

The Conscription of Supernumerary Soldiers (*yangyubing*) in the Qing Military System

YEH Kao-shu*

The policy of “supernumerary soldiers” (*yangyubing*) was one of the new strategies devised by the Qing emperors to continue the Eight-Banner system when they confronted new social and political situations after 1644. The term “supernumerary soldiers” in Manchu is “*hūwašabure cooha*,” referring to “a young man brought up at state expense who was destined for military service and therefore exempt from the corvée.” Since the implementation of the policy in 1724, some emperors regarded it as a social relief policy while others emphasized its military functions. In reality, the number of the supernumerary soldiers grew over time to one quarter of the total of the Metropolitan Banners. They were engaged in the defense of provincial garrisons and were candidates to be reservists. Being a supernumerary soldier was thus considered to be an avenue for a poor bannerman to improve his livelihood. However, given the fixed nature of the military establishment and the limited budget from the government, issues such as the expansion and regulation of the “supernumerary soldiers,” the adjustment and manipulation of the funds, whether it was a solution to the problem of livelihood of the poor bannermen, and the reasons that the system could be operated continuously till the twentieth century deserve further discussion. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the nature, the functions, and the evolution of the policy on

* Professor, Department of History, National Taiwan Normal University

“supernumerary soldiers” in terms of the system of qualification, funding sources, recruitment and training, as well as salary and livelihood issues.

Keywords: Eight-Banner system, supernumerary soldiers (*yangyubing*), bannermen, livelihood, Metropolitan Banners, provincial garrison