, in the 7th century ce, Japanese noblewomen arranged their hair in a style known as *ke-patsu*, in which the frontal line appeared to be artificially retracted (Figure 1). In China during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) extending into the early Republican period, shaving of frontal hair acquired a critical social and political meaning.

Before the Qing Dynasty, people widely followed the principles of Confucius in that the skin and the hair would form part of the inheritance from their ancestors. These should not be damaged by any means; instead, they should be ornamented in different styles. Contrary to this, the Manchus from Central Manchuria wore a traditional

hairstyle known as a “queue” or “ponytail.” This was achieved by shaving the front of the head above the temples every 10 days, while the remaining hair was braided into a ponytail (Figure 2).

From 1589, the Jurchen tribe had been allied with China in the battles against the Japanese invaders of Korea (1592-1598). The leader of the Jurchen, Nurhaci, unified the tribes of Eastern Manchuria (Figure 3) by a series of alliances with other groups through marital unions, coercion, and conquest. In 1609, the Manchus joined with the Eastern Mongols (traditional enemies of China), resulting in the Chinese becoming enemies of Manchus, instead of being collaborators.

Nurhaci was proclaimed “Khan” in 1616 and founded the Later Jin Dynasty.<sup>1</sup> A few years later, the Manchus attacked North China and managed to establish their capital (Mukden) in Shenyang. When Nurhaci died (1626), Hong Taiji, also known as Abahai, was proclaimed his successor.<sup>2</sup> He started using the name “Manchu” for his people (instead of Jurchen) and changed the dynastic name Later Jin to Great Qing (meaning clear, clarity).

In 1645, Abahai established the Great Qing capital in Beijing and decreed several regulations to force the Chinese population into submission. For example, Chinese men were ordered to wear the Manchu hairstyle: a shaved forehead with a ponytail wound around the head. These styles, along with leather tunics, were strongly encouraged by Nurhaci.<sup>2</sup>(p422)

Prince Dorgon (one of the many deceased Abahai brothers who acted as regent)<sup>2</sup>(p425) issued an imperial edict in early 1645, to the Board of Rites:

*All residents of the capital and its vicinity will fulfill the order to shave their heads within ten days of this proclamation. For Zhili and other provinces compliance must take place within ten days of receipt of the order from the Board of Rites. Those who follow this order*

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**Fig. 1** Illustration from a wall mural in the Takamatsu Zuka Kofun, or Tall Pine Ancient Burial Mound, in Asuka, Japan.

*belong to our country; those who hesitate will be considered treasonous bandits and will be heavily penalized. Anyone who attempts to evade this order or who uses cunning language to argue against it will not be lightly dealt with.*<sup>3</sup>

Some Chinese had already voluntarily adopted the Manchurian hairstyle even before the Manchus crossed the Great Wall<sup>2</sup>(p427); however, the new orders established that resisting the queue policy was equal to rebellion. Violating the queue policy was punishable by death, which made famous the slogan “keep your head, lose your hair; keep your hair, lose your head.”<sup>2</sup>(p427)

One of the main sources of resistance against the Manchu hairstyle was the Filial Piety principle of Confucianism,



**Fig. 2** Lithograph from 1895 shows three peoples of Siberia: a Samoyedic, a Manchu, and an Evenki. The Manchu shows the typical hairstyle, with the retraction of the frontal line of the hair.



**Fig. 3** Nurhaci, leader of the tribe Jurchen, unifier of Eastern Manchuria.

which preserved a person’s bodily integrity and conveyed high social status and prestige as a way of honoring one’s parents. Dorgon, uncle of the young Emperor Fulin, tried to turn this Confucian approach to the favor of the conquerors by emphasizing that the Manchus should be considered as the “new” parents of China.<sup>4</sup>(p125) The Kangxi Emperor stated, “We are one family . . . The emperor is like the father,



**Fig. 4** Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925).

the people like his sons. Father and sons being of the same body, how can they be different?"<sup>2</sup>(p427)

There were also cultural reasons why Chinese people strongly refused to adopt the new hairstyle. The Chinese hairstyle, for example, was historically considered as a way of distinguishing oneself from barbarians.<sup>4</sup>(p127) Chinese people attributed a magical power to hair, which was also related to "manhood," because many believed that they would lose their wives after cutting their hair.<sup>4</sup>(p128) Haircutting was considered dishonorable due to the role of such acts as a method of punishment, used during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 bce).<sup>4</sup>(p127)

Together with this type of resistance founded mainly on cultural, religious, and superstitious beliefs, a second source of resistance was led by scholars, who avoided the haircutting orders by hiding behind their villa walls.<sup>4</sup>(p126) The wide range of social groups that showed resistance to these changes, were listed by a scholar<sup>4</sup>(p125) as:

*... incumbent or retired Ming civil and military officials, members of the district yamen or constabulary staffs, Ming imperial clansmen, local landowners and merchants, leaders of political and literary societies, regular Ming military units, local sea and land militia, freelance military experts, armed guards from private estates, peasant self-defense corps, martial monks, underground gangs, secret societies, tenant and 'slave' insurrectionary forces, and pirate and bandit groups.*<sup>4</sup>(p125)

## Counter-reform: The queue-cutting movement

Just as every reform eventually incites a counter-reform, the last period of the Qing Dynasty saw one of its most characteristic symbols (the queue) threatened by a completely opposed trend: "queue-cutting." This was mainly due to the modernization of the country, because the anti-Manchu movement was mainly supported by radical intellectuals, convinced that Westernization would achieve the industrialization of China.<sup>4</sup>(p128) To achieve their goals, they denounced the oppressive and detrimental connotations of the queue to the Chinese population.<sup>4</sup>(p129) They also argued that Western fashion and hairstyles were more hygienic, aesthetically appealing, and practical.<sup>4</sup>(p130)

This resulted in new regulations against the queue; for instance, Sun Yat-Sen, the provisional president of the Nanjing government, passed a decree in 1912 requiring people to abandon their queues within 20 days of its passage<sup>4</sup>(p131) (Figure 4). After this, spontaneous riots among the Chinese population provided further evidence for the rejection of the queue: in Guangdong, 200,000 men cut their queues, proclaiming an independence day, and students from Changsa, Hunan Province, removed the queues of anyone they could find in the street.

The "queue-cutting" movement also attributed this social rejection to the increase of taxes during the late Qing Dynasty; however, the lower classes were less prone to change their

traditions, once again attributing a magical power to hair.<sup>4</sup>(p132) Such resistance to modernization was mainly felt in the hinterland and in Northern China. Once again, Confucian concepts were a source of resistance: the monarch was the new father, and queue cutting dishonored him.

Some intellectuals also objected. Members of the scholar/official class preserved queues in support of the Qing dynasty and in defiance of Republican authority. Again, some authorities, such as the governor-general of Manchuria, enacted executions for people who refused to wear a queue.<sup>4</sup>(p134) Several secret organizations were active against the "queue-cutting" policy. Among them, the Elder-Brother Society in the Yangzi region, the Queue-Protection Society of Chuzhou, and the Society for Restoring Ancient Ways in the border area of Hubei and Sichuan Provinces were the most remarkable.<sup>4</sup>(p137-7)

In December 1911, several representatives from various provinces in Nanjing drew up a provisional union and bestowed the title of President on Sun Yat-Sen.<sup>5</sup> On January 1, 1912, the new Republic of China was proclaimed. On February 12, the new Xuantong emperor abdicated, and the Qing dynasty was gone.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusions

Skin is often "much more than an organ." Not infrequently, hair and skin have aesthetic and social connotations, as shown by the serious political connotations: the destiny of a whole empire with riots and protests, the creation of secret societies, and the eventual fall of a dynasty.

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