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Los Angeles

Staging Sovereignty:

Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and Late Qing Court Art Production

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requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Ying-chen Peng

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

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Professor Hui-shu Lee, Chair

Empress Dowager Cixi was the last formidable imperial woman of dynastic China and the de facto ruler of the Qing Empire between 1862 and 1908. Her significance in modern Chinese politics is well studied, but the matriarch's encompassing engagement in art remains understudied. This dissertation examines concentrically Cixi's avid participation in portraiture, attire and daily accessories, painting and calligraphy, as well as imperial garden palaces, to illuminate her self-expressions in visual and material cultures. I argue that Cixi utilized the notion of court art as a symbolic realm of sovereignty and adapted prior Qing rulers' patterns of representing authority to visualize the power she exercised. As such, the late Qing court art organizations were at her service to stage her performance as a female ruler.

While adopting the visual language of imperial portraiture to represent her authority, the strategic choices of subjects and motifs in the portrait maintained the sitter's womanly identity. In the

realm of decorative arts, Cixi manipulated the production of imperial porcelain ware to assert her role as a ruler, but she imprinted a touch of feminine taste in the porcelain by using designs that shared similar color schemes and patterns with those on imperial women's attire. In comparison, the matriarch's performance of the high arts operated differently. Cixi displayed the fondness and capability to participate in the gentlemen's arts. She also spared no effort to model after the painting and calligraphic works of earlier Qing emperors to make an intimate connection with the imperial genealogy. The most ambitious dimension of her patronage lies in the empress dowager's renovation and reconstruction of the imperial space, whose apex was the reconstruction of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, which was transformed into an arena of female agency.

The dissertation of Ying-chen Peng is approved.

Lothar von Falkenhausen

Andrea S. Goldman

Peter C. Sturman

Dell Upton

Hui-shu Lee, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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Ying-chen Peng 彭盈真

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Introduction

At the 1906 Paris Salon, the Dutch-American painter Hubert Vos (1855-1935) exhibited a three-quarter-length portrait of the Great Qing Empire's de facto ruler, Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) (fig.0.1).¹ Although it is an unauthorized portrait, several elements denote the imperial authenticity Vos intended to deliver. A banner bearing the sitter's official international title, *Daqingguo Cixi huangtaihou* 大清國慈禧皇太后, "Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire," and the vertical inscription *Guangxu yisi nian* 光緒乙巳年, "the year of *yisi* of the Guangxu reign (1905)," are both standard items in this female ruler's official photographic portraits produced in 1903 and 1904. Vos's Chinese signature on the left side of the throne, *Huashi Hubo gonghui* 華士胡博恭繪, "respectfully painted by Huashi Hubo," is also in the standard location where a Qing court painter would sign an imperially commissioned painting.² Vos was a professional portrait painter who had painted many celebrities in the United States and East Asian countries, and he acutely captured the empress dowager's facial features, which, in the painting, are comparable to photographs taken of her in 1903 (fig.0.2). Nevertheless, the award-winning portrait has a confusing *double* that Vos painted a year earlier (fig.0.3). When set side-by-side, the apparently much younger sitter in this *double* makes the viewer wonder if Vos had travelled back in time several decades to paint the same woman. Why did he paint two portraits? What made these portraits so different from each other?

¹ Charles De Kay, "Paris and Her Salon," *The New York Times*, July 22 1906.

² According to Vos's letter to his family when he was painting the portrait in Beijing, Cixi granted him the Chinese name Huashi Hubo after the commission. See Kuang Zhaojiang 鄺兆江 (Luke S. K. Kwong), "Cixi xiezhao de xubi: Huashi Hubo" 慈禧寫照的續筆：華士胡博, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊, 1 (2000): 81. However, it should be noted that Chinese imperial portraits do not bear the painter's signature. It should also be noted that Vos's signature was rather a sinicized representation of authorship in the Western painting tradition because Chinese court painters were not supposed to sign the imperial portraits they painted.

Vos received the commission to paint the oil portrait of Empress Dowager Cixi in the summer of 1905.³ During the course of the sitting, the elderly empress dowager meticulously stipulated how she should be portrayed. In addition to demanding that no shadow or wrinkle appear on her face, Cixi even showed the male painter how to paint eyebrows in the Chinese way.⁴ The result was the *double* portrait—an idealized painting of a middle-aged, wrinkle-free and benevolent Empress Dowager Cixi that pleased the commissioner yet upset the painter. Coming from a culture where the autonomy of an artist had been recognized and respected since the fifteenth century, Vos regarded his own sketch, which did not comply with the empress dowager’s commands, as a more truthful representation of the sitter’s appearance and persona.⁵ He completed the sketch after returning to the United States and submitted it to the Paris Salon in 1906.⁶

The story of Empress Dowager Cixi’s double portraits is intriguing in multiple respects. It exemplifies how tension between the commissioner and the painter can yield strikingly different representations of the same sitter. More importantly, however, the interaction between Cixi and Vos suggested that the matriarch of the Great Qing Empire had certain image-making agendas in mind when she sat for the portrait. My interest in Cixi began with an inquiry into the nature of these agendas, but I could not find a reliable textual self-account by this woman. On

³ The painting has been stored in the Yihe yuan 頤和園 (Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, also known as Summer Palaces), in Beijing, since its completion. It suffered serious damage due to the lack of proper care and was sent to the Netherlands for conservation in 2008. Since the completion of restoration and repair in 2010, the painting has been displayed again in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony. See Beijing shi Yihe yuan guanlichu 北京市頤和園管理處 ed., *Hubo Huashi hui Cixi youhua xiaoxiang: lishi yu xiufu* 胡博華士繪慈禧油畫像：歷史與修復 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2010).

⁴ Kuang Zhaojiang, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi: Huashi Hubo,” 79.

⁵ The artistic autonomy in European art is a well-studied topic. For an exemplary work, see Francis Amens-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁶ Kuang Zhaojiang, “Cixi xiezhao de xubi: Huashi Hubo,” 74.

realizing that imperial China's last formidable ruler left a rich artistic heritage comparable to preceding Qing emperors, I joined the search for clues with an art historical perspective. The abundant works of art Cixi commissioned and produced will be the invaluable materials in the quest to unearth her own voice.

Historiography of Cixi

Empress Dowager Cixi, who carried a sixteen-character honorary title, beginning with *ci* 慈, “mercy,” and *xi* 禧, “delight,” and was granted the posthumous title Xiaojin 孝欽, is one of the most significant yet controversial figures in modern Chinese history. Born into the Yehenara clan of the Bordered Blue Banner on November 29, 1835, the young daughter of mid-level official Huizheng 惠徵 (1805-56) was selected as the fifth rank imperial consort with the title Lan Guiren 蘭貴人 (Worthy Lady Orchid) in 1852.⁷

The young lady of the Yehenara clan's literary learning, though quite possibly merely elementary, was exceptional among most of the Qing imperial consorts. Contrary to anecdotal stories, she was a local Manchu banner woman in Beijing and led a comfortable life before entering the Forbidden City.⁸ The Manchu traditionally granted women much greater freedom when compared to their Han counterparts, and thus Manchu women were able to establish a

⁷ The Bordered Blue Banner is in the lower tier of the eight-banner system. Cixi followed the Qing convention of elevating the banners of imperial consorts' families and moved her family to the higher-ranked Bordered Yellow Banner in 1861. Xu Che 徐徹, *Cixi dazhuan* 慈禧大傳 (Shenyang: Liaoshen shushe, 1994), 2, 22, 33-34. In this dissertation I follow Charles O. Hucker's translation of official titles in Imperial China. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1985).

⁸ Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 29.

presence in public and even participated in masculine activities such as archery.⁹ Yet their literary education was not particularly encouraged. Although daughters of the imperial clan had some educational opportunities at home, illiteracy was quite common among Manchu women.¹⁰

Equipped with her youth, fine appearance and cultured mind, Lan Guiren stood out from the other consorts and produced Emperor Xianfeng's 咸豐 (r.1851-61) only male heir, the future Emperor Tongzhi 同治 (r.1862-75), in 1856, and this commenced her rapid advancement in the inner quarters. She was promoted to the second rank title Yi Guifei 懿貴妃 (Honored Consort Virtue) the following year. Nonetheless, unlike what most anecdotes suggest, Lan Guiren was not Xianfeng's favorite, even though she gave birth to his only son and thus advanced to second rank consort Yi Guifei in 1854.¹¹ Xianfeng died in Rehe 熱河 on August 22, 1861 when the court moved there to escape the invasion of Anglo-French troops in the capital Beijing during the Second Opium War. Yi Guifei instantly promoted herself to junior empress dowager in the name of her son, the new Emperor Tongzhi, only one day after Xianfeng's empress advanced to the title of empress dowager. The core officials did not oppose this order because it was indeed the convention for the Qing emperor to promote his birth mother to the position of empress

⁹ Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors, A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 113-4.

¹⁰ Lai Hui-min 賴惠敏, "Qingdai huangzu funü de jiating diwei" 清代皇族婦女的家庭地位, *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究, 2 (1994): 3-5; Mark C Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001), 250 n76.

¹¹ Wu Xiangxiang argued against the anecdotal impression that Xianfeng was in favor of Cixi by analyzing the distribution of food and the seating order at the emperor's banquets, neither of which ever listed Cixi before the empress, prince, and Cixi's son. Wu Xiangxiang 吳相湘, *Wanqing gongting shiji* 晚清宮廷實紀 (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1961), 22.

dowager.¹² The two empress dowagers thereupon received honorary titles of Cixi and Ci'an 慈安 (1837-81).

Tongzhi's premature death in 1875 after a mere two years of personal rule brought Cixi a devastating emotional loss but also the opportunity to regain political power by appointing his successor. Her four-year-old nephew was named Emperor Guangxu 光緒 (r.1876-1908), and following the Tongzhi convention the two empress dowagers became the regents again. After Ci'an's sudden death in 1881 Cixi became the sole regent and achieved the pinnacle of authority.¹³ She remained influential even after the young Guangxu began his direct rule in 1889. The emperor's radical Hundred Days Reform in 1898 resulted in strong resistance from the conservative clans in the court who turned to Cixi for support and quelled the reform by terminating Guangxu's rule.¹⁴ The coup d'état was followed by the matriarch's third regency, which would last until the deaths of both the aunt and the nephew in 1908.

Cixi's era was a politically tumultuous but culturally exciting period in imperial China. The economic and socio-political system of the Celestial Kingdom experienced extraordinary challenge from Western imperial powers. In response, calls for and experiments with modernization emerged in various areas and to differing degrees. The tide of Westernization also overtook Chinese ideology and philosophy, whose loosened dominance not only empowered

¹² Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 119.

¹³ Rumor has it that Cixi poisoned Ci'an to death. This speculation first emerged from Yun Yuding's 惲毓鼎 (1863-1918) unofficial biography of Emperor Guangxu. Yun Yuding, *Chongling chuanxin lu* 崇陵傳信錄, in *Qingdai yeshi* 清代野史, vol. 4 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1987-88), 3. Yun served in the Rijiang qijuzhu guan 日講起居注館 (Imperial Diary Office) during the Guangxu reign and thus his account was often held to be true. But as Xu Che argued in his biography of Cixi, Yun's speculation was filled with mistakes in narrative logics. Contrary to the rumor, Ci'an likely died from a serious stroke, which had struck her at least twice before she died. Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 274-90.

¹⁴ Luke S. Kwong, "Chinese Politics at the Cross-roads: Reflections on the Hundred Days Reform of 1898," *Modern Asian Studies*, 34.3 (2000): 663-95.

oppressed subjects such as women and poor peasants but also triggered comprehensive debate over the modernization of Chinese culture in the early twentieth century.

Against this backdrop, Cixi ascended to the stage of power. The sophisticated framework of the Qing court facilitated her regency. A consolidated inner court agency, the Junji chu 軍機處 (Council of State), appeared during the early years of Emperor Qianlong's 乾隆 reign (1735-95). Led by five ministers, three Manchu and two Han Chinese, the Council of State was responsible for the emperor directly, and it supervised all kinds of state affairs and drafted edicts for the emperor. Theoretically the emperor could appoint anyone as the minister, but the chosen officials were generally civil officials at the capital with the regular second rank or higher. The ministers were the emperor's most reliable officials and often handled the top-secret materials.¹⁵ Although the subsequent Emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 (r. 1796-1820) deprived the Council of State of some of its imperial and inner-court exclusivity, the council remained the most powerful institution, and this political system continued until the end of the Qing dynasty.¹⁶

Cixi manipulated the structure and power of the Council of State to secure her ruling power. When assuming the position of empress dowager she also demanded the power to act as the regent to the new emperor, which stemmed from Xianfeng's controversial arrangement. The emperor ordered merely ordering the eight core officials, including four ministers of the Council of State to assist his successor in the final will, but he also left two seals, one to Ci'an and the other to his son but which was kept by Cixi. They had to be stamped at the beginning and at the end of every imperial order as an alternative to the young Emperor Tongzhi's signature, which

¹⁵ Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: the Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 169-99.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 231-55.

implied that the keepers of the seals were empowered to veto any order. It was a seemingly a well-conceived strategy to balance the unavoidable power struggle between the assisting officials and the emperor, but in reality it provided a loophole for Cixi to manipulate.¹⁷ The two empress dowagers successfully resisted the demand for the seals from Sushun 肅順 (1816-61), the head of the core official group, and thus acquired the power to participate in politics. Furthermore, with Ci'an's acquiescence, Cixi collaborated with Xianfeng's brother Prince Gong 恭親王 (1833-98) to stage the coup of Xinyou 辛酉 immediately after returning to Beijing in November 1861. Sushun and two other officials were put to death; the remaining five core officials were deposed.¹⁸

A new core power alliance, the triangle of Prince Gong, Cixi and Ci'an, was born. Prince Gong became one of the ministers of the Council of the State, and the positions of the other four ministers were given to officials who assisted the coup. The stable officialdom system avoided a potential political crisis, and the ministers helped the young female regents to familiarize themselves with political administration and decision-making swiftly. Eunuchs were another group in the inner court at Cixi's disposal. They were the empress dowager's informants of events outside of the inner quarters, and those knowledgeable were often ordered to recite and explain the Four Classics for her.¹⁹ However, the degree of their manipulation of politics was insignificant compared to their predecessors in the Ming dynasty. Specifically, after Cixi's

¹⁷ Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 103-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 146-59.

¹⁹ Xin Xiuming 信修明, *Lao taijian de huiyi* 老太監的回憶 (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 1987), 10-11, 35-36. The Qing emperors prevented eunuchs from manipulating politics by keeping eunuchs who had minimum literacy and taking severe measures against those who violated the rules. But the regulation loosened in the late Qing because according to the memoir of her eunuch Xin Xiuming, the two eunuchs recited for Cixi used to be the *xiucais* 秀才 (Cultivated Talent) who were qualified to participate in Provincial Examination in the civil service recruitment examination sequence.

favorite eunuch An Dehai 安德海 (d.1869), who was so much protected by her as to offend eminent officials without being punished, was decapitated under Tongzhi's order for unauthorized leave from the Forbidden City in 1869 the influence of eunuchs was restricted in the inner quarters.²⁰

The first years of Cixi's regency were no easy task. She not only had to bring the empire back to order, she also faced challenges from Prince Gong. Although only in her late twenties to early thirties, the young and inexperienced Empress Dowager Cixi overcame both obstacles. She elevated Han Chinese officials, such as Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-72) and Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), to quell the Taiping rebels in southern China and the Nian rebels active north of the Yangtze River in 1864 and 1868, respectively. The division of power with Prince Gong did not last long either. She stripped him of his official title Yizheng wang 議政王 (Prince of the Deliberative Council) in 1865 and thereafter became the sole power center in the court.²¹ As such, except for the years between 1873 and 1874 and 1888 and 1898, during which she still retained prominent influence, the empress dowager's regency lasted five decades. It created an unprecedented situation in late Qing politics: a female ruler maintaining imperial authority in the face of domestic upheavals and foreign threats.

The unique circumstances of Cixi's regency and the abundance of visual and textual materials therefore make this formidable woman a popular topic for scholarly research and popular books alike. Quite a number of Cixi's biographies and anecdotes have been published in the past century. Her historical image varies along with the changing perspectives of the late

²⁰ For the incident of An Dehai, see Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 226-32.

²¹ *Ibid*, 195-206.

Qing and early Republican eras. The empress dowager is represented in a wide spectrum of images. She is wickedly malicious for those involved in and sympathetic towards the Hundred Days Reform.²² Yet the same person appears humane and benevolent in the eyes of those few who had direct contact with her, such as: the high official Qu Hongji 瞿鴻禨 (1850-1918), her ladies-in-waiting Yu Deling 裕德齡 (also known as Princess Der-ling, 1885-1944) and Yu Rongling 裕容齡 (1882-1973); and foreigners such as U.S. ambassador's wife Sarah Conger (1843-?), American portrait painter Katharine A. Karl (1865-1938), as well as American missionary Isaac T. Headland (1859-1942) and his physician wife Marian S. Headland (1859-1953).²³ For the most imaginative minds, Cixi is even the target of Orientalist and sexist fantasy.²⁴ Comparatively, Cixi's reputation is evaluated in a balanced tone in the official history. The biographer acknowledged the empress dowager's effort to promote capable officials, but he also criticized her excessive trust of the head eunuch, Li Lianying 李蓮英 (1848-1911). Similarly, in describing the Hundred Days Reform, the radical Westernization movement led by Emperor Guangxu, Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929)

²² In his comprehensive review of Cixi's historical image up to 1980 Kuang Zhaojiang pinpointed the role of the Hundred Days Reform activists, such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), in creating the malicious image of Cixi that continued to thrive in the twentieth century. Kuang Zhaojiang 鄺兆江, "Cixi xingxiang yu Cixi yanjiu chutan" 慈禧形象與慈禧研究初探, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 61.3 (1980): 4-15.

²³ See Qu Hongji 瞿鴻禨, *Shengde jilue* 聖德紀略 (Taipei xian: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970); Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City, by the Princess Der Ling, First Lady in Waiting to the Empress Dowager, illustrated from Photographs* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911); Yu Rongling 裕容齡, *Qinggong suoji* 清宮瑣記 (Shenyang: Liaoshen shushe, 1999); Sarah Conger, *Letters from China: With Particular Reference to the Empress Dowager and the Women of China* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1909); Isaac T. Headland, *The Court Life in China: The Capital, Its Officials and People* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1909); Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager, by Katharine A. Carl; Illustrated by the Author and With Photographs* (New York: The Century co., 1905). Additionally, accounts by Cixi's eunuchs and maids also provide sources on the empress dowager's private life. See Jin Yi 金易, *Gongnü tanwanglu* 宮女談往錄 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1991); Xin Xiuming, *Lao taijian de huiyi*.

²⁴ The most famous example of this kind of literature is Edward Backhouse, a British sojourning in fin-de-siecle Beijing who claimed to be Cixi's secret lover in his unpublished autobiography. For more on this fabricated piece, see Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Hermit of Beijing* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 1-25.

during June and September in 1898, the biographer stressed Cixi's disapproval, but he singled out Zaiyi 載漪 (1856-1922), the minister of Zongli Geguo Shiwu Yanmen 總理各國事務衙門 (Foreign Office), as the key figure to blame in the Boxer's Uprising in 1900.²⁵ The narrative counters many popular writings in which Cixi was considered responsible for this traumatic war with eight foreign imperialist powers.

Since the 1990s, newly published historical records that aimed to present Cixi from more objective and historicized vantage points encouraged a new wave of interest in her biography.²⁶ With the recent rise of revisionist historiography in the field of modern Chinese history, the “dragon lady” is reevaluated as a remarkable ruler whose reform policies laid the foundation for China's full-scale modernization in the twentieth century.²⁷ The revisionist approach to understanding this political figure's role in modern Chinese history and memory also reflects changing views of Cixi's historical image. Instead of sending the empress dowager to either the

²⁵ Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽 et al., *Qing shigao* 清史稿, *juan* 214, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 vol. 298 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995 and 1999), 77-79.

²⁶ It should be noted that Wu Xiangxiang's research on late Qing court politics in the 1960s, which is based on various court documents preserved in the National Palace Museum, is the prelude to these writings. Wu Xiangxiang, *Wangqing gongting shiji*. For other biographies that consult historical records, see Sterling Seagrave, *Dragon Lady, the Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*; Shen Weibin 沈謂濱, *Wanqing nüzhū: xishuo Cixi* 晚清女主: 細說慈禧 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007); Chen Jiexian 陳捷先, *Cixi xiezhen* 慈禧寫真 (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2010); Jung Chang, *Empress Dowager Cixi: the Concubine Who Launched Modern China* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

²⁷ For instance, William Rowe gives a positive assessment of Cixi's regencies and their contribution to the late Qing reform movement and the military campaigns to Xinjiang that kept the Qing Empire alive for another several decades after the Second Opium War, from 1856-60. Similarly, she is included as one of the key figures, with a mixed reputation, in Orville Schell and John Delury's analysis of China's path towards wealth and power. William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: the Great Qing* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 201-52; Orville Schell, John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Random House, 2013), 69-83.

pantheon or dungeon of history, these studies focus on the construction and fabrication of her historical image.²⁸

Contrary to the continuing enthusiasm for the study of Cixi in the socio-political context, scholars have paid scant attention to her other equally substantial role as a patron of court art, a symbolic realm of sovereignty in China. In fact, the empress dowager directed the production of her attire and porcelains; she took persistent interest in painting and calligraphy and commissioned numerous works from court artists; she renovated the palace compounds in the Forbidden City as well as the Yihe yuan 頤和園 (Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, formerly known as the Summer Palaces); theatrical performance in the court achieved its climax of creativity under her support. In other words, Cixi's cultural interventions, from her physical body extending to the space where her performance of power took place, are critical to understanding late Qing court art production during the twilight of the Chinese empire. This dissertation therefore aims to articulate how Cixi's patronage reshaped both the expression of imperial women and the production of court art through the lens of gender and politics.²⁹

²⁸ See Qin Weixian 秦維憲, "Wanqing nüzhu de duochongxing – jinnianlai guanyu Cixi pingjia de xinqixiang" 晚清女主的多重性—近年來關於慈禧評價的新氣象, *Shanrao shifan xueyuan xuebao* 上饒師範學院學報 28.5 (2008): 86-88; Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖, "Jiyi yu lishi: Yehe Nala shi ge'an lunshu" 記憶與歷史—葉赫納拉氏個案論述, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiu jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究集刊, 64 (2009): 1-39.

²⁹ In recent years female patronage of early modern European art has become a popular topic. In addition to the publications of powerful women from the noble houses and nuns, research on female rulers' patronage is also emerging. The latest fruit of this field is the study of Maria Theresa (1717-80), the only female ruler of the House of Habsburg. Michael Yonan not only scrutinized Empress Maria Theresa's images and the artworks she commissioned but also analyzed the gendered factors of the Schönbrunn Palace the empress constructed as an extension. Michael E. Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

Literature Review and Sources

In their introductory essay to the special issue of the journal *Nan Nü*, dedicated to the latest research on Cixi's cultural activities, Yuhang Li and Harriet T. Zürndorfer pointed out the importance of evaluating the matriarch's role as a patron from a historicized perspective. That is, art patronage was a part of sovereignty that Cixi performed in accordance with the preceding Qing emperors.³⁰ This methodology incorporates her artistic activities into the lineage of Qing imperial art, and in so doing it enables us to explore the distinct characteristics in her works and commissions from the angle of gender difference. Such new scholarly assessment opens a window to Cixi's engagement with art and enables this dissertation to enter the conversation with questions to characterize her role as a patron: how did Cixi express herself in the visual and material cultures? How did her intended viewers—primarily men—perceive her strategies? Ultimately, what role did gender play in Cixi's pattern of self-expression?

As yet, most studies of Cixi's influence in the cultural domain are confined by popular interest in imperial women's private lives in the inner quarters and the strong focus on the materiality of art media. Images of her are arguably the most frequently studied visual materials. Art historians have approached these materials without considering how the sitter's gender would influence the production and reception of these images. For instance, Wang Cheng-hua's seminal essay carefully examined Cixi's portraits as a ruler rather than a *female* ruler. She contextualized how the empress dowager's portraits represented the sitter's advancement of power and authority and further explored the distribution of Cixi's photographic portraits to reach the conclusion that they were the product of a well-calculated image-making project and

³⁰ Yuhang Li, Harriet T. Zürndorfer, "Rethinking Empress Dowager Cixi through the Production of Art," *Nan Nü* 14 (2012): 20.

that these images embarked on a new era in which the ruler's images went public and tied closely to the image of the state.³¹ Feng Youheng's essay, in comparison, diverged from the traditional and problematic method of embedding Cixi's painted portraits within the frame of the imperial consort's portraits. Unable to read the sitter's agency in the details of these portraits that Wang unveiled, Feng stated that Cixi did not transgress the existing framework to produce images like other Qing emperors in order to showcase the ruling power she exercised.³² The argument is simplistic. The lack of certain kinds of portraits, such as those depicting participation in a military event or in literary activities, does not equate a lack of images achieving the same propaganda function. In other words, gendered strategies of self-expression are not considered in Feng's research, which exemplifies the typical pitfall of studies on women's images that persists in Chinese art history.

Cixi's photographic portraits grabbed the attention of scholars in the field of cultural studies. Interestingly, what they looked for was what many Chinese art historians did not see. Taking inspiration from Cixi's portraits wherein she embodies the male-turned-female Buddhist deity Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 and the photographic portraits where she looks into the mirror, they explored the performativity and the blurred boundary between femininity and masculinity in these photographs. While Lydia Liu and Laikwan Pang concluded that the Guanyin costume revealed Cixi's patriarchal complex, Carlos Rojas countered their opinion by emphasizing the femininity of the empress dowager's other photographic portraits and contended that her

³¹ Cheng-hua Wang, "‘Going Public’: Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi, Circa 1904," *Nan Nü* 14 (2012): 119-76. Also see Wang Cheng-hua 王正華, "Zongxiang gongkaihua: Cixi xiaoxiang de fengge, yunzuo yu xingxiang suzao" 走向「公開化」：慈禧肖像的風格、運作與形象塑造, *Meishushi yanjiu jikan* 美術史研究集刊 32 (2012): 239-320.

³² Feng Youheng 馮幼衡, "Huangtaihou, zhengzhi, yishu – Cixi taihou xiaoxianghua jiedu" 皇太后、政治、藝術—慈禧太后肖像畫解讀, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 30.2 (2012): 103-55.

Guanyin photographs were yet another representation of femininity.³³ Observing the theatricality in the matriarch's embodiment of Guanyin, Li Yuhang unveiled the novelty of Cixi's practice in the long history of the Guanyin cult among late imperial Chinese women.³⁴

Current scholarship has captured prominent characteristics of Cixi's dual images: political propaganda and ambiguous visual representation of gender. Since the matriarch was also an avid patron, could the same phenomenon be applied to other aspects of her patronage? Such inquiries have rarely been discussed. Many articles on Cixi's artistic activities published before the 1990s were reportages colored by strong criticism of her extravagant lifestyle and vulgar taste.³⁵ When brought up in exhibition catalogues or lushly illustrated popular books, the empress dowager's personal objects were usually introduced as representative of imperial women at large.³⁶ Although the Palace Museum in Beijing organized a special exhibition of Cixi's life and art, it was an uncritical display of the museum's collection as it related to her.³⁷

³³ Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: the Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 162-64; Laikwan Pang, "Photography, Performance, and the making of Female Images in Modern China," *Journal of Women's History* 17.4 (2005): 56-85, 66; Carlos Rojas, *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center and Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-30.

³⁴ Yuhang Li, "Oneself as a Female Deity: Representations of Empress Dowager Cixi as Guanyin," *Nan Nü* 14 (2012): 75-118.

³⁵ For instance, the empress dowager's birthday celebrations and her renovation of the palaces are usually regarded as concrete evidence of extravagance, whereas her debatable taste is discussed in articles on her artistic practice and theater patronage. See Li Pengnian 李鵬年, "Yiren qingshou, juguo zaoyang – lueshu Cixi 'liuxun shengdian'" 一人慶壽舉國遭殃—略述慈禧「六旬盛典」, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 3 (1984): 32-40.

³⁶ Wan Yi 萬依, Wang Shuqing 王樹卿 and Lu Yanzhen 陸燕貞 et al., *Qingdai gongting shenghuo* 清代宮廷生活 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2006); Kokyū hakubutsuin 故宮博物院, *Sezon bijutsukan* セゾン美術館 eds., *Shikinjō no kōhi to kyūtei geijutsu: Pekin Kokyū Hakubutsuin ten: Nitchū kokkō seijōka 25-shūnen kinen* 紫禁城の后妃と宮廷芸術：北京故宮博物院展：日中国交正常化25周年記念 (Tokyo: Sezon bijutsukan, 1997); Kokyū hakubutsuin 故宮博物院 ed., *Chijō no tenkyū: Pekin Kokyū hakubutsuin ten: Nitchū kokkō seijōka 40-shūnen kinen* 地上の天宮：故宮博物院展：日中国交正常化40周年記念 (Tokyo: Fuji bijutsukan, 2012).

³⁷ Yuan Hongqi 苑洪琪 et al., *Cixi taihou: shenghuo yishu* 慈禧太后：生活與藝術 (Beijing: Gugong bowuyuan, 1998).

The rise of late Qing court art studies in the past decade has signaled a turning point. Serious investigations into Cixi's porcelain, painting and calligraphy have emerged. For instance, the catalogue *Official Models and the Qing Imperial Porcelain Ware* 官樣御瓷 contains a comprehensive introduction to the porcelain wares she commissioned, and the accompanying essays offer detailed contextualization of how these porcelains were ordered and produced.³⁸ In the same vein, Li Shi and Ts'ang Ka Bo explicated the system and production of the late Qing imperial painting workshop while acknowledging the empress dowager's strong influence. Cixi's appointment of female court painters, the first-ever official recruitment of professional women painters in dynastic China, was especially emphasized in their investigations.³⁹

The empress dowager's involvement in the reconstruction and renovation of the imperial space was also under scrutiny in the last decade. Jia Jun's studies of the Qing dowager empresses' palace compounds have pinpointed the unusual size and decoration of Cixi's palaces.⁴⁰ Zhang Wei's dissertation on the reconstruction projects of the Xiyuan 西苑 (West Imperial Gardens), the imperial property located to the west of the Forbidden City, during the

³⁸ Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院 ed., *Guanyang yuci—Gugong bowuyuan cang Qingdai zhici guanyang yu yuyao ciqu* 官樣御瓷—故宮博物院藏清代製瓷官樣與御窯瓷器 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2007). A similar exhibition catalogue focused on Cixi's porcelain patronage was published in 2013. See Gugong bowuyuan, Shoudu bowuguan 首都博物館 eds, *Gugong zhencang Cixi de ciqu* 故宮珍藏慈禧的瓷器 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2013).

³⁹ Li Shi 李滢, "Tongzhi Guangxu chao Ruyiguan" 同治光緒朝如意館, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 6 (2005): 99-115; "Gugong bowuyuan cang Wanqing gongting huihua tuanshan" 故宮博物院藏晚清宮廷繪畫團扇, *Wenwu* 文物 5 (2011): 1-7; Ts'ang Ka Bo, "In Her Majesty's Service: Women Painters in China at the Court of the Empress Dowager Cixi," in Deborah Cherry, Janice Helland eds., *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 35-58.

⁴⁰ Jia Jun 賈琚, "Qingdai ligong yuyuan zhong de taihou qingongqu jianzhu chutan" 清代離宮御苑中的太后寢宮區建築初探, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 5 (2002):33-44.

late Qing era also highlight Cixi as an important participant and decision maker.⁴¹ In terms of the matriarch's role as a practitioner of art, however, the current scholarship does not take us beyond the biased common understanding. Although her large-character calligraphy is generally received as competent, the paintings under the name of the empress dowager are dismissed as either amateur works of her own creation or as stylized images produced by her ghost painters.⁴²

These scholarly endeavors offer details of Cixi's patronage in various media. What is lacking, though, is the exploration of her collective artistic activities in light of the underlying political and gender issues. I believe it is the key to understanding late Qing court art production as well. In order to provide context with solid ground and nuance, it is necessary to embed her artistic activities in the traditions of imperial female patronage. The empress dowager's common and uncommon strategies will therefore emerge and help us clarify how she pictured herself as a female ruler in the cultural sphere.

Artistic patronage was indispensable to Chinese sovereignty. It facilitated rulers' self-promotion and celebrated imperial power. In other words, art was utilized to establish what Jürgen Habermas has termed the sovereign's "representative publicity."⁴³ During the past several decades, studies on Chinese male rulers' patronage have thrived. Avid patrons such as Emperor Huizong 徽宗 of the Northern Song dynasty (r.1100-1125) and Emperor Qianlong of the Qing, to name the two most famous in the galaxy of imperial patrons, have proven of great

⁴¹ Zhang Wei 張威, "Tongzhi Guangxu chao Xiyuan yu Yihe yuan gongcheng sheji yanjiu" 同治光緒朝西苑與頤和園工程設計研究, Ph.D. diss., Tianjin University, 2005.

⁴² Ts'ang Ka Bo, "Receiving Imperial Favor: Paintings by Cixi, the Empress Dowager," *Oriental Art* 35.4 (1989-90): 207-17; Li Shi 李滉, "Cixi kuan huihua ji gongye nü huajia" 慈禧款繪畫及宮掖女畫家, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 191 (1997): 92-99.

⁴³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (New York: The MIT Press, 1991), 5-12.

interest to scholars. The two exhibitions of Qianlong's patronage held in the National Palace Museum in Taipei in 2002 and 2013 are useful references that show how the research of imperial patronage can be systematically framed. The former, "Emperor Ch'ien-lung's Grand Cultural Enterprise" introduced the court art during Qianlong's reign as the fruit of a collective effort headed by the ruler.⁴⁴ The latter took a more personal angle of displaying artworks. The curators traced the trajectory of how the patriarch became a patron and offered a nuanced look at Qianlong's aesthetic practice.⁴⁵ The institutional vis-à-vis personal perspectives are also observed in the scholarship on Emperor Huizong.⁴⁶

The rigidly structured Qing court art institute, Zaoban chu 造辦處 (Imperial Workshops), supervised by the Neiwu fu 內務府 (Department of Imperial Household) marked the zenith of court art in imperial China. Despite its unclear early development, the Qing imperial archives show that the Imperial Workshops was first established during the early years of the Kangxi reign. The various studios were structured into fifteen workshops in 1755 and experienced minimal changes in the years that follow. It was a large institute of several hundreds of artists and craftsmen in responsible for the design, production and maintenance of imperial

⁴⁴ Shi Shou-chien 石守謙 and Feng Ming-chu 馮明珠 ed., *Qianlong huangdi de wenhua daye* 乾隆皇帝的文化大業 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2002).

⁴⁵ Guoli gugong bowuyuan 國立故宮博物院 ed., *Shiquan Qianlong – Qing Gaozong de yishu pinwei* 十全乾隆—清高宗的藝術品味 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2013). For other important catalogs and publications that took similar vantage points, see Chou Ju-shi and Claudia Brown ed., *The Elegant Brush: Chinese Painting under the Qianlong Emperor, 1735-1795* (Phoenix Art Museum, 1985); Chuimei Ho ed., *Splendors of China's Forbidden City: The Glorious Reign of Emperor Qianlong* (London, New York: Merrell, 2004); Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson ed., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).

⁴⁶ For instance, Peter Sturman and Maggie Bickford connected Huizong's commissions of paintings of auspicious omens and creatures with his intention of strengthening his subjects' resolve to combat the Liao State in the north, while Patricia Ebrey associated his cultural activities with the concept of authority and authenticity. Peter Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis*, 20 (1990): 33-68; Maggie Bickford, "Emperor Huizong and the Aesthetic of Agency," *Archives of Asian Art*, LIII (2002-3): 71-104; Patricia Ebrey, *Accumulating Culture: The Collections of Emperor Huizong* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

commissions. The majority of them were selected from the bannermen; accomplished Han Chinese craftsmen in southern provinces and all over the country were summoned to serve in the Imperial Workshops as well.⁴⁷ That the Imperial Workshops belonged to the Department of Imperial Household usually led by princes signifies the domestic role of these craftsmen. Unlike their fellow artists outside of the imperial precincts and in European countries, they were not allowed to create by free will. Whenever the emperor or member of the imperial family made a commission, they were obliged to present drawings or models for imperial approval at every stage towards the completion of the commission.⁴⁸ Satisfying the ruler's wish was their ultimate responsibility. The European Jesuit missionary artists serving in eighteenth-century Qing court felt the impact most dearly. Father Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot's (1718-93) letter of Father Jean-Denis Attiret's (1702-68) stay in Emperor Qianlong's court included a plain description of the lack of respect toward artistic autonomy in the court: "one does only what one is told and does what one is told to the letter. It is not genius that is valued."⁴⁹ It was such absolute power relation that enabled the Qing ruler to illustrate their personae and the characteristics of their sovereignty in art.

By contrast, the assertion of sovereignty by powerful imperial women has attracted little attention regardless of the fact that it is indispensable for understanding critical issues such as the relationship between gender and art production and how imperial women posited and expressed

⁴⁷ Wu Zhaoqing 吳兆清, "Qingdai Zaoban chu de jigou he jiangyi" 清代造辦處的機構和匠役, *Lishi dang'an* 歷史檔案, 4 (1991): 79-86, 89.

⁴⁸ Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Qingdai gongting huihua jigou, zhidu yu huajia" 清代宮廷繪畫機構、制度與畫家, *Meishu yanjiu* 美術研究 3 (1984): 53.

⁴⁹ Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot, Deborah Sommer trans., "A Letter from a Jesuit Painter in Qianlong's Court at Chengde," in James A. Millward, Ruth W. Dunnell, Mark C. Elliott and Philippe Foret eds, *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 177.

themselves in the Confucian patriarchal power structure.⁵⁰ The status quo may be the consequence of Chinese women's unique strategies to function within this structure. As Hui-shu Lee argues, women's self-expressions, such as witty palindromes, might appear inwardly focused, yet through the appreciation of the dominant group, that is, men, women gained the outward power to claim their subjectivity. Such a pattern relied on careful dialogue with the dominant group and proved effective in many cases, but it simultaneously risked masking women's self-expression.⁵¹ If later generations failed to identify women's nuanced self-expression, the traces of their pursuit of subjectivity became obscured by the mists of time.

Religious art was one of the few spheres where imperial women participated with limited censorship from Confucian patriarchy, and it thus became the most studied area. For instance, Empress Feng of the Northern Wei dynasty (d.490), Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 of the Tang dynasty (624-75) and Empress Liu of the Northern Song dynasty (968-1033) all contributed to the construction of Buddhist caves or temples. Their agency appeared in their portrayal of themselves as the leading pious patrons, and in some radical cases their identities were linked to the face of sculpted deities to imply their sacred power.⁵² The strategy of embodying deities

⁵⁰ I single out imperial women to avoid the pitfall of generalizing women's strategies of claiming agency in China. With their prominent socio-political status imperial women enjoyed more resources and at times suffered from more scrutiny. In fact, studies on gentry and courtesan women painters, specifically gentry women, are much more fruitful. See Marsha Weidner et al, *Views for Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indianapolis Museum of Art; New York: Rizzoli, 1988); Marsha Weidner et al., *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990); Tao Yongbai 陶咏白, Li Shi 李滢, *Shiluo de lishi: Zhongguo nüxing huihuashi 失落的歷史: 中國女性繪畫史* (Changsha Shi: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000); He Junhong, *Danqing qipa—Wanming Qingchu de nüxing huihua 丹青奇葩—晚明清初的女性畫家* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2008); Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu 明清閨閣繪畫研究* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008); Cao Qing 曹清, *Xianggui zhuizhen—Ming Qing caiyuan shuhua yanjiu 香閨綴珍—明清才媛書畫研究* (Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2013).

⁵¹ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010) 9.

⁵² Alexander C. Soper, "Imperial Cave-Chapels of the Northern Dynasties: Donors, Beneficiaries, Dates," *Artibus Asiae* 28.4 (1966): 241-70; Dorothy Wong, "Women as Buddhist Art Patrons During the Northerns and Southern

prevailed in later times. Empresses Zhang 張 (1471-1541) and Empress Dowager Li 李 (d.1614) of the Ming dynasty were known for their commissions of religious paintings in which the empresses were depicted as a leading Daoist priest and the newly fabricated Buddhist deity, “Nine-Lotus Bodhisattva” 九蓮觀音, respectively.⁵³

In terms of imperial women who acted as collectors or patrons of fine arts, Empress Yang 楊 (1162 or 1172-1232) of the Southern Song dynasty and the Mongol Princess Sengge Ragi (ca. 1283-1331) of the Yuan dynasty are most renowned examples. The difference in approaches to female patrons is well reflected in the scholarship of these two imperial women. Fu Shen’s descriptive text and listing of Sengge Ragi’s biography and collection was conducted in the late 1980s and still awaits future studies from gender and ethnographic perspectives.⁵⁴ In comparison, Hui-shu Lee conducted nuanced close readings of Empress Yang’s patterns of self-expression. Arguing that the empress’s inscriptions were coupled with the painting she assigned the court painters to produce so as to complete the intimate communication with the emperor, Lee unveiled the gendered message in these elegant flower-and-bird paintings of the Southern Song

Dynasties,” in Wu Hung ed., *Between Han and Tang: Religions, Art, and Archaeology in a Transformative Period* (Beijing: Cultural Relics, 2000), 535-64; Chüan-ying Yan, “The Tower of Seven Jewels and Empress Wu,” *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 22.1 (1987): 1-16; Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 23-68.

⁵³Yu-ping Luk, “Picturing Celestial Certificates in Zhengyi Daoism: A Case Study of the *Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang*,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 3 (2011): 17-48; Marsha Weidner, “Images of the Nine-Lotus Bodhisattva and the Wanli Empress Dowager,” *Chungkuksa yǒngu* 35 (2005): 245-78.

⁵⁴Fu Shen 傅申, *Yuandai huangshi shuhua shoucang shi lue* 元代皇室書畫收藏史略 (Taipei: Gugong bowuyuan, 1981), 3-62. Also see Fu Shen, “Princess Sengge Ragi: Collector of Painting and Calligraphy,” in Marsha Weidner ed., *Flowering in the Shadows*, 55-80. The female collector has not yet attracted scholarly scrutiny for gender issues as Chen Yunru’s article on the collection of the Mongol imperial house still took similar approaches of focusing on the collected items instead of the collector. Chen Yunru 陳韻如, “Mengyuan huangshi de shuhua yishu fengshang yu shoucang” 蒙元皇室的書畫藝術風尚與收藏, in Shi Shou-chien, Ge Wanzhang 葛婉章 eds., *Dahan de shiji: Mengyuan shidai de duoyuan wenhua yu yishu* 大汗的世紀: 蒙元時代的多元文化與藝術 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2001), 266-85.

court art.⁵⁵ Such a vantage point requires cautious investigation to identify the continuous destabilizing pressure that women's agency has exerted upon culture, but it also enables a broadened inquiry about women artists and patrons, female viewers and tastemakers to map out modes of female agency.⁵⁶ As such, Lee's research opened a window to court art during the time as imperial *matronage* instead of *patronage*.⁵⁷

Compared with these women, the comprehensiveness of Cixi's artistic activities distinguishes her patronage from that of her predecessors. In addition to fashion-related crafts such as costume and accessory design or the fine and religious arts in which imperial women were more actively involved, she also participated in architecture and porcelain making, which were rarely conceived of as areas for women's intervention. Unlike Empress Wu, who claimed official sovereignty and became the only female emperor in China's long history, Cixi remained the dowager empress regent and never abandoned her female identity. Such unique status arguably granted her access to all kinds of political and cultural events. But since most of the aforementioned imperial female patrons also served as dowager empress regents, it is critical to

⁵⁵ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 160-218.

⁵⁶ In their introduction to the latest essays on feminist art history, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrad offer a comprehensive review of this trajectory, and essays in the anthology exemplify the new directions as well. "Introduction: Reclaiming Female Agency," *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1-24. The "women and gender in the early modern world" series published by Ashgate also include titles that take similarly broad ranges. See Andrea Pearson ed., *Women and Portraits in Early Moderns Europe: Gender, Agency, Identity* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), Sally Anne Hickson, *Women, Art and Architectural Patronage in Renaissance Mantua: Matrons, Mystics and Monasteries* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

⁵⁷ The term "art matronage" was coined by Wanda Corn in *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage* in 1997. Introducing important female cultural figures such as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875-1942) and Peggy Guggenheim (1898-1979) and their contribution to modern American Art. These "art matrons," according to Corn, used flamboyant behavior (by Victorian standards) to assert cultural authority, and they had distinctly civic, public purposes for their productions. Their house museums made private domains public enterprises. As the definition contains an awareness of dedicating art to the public, which is not as pertinent in Chinese cases, I use the neutral term of "patronage" to refer to Cixi's engagement in art. Wanda Corn, "Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America," in Wanda Corn ed, *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage* (Boston, Mass.: Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997), 9-24.

look for the conditions that enabled Cixi to venture out of the imperial women's conventional comfort zone and initiate an unprecedentedly wide range of art patronage.

However powerful she was, Empress Dowager Cixi was after all a woman. The gender difference has made it so that her patronage is perceived as essentially different from that of an emperor, no matter how similar they looked. Such dynamics remind us of the post-colonial discourses on subaltern mimicry. That is, the subaltern's mimicry effectively resulted in the colonizer's core ambivalence, and thereby threatened his power from the inside and admitted the potential for resistance.⁵⁸ The discourse of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity has helped feminist art historians to discredit the concept of monolithic patriarchal control over women as passive victims, which is reflected in recent studies of female agency in patronage, women artists and taste makers.⁵⁹ Similarly, in mimicking the emperor's art patronage, Cixi successfully claimed her role as a ruler and threatened—in effect overrode—the sovereignty of Emperors Tongzhi and Guangxu. Specifically, this occurred when she included the arts that used to be reserved for male rulers, such as porcelain production and palace construction. What made Cixi's patronage more complex was that although the patterns of imperial patronage were copied, the representations were a disturbing *déjà vu*. Unlike an emperor's self-expressions, in which masculine quality was never a question, Cixi's image making was both masculine and feminine. The complexity not only shook Chinese sovereignty; it also became the signature of the matriarch's artistic activities.

⁵⁸ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 152-60.

⁵⁹ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, introduction to *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, 3.

The abundance of works of art related to Cixi, in contrast to the scarcity of works commissioned or created by Tongzhi and Guangxu, suggests that court art during Cixi's regency primarily functioned at the empress dowager's service. Her comprehensive involvement encompassed works of different materials and scales and made possible an approach that creates balance between the institutional and personal formulas in the study of imperial patronage

A plethora of visual and textual materials are available for research. Most of them are preserved in the museums and archive centers in Beijing. The two Palace Museums in Taipei and Beijing house a sizable number of artworks, while the Nanjing Museum holds some additional pieces. Some crucial works are now in the United States and Canada. The Freer Gallery has collected roughly a hundred of Cixi's photographs, and one of her oil portraits is in the Fogg Museum. Some paintings and calligraphies attributed to Cixi are in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and the Mactaggart Art Museum in Edmonton holds several war paintings commissioned by Cixi. Japan is another country that presumably has quite a number of works of art related to the empress dowager. For instance, the Institute of Advanced Studies on Asia Library in Tokyo University collects 58 drawings and maps the late Qing imperial architects painted.⁶⁰ However, as many of Cixi's photographic portraits, paintings and calligraphy works were presented to individuals, these works are scattered in various private collections and require future investigation. The same situation applies to European collections. As far as I am informed, an official photographic portrait in its original frame is housed in the Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt, and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin hold

⁶⁰ These drawing and maps are open to the public in the institute's database. See <http://kande0.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ap/chinese-archi/index.html>

more than twenty pieces of porcelain wares the empress dowager commissioned in addition to several paintings under her name.⁶¹

In terms of the imperial spaces Cixi renovated and reconfigured, most of them are open to the public and are maintained to appear as they did in the early Republican era. Although the case of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony is less clear (its Republican era inhabitants probably modified certain elements), photographs taken in the late Qing adequately compensate for the discrepancy and reveal details of the interior at the time. A group of more than eighty architectural models in the Palace Museum in Beijing and numerous blueprints of late Qing imperial construction projects in the National Library, also in Beijing, provide a further, rare glimpse of each site's different stages of construction, along with visual records of projects that were never realized.⁶²

Textual records are also critical to reconstructing the intention and process of Cixi's involvement in art. These include official records and memoirs of those who had contact with Cixi, for the empress dowager not only left visual evidence of her dominance of the court art, but her instructions and considerations were recorded in detail thanks to the meticulous Qing imperial recording system. These archives cover both the public and private spheres, including

⁶¹ I am indebted to Dr. Wang Ching-ling, who generously shared the information and showed to me the collection in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin.

⁶² The architectural models and drawings were supposed to be destroyed after the construction projects were completed or terminated, but the architect family secretly kept them, most of which were models of late Qing projects, and sold them during the early Republican era. It was the architectural historian Zhu Qiqian 朱啟鈞 (1871-1964) who first recognized the importance of these materials and collected many of them. However, the majority of these materials have not been published, and the limited access to examining the models also has hindered the research on Chinese imperial architecture. As yet, only one exhibition is dedicated to the late Qing architectural drawings and models, and the National Library is in the midst of digitalizing its collection. See Zhongguo guojia tushuguan 中國國家圖書館 ed., *Qingdai Yangshilei jianzhu tudang zhan* 清代樣式雷建築圖檔展 (Beijing: Zhongguo guojia tushuguan, 2004); Su Pinhong 蘇品紅, "Yangshilei ji Yangshilei tu" 樣式雷及樣式雷圖, *Wenxian* 文獻 2 (1993): 214-25; Gugong bowuyuan yangshifang ketizu 故宮博物院樣式房課題組, "Gugong bowuyuan cang Qingdai Yanshifang tuwen dang'an shulue" 故宮博物院藏清代樣式房圖文檔案述略, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 2 (2001):60-66.

edicts, memoranda of officials, and most importantly the “Documents of the Imperial Workshops in the Department of the Imperial Household” 內務府造辦處活計檔.⁶³ Additionally, memoirs or diaries of officials close to Cixi such as Wong Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830-1904)⁶⁴ and the diary of the Lei 雷 family, who served as the imperial architects, are valuable for studying how her commissions were perceived and executed.⁶⁵ Together the rich visual and textual materials enable a detailed contextualization of Cixi’s patronage unparalleled in the studies of women and art in imperial China.

My chapters are structured concentrically to delineate Cixi’s art patronage. I begin by centering the matriarch’s gendered persona in portraiture, then radiate my explorations to her commissions of attire and daily accessories, her painting and calligraphy, and finally her participation in the renovation and reconstruction of imperial architecture. This structure represents two distinct characteristics of Cixi’s patronage. On the one hand, she masterminded the court setting as a kind of staging. It proceeded from herself as the lead actor to the surrounding props, to performance on an everyday basis, and then to the physical stage where the games of power were played. Each chapter unveils how the empress dowager presented herself as a female ruler in different art media. On the other hand, the structure underlines the blurred hierarchy of arts, which was one of the most distinct features of Cixi’s era. The fine arts of painting and calligraphy yielded prominence to the applied arts of ceramics and textiles, to name

⁶³ This set of documents has only been partially published. None of the post-Qianlong era documents are currently available in published format. I utilized the photocopies of the microfilm housed in the library of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, and the roll/film numbers are included in the footnotes.

⁶⁴ Zhao Zhongfu 趙中孚, ed., *Wong Tonghe riji paiyin ben* 翁同龢日記排印本 (Taipei: Chengwen faxing, 1970).

⁶⁵ The Lei family’s diary is included in the archives of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. See Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan 中國第一歷史檔案館, ed., *Yuanming yuan* 圓明園 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991).

only a few media, in her patronage. The energy and funding invested in the imperial kiln and her textile manufactory were much greater than what was spent on painting commissions and the purchase of masterpieces.

Chapter One, “*Director and Actor: the Last Formidable Empress Dowager,*” reconstructs Cixi’s persona from extant visual and textual materials. Instead of retelling the matriarch’s life story, this chapter focuses on how Cixi manipulated the visual language in the tradition of Chinese imperial portraiture to represent the image of an empress dowager regent – a ruler who was both male and female.⁶⁶

Chapter Two, “*Accoutrements: Attire and Daily Accessories,*” investigates the two most significant craft arts in Cixi’s patronage. While designing one’s attire was not uncommon among imperial women, the matriarch was a trendsetter instead of a follower. I shall look into the new fashions she promoted and examine how they were applied to the designs of the imperial porcelain wares.

Chapter Three, “*Performing High Arts: Production and Use of Painting and Calligraphy,*” looks into the production and use of painting and calligraphy works under Cixi’s name in light of how she illustrated her legitimacy and authority in the fine arts. The choice of specific subject matters and the display of these images are the foci of my analyses.

China’s last formidable empress dowager’s strategies to assert power also fundamentally changed the landscape of imperial space. Chapter Four, “*Stage: Reconstruction and Renovation of Imperial Space,*” considers this issue and scrutinizes its manifestations through the close readings of the reconstruction projects of the Yuanming yuan 圓明園 (Gardens of Perfect

⁶⁶ A part of the third section of this chapter has been published into a journal article. See Ying-chen Peng, “Lingering between Tradition and Innovation: Photographic Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi,” *Ars Orientalis* 43 (2013):157-75.

Brightness) and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony.⁶⁷ Empress Dowager Cixi's feminine and masculine self-expressions, discussed throughout the dissertation, are concluded with the notion of widowhood in the coda.

⁶⁷ A part of the third section of this chapter has been published into a journal article. See Ying-chen Peng, "A Palace of Her Own: Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and the Reconstruction of the Wanchun Yuan," 47-74.

Chapter One

Director and Actor:

Portraits of Cixi

“Cixi did not really want a Western-style portrait of herself, [Hubert Vos] explained, but a symbolical and allegorical composition, more like a monument to commemorate the Empress of China. Personal and dynastic pride dictated that neither she nor the Chinese Empire be depicted as old and decrepit.”

Luke Kwong, “No Shadows,” 43.

The interaction between Hubert Vos and Empress Dowager Cixi signifies the ontological gap between the painter and the sitter. While the painter regarded the truthful depiction of persona critical to a portrait, the sitter demanded an image beyond physiognomy. Vos interpreted Cixi’s request to mean that a portrait of her should be the embodiment of the empire, both youthful and energetic. Was it so? China’s last formidable empress dowager indeed had a strong interest in portraiture. Her portraits are the most numerous among Chinese imperial women. In addition to commissioning traditional portraits in the genre of *xingle tu* 行樂圖 which depicted the imperial figure at leisure, the matriarch also ventured into new media, oil and photographic portraits, from 1903 onward. At least eight paintings, thirty-one kinds of photographs, and four oil portraits painted by Katharine A. Carl (1865-1938) and Hubert Vos are extant today. The ink and color paintings include six hanging scrolls housed in the Palace Museum, Beijing,¹ an illustration possibly inserted into a transcribed Buddhist sutra published in

¹ This chapter covers five portraits. The sixth work is for ritual purpose and is not discussed here. For the reproduction of the ritual portrait, see Yuan Hongqi et al., *Cixi taihou: shenghuo yishu*, 22.

Zong Fengying's article,² and a hanging scroll published in Isaac T. Headland's memoir.³ Not all the photographic portraits have been published, but Lin Jing's studies of the extant prints and the "Inventory of the Imperial Portraits" 聖容帳 show that there are as many as thirty-one different kinds of Cixi's photographic portraits.⁴ In terms of the oil portraits, in addition to Vos's two portraits, Carl claimed that she had painted four portraits for the matriarch, but only two remain today.⁵ Together they form a kaleidoscope of Cixi's images: she is an imperial consort, a matriarch, and even Guanyin in these portraits. The robust variety of subject, style, and composition suggest that the sitter's self-expressions were more intricate than Vos's understanding.

The surface of a portrait is where the sitter's likeness and persona converge; therefore, the painted portrait is not only an artwork but also the sitter's painted biography. In Chinese imperial portraiture, the commissioner had absolute authority to supervise the portrait painter, and thus, in principle, the finished work is the visual demonstration of the sitter's subjective self-

² Zong Fengying 宗鳳英, "Cixi de xiao zhizao: Qihua guan" 慈溪的小織造：綺華館, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 161 (1997): 53.

³ See Issac T. Headland, *Court Life in China*, fig.1.

⁴ Lin Jing 林京, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian* 故宮藏慈禧照片 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2001), 16, 19, 23. While the traditional portraits remain understudied due to their inaccessibility, Cixi's photographic portraits have been reproduced and circulated widely without the court's authorization since her death in 1908. Unauthorized prints of Cixi's photo portraits appeared in publications soon after these photographs were taken. The Shanghai-based publishing house Youzheng shuju 有正書局 advertised its book of famous rulers of the world, with Cixi's photo portrait included, in the newspaper *Eastern Times* 時報 on June 12, 1904. The channel through which the publishing house obtained Cixi's photo portraits is unclear, but it is very likely related to the Yu family who was directly involved in the photo-shooting project. Its members kept negatives and prints of Cixi's photographs and donated or sold them to collections in the United States. For instance, the prints housed in the special collection of the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as the collections of negatives in the Freer Gallery of Art, both came from Yu Deling's family. See Cheng-hua Wang, "'Going Public': Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi, Circa 1904," 120, 150.

⁵ Katharine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, xxi; Wang Laiyin 汪萊茵, *Gugong jiuwen yihua* 故宮舊聞憶話 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1986), 178.

presentation. Such power relations were especially prominent in the Qing court art, which the ruler utilized with the assistance of his/her advisors, to visualize the desired rulership.⁶ The only exception was the production of the emperor's posthumous portrait, which was usually directed by his successor or surviving spouses.⁷ Likewise, Cixi wielded absolute mastery over her portraits, with the control of the portrait painters and the photographer reduced to a minimum. In this regard, the sheer number of her autobiographic portraits becomes the raw material for studying this imperial woman's own voice, which has been buried under commentaries and anecdotes based on political or commercial agendas.

Most writings on Cixi's portraits, however, only read the surface. Some emphasize her extraordinarily luxurious attire and accessories; others merely introduce the images as snapshots of her private life.⁸ While recent research on the empress dowager's portraits has unveiled the rich potential for interpreting these portraits beyond their surfaces, they still leave unresolved the fundamental question of why Cixi adopted certain poses in the portraits. From where do these portraits take their inspiration? What images did the sitter project onto the portraits? Bolstered by recent scholarly achievement, this chapter scrutinizes the visual language and function of the empress dowager's portraits. In the sections that follow I shall trace the trajectory of Cixi's

⁶ Maxwell Hearn, "Qing Imperial Portraiture," in *Shōzō: Kokusai kōryō bijutsushi kenkyūkai dairokkai shinpojiamu*, ed. Department of Aesthetics and Art History, Faculty of Letters, Kyoto University (Kyoto: Kokusai Kōryū Bijutsushi Kenkyūkai, 1987), 108.

⁷ For instance, Cixi and her coregent Ci'an commissioned several posthumous portraits of Emperor Xianfeng in 1863. The procedures were well documented in NZHD, Box No. 35_131_583.

⁸ See Wang Laiyin 汪萊茵, *Qingong cang zhao tanbi* 清宮藏照探秘 (Taipei: Huangguan chubanshe, 1997), 39; Zong Fengying 宗鳳英, "Cixi de xiao zhizao – Qihua guan" 慈禧的小織造—綺華館, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 161 (1996): 42-55.; Liu Beisi 劉北汜 and Xu Qixian 徐啟憲 eds., *Gugong zhengcang renwu zhaopian huicui* 故宮珍藏人物照片薈萃 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1994).

image making in conjunction with her life cycle.⁹ Section One explores the spectrum of the empress dowager's gendered self-presentation. Section Two focuses on Cixi's portraits in the guise of Guanyin. The last section centers on the visual construction on the last stage of her regency and scrutinizes the visual construction of the image of Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire.

1.1 A Spectrum of Gendered Representation

In Qing imperial portraiture imperial consorts and rulers were represented in separate visual languages. While subject matters and motifs implying the sitter's heroic and intelligent quality, such as archery and reading, were chosen to depict the former, the latter were conventionally represented in a garden or palace scene to emphasize their domesticity. The portrait of a female ruler, however, did not belong to either category. The only example before Cixi's time was Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang 孝莊 (1613-1688), who was the regent to Emperors Shunzhi 順治 (r.1644-1661) and Kangxi 康熙 (r.1662-1722). Her portrait *Empress Xiaozhuang Wen in Day Robe*, now in the collection of Palace Museum in Beijing, revealed the tendency of de-sexualization. Seated squarely on the throne, the sitter's feminine quality was downplayed due to her shaved head and plain yellow robe. The religious piety is rather the focus of this portrait as she holds a string of red rosary (fig.1.1).¹⁰ Cixi's self-expression was more

⁹ Several segments of this chapter have been published in *Ars Orientalis* in 2013. Ying-chen Peng, "Lingering Between Tradition and Innovation: Photographic Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi," *Ars Orientalis* 43 (2013): 157-75

¹⁰ Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang was from the Mongolian clan of Khorchin 科爾沁. As a regent, she assisted Emperors Shunzhi and Kangxi; as a pious disciple of Tibetan Buddhism, she was an important patron of Buddhism. The empress dowager sponsored the Buddhist temples in Mount Wutai 五臺山, and in 1667, she initiated the project

complicated. On the one hand, the imperial portraiture had developed into a complex genre during the eighteenth century, from which various elements were available for adoption and adaptation. On the other hand, Cixi revealed a strong interest in representing herself as a female ruler in her portraits, and she took inspiration from the portraits of both emperors and imperial consorts and experimented with a spectrum of gendered representation.

Juxtaposition of masculine and feminine elements

The strong motivation to gain power in the sphere of politics made Cixi familiar with the patterns of power exhibition in visual forms, exemplified in the three early portraits. A unique hybridity of femininity and masculinity was achieved by adopting metaphors suggesting a ruler's quality in her seemingly conventional portraits. If Tongzhi's ascension to the throne legitimized Cixi's advancement to the junior empress dowager, it was the ability to read and write that contributed to securing her regency. Cixi's conversation with Qu Hongji in her later years revealed the matriarch's early interest in learning politics and administration, and Xianfeng might have allowed her to be involved in his office chores:

我十八歲入宮，文宗顯皇帝在宮內辦事時，必謹侍立，不敢旁竊窺，一無所曉。後軍務倥傯，摺件極繁，文宗常令清檢裁簡，事略知分類。

I entered the imperial harem at the age of eighteen *sui*. When the late Emperor Wenzong [Xianfeng] administered in the inner court, I always stood and served carefully. I did not

of transcribing *Longzang Sutra* 龍藏經, the Tibetan version of *Ganggyur Sutra* 甘珠爾經. It marked the beginning of the Qing imperial support of the transcription of the *Chinese Buddhist Canon* or *Dazang jing* 大藏經, the total body of Buddhist literature deemed canonical. For Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang's biography and her patronage of Buddhism, see Chuang Chi-fa 莊吉發, "Yidai huanghou Bumubutai" 一代皇后布木布泰, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 113 (1992):86-95; Li Baowen 李保文, "Cong 'Zongguan Neiwu fu dang'an' shushuo taihuang taihou Tufan tewen nijin xieben 'Ganzhuer jing' de xiuzao" 從「總管內務府檔案」述說太皇太后吐蕃特文泥金寫本《甘珠爾經》的修造, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 28.4 (2011): 133-85; Li Shixuan 林士鉉, "Yuancang 'Longzang jing' yu Qingchu Man Meng lianyin-jianshu Xiaozhuang huanghou de zhengjiao taidu" 院藏《龍藏經》與清初滿蒙聯姻一兼談孝莊皇后的政教態度, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 341 (2011):116-27.

dare to peek over from aside, [thus] I knew nothing [about politics]. Later on the military affairs became urgent and complicated, and the amount of memorials were tremendous. Emperor Wenzong often asked me to count, check and summarize [memorials]. Consequently I gained some idea of the classification [of official documents].¹¹

Literacy and political ambition thus marked the most distinct differences between Ci'an and Cixi. The former, Xianfeng's first wife, enjoyed but was not interested in the legal authority granted to her position in the patrilineal family structure. Although she also wielded the brush on the New Year, no evidence shows that Ci'an was fond of any literary activities.¹² Xianfeng's second wife, the self-appointed junior empress dowager, in contrast had to seize authority through political maneuvers. Be it anxiety or pride, as Wang Cheng-hua pointed out, Cixi manipulated masculine metaphors such as an opened book, playing the *go* game, and smoking snuff in her portraits to demonstrate the political power she wielded.¹³ These details did not significantly change the composition of a typical imperial consort's portrait, but they were in effect important indicators of Cixi's experiment of visualizing her capability to play the role of a male ruler.

Reading was the first element Cixi borrowed from the emperor's portrait. There are two portraits of young Cixi and Ci'an, both likely to have been produced during the Tongzhi reign.¹⁴ The former is untitled but recorded as *Portrait of Empress Xiaoqin Xian* 孝欽顯皇后像, whilst the latter has the colophon *cizhu yanqing* 慈竹延清, "benevolent bamboo and extended clarity," and is named as such (fig.1.2, 1.3). The similarity in composition and painting style of these two portraits is the product of the standardized production of Qing imperial portraiture. In such

¹¹ Qu Hongji, *Shengde jilüe*, 10-11.

¹² Writing auspicious characters for the New Year's decoration was the only occasion where Ci'an is documented writing. I will discuss this activity further in Chapter Three.

¹³ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 6-10.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 6-7.

portraits of imperial consorts, the sitter sits or stands before a balustrade, a large scholar's rock and bamboo. She often wears a day robe and fashions her hair into the horizontally styled signature look of Manchu women, *yizi tou* 一字頭, which was popular during the mid-and late-Qing dynasty. The tally is the shape of the character *yi* 一, "one." Sometimes she holds a fan, but most often she remains empty handed.

Such standardization left little room for the sitter's individual persona and thus makes the portrait little more than an item in a pictorial inventory of the imperial family. The portrait of Emperor Daoguang's 道光 (r.1821-50) Empress Xiaoshen 孝慎 (1790-1833) is a typical example of such portraits (fig.1.4). It also suggests that the composition remained nearly unchanged up until Cixi's time. Ci'an's portrait largely follows this convention. Except for her face, the only personal attribute is the peony—as king of all flowers, it matched her prestigious status—painted to her right side. Another portrait, titled after the colophon *xuanwei riyong* 璇闈日永, "may the [dweller in the] palace of beautiful jade enjoys the longest daylight," represents the same compositional conventions as well.¹⁵ Overall, Ci'an's simple day robes, the portrait titles, which allude to birthday greetings to a female senior in the family, and Tongzhi's calligraphy and seals complete the intimate and domestic aura of her images. Interestingly, Cixi's portraits bear no trace of her son. Tongzhi never appeared in the same picture as her, and to my knowledge Tongzhi did not write a colophon as we see on Ci'an's portraits, for his birth mother either. Her portraits thus display a strong focus on the sitter and appear to be more personal than familial.

¹⁵ For the reproduction of this portrait, see Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan wenxianguang 國立北平故宮博物院 ed., *Qingdai dihou xiang* 清代帝后像 (Beijing: Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan, 1931), 55.

The most unusual difference from *Portrait of Empress Xiaoqin Xian* lies in the opened book on the table. Although the portrait follows the common composition of the imperial consorts' portraits, the sitter is not appreciating the garden scene but taking a break from reading (fig.1.2). Reading was a popular subject in Chinese portraiture and beauty painting alike. A woman engaged in reading could signify her intellectual accomplishment, but more often than not the depiction had amorous undertones.¹⁶ Cixi might have been influenced by this convention, but her primary inspiration came from Emperor Kangxi.

Kangxi was an enthusiastic supporter of science and scholarly learning. He not only laid the foundation of the Qing Empire's prosperity in the eighteenth century but also standardized Qing imperial portraiture. Although small in number, each of his portraits became a model for his successors.¹⁷ The subject of studying was one among them. *Emperor Kangxi Writing in Daily Robe* 康熙帝便裝寫字像, in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, undoubtedly belongs to the category of allegorical portraiture. It is an image combining elements of ritual portraits and the *xingletu* genre of imperial figures at leisure. The screen, chair, and desk are depicted like a set on stage against an elaborate carpet and blank background, which are standard in imperial ritual portraits. Rather than sitting rigidly on the throne, the sitter acts as though he is about to write. The action of writing is thereby integrated into the system of visualized imperial authority that is already vividly represented in the dragon on the screen and the standard background of imperial portraiture (fig.1.5).¹⁸ This subject was soon codified and appeared in

¹⁶ It is not the painted book per se but its title or content that was a trope of amorous implication. A good example is one of the twelve beauty paintings Emperor Yongzhen commissioned before ascending to the throne (fig.1.12). The woman is depicted reading a love poem, which was clearly written on the picture surface.

¹⁷ Wang Qi 汪元, "Kangxi huangdi xiaoxianghua ji xiangguan wenti" 康熙皇帝肖像畫及相關問題, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 1 (2004): 56-57.

¹⁸ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 8.

the portraits of every Qing emperor, including Tongzhi and Guangxu.¹⁹ Although no direct evidence proves that Cixi requested a book in her portrait, Qing court painters never painted without the commissioner's approval, and it is certain that she was aware of this adjustment, which transformed her from an average imperial consort into a literate, intelligent imperial woman who knew how to rule.

Cixi's second manipulation of the imperial portrait was to include the subject of playing the game *go*. Like Kangxi's writing portrait, *Cixi Playing Go* 慈禧弈棋像 is also an allegorical portrait. Earlier publications usually described it as a depiction of Cixi's private life (fig.1.6A).²⁰ But the unusual subject and the identity of her company, the Manchu nobleman in a blue robe, suggest the opposite interpretation. Unlike other portraits in which the sitter occupied the center of the picture, the two figures here yield the visual focus to the table where the game takes place. *Go* was a common symbol of competing political powers in portraiture, and the players were always the same gender. Since no record shows that Cixi was fond of this literati activity, the portrait is unlikely to be a literal depiction of Empress Dowager Cixi at leisure.

The identity of the Manchu nobleman has not been determined. Wang Cheng-hua was the first to question the Palace Museum's inventory title that identified the man as Emperor Xianfeng. She compared the figure's facial features with Tongzhi's and claimed that they both had smaller mouths and high cheekbones. The male figure used the black stones, which was conventional for the junior or inexperienced player in the game. Furthermore, the accessories the man wore also appeared in a portrait of Tongzhi, which, she argued, also helped to identify this

¹⁹ For their portraits, see Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan wenxianguang ed., *Qingdai dihou xiang*, 68, 71.

²⁰ For instance, the caption of for *Cixi taihou: shenghuo yishu* described the painting as the representation of Cixi in her leisure time and left the identity of the Manchu nobleman unexplained. Yuan Hongqi et al., *Cixi taihou: shenghuo yishu*, 88.

man.²¹ The facial resemblance between the mysterious man in blue and Tongzhi is indeed noticeable, but a closer look reveals that Cixi's company had a mature man's face (fig.1.7, 1.6B). Since Tongzhi died at the age of 19 *sui* (18 years old) and no example in Chinese imperial portraiture depicted the sitter considerably older than his/her actual age, I would like to suggest that the man in question could be Prince Gong, whose facial features also shared similarities with the man in the portrait (fig.1.8).

Another detail that argues against Wang's identification lies in Cixi's clothes. Unlike *Portrait of Empress Xiaozhen*, in which she is in a dark brown day robe, here she wears a light purple riding jacket and dark blue skirt. As I will articulate in the next chapter, Qing widows, Han Chinese and Manchu alike, had limited choices of colors for their clothes. Dark blue and purple were most common, and the two empress dowagers wore these two colors in their early portraits. It is unlikely that Cixi would go against the convention so openly under the looming ritual superiority of Ci'an, who appeared to be a rigid follower of the widow's dress code in her portraits. There is thus a strong possibility that this portrait was commissioned after Ci'an's death in 1881. Under such circumstance, Cixi's *go* mate can only be a nobleman prestigious enough to compete with Cixi.

Despite being divested of his title of Prince of the Deliberative Council in 1865, Prince Gong remained the most powerful political figure under the two dowager empress regents, and Cixi was a strong supporter of his Westernization policies. It was not until 1884 that she utilized the Qing government's military entanglement with French forces in Vietnam to fundamentally expel Prince Gong from the Council of State. If, as Wang convincingly argued, playing *go* was a

²¹ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 8-10.

representation rich with political symbolism, the painting was most likely commissioned between 1881 and 1884, before Prince Gong's fall.

Cixi's dominance over her company is clearly represented in the composition. Motifs of pine and rocks enrich the visual elements on her side and attract the viewer's attention. The pine tree partially frames her and extends to the man's head. The foreground is planted with orchid, which, as I will analyze presently, had strong association with the empress dowager. These elements, together with the dynamics between the two figures, imply that the portrait was likely her commission. Compared to the explicit expression of authority in her later portraits, however, this work represents a subtle power struggle between the two figures. The invisible tension is cleverly depicted in the disguise of a developing game. A blossoming peony planted in a vessel decorated with two dragons is placed before the table, signifying the authority and prosperity that the two players share. Cixi holds the white stone, while the man holds the black and is ready to make the next move. The two players seem to match each other's skill. The man with the black stone takes an aggressive position on the upper left corner but is not well defended, while the white stones are endangered on the lower right corner, depending on how the player with the black stones takes his next step (fig.1.6C). Yet, it is clear that this player has already lost the upper left corner, and we can never know if his next move will take over the lower right corner.²²

The third symbol Cixi borrowed is the gesture of snuffing. She embedded it in *Cixi in Ceremony Garment* 慈禧吉服像 (fig.1.9), an elaborately decorated portrait possibly produced for a birthday celebration. Wearing a ceremonial garment, she sits in the courtyard surrounded by objects bearing auspicious symbols. The pine tree extending over her head and the peaches

²² My interpretation of the game of *go* stands on the logic that although Cixi might not have known how to play *go*, it is hard to believe that the court painter would make a random display of a game of *go* on an imperially commissioned painting. I am grateful to Mr. Lin Yung-jun, who kindly deciphered the game for me.

on the white jade tray are both common symbols of longevity; the butterfly patterns on the rectangular basin and flowerpot carry the same meaning as well. The portrait is also a celebration of power. There are two symbols of power on the table: the *ruyi* 如意, an s-shaped ornament usually made of jade, and the snuff bottle; both appear in the portraits of Qing emperors from time to time.²³

Snuff was introduced to China during the seventeenth century. It was once an exotic, luxurious product circulated among the imperial clan, high officials, and wealthy merchants, but it became more common at the end of the eighteenth century.²⁴ The snuff bottle also became a symbol for the powerful in mid- to late-Qing imperial portraiture. It is depicted in the portraits of Emperors Daoguang, Xianfeng, and Tongzhi (fig.1.7) and even in a portrait of Daoguang's beloved Empress Xiaquan 孝全 (1808-40).²⁵ But what is striking in Cixi's portrait is that she poses as if to smoke the snuff powder, which represents a more assertive gesture. There was a gender difference in the custom of smoking in Qing China. While snuff was popular among men, women smoked from a water pipe instead.²⁶ Cixi smoked, but according to her maids she only smoked the water pipe.²⁷ A similar representation of such gender difference is witnessed in a family portrait of a late Qing Manchu nobleman (fig.1.10). The matriarch shares the table with

²³ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxian 'gongkai hua'," 7.

²⁴ Carol Benedict, *Golden-Silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1550-2010* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011), 111-19.

²⁵ For the reproduction of the portraits of the Daoguang and Xianfeng emperors as well as Empress Xiaquan, see Gugong bowuyuan 故宫博物院 ed., *Qingshi tudian: Qingchao tongshi tulu* 清史圖典：清朝通史圖錄 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002), vol. 9, 14, vol. 10, 79.

²⁶ Professor Jonathan Hay kindly shared his research on snuff bottles with me and informed me about the gender division in smoking.

²⁷ Jin Yi, Shen Yiling, *Gongnü tanwan lu*, 70.

the young decedent. A water piper sits by her side, while her male descendant makes a gesture of tipping the snuff dish that is also seen in Tongzhi's portrait (fig.1.7).

In this regard, the act of sniffing the snuff powder signifies masculinity in Cixi's birthday portrait, moving the portrait away from the conventional image of imperial women and making it comparable with powerful men. But it does not mean that the sitter abandoned her feminine qualities. Feminine beauty was her lifetime pursuit, and she constantly celebrated it in the portraits. While tipping the snuff powder with her left hand, Cixi pinches a branch of orchid in her right hand (fig.1.9B). Orchids not only symbolize purity and aloofness for both genders; it also resonates with Cixi's first title "Worthy Lady Orchid." It is not uncommon in Chinese portraiture for a gentleman to be depicted holding a certain plant or flower that matches his persona, but the implication changes drastically if the portrayed subject is a woman. As James Cahill argued, in a beauty painting the figure's specific gesture and the things she holds, such as a bergamot and a flower, "are coded invitations ... for male viewing."²⁸ Being an imperial widow meant that pleasing the male gaze was both unnecessary and inappropriate. Moreover, since Cixi's portrait was made for a different reason and displayed in a same context different from beauty painting, in which the painted woman is merely an object of desire, her image was immune from such interpretation. Instead of inviting the male gaze, the orchid was rather a device to celebrate her triumph in the competition among Emperor Xianfeng's consorts. After all, she was the *orchid* that the emperor held in hand. Were it not for the imperial favor that had enabled her to conceive Emperor Tongzhi Cixi would not have advanced to the status of empress dowager regent. The orchid she pinched, therefore, was not only a flower but also a prop of self-

²⁸ James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 32-33.

identification. Now, with the ultimate power and authority, she was no longer handled by anyone else but herself.²⁹

The appropriation of suggestive postures in the genre of beauty painting or *shinü hua* 仕女畫 is also observed in Cixi's portraits. She made poses considered improper for women of good social standing, but her prestigious status and age transcend the negative connotations and conversely reflect new meanings on them. This strategy was most apparent in her later years, especially in the photographic portraits. These photographs were mostly taken in 1903, the year the matriarch celebrated her seventieth birthday.³⁰ In addition to holding her emblem orchid in several photographs, her other appropriation is no less assertive. In one photograph Cixi returns to her core identity as the matriarch of the inner and outer courts (fig.1.11). The empress dowager sits on the throne, crossing her right leg over her knee and leaning on the cushion, while her sparkling, vigilant eyes look purposefully aside. The posture was considered inappropriate for wellborn women because it exposed the contours of the body. The *Classics for Daughters* 女兒經, a popular textbook for woman's education since the sixteenth century, admonishes that “a lopsided posture and crossed legs harm your dignity; showing your face outside the household

²⁹ I would like to thank Professor Lothar von Falkenhausen's insight of pushing the interpretation of orchid to the bodily dynamics between Xianfeng and Cixi.

³⁰ Clare Roberts stated that the photographs were taken to celebrate Cixi's seventieth birthday. But, as I will explain in the next section, the photographer was initially hired as a side project of the St. Louis oil portrait. Some of the photographs were indeed taken in front of the birthday ceremony venues, but I do not think they were purposefully for the birthday. Roberts especially mentioned the photograph of Cixi and foreign women friends, arguing that the rich symbols of longevity in these photographs imply that they were taken at an audience to commemorate the empress dowager's birthday. But the evidence is rather indirect. The audience was not recorded in the guests' memoirs. Other longevity-related symbols were popular elements in the Qing material culture and were not necessarily decorations for Cixi's birthday. Therefore, these photographs are at best the visual records of the ceremonial ambience in the court rather than the products of Cixi's seventieth-birthday celebration. Clare Roberts, “The Empress Dowager's Birthday: The Photographs of Cixi's Long Life Without End,” *Ars Orientalis* 43 (2013): 186-7.

ruins your reputation” 身歪腳斜傷體面，拋頭露面壞聲名。³¹ This notion persisted into the twentieth century, as even modern women of the Republican era had to negotiate the proper style of crossing their legs in public.³²

Due to this posture's heavy emphasis on the body, painters used it extensively to stimulate desire in male viewers. The motif was so firmly codified that a cross-legged beauty portrayed adjacent to a love poem was enough to create a highly exotic atmosphere. In the set of twelve lovelorn beauties commissioned by Prince Yinzhen 胤禛 (later Emperor Yongzheng 雍正, reigned 1722-35), for example, one painting depicts a lady reading by a table with her legs crossed (fig.1.12). The love poem on the opened page of her book, a courtesan's passionate poem to her lover during the Tang dynasty (618–907),³³ bespeaks the lady's longing for her own beloved. If the posture is combined with provocative elements, such as a partially exposed female body and objects with sexual implications (bergamot, for instance), the image can be further transformed into an erotic painting.³⁴

Cixi certainly did not assume the cross-legged pose out of ignorance. Unlike most Manchu women, she was educated and well aware of the importance of self-cultivation, and her literary and artistic talents created opportunities for her to stay close to Emperor Xianfeng.³⁵ As

³¹ (Ming) Anonymous, “Nüer jing” 女兒經, in Wang Wenbao 王文寶 ed, *Zhongguo ertong qimeng mingzhu tonglan* 中國兒童啓蒙名著通覽 (Beijing: Zhongguo shaonian ertong chubanshe, 1997), 1046-47. For a study of this text, see Xiong Xianjun 熊賢君, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu shi* 中國女子教育史 (Taiyuanshi: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 132-34.

³² Francesca Dal Lago, “Crossed Legs in 1930s Shanghai: How ‘Modern’ the Modern Woman?” *East Asian History* 19 (2000): 107-108, 11.

³³ Wu Hung, “Beyond Stereotypes: The Twelve Beauties in Qing Court Art and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*,” in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 358-59.

³⁴ For examples of such images, see James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 177, 179.

³⁵ Wang Cheng-hua, “Zouxiang ‘gongkai hua’,” 8.

a learned woman, Cixi must have known the general negative and erotic perception of the cross-legged pose. Indeed, the posture is admittedly more relaxed than sitting upright, and it might have made it easier for the aged empress dowager to stay still during the long exposure time, yet the sitter's body language and facial expression do not show signs of resting. Cixi is aware of the camera. Her body does not collapse into full resting position. Nothing erotic can be discerned from the image. What is captured, however, is a commanding matriarch ready to confront the male gaze.

When this photograph was taken, the imperial matriarch, at the age of sixty-nine or seventy, had surpassed the constraints associated with marriage and childbearing. Whether her pose was appropriate or not was no longer an issue. Cixi was able to derive inspiration from popular representations of women and transcend the erotic aspects of these postures, transforming them into an expression of her matriarchal power. Her photograph with the entourage best illustrates this attitude (fig.1.13). The empress dowager crosses her legs and holds in her right hand the emblematic orchid. Surrounded by the young ladies-in-waiting, the heroine does not at all appear sensuous or seductive. It is rather a portrait of the matriarch of the inner quarters, a private celebration of her authority in the domestic sphere.

Mirrored female agency

Advancing a traditional subject was another kind of self-expression in Cixi's portraits. The image of her gazing into a hand mirror marks the epitome of such appropriation (fig.1.14A). The background setting and the banner are the same as the formal photographic portraits (fig.0.2A), but the spittoon and tissue paper on the throne lend a sense of intimacy to the image and also imply that the sitter did not pose for a formal occasion. Standing in front of the throne,

Cixi supports her right elbow on a tall stand covered with a cloth that was presumably from Europe, and she holds a mirror in her right hand. She has a pin decorated with a flower in her left hand while she looks narcissistically at her reflection in the hand mirror. Her two prominent nail protectors point to the banner, as if to direct the viewer to associate the sitter with her full honorary title displayed overhead. Cixi also assumed the same pose openly before the camera lens, an action that goes against the common idea of the daily toilette being a private matter. For instance, she took the mirror-looking pose among the entourage at the Paiyun men 排雲門 (Gate of Dispelling Clouds) of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony (fig.1.15). Whereas all the women look straight at the lens, Cixi gazes enthusiastically into the hand mirror.

In fact, Cixi acts out a common subject that has a long history in literature and visual culture.³⁶ Looking at one's own reflection is a crucial step for self-identification. By extension, it can also imply narcissism.³⁷ With the popularity of the cult of *qing* 情, "sentiment," in the Ming and Qing cultural spheres, a more positive perspective emerged toward representing the female self. Women no longer looked into a mirror merely to lament their loneliness or to adorn themselves for their beloved. A mirror became a device to assert agency when women incorporated it into their own images, as the novel *The Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) exemplifies.³⁸ Before the death of the hero, his lovelorn heroine, Du Liniang 杜麗娘, painted an idealized self-portrait that played a critical role in uniting her with

³⁶ Peng Ying-chen 彭盈真, "Guying zilian? Qiantan Cixi taihou de liangzhang zhaopian" 顧影自憐? 淺談慈禧太后的兩張照片, *Zijincheng* 紫禁城 188 (2010): 70-75.

³⁷ Diana T. Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.

³⁸ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 27–31. For the detailed discussion of *The Peony Pavilion* and female subjectivity, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 68-114.

her dream lover Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅. A seventeenth-century illustration of this episode, “Sketching a Likeness” 寫真, follows the story and demonstrates the difference between Liniang and her idealized self-portrait (fig.1.16).³⁹ Looking into a mirror thus becomes a representation of the heroine’s control of her own fate, even if it was limited. Were it not for Mengmei’s discovery and preservation of the portrait, her roaming soul would not come back to life. Interestingly, similar depictions of famous women painting self-portraits emerged around the same time.⁴⁰ The phenomenon could be related to the popularity of *The Peony Pavilion*, but overall it indeed helped to reinforce the positive aspect of the mirror-looking subject.

By the time these photographs of Cixi were taken, poignant representations of women’s subjectivity had become quite common in literature and theatrical performances.⁴¹ Therefore, it is by no means surprising to find Cixi taking the symbolism of the mirror one step further.⁴² She looks into a mirror for no one but herself, and she holds full control over her images, including composition, pose, and audience. The dynamics between the empress dowager and the photographer explain such fundamental control. According to Yu Deling, Cixi was displeased at the first photo shooting because the photographer Yu Xunling did not notify her before he

³⁹ Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600–1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 18.

⁴⁰ For instance, *Unique Beauties of Ten Thousand Autumns* 千秋絕艷圖, a handscroll formerly attributed to Qiu Ying 仇英 (ca. 1494–1552) but in effect a Qing copy, includes the image of Xue Yuan 薛媛 (act. 9th century) painting a self-portrait. For the reproduction of this segment, see Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe 天津人民美術出版社 ed., *Zhongguo lidai shiniuhua ji* 中國歷代仕女畫集 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998), 142-43.

⁴¹ *The Peony Pavilion* was adapted to various popular plays throughout the Qing dynasty, while the female characters in the eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢 became common subjects in nineteenth-century visual culture. See Zhongguo Guojia Tushuguan, ed., *Guben Honglou meng chatu huihua jicheng* 古本紅樓夢插圖繪畫集成 (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian weisuo fuzhi zhongxin, 2001).

⁴² It is unclear from which play or novel Cixi drew inspiration to assume this pose, but it does not impede the discussion of how she utilized the metaphor of the mirror to claim female agency.

pressed the shutter and therefore captured her making a serious face. She commanded that he should always inform her thereafter.⁴³ Although scholars have cautioned that Yu Deling's memoirs are a mixture of facts and fabricated stories,⁴⁴ her account about this incident is possibly true. She recorded that Cixi sat on the sedan chair to take her first photographs, and there are indeed matching prints in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Palace Museum, Beijing.⁴⁵ Therefore, this communication between the empress dowager and her photographer might well have occurred.

Such absolute power makes Cixi's photographic portraits similar to self-portraits: Xunling's role was reduced to the hand following the sitter's order to press the shutter. It should be noted that Cixi's self-portrait was in effect as idealized as that of Du Liniang. Whereas the glass-plate negatives and prints housed in the Archives of the Freer Gallery of Art show the original image, the prints preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing were retouched and thus show a younger and wrinkle-free face of the sitter (fig.1.14B, 1.17). Retouching was a common practice in photography at that time, and in the context of Cixi's project she likely kept, appreciated, and displayed the retouched prints. Representing her in a realistic yet idealized manner, these images became a part of the empress dowager's celebration of her womanly identity.

⁴³ Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 219-20.

⁴⁴ Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, "Deling, Rongling suo zhu shu zhong de shishi cuowu" 德齡、容齡所著書中的史實錯誤, *Gugong tuishi lu* 故宮退食錄 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2000), 467-503.

⁴⁵ For the reproduction of the print housed in the Palace Museum, Beijing, see Lin Jing, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 19.

1.2 Matriarch of Secular and Sacred Worlds

In addition to paintings of domestic activities, Cixi also commissioned a great number of portraits related to her religious practice. The practice falls within the orbit of imperial women's art patronage, but the images are revolutionary in their allegorical implication. Depicting Cixi as Guanyin, they represent the sitter more than a matriarch. They are more complicated than the popular interpretations of either the icon of patriarchal sovereignty or the feminine spice to the sitter's masculine social and political identity.⁴⁶ Yuhang Li's nuanced contextualization of Cixi's Guanyin images from the religious perspective, for example, illuminated the unique theatricality the empress dowager brought into the Guanyin cult.⁴⁷ In the same vein, Cheng-hua Wang read these portraits from the tradition of Qing imperial portraiture, and precisely identified these Guanyin images as reflective of the sitter's triple identity as matriarch, ruler, and Buddhist deity.⁴⁸

Indeed religion had been a popular tool for strengthening political authority in China. Rulers often addressed divinity by claiming to be the incarnation of a powerful deity. Cixi was no exception. But exactly how did these portraits satisfy Cixi's complex identities? Following the loosely outlined Guanyin iconography in the portraits the two scholars observed, I shall look into the same body of material from the tradition of embodying deities among imperial women and the purposeful display of symbols and objects in Cixi's Guanyin images.

⁴⁶ Lydia Liu, "The Secret of Her Greatness," 162-64; Laikwan Pang, "Photography, Performance, and the Making of Female Images in Modern China," 66.

⁴⁷ Yuhang Li, "Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women's Artistic and Literary Reproductions of Guanyin in Late Imperial China," Ph.D. diss., Chicago University, 2011, 142-212.

⁴⁸ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxian 'gongkai hua'," 10-14.

Religion and imperial portraiture

Religion had been interwoven into Chinese imperial portraiture from the outset. From the fifth century onward, rulers often assumed connection with powerful deities by performing the role of a leading patron or even the incarnate Buddha in their sculpted portraits.⁴⁹ Such portraits were usually in imperially patronized grottoes, but their magnificent size enabled commoners to see and worship them from afar in order to garner a certain kind of publicity. Powerful imperial women played a critical role in the patronage of Buddhist art as well, but their sponsorship did not necessarily appear in the same manner of projecting their images to the visual representation of deities. Lady Feng 馮 (442-490, known as Empress Dowager Wenming 文明 posthumously) acted as the regent to her foster grandson Emperor Xiaowendi 孝文帝 (r.471-499) for the last twenty years of her life. She sponsored three pairs of twin-chapels in Yungang 雲崗, Shanxi 山西 Province, whose design may imply the co-rule of the empress dowager and the young emperor as twin sages.⁵⁰ Lady Hu 胡 (d.528, also known as Empress

⁴⁹ The phenomenon was most prominent during the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). Northern Wei (386-534) monarchs' respect and trust for Buddhist priests resulted in the powerful priest Faguo's 法果 propaganda that "the Emperor was a present-day Buddha." For a discussion about this strategy, see Alexander C. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China, Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1958), 94-96.

⁵⁰ The three sets of twin cave-chapels are numbers 5 and 6, 7 and 8, and 9 and 10. Alexander C. Soper is the first scholar who identified the connection between Empress Dowager Wenming and the excavation of these chapels. Alexander C. Soper, "Imperial Cave-Chapels of the Northern Dynasties: Donors, Beneficiaries, Dates," *Artibus Asiae* 28.4 (1966): 241-246; For other discussions along this line, see Su Bai 宿白, "Da Jin xijing Wuzhoushan chongxiu da shikusi bei de faxian yu yanjiu" 大金西京武周山重修大石窟寺碑的發現與研究, *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究 (1982; reprint, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 110-113; James Caswell, *Written and Unwritten: A New History of the Buddhist Caves at Yungang* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 22-31; Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 6-11. Although of Han ethnic descent, Lady Feng was a formidable existence in the politics and cultural policies of the Northern Wei, a non-Han regime. She was the prominent architect behind the large-scale sinicization project under Emperor Xiaowendi's name, including moving the capital from Pingcheng 平城 to Luoyang 洛陽, which was closer to the Han regimes in southern China. She also masterminded the construction of the mausoleums for her and Emperor Xiaowendi. For this project and the biography of Empress Dowager Wenming, see Archibald G. Wenley, *The Grand Empress Dowager Wen Ming and the Northern Wei Necropolis at Fang Shan* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1947), 1-22.

Dowager Ling 靈), another powerful Northern Wei imperial woman, was the regent to Emperor Xiaowendi's grandson Emperor Xiaomingdi 孝明帝 (r.515-528) and a prominent patron of Buddhist art. In addition to patronizing the grottos in Longmen 龍門, Henan 河南 Province, she also sponsored the construction of the Temple of Eternal Tranquility 永寧寺 that contains a nine-story pagoda.⁵¹ Alexander C. Soper proposed that the empress dowager was depicted in a relief of empress procession in the Binyang Central Cave 賓陽中洞 in Longmen.⁵² While the hypothesis has been disproved on the basis of sponsorship, function of the grotto, and the convention of Buddhist visual culture, Lady Hu's influence on the grotto's construction cannot be denied.⁵³ The fact that the figures on the relief share similar lines and forms with the pottery figures excavated from the Temple of Eternal Tranquility, and that the grotto was completed during the height of Lady Hu's regency, imply her active participation in the project.⁵⁴

Similar ambiguity in the connection between image and specific identity occurs in the speculation that Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624- or 627-705) had followed this thread and ordered the magnificent Vairocana Buddha carving be made with herself as the model in the

⁵¹ Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen: Faith, Politics, and Patronage in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Sculpture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 60-67.

⁵² Alexander C. Soper, "Imperial Cave-Chapels," 248. The relief is now housed in Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas. For a reproduction of this work, see Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, fig. 1.2.

⁵³ Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 43-44; Ning Qiang, "Gender Politics in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Art: Images of Empress Wu at Longmen and Dunhuang," *Oriental Art* 49.2 (2003): 28-39; Dorothy C. D. Wong, "Women as Buddhist Art Patrons during the Northern and Southern Dynasties," in Wu Hung ed., *Between Han and Tang: Religious Art and Archaeology in a Transformative Period* Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2000), 546.

⁵⁴ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 10-11. Ladies Feng and Hu were the two most powerful imperial female patrons of the Northern Wei dynasty. For a comprehensive introduction to women's support of Buddhist art during this period, see Dorothy C. D. Wong, "Women as Buddhist Art Patrons during the Northern and Southern Dynasties," 535-64.

grotto named Temple of Offering Ancestors 奉先寺 at Longmen.⁵⁵ Although artistically speaking the feminine elegance of the Buddha's visage furthers the speculation, some scholars argued that the hypothesis did not fit the timing and purpose of Empress Wu's patronage of this grotto.⁵⁶ In the case of the connection between Empress Dowager Liu 劉 (969-1033) of the Northern Song dynasty and the statue of the Sage Mother in the Sage Mother Hall of the Jin Shrine 晉祠, Hui-shu Lee's study of the iconography of the empress's portrait and the Sage Mother statue suggest that Empress Dowager Liu was referred to as this deity. The shared motif of the Queen Mother of the West on the crowns in the empress dowager's portrait and on the statue as well as the statues of eunuchs and female attendants in the Sage Mother Hall suggested a combination of secular and sacred power the empress dowager wielded.⁵⁷

The subtle connection between the images of powerful imperial women and religious deities changed in the mid-Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The phenomenon is exemplified by Empress Dowager Cisheng 慈聖 (1545-1614), the birth mother of Emperor Wanli 萬曆 (r. 1572-1620). She was merely a maid in the inner quarters when she gave birth to the emperor's heir,⁵⁸ and thus when Wanli ascended to the throne he elevated her status by fabricating a story of her as

⁵⁵ For a review of this speculation, see Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 117-18.

⁵⁶ According to Amy McNair, the excavation of the grotto began in 672 and there was no evidence Empress Wu intended to usurp the throne. The empress's attempt to acquire the legitimizing aura of deification appeared in 694 when she masterminded the plot. Amy McNair, *Donors of Longmen*, 118. For Empress Wu's manipulation of Buddhism, see Chüan-ying Yan, "The Tower of Seven Jewels and Empress Wu," *The National Palace Museum Bulletin* 22 (1987):1-16.

⁵⁷ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 52-69.

⁵⁸ For the biography of Empress Dowager Cisheng, see Carrington L. Goodrich and Chao-ying Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 856-8.

the incarnated “Bodhisattva of Nine Lotuses” 九蓮菩薩.⁵⁹ Moreover, he commissioned a large stone slab, *Poems for the Auspicious Lotuses Stele* 瑞蓮賦碑, and erected it in the Temple of Kindness and Longevity 慈壽寺 in 1587 (fig.1.18). The exquisite craftsmanship and the characters of *yuzhi* 御製, “imperially commissioned,” flanked by two dragons on the top of slab show that its production is directly associated with the emperor. A brief inscription of the imperial order is carved on the top left corner of the Guanyin image:

贊曰：惟我聖母，慈仁格天，感斯嘉兆，闕產瑞蓮。加大士像，勒石流傳，延國福民，霄壤同堅。

The emperor’s ode: My divine mother’s kindness and benevolence is as great as Heaven. [Heaven] has been moved and thus the good omen appeared in the form of auspicious lotus blossoms in the palace. [I, the sovereign] supplement [the omen] with an image of Bodhisattva and ordered to have it transcribed to a stone slab so that [the omen] will be spread. It will ensure the long existence of the state and bring fortune to my subjects, and stabilizes the cosmos.⁶⁰

The sentences reveal Wanli’s eagerness to promote his mother, as he ordered that rubbings be made of this slab and circulated widely. The strategy was successful because Empress Dowager Cisheng was enshrined in the Temple of Eternal Spring 長春寺 in Beijing in 1618 and was continuously worshiped in other sectarian temples.⁶¹

The extant rubbing coincides with the two anecdotes the Qing scholar Hu Jing 胡敬 (1769-1845) cited in his *Examination of the Images in the Hall of Southern Fragrance* 南薰殿圖

⁵⁹ Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良, “Ming Wanli nianjian wei Jiulian Pusa bianzao de liangben jing” 明萬曆年間為九蓮菩薩編造的兩本經, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, 2 (1985): 37. For a complete study of the iconography of this deity and its association with Empress Dowager Cisheng, see Marsha Haufler, “Images of the Nine-Lotus Bodhisattva and the Wanli Empress Dowager,” *Chungguksa yǒngu* 35 (2005): 245-78.

⁶⁰ Zhou Shaoliang, “Ming Wanli nianjian wei Jiulian Pusa bianzao de liangben jing,” 40. Translation mine.

⁶¹ Yuhang Li, “Gendered Materialization,” 153.

像考, a thorough study of the imperial portraits housed in the Forbidden City in the late-eighteenth century. According to *Notes Written With a Red Tube Brush* 彤管拾遺記, which is no longer in existence, Wanli once saw a red lotus whose nine pistils formed the shape of a platform. The emperor regarded it as an auspicious omen generated from Empress Dowager Cisheng's benevolence and had it displayed in the outer court. When the emperor celebrated his mother's birthday shortly afterwards, he had a Bodhisattva image painted by the Tang master Wu Daozi 吳道子 (fl.680-759) copied. The face of the copy was replaced with his mother's. The copy was subsequently made it into a stone slab and one thousand rubbings were distributed to various temples.⁶² By doing so, Cisheng's face was publicized in the form of a bodhisattva and came to be identified as the incarnation of the deity. Cisheng must have played a role in this project, for she was a fervent Buddhist and commissioned many temples in and near Beijing.⁶³ Such a portrayal not only transcended piety and reached divinity but also helped legitimize her sovereign son.

It should also be noted that after the Tang dynasty most imperial portraits were not produced for general public display due to the Confucian dogma that women stay out of the public sphere. Imperial women's portraits were not even shown outside of the inner court. Under such circumstances, Cisheng's case is an intriguing example of how religion facilitated imperial women in their pursuit for publicity. The juxtaposition of Cisheng and a Buddhist deity avoided the restraints on the domesticity of woman's body and image. Cixi might not have taken the idea from Cisheng's case directly, but the remote predecessor shows that such appropriation

⁶² Hu Jing 胡敬 (1769-1845), "Nanxun Dian Tuxiang Kao" 南薰殿圖像考, in *Hu Jing shuhua kao sanzong* 胡敬書畫考三種 (Beijing: Laixun ge, 1934), 10a,b. Also see He Xiaorong 何孝榮, "Mingdai huangong zhong de fojiao jianzhu yu chongfo huodong" 明代皇宮中的佛教建築與崇佛活動, *Gugong xuekan* 故宮學刊, 4 (2008): 138.

⁶³ Marsha Haufler, "Images of the Nine-Lotus Bodhisattva and the Wanli Empress Dowager," 249-50.

was not a novel phenomenon, and viewers of these portraits at her time might not have been as stunned as contemporary viewers.

In comparison, Qing imperial women revealed rather ambiguous religious associations in their portraits. Two examples come to mind. The first is the portrait of Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang, in which the sitter's head is shaven like a nun's (fig.1.1).⁶⁴ It was likely a portrait showing the sitter's religious devotion in her later days. The second example is rather mysterious. Emperor Daoguang's consort Empress Xiaoquan left a portrait in the costume of a female deity (fig.1.19). Floating among the clouds, the empress wears a Han Chinese-style robe and a headpiece decorated with a phoenix and three tassels of pearls. She holds the *fuchen* 拂塵, a prop common to Daoist deities and priests. Lacking sophisticated iconography for identification, the portrait is open for interpretation. It would be reckless to categorize it as the kind of image that deifies the sitter.⁶⁵

The ambiguous meaning of Qing imperial women's religious portraits is a stark contrast to their male counterparts' images, which also suggests that the latter are Cixi's direct inspiration. The tradition of Qing imperial portraiture, in which the emperor is portrayed as Bodhisattva Manjusri has drawn much scholarly attention.⁶⁶ Bodhisattva Manjusri is the deity that embodies

⁶⁴ For the reproduction of this portrait, see Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson, ed., *China : The Three Emperors*, 169.

⁶⁵ Although more study is needed, I suspect that this image is a posthumous portrait of Xiaoquan. There was a convention of making posthumous portrait for the deceased imperial family member. Textual evidence shows that the painting workshop made a posthumous portrait of Xianfeng in a grotto; a similar portrait of Tongzhi can be found in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing as well. Tongzhi is depicted in a monk's robe sitting in a grotto. It is as if the deceased emperor has transcended to the sacred realm. As yet, no such portraits of Qing imperial women can be identified from the textual and visual materials, but since the portrait of Xiaoquan reveals similar transcendental ambience, it is worth considering the image posthumous portrait.

⁶⁶ David M. Farquhar, "Emperors as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38.1 (1978), 5-34; Wu Hung, "Emperor's Masquerade – 'Costume Portraits' of Yongzheng and Qianlong," *Oriental Art* 26.7 (1995), 40-41; Michael Henss, "The Bodhisattva-Emperor: Tibeto-Chinese Portraits of Sacred and Secular Rule in the Qing Dynasty," *Oriental Art* 47.3 (2001): 2-16; Hui-chi Lo, "Political

Buddha's intellect. It was the Tibetan lamas who began to refer to the Manchu rulers as "Manjughosa (Manjusri in Tibetan) Bodhisattva" as early as 1640. The concept that every Manchu monarch was the incarnation of a bodhisattva was coined when the fifth Dalai Lama bestowed to Emperor Shunzhi with a gold plate engraved with "God of the Sky, Manjughosa-Emperor and Great Being" on his trip to Beijing in 1653.⁶⁷ Since then every Qing emperor has had the informal name of *fuoye* 佛爺, "venerable Buddhist." But the visual representation of the emperor as Manjusri appeared relatively late. Yongzheng is the first Qing emperor portrayed in religious guise, but he is dressed as a Gelugpa lama instead of as Manjusri.⁶⁸ In contrast to Yongzheng's ambiguously disguised identity, Qianlong explicitly addressed his divine bodhisattvahood (fig. 1.20).⁶⁹ In this tanka a sword and *Prajnaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom) *Sutra* 般若經, both attributes of Manjusri, are depicted on his shoulders, while the Tibetan inscription in front of his seat also mentions this bodhisattva's title.⁷⁰ To maximize the divinity, all traces of the sitter's secular identity are erased. The portrait is thus a religious icon, which means that the Qianlong emperor is also Manjusri for worship.⁷¹

Advancement and Religious Transcendence: The Yongzheng Emperor's (1678-1735) Deployment of Portraiture," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2009, 174-89.

⁶⁷ David M. Farquhar, "Emperors as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire," 19-20.

⁶⁸ Evelyn Rawski, ed., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, 251.

⁶⁹ For a study of Qianlong's appropriation of the Manjusri identity, see Patricia A. Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 60-62.

⁷⁰ Evelyn S. Rawski, ed., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, 400.

⁷¹ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 11.

Cixi's images in the Guanyin costume

Qianlong's male successors did not carry out identity transformation in their patronage; it was Cixi who picked up and adjusted the practice to suit her needs. Cixi and Ci'an were also referred to as *foye*, or the venerable Buddhist, in imperial documents. For instance, the clerk in the Department of Imperial Household mentioned Ci'an and Cixi as Dong foye 東佛爺 (the Venerable Buddhist of the East) and Xi foye 西佛爺 (the Venerable Buddhist of the West) respectively when cataloguing the New Year's calligraphy pieces the two empress dowagers had written.⁷² It is not inappropriate because they were the most senior members in the imperial family clan, and Tongzhi was still too young an emperor for such an alias. Moreover, as Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang's portrait exemplifies, religion occupied a great portion of Qing imperial women's daily lives. In addition to Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism and Daoism were popular in the court as well. The Guanyin cult was particularly popular because of the deity's protection of women's health and their families. Cixi was also a fervent disciple of Guanyin and, beginning during Tongzhi's reign, made offerings at the statue of the deity in the meditation room of her residence Chuxiu gong 儲秀宮 (Palace of Concentrated Beauty) in the Forbidden City.⁷³ Her devotion to Guanyin continued through her last days; both Yu Deling and Katharine Carl recorded their conversations with Cixi regarding the empress dowager's worship and embodiment of Guanyin.⁷⁴ Cixi's consistent bond with the Guanyin cult leads one to believe that her desire to embody this Buddhist deity was not necessarily an action of pure political

⁷² "NZHD," entry of January 2, 1871. Box No.35_553_83. Ci'an lived in the east while Cixi lived in the west palace compound in the imperial harem of the Forbidden City, and thus they were often referred to as the empress dowager of the east and the empress dowager of the west, respectively.

⁷³ Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, *Ming Qing shinei chenshe* 明清室內陳設 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2004), 55-56.

⁷⁴ Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 225, 306-307; Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 93, 205-06.

calculation.⁷⁵ Her long-term habit of dressing as Guanyin might have also resulted from her religious piety to enhance effects similar to the employment of a mandala.⁷⁶

Cixi's portraits in the guise of Guanyin can be divided into two categories: small paintings in the frontispieces of transcribed sutras and large images with more complex compositions. While the number of the first kind is unknown because of the lack of studies on the sutras, the latter contains two portraits and a series of photographs. Unlike Qianlong's Manjusri portraits, these images do not follow the iconography of Guanyin rigorously, which implies their new intended meanings were different from the pure identity transformation observed in Qianlong's portraits. The first and most prominent feature is the new Guanyin outfit inspired by theatrical costume. As Yuhang Li detailed, Cixi utilized fashionable styles and fabrics to modify the codified religious costume and create her own Guanyin garment. The elaborate blue robe decorated with golden bamboo, for example, is the empress dowager's invention. This garment appears repeatedly in the painted portraits, and Cixi also wears a robe of this design in many of her Guanyin photographs (fig.1.21).⁷⁷

Transcribing the *Heart Sutra* was a common religious practice performed by women to perform in order to demonstrate their affection toward deceased family members, and Cixi was a practitioner, too. To decorate the transcription, she often ordered the court painters to paint "images of Buddha painted with gold pigment" 全身佛像 on the front and back covers.⁷⁸ This

⁷⁵ For instance, Wang Cheng-hua's interpretation emphasized the political merit of Cixi's portraits in the Guanyin costume but left the empress dowager's religious practice undiscussed. Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 13-14.

⁷⁶ Yuhang Li, "Gendered Materialization," 179.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 163-7.

⁷⁸ The earliest record of this kind of commission appears in 1868. The court artist was ordered to paint the covers of ten copies of *Heart Sutra* and twenty images of Buddha. Since the number of Buddha images is always double the

religious activity was also manipulated to achieve her political agenda. Headland recorded how the Painting Workshop operated in Cixi's late years for political purposes:

[The court painter] told me that she not infrequently copied the gospel of that goddess [of mercy] with her own pen, had her portrait painted in the form of the goddess which she used as a frontispiece, bound the whole up in yellow silk or satin and gave it as a present to her favorite officials.⁷⁹

It clearly identifies Cixi as the mastermind in the production of *Heart Sutra*, decorated with Guanyin images that carried her likeness. Furthermore, the sutra transcriptions are no longer products of personal, religious devotion when they are gifted as an imperial favor. They represent the gift giver's dual identity. While the sutra represents Cixi's secular role as an imperial consort and her bond with her emperor and husband Xianfeng and her son Tongzhi, the cover images vividly show the empress dowager's sacred Guanyin identity.

The strategy of mixing secular and sacred power is also applied to Cixi's large paintings and photographs. Taking *Empress Xiaoqin in the Costume of Buddha* as an example, the sitter's accessories and the setting complete the representation of her mixed identity as empress dowager, Buddha, and bodhisattva (fig.1.22A). She wears the official ceremony garment, *jifu* 吉服, which matches her secular role as an empress dowager. But as Wang Cheng-hua pointed out, the rich iconography of Guanyin is also present in the portrait. The *wu fo guan* 五佛冠, "headdress of five Buddhas," the sitter wears is an accessory commonly seen on the bodhisattva in Tibetan art; the wood chair is carved into a lotus blossom emerging from the water to resemble the bodhisattva's lotus throne; the vase with a willow branch is Guanyin's attribute; the bamboo

copies of the sutra, I believe the Buddha images are used to decorate the front and back covers of the sutras. For the record in 1868, see NZHD, BOX 37_63_546.

⁷⁹ Isaac T. Headland, *Court Life in China: The Capital, Its Officials and People*, 90.

grove on the screen is also associated with the deity (fig.1.22B).⁸⁰ Upon closer investigation, Cixi's costume also has theatrical elements. The pearl mantle is often worn by the Guanyin character on stage,⁸¹ and Cixi's ceremonial robe is also decorated with golden characters of *fo* 佛 or Buddha, a common device in theatrical performance in the late-Qing dynasty (fig.1.22C).⁸²

In the same vein, another portrait, *Empress Xiaozhen in the Costume of Guanyin*, represents the sitter's secular and sacred identities through theatrical devices (fig.1.23). Sitting on a rock platform, Cixi wears a blue robe decorated with golden bamboo patterns, which she designed, and the pearl mantle similar to the aforementioned portrait. Despite the sitter's Guanyin costume the painting is a representation of her wish for longevity. The rich symbols of longevity include the peach tree heavy with peach fruit, the butterflies whose Chinese *die* 蝶 is homophonous with the character of the elderly (耄), as well as the rock where her hand rests, which is in the shape of *shou* 壽, "longevity," character. The wish for longevity is irrelevant to the common contexts of Guanyin's image, and thus the sitter is not Guanyin but Empress Dowager Cixi in the Guanyin costume.⁸³

The expression of such duality continues in the photographic portraits the matriarch took in 1903 and 1904. "By having a photograph taken of myself dressed in this costume [of

⁸⁰ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxian 'gongkai hua'," 12.

⁸¹ Ibid, 12.

⁸² I will further discuss the connection between Cixi's accoutrement and stage costume in the next chapter. For now, I will focus on how theatricality is presented in her portrait paintings.

⁸³ Wang Cheng-hua assumed that the portrait was probably commissioned to celebrate Cixi's seventieth birthday because the character *die* visualized in the butterfly image stands for seventy years of age. I agree that the portrait was likely the product of a birthday celebration, but there is no direct evidence to make such a definitive connection. In fact, the *die* character does not refer specifically to the seventy-year-olds. According to the definition in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, it means people in their eighties. Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxian 'gongkai hua'," 13-14; Xu Shen 許慎 (?-120), *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), vol.223, 196.

Guanyin],” Cixi once told Deling, “I shall be able to see myself *as I ought to be* at all times.”⁸⁴

What ought the empress dowager to be? If interpreted from the religious perspective it seems that these photographs are a reminder of Guanyin’s calm mercy that her disciples should seek to achieve. Yet as the following photographs show, the loose iconographical attributes of Guanyin and the traces signifying the sitter’s role as the empress dowager complicate this interpretation.

There are several photographs of Cixi and the entourage boating in Zhonghai 中海, one of the lakes in the Western Imperial Gardens (fig.1.24A). In spite of the blurry focus we can still see how Cixi juxtaposed her sacred and secular identities. She wears the “headdress of five Buddhas” (fig.1.24B), and a plaque displaying the title *Putuo shang Guanyin dashi* 普陀山觀音大士, “Great Master Guanyin of the Mount Putuo,” hungs on the three-fold screen behind her (fig.1.25).⁸⁵ To this point, the photograph seems to be another example of Cixi’s embodiment of Guanyin. Yet an object that has nothing to do with Guanyin complicates the symbolism. A plaque, possibly made of metal, is inserted in the incense burner. It is in the shape of rising smoke that forms the *shou* (longevity) character and gradually evolves into Cixi’s Daoist sobriquet, Guangrenzi 廣仁子 (Master of Extensive Benevolence), on the top.⁸⁶

No official document informs us as how Cixi received this title. It is possible that Gao Rentong 高仁桐 (1841-1907), the abbot of the White Cloud Monastery 白雲觀, granted her the

⁸⁴ Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 225. Italics mine.

⁸⁵ The photographer took several photographs of this setting, and Fig.1.25 is the one that offers the clearest details of the screen and other objects near Cixi’s body.

⁸⁶ I appreciate the observations of David Hogge and Yuhang Li. David kindly shared this discovery with me when I visited the Freer Gallery Archives in October 2010. Originally, I thought that the character and pattern were painted afterwards. But he pointed out that it is an actual object in our conversation, and Yuhang further explained to me during our discussion in February 2011 that it is likely to be a metal plaque as it shines brightly in the light

title when he was summoned to recite blessings for Cixi's diseased mother in 1870.⁸⁷ The Monastery belongs to the cult of Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君 (Primordial Sovereign of the Azure Cloud, or Our Lady), which responds to women's prayers for conception, begetting and rearing healthy sons, as well as prolonging their parents' life spans.⁸⁸ Soon after its emergence in the mid-Ming dynasty, the cult gained support from imperial women. Many Qing imperial women were enthusiastic disciples, and even emperors sometimes made modest patronage, too.⁸⁹ Cixi's belief is within this established tradition. Regardless of whether she inserted this plaque for convenience, to show her multiple religious beliefs, or to appropriate Our Lady's power of "defending the state and protecting the people,"⁹⁰ the appearance of this plaque makes the photograph a mixture of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs.

Cixi's order to her entourage to prepare for this photo series offers another layer of symbolism in the photograph. It relates to her favorite piece of popular culture⁹¹:

⁸⁷ For Cixi's association with Daoism, see Zhang Xuesong 張雪松, "Qingdai yilai de taijian miao tanxi" 清代以來的太監廟探析, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究, 4 (2009): 89-96. Xin Xiuming also recalled that Cixi would burn the talisman, written with characters "某年元旦上奉玉皇大帝, 弟子廣仁子," and her seals on New Year's day. Xin Xiuming, *Lao taijian de huiyi*, 191.

⁸⁸ Xun Liu, "Visualizing Perfection: Daoist Paintings of Our Lady, Court Patronage, and Elite Female Piety in the Late Qing," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 64.1 (2004): 59.

⁸⁹ Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 560-2.

⁹⁰ Xun Liu, "Visualizing Perfection: Daoist Paintings of Our Lady, Court Patronage, and Elite Female Piety in the Late Qing," 102.

⁹¹ The term "popular culture" generally refers to non-elite culture, which usually has a more direct appeal than the complex, sophisticated representation and form seen in the elite culture. Popular culture comprises of a strong variety of forms such as scriptures, handbooks and scripts of plays. They were widely circulated in the late imperial Chinese society. Since the future Cixi, like other young Manchu ladies, were free from being segregated from the public sphere, she must have been exposed to the thriving popular culture in Beijing, but whether her gender and ethnicity had filtered the kinds of popular culture she absorbed is a separate topic awaiting for further research. For the general definition of popular culture in late imperial China, see David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski, preface to *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), ix-xi.

七月六日海里照相，乘平船，不要蓬。四格格扮善財，穿蓮花衣，著下屋綳。蓮英扮韋馱，想著帶韋馱盔、行頭。三姑娘、五姑娘扮撐船仙女，帶漁家罩，穿素白蛇衣服，想著帶行頭，紅綠亦可。船上槳要兩個，著花園預備。帶竹葉之竹竿十數根，著三順預備。于初八日要齊呈覽。

Take photographs in the [South] Sea [area] on the sixth day of the seventh month. Ride on a flat barge; no canopy is needed. The Fourth Princess will play Shancai. [Tell her to] Wear clothes with lotus pattern and a working strap. [Li] Lianying will play Weituo; remember to bring Weituo's helmet and costume. The Third and Fifth Ladies will play punting fairies, wearing fishermen's hats and clothes of the white snake in plain color. [They should] remember to bring their accessories, red or green color will do, too. Have the Garden [staff] prepare two oars on the barge. Have Sanshun prepare about a dozen of bamboo sticks with leaves. Have them ready on the eighth day and present [them] to me for examination.⁹²

The Fourth Princess here is Prince Gong's eldest daughter, whom Cixi adopted as a child; the Third and Fifth Ladies refer to Yu Deling and Rongling, respectively.⁹³ Why were Deling and Rongling ordered to wear the costume of "white snake"? It is directly related to Cixi's expertise in Peking Opera. *Biography of the White Snake* 白蛇傳 was a popular novel in late imperial China, and it had been adapted into various plays during the Qing dynasty. The Guanyin character was not included in the original novel, but Qing opera writers often added an opening scene in which the bodhisattva and Buddha recount the outline of the story.⁹⁴ An opera expert like Cixi must have been familiar with this play, and thus it is not impossible that she appropriated the theatrical scene to add spice to her performance.⁹⁵

⁹² Lin Jing, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 34.

⁹³ Xin Xiuming, *Lao taijian de huiyi*, 37.

⁹⁴ Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨, *Leifeng ta chuanqi xulu ji qita* 雷峰塔傳奇續錄及其他 (Shanghai: Shangza chubanshe, 1953), 10-11.

⁹⁵ Qing opera specialist Liana Chen was very kind to share her insight with me. She mentioned that the deities in these court plays were designated as roles descending from the heavens to pay respect to the imperial audience, such as the emperor and empress dowager. Hence Cixi might not downgrade to a role inferior to her status. Yet if we put

The same mixture of secular and sacred identity also appears in Cixi's Guanyin trio of photographic portraits, accompanied by her head eunuch Li Lianying and Fourth Princess (fig.1.26A). The trio stands against the backdrop of a large cloth painted into bamboo groves. The foreground is decorated with many lotus flowers. A plaque reading "Great Master Guanyin of the Mount Putuo" is hung above Cixi's head like a nametag. But it is stamped with a seal that reads *Ningshou gong zhi bao* 寧壽宮之寶, "Seal of the Palace of Tranquil Longevity," and a bird holding another seal carved with the same characters is painted on the right side of the backdrop (fig.1.26B). The Palace of Tranquil Longevity is associated with the prestigious status of a retired emperor because it used to function as Emperor Qianlong's post-retirement residence. Late in Guangxu's reign Cixi also resided in this palace when she was in the Forbidden City, as if inheriting Qianlong's status. As a result, the plaque serves as the embodiment of Cixi's mixed identity. She was simultaneously the sacred Great Master Guanyin of the Mount Putuo and the successor of the imperial lineage, the most powerful status in the mundane world. Cixi created a collage of multiple identities in her images in the guise of Guanyin. Although the approach of manipulating theatricality makes them informal and even entertaining, the commissioner's goal was not much different from that of her role model, Emperor Qianlong. They both aimed to visualize the sovereign authority in the sacred and secular worlds. Furthermore, by embodying Guanyin Cixi made the same political statement without sacrificing her identity as a woman.

the medium into consideration, Cixi's Guanyin image is not a theatrical role but retains its divinity as shown in the script.

1.3 Posing Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire

Revisionist historians argue that one of the key reasons why Cixi succeeded in ruling the Qing Empire for four decades was her support of modernization. However the reforms did not affect her representation of sovereignty until the turn of the century. This is understandable since, beginning in the Song dynasty (960–1279), Chinese imperial portraiture had seldom been produced for the general public.⁹⁶ The absolute authority of the ruling house was confirmed through the abstract notion of *tianming* 天命, or heaven's order, without the necessity of propagating it via images. By contrast, European royal portraiture was highly publicized and worked as the connecting knot between the ruler/sitter and subject/viewer. A king's portrait, as Louis Marin puts it, offered him the icon of the absolute monarch he desired to be and hence was "his *real presence*."⁹⁷ This tradition is traced back to as early as the era of the first Roman Emperor Augustus (r.27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), when a vast number of his imagery were made on coins and into honorary statues. It is under the influence of such ideology that royal portraits were widely circulated in different media and served as diplomatic gifts.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ During this time, imperial portraiture was incorporated into the ruling house's ancestral cult. Thus, the images of emperors and their ancestors became familial and private. Patricia Ebrey, "Portrait Sculptures in Imperial Ancestral Rites in Song China," *T'oung Pao* 83. 1/3 (1997): 53-55.

⁹⁷ Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha Houle (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 7.

⁹⁸ For the discussion of how this new form of propaganda emerged, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), 101-66. Many European rulers were known for using their images to solidify the ruling power and characterize their rulerships. The scholarships of Louis Marin and Peter Burke on the images of Louis IX of France (1638-1715) are the examples of the scholarly achievement on this topic. In the cases of female rulers or powerful royal women, it requires close readings to decipher the negotiation between the sitter and the preexisting social values. Mary D. Sheriff's analysis of the *Marie-Antoinette en chemise*, for instance, unraveled the French Queen's (1755-1793) catastrophic confrontation with the French public's taste in this portrait, which became an ominous sign of her eventual execution during the French Revolution. Mary D. Sheriff, "The Portrait of the Queen: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Marie-Antoinette en chemise*," in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 121-41.

Although Cixi began to host audiences for foreign ambassadors and envoys after 1898, she did not commission portraits for the foreign public until 1903. It seems that the first official photographic portrait Cixi received was a gift from Nicholas II of Russia (1868-1918). The ambassadors' wife presented the empress dowager and Emperor Guangxu with the czar's eight-inch framed family photograph in 1902.⁹⁹ Cixi soon learned the display function of these portraits. Two lithographs of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), one representing the queen in regal array and the other the group portrait of royal family, were hung in the empress dowager's residence palace when she invited Katharine Karl to visit at the end of 1903 to impress the woman painter with the hostess's awareness of another female ruler in the globe.¹⁰⁰

Adapting to international diplomatic conventions, the empress dowager began integrating Western performances of kingship with traditional Chinese expressions in the late 1890s, and the newly introduced medium of photography played a crucial role in this process.¹⁰¹ Cixi commissioned many photographic portraits in 1903 and 1904. Some were officially bestowed on foreign rulers and, on occasion, her high officials, while many others remained private until the empress dowager's death. The fact that such portraits were unprecedented in imperial portraiture, and that the majority of these portraits were made for the foreign public, gave her freedom to experiment with appropriate images.

⁹⁹ Lin Jing 林京, "Ehuang Nigula Ershi quanjia zhao" 俄皇尼古拉二世全家照, *Zijin Cheng* 3 (1983): 27.

¹⁰⁰ Katharine Karl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 206-207. It is unclear if Emperor Meiji ever presented Cixi any photograph portrait of him or his empress. Although as Japan was the first East Asian country that Westernized the visual representation of rulers, its possible influence on the Qing regime still awaits further investigation due to the lack of existing documents and works.

¹⁰¹ Cixi's first audience for foreigners was a luncheon held on December 14, 1898; only the wives of foreign ambassadors and ministers were invited. Her debut before the foreign ministers did not take place until January 29, 1902. See "Empress Dowager Entertains," *New York Times*, December 15, 1898, 2; "Chinese Dowager Empress Center of Attraction," *New York Times*, January 29, 1902, 9 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, www.proquest.com).

New alternatives to traditional portraiture

Using a portrait as her real presence in the public domain was not Cixi's concern during her early regency. Yet, after quelling the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 and declaring war on all foreign imperialist powers in 1900, her reputation plunged in the eyes of the foreign public.¹⁰² The French magazine *Le Rire* exemplifies how Cixi became a target of the exaggerative illustrations in Western tabloids. The cover of the July 1900 issue features a caricature of the empress dowager as an ugly, mannish, savage-looking Manchu (fig.1.27). The Qing court never officially protested such distorted images, but Cixi was captured waving her handkerchief to foreign onlookers on the city wall of Beijing when she returned to the capital to reformulate the court in 1902.¹⁰³ The friendly attitude toward the camera suggests her awareness of the need to improve her public image.

Soon after Cixi resumed activities in the capital, her sympathetic friend Sarah Conger, the wife of the American ambassador, proposed the project of publicizing the empress dowager's portrait. At an audience in April 1903, Conger suggested Cixi correct public opinion by commissioning a portrait that would be displayed at the international exposition in St. Louis in 1904.¹⁰⁴ Conger's positive assessment of this strategy, however, contrasted with Cixi's hesitation and signified a fundamentally different notion about "public presence" in China: the

¹⁰² The supporters of the Hundred Days' Reform were well connected with British and American journalists in Shanghai, who assisted them in escaping from China and published their criticisms of Cixi's clan. Among these articles, some were personal attacks on Cixi and her private life based on anecdotal accounts. They tarnished the Empress Dowager's international image, despite their questionable reliability. Kwang Zhaojiang, "Cixi xingxiang yu Cixi yanjiu chutan," 108-09.

¹⁰³ For the reproduction of this photograph, see Gilles Béguin and Dominique Morel, *The Forbidden City: Heart of Imperial China, New Horizons* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 65.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah P. Conger, *Letters from China*, 247-48.

body of a sovereign was divine and that of an imperial woman was private.¹⁰⁵ By this logic, how could Cixi, a regent and an imperial woman, present her image to an unknown audience? It is unclear how the dilemma was settled, but the urgency of restoring her public image overcame traditional ideology, and the commission was soon confirmed. Now it was necessary to conceive a proper setting and pose for the empress dowager's first-ever public portrait. Cixi came across the idea of taking a photograph after learning about the time-consuming sitting process required for Western portrait painting.¹⁰⁶ Yu Xunling 裕勳齡 (1874-1943), the elder brother of Yu Deling and Rongling, was recommended by his mother to serve as the photographer. He had studied photography in Paris while their father, Yu Geng 裕庚 (died 1905), served as the ambassador to France from 1899 to 1902.¹⁰⁷

Cixi immediately summoned Yu Xunling to the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony and ordered him to take two sets of photographs: one of her in a sedan chair on the way to an audience, and the other of her seated on the throne as if in the middle of an audience.¹⁰⁸ The request suggests the sitter wanted her performance as a ruler to appear in the photographs as a way to create a proper official image. According to Yu Deling's account, the empress dowager witnessed how the photograph was developed and printed, and she was much impressed with photography's convenience and lifelike visual effect.¹⁰⁹ Cixi enthusiastically commissioned

¹⁰⁵ The audience was recorded in the memoirs of two other participants: Cixi's interpreter Yu Deling and Mariam S. Headland. They both reported the Empress Dowager's dumbfounded, confused reaction to the proposal and remarked that she did not answer Conger's plea immediately. Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 198-99; Isaac Taylor Headland, *Court Life in China*, 104.

¹⁰⁶ Yu Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ For a study of the Yu family, see Grant Hayter-Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade: The Legend of Princess Der Ling* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 218-21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 221-23.

other photographs and ordered large quantities of them to be printed. In September 1903, the “Inventory of the Imperial Portraits” was established, which numbered about six hundred prints of thirty-one kinds of photographs.¹¹⁰

Contrary to her enthusiasm for photography, Cixi took a more cautious attitude toward the official portrait for the St. Louis exposition. Although the first sitting for Carl was as early as August 7, the empress dowager only had the painter produce two informal portraits.¹¹¹ Not until December did she finally sit for the St. Louis portrait.¹¹² The sequence of the photograph and portrait commissions suggests that Cixi was not ready for the official portrait in the summer of 1903. It is likely that she spent time observing how Carl would carry out her orders and finding out the most suitable posture through taking various photographs. What, then, did Cixi try before she sat for this portrait?

The photographic portraits of Cixi share several common features. Most of them are staged around her throne with a banner hanging above it. Two kinds of banners were used. One displays the title *Daqing guo dangjin shengmu huangtaihou wansui wansui wanwansui* 大清國當今聖母皇太后萬歲萬歲萬萬歲, “Long Live the Contemporary Sage Mother Empress Dowager of the Great Qing Empire,” along with Cixi’s square, official seal, the *Cixi huangtaihou zhi bao* 慈禧皇太后之寶, “Empress Dowager Cixi’s Treasure,” above and at the center of the banner (figs.0.2A, 0.2B). A small oval seal, *Ningshou gong* 寧壽宮, “Palace of Tranquil Longevity,” is stamped next to the first character, and another small square seal that

¹¹⁰ Jing Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002), 16, 19, 23. The inventory is only partially published in Lin Jing’s book. My gratitude goes to Dr. Wang Cheng-hua, who generously shared her transcription of the rest of the inventory.

¹¹¹ Yu Rongling recalled that Carl only painted two portraits, but the painter mentioned that she painted four in total. Yu Rongling, *Qing Gong Suoji*,” 18; Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China* xxi.

¹¹² Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China*, 215.

refers to her studio, *Daya zhai* 大雅齋, “Studio of Great Elegance,” is placed next to the final character. *Guangxu guimao nian* 光緒癸卯年 (1903) is written vertically beneath the “Daya zhai” seal. The other banner adopts the same format but has Cixi’s complete sixteen-character honorary title (fig.1.28). Objects with symbolic meanings are displayed on flanking tables. Sometimes the same cloth that was used in the photographs of her as Guanyin appears as a backdrop, as is seen behind the standing screen (figs.1.13, 1.26).

Four extant examples facilitate the study of Cixi’s official image: one portrait bestowed on Xunling and his brother, Yu Xinling 裕馨齡 (fig.1.29); one large photograph that was given to the American president Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919; fig.1.30); and two portraits gifted to Sarah Conger (figs.0.2A, 1.28). The first portrait is the earliest dated photograph for this official purpose. It shows the empress dowager sitting upon the throne (see fig.1.29), which is fashioned with lotus flowers that imply the summer season, and details of Cixi’s face were carefully painted by hand. The right margin is inscribed with the date on which the portrait was to be bestowed: an auspicious day in the sixth month of the twenty-ninth year of the Guangxu reign (late July to August of 1903). Names and official titles of the recipients are marked in the left margin. This print was likely prepared as a special reward to the photographer because, as will be further discussed, such photographic portraits were not distributed frequently until 1905.

The other two images were those given to Mrs. Conger. One is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig.0.2A); the other exists only as the frontispiece of her memoir (fig.1.28). Although they were presented after the portrait for the St. Louis exposition was completed in December 1903, Cixi’s summer attire and the decorative objects indicate they were taken earlier in the year. Sitting formally on the imperial throne, Cixi holds an unfolded fan painted with a peony. The treatment of her face is similar to the portrait given to Xunling—only her cheeks and

lips are slightly colored red (see fig.0.2A).¹¹³ The portrait in Sarah Conger's memoir was also obtained through official channel, as it was retouched and identified as being reproduced "by special permission," in print underneath the photograph. Cixi maintains a similarly rigorous posture, but she does not hold anything in her hand.

Highly satisfied with the photograph given to Xunling, Cixi presented an enlarged and meticulously hand-colored print to President Roosevelt. The portrait remained in the collection of Blair House (located across the street from the White House) until David Hogge, archivist of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, identified the sitter a few years ago (fig.1.30).¹¹⁴ This work is unusual in its composition: the banner and the side tables are cropped in the enlarged image, which erased the identity of the empress dowager. The objects on both sides of the throne, including a spittoon and some tissue papers (fig.1.29A), may explain why the print was cropped as such. Neither the photographs given to Conger nor the St. Louis portrait include these daily utensils, yet they appear in almost all of the other photographs in which Cixi casually posed (fig.1.14A). In this regard, the spittoon may be a critical detail that differentiates the original function of certain photographs. In other words, those without it were meant to be candidates for the empress dowager's internationally distributed official portrait in which any impropriety and traces of daily life must be avoided. In addition to excluding the daily object, great care was also spent on which objects to feature in the portraits. As Wang Cheng-hua has observed, the dragon, the foremost symbol of the Chinese emperor, is nowhere to be found.

¹¹³ On examining this photograph in the museum, I observed coloring on Cixi's face. Since pigments may have faded over time, it is likely other parts of the photograph were also painted.

¹¹⁴ According to David Hogge, the portrait was originally framed in yellow satin, but it was later remounted in its current frame, and no evidence shows later trimming of the photograph.

Instead, proper emblems for the empress dowager, such as the phoenix and peacock, are present.¹¹⁵

The oil portrait for the St. Louis exposition in 1904

The carefully arranged setting and pose in the photo portraits must have been useful references when Cixi sat for her oil portrait. The fact that Cixi did not sit for the St. Louis portrait until December 1903 suggests she spent time taking various photographs to determine the most appropriate posture for the oil portrait.¹¹⁶ The result is the strong similarity of composition between the photographs and the oil portrait, except that the painted work presents the sitter in a more formal reception space decorated with the three-piece throne set that includes a throne, a standing screen, and a pair of fans (fig.1.31B). Cixi's pose is also slightly different from her photo portraits. Instead of holding hands together on her laps, she rests her left arm on a cushion. In fact, the portrait painter suggested this adjustment. According to the memoir of Katharine Carl, Cixi originally assumed the same posture as in the photographs:

[Her Majesty] had on fur-lined under-sleeves, which hid half her beautiful hands. The effect of her tiny finger-tips, with their long curving nails and jeweled shields, the palms not being visible, was most unfortunate. Added to this, she held them tightly together in her lap, and the lines were obscured by a large, pale-blue handkerchief in one hand. . . . I told Her Majesty I did not like her hands as they were. "But I like them like that," she said . . . and I was obliged to begin the picture with the hands in that position.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Wang Cheng-hua suggested that the use of a peacock was to remind the viewer of the legendary phoenix, and she offered a fifteenth-century example. See Wang Cheng-hua, "Going Public," 143-44, n. 49.

¹¹⁶ In her memoir the portrait painter Katharine Carl recorded the date when she began working on the St. Louis portrait. The memoir also contains a reproduction of this portrait. Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China*, front cover, 215.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 216-17.

Cixi's understanding of imperial portraiture and her experiments with photography had convinced her that sitting upright and holding her hands together best expressed her status, dignity, and the formality of this portrait. A few days later she agreed with the painter's suggestion that she let her left arm rest on a cushion.¹¹⁸ The reason why Cixi relented remains unclear, but since an American painter who represented the unknown foreign, public gaze proposed it, the empress dowager might have been persuaded that this minor change would not harm the formal and benign image she intended to promote.

In addition to the upright and rigorous pose, the strong preference for a frontal view and the densely crowded objects that reduce the sense of space in Cixi's photographic and oil portraits are other features adopted from traditional imperial portraiture. These changes result in a visual language that is vastly different from what is found in photographs of Western monarchs. Overall, they echo the typical features of early Chinese photographic portraiture—something Western photographers appropriated from Chinese ancestral portraits and which thereby became the model for early Chinese photographic portraiture¹¹⁹—and raises the question of whether Cixi simply complied with this self-orientalized visual language. In fact, such choices may have arisen from political consideration.

Despite her familiarity with the portraits of European sovereigns, Cixi decided to follow the traditions of Qing imperial ancestral portraiture. The decision was possibly made under the premise that it was the most appropriate style with which to transform the sitter from an individual into a symbol of supreme authority. The techniques for enacting this transformation

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 280-81.

¹¹⁹ Wu Hung, "Inventing a 'Chinese' Portrait Style in Early Photography: The Case of Milton Miller," in *Brush and Shutter: Early Photography in China*, ed. Jeffery W. Cody and Frances Terpak (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 80-87.

originated in the mid-Ming convention of erasing the sitter's personality as an individual in ritual portraits.¹²⁰ In the same vein, Cixi minimized her body language and facial expression, thereby transforming herself from an individual into the embodiment of the Great Qing Empire.¹²¹ She also bypassed the Confucian restriction on women's public presentation, for what is exposed is no longer her body but rather a symbolic being. It should be noted, however, that Cixi did experiment with some elements of Western visual language. Several photographs were taken from a three-quarters angle,¹²² yet it is possible that her uncertainty as to whether these elements could achieve the same dual function of representing sublime sovereignty and avoiding Confucian scrutiny caused Cixi to adhere closely to tradition.

With the aid of photography, the official image of Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire was completed for the foreign public. Since it was an unprecedented project, Cixi was eager to learn viewers' opinions. She showed the portrait intended for the St. Louis exposition to her foreign female guests and highest court officials right after Carl completed it.¹²³ The satisfying compliments she received resulted in a slightly wider and semipublic viewing. The portrait was moved to the Waiwu bu 外務部 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) for a limited exhibition for officials whose ranks qualified them to view the portrait before it was shipped to the United States on April 21, 1904.¹²⁴ That marked the first and the last occasion where a reigning Chinese monarch publicized his/her appearance in a painted medium. It seems Cixi

¹²⁰ Cheng-hua Wang, "Material Culture and Emperors: The Shaping of Imperial Roles at the Court of Xuanzong (r. 1426–35)," PhD diss., Yale University, 1998, 243-44.

¹²¹ Cheng-hua Wang, "Going Public," 142-43.

¹²² Lin Jing, *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, 12, 17, 33.

¹²³ Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China*, 294–96.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 296-98.

grew more comfortable with the practice of distributing portraits after this semipublic viewing. Soon afterward she began to bestow her photographic portraits on close officials and foreign guests more frequently. According to the “Inventory of imperial portraits,” Cixi bestowed a large portrait to the empress of Germany on May 17,¹²⁵ and her close ally Qu Hongji recorded receiving a portrait on June 8, 1904, noting in his diary that such an imperial favor had “never occurred in the past, thus my descendants should always pay respect to [the photograph] and forever remember the imperial favor.”¹²⁶

The majority of Cixi’s presentations were to foreign guests. Headland mentioned seeing two large photographs gifted to Roosevelt and Conger in the American legation, and “similar photographs had been sent to all the ministers and rulers represented at Peking [Beijing].”¹²⁷ The photograph to Roosevelt in Headland’s account is very likely the photo portrait in Blair House. In addition to sending photographs to foreign ambassadors, envoys, and associated personnel, the empress dowager also offered her photo portraits when she received these guests in person. For instance, the wife of Japanese ambassador Uchida Kōsai (1865–1936) was given a photo portrait when Cixi received the couple on June 5, 1905.¹²⁸

As such, these formal portraits helped shape the empress dowager’s public image as a benign ruler who concealed her personality behind a rigorous pose and reserved facial expression to embody the Qing Empire. Although Cixi also posed in celebration of her gender, these

¹²⁵ The document is only partially published in Lin Jing’s *Gugong cang Cixi zhaopian*, but Dr. Wang Cheng-hua was very generous to share her transcription of the complete document with me. This record of gifting a portrait to the German empress is included in Dr. Wang’s transcription.

¹²⁶ Qu Hongji, *Shengde jilüe*, 104-5.

¹²⁷ Isaac T. Headland, *Court Life in China*, 73. The Blair House portrait should be the portrait intended for Theodore Roosevelt that Headland noted.

¹²⁸ Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan 中國第一歷史檔案館, ed. *Qingdai Zhongnanhai dang’an dihou shenghuo juan shang* 清代中南海檔案帝后生活卷上 (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanshe, 2004), 305.

provocative works were not included in her official images. Rather, the empress dowager's feminine quality was represented with subtlety, which is exemplified in Carl's paintings, delivered through soft colors, the soft texture of textiles, as well as the painted subject's young and fair complexion.¹²⁹

However, Cixi's self-presentation before the foreign public is not one-sided. By bordering the portrait with an extraordinarily large frame she designed, the empress dowager displayed the manly ruling power (fig.1.31A).¹³⁰ The gigantic frame stands more than four meters high. The top is decorated with a round *shou* character (longevity) and two five-claw dragons, and round and square *shou* characters are carved on the frame. The extraordinary size is masculine in its own right, let alone the strong impression of authority conveyed by the five-claw dragon, which was the well-known symbol of Chinese sovereignty. The American public's uneasiness with the excessively large portrait is best represented in reportage in the *New York Times*. The reporter commented that "Her Chinese Majesty would not look less at St. Louis if her portrait were only half as long as it is alleged to be, and most of those who look at it would think that it more nearly represented her *correct* dimensions as well as her relative value in the scale of things in general."¹³¹

What was correct to Cixi, though, was not the same as her foreign viewer's understanding. For her, the portrait had to display both femininity and masculinity in that the former was to correct her personal image while the latter was to represent the Great Qing Empire she embodied. If her female body could not visibly communicate masculinity, the size of the portrait and the

¹²⁹ Wang Cheng-hua, "Zouxiang 'gongkai hua'," 38-39.

¹³⁰ Carl specifically mentioned that Cixi designed this frame in her memoir, and there is also a commission record in NZHD. Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 303; NZHD, Box No.55_171_555.

¹³¹ "An Imperial Portrait," *New York Times*, Jun 27, 1904, p.6. Italics mine.

frame then were factors that could be employed. After all, the border between painting and frame is so arbitrary that the latter has the potential for merging into the former.¹³² Indeed the observer of the *St. Louis Portrait* regarded the two as one thing because when discussing the size of the picture, the number given was for the height of the frame rather than for the painting only. Even though the dragon, the symbol of sovereignty, was not painted on the picture surface, its presence on the top of the frame achieved an equally powerful effect of showcasing the authority the sitter wielded.

Conclusion

Cixi's portraits tell a remarkable biography of how she rose from an imperial consort to the junior empress dowager regent, and finally became Empress Dowager Cixi of the Great Qing Empire. On the one hand, the adoption and adaptation of symbols from the portraits of preceding Qing emperors bespoke her savvy manipulation of imperial portraiture. On the other hand, the suggestive postures and symbols from the beauty painting were transformed into the eulogy to female fecundity and beauty, the most fundamental source of her power and authority.

With age, Cixi's religious practice of embodying Guanyin also became a subject of her portraits. She did not rigidly follow Emperor Qianlong's trajectory of transcending himself to pure divinity in these portraits. What was embedded in these images was her dual identity, the ruler of both secular and sacred realms. When the necessity of making an official image emerged in the last stage of her regency, Cixi conformed to Western conventions and commissioned oil and photographic portraits. By framing the feminine representation of the sitter with a robust frame rich with symbols of Chinese sovereignty, she salvaged a positive

¹³² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 61.

reputation and reconfirmed the regent's absolute authority in front of the international public. This juxtaposition of masculine and feminine qualities in the representation of Cixi's image is the most distinct characteristics of her patronage, and such juxtaposition will be examined in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two

Costumes and Props:

Attire and Everyday Accessories

On June 15 and 16, 1903, Empress Dowager Cixi held two private audiences. The first was to Robley D. Evans (1846-1912), commander of the Asiatic Fleet of the United States, and his staff. The second was to the female members of the delegation. As reported by Sarah Conger, one of the female guests, the audience was “bright and delightful” and the event was in effect a well-prepared performance.¹ Every detail, from the hostess’s attire to the venue’s setting, had been meticulously calculated to give an elegant and refined impression. For instance, instead of her most formal yellow dragon robe, Cixi chose a light green gown embroidered with numerous *shou* characters (referring to longevity) and decorated with gemstones because, as the empress dowager stated, “it goes better with my complexion.” Her accessories were selected to match the gown: her headdress, handkerchiefs and shoes were decorated with the same auspicious motifs signaling longevity.² The matriarch also ordered a makeover of the regular setting and decorations in her residential palace where the audience was to take place. The interior color scheme was changed from pink to blue; jade Buddha sculptures and curtains embroidered with auspicious deities were all replaced by plain blue fabrics; the sanctioned woodcarvings around her bed were covered with plain textiles. To cater to the American guests’

¹ Sarah Conger, *Letters from China*, 295-96. It was at this occasion that the Congers proposed the St. Louis portrait project to Cixi.

² Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 188-89.

customs, the only carpet in the palace was moved to the reception hall.³ The palace, in effect, was transformed into a stage equipped with props to project the calculated image of a graceful and modest regent.

This incident exemplifies Cixi's awareness of the communicative power of attire, personal objects and accessories. It also displays her knowledge of how such items could be used to express different identities and project various images. In recent years, scholars have grown more interested in Cixi's attire and everyday accessories. Although recognized as gems of late Qing court art for their stylistic novelty and high quality, most scholars have focused on the materiality of these objects. Previously, the context of their use and Cixi's practice of patronage have merely been taken at face value, understood only as an index of her extravagance and a marker of her insatiable appetite for power. Zong Fengying, for instance, who created a typology of Cixi's various textile commissions, concluded that these works simply evince this female patron's decadence, her indifference to state finance, and her heartlessness toward the disenfranchised.⁴ Studies of Cixi's patronage of porcelain show the same ideological pitfall: scholars regularly condemn, rather than examine, their high cost and the frequency of her special commissions.⁵ It was not until the 2007 publication of the exhibition catalogue *Guanyang yuci* that a large number of Cixi's porcelains were granted art historical significance. Nonetheless, although the contributors acknowledged the uniqueness of these works, all commissioned by an imperial woman, they barely analyzed the ways in which Cixi's porcelain patronage embodied

³ Ibid, 186-87.

⁴ Zong Fengying 宗鳳英, *Qingdai gongting fushi* 清代清廷服飾 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2004), 182-85.

⁵ Ronald Longsdorf, "Dayazhai Ware: Porcelains of the Empress Dowager," *Orientalism*, 23.3 (1992): 45-56; Geng Baochang 耿寶昌, *Ming Qing ciqu jianding* 明清瓷器鑑定 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1993), 318.

her political power and displayed her aesthetic preferences.⁶ Recently, Liu Wei conducted research on Qing imperial wares by considering each imperial patron's persona. Liu included a comprehensive list of Cixi's porcelain commissions, but did not, however, analyze them in terms of their commissioner's ideological or aesthetic concerns.⁷

Breaking with this tendency, this chapter considers Cixi's avid involvement in decisions concerning her attire and daily accessories as part of her comprehensive control of the Imperial Workshops, where craftsmen realized the Qing ruler's demands for works of art, to showcase her symbolic sovereignty. This chapter also studies these materials using the connection between dress and identity to analyze how the empress dowager utilized the design and production of such wares as a means of self-expression. The definition of dress in sociology offers the logic for grouping Cixi's attire and porcelain together. Sociologists define dress both as a direct modification of the body and as a supplement to the body. The former idea refers to the clothes one wears, while the latter can be applied to accessories and other smaller objects that one uses.⁸ In addition to covering and adorning the body, dress also carries the more important function of communicating the identity and social position of its wearer or user. As such, it can be understood as a secondary social agent extending its user's agency and exalting the viewer's perception.⁹ From this point of view, Cixi's attire and accessories, regardless of their materiality,

⁶ Lü Chenglong 呂成龍, "Duju fengge de 'Tihedian zhi' kuan ciqu" 獨具風格的「體和殿製」款瓷器, in *Guanyang yuci*, 220.

⁷ Liu Wei 劉偉, *Diwang yu gongting ciqu* 帝王與宮廷瓷器 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2010), 465-79.

⁸ Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher, "Dress and Identity," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10.4 (1992): 1-3. Following their definition, I hereafter use the term attire to include clothing and accessories, which are a subcategory of dress.

⁹ This notion has aroused wide discussion since the anthropologist Alfred Gell proposed it in his posthumously published book *Art and Agency*. Despite being criticized for its oversimplification and Orientalist generalizations about the "non-Western" world as an entity, this thought-provoking theory requires art historians to understand the complex nexus of artwork, maker, commissioner, viewer, society and culture at large. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998). For critiques of Gell's theory, see Robert

can both be studied as aspects of her attire. Her choices were hardly casual—Yu Deling’s aforementioned account, for instance, vividly illustrates how attuned the empress dowager was to the communicative properties of dress.

Although such a practice was by no means uncommon among imperial women, Cixi’s approach operated in a more thorough-going, almost all-encompassing manner. Among the many subcategories of Cixi’s wardrobe, her attire and porcelain wares require particular attention. The former was a conventional method of showcasing persona among Chinese imperial women, while the latter signified Cixi’s attempts to cross the gendered boundary of court art patronage. Moreover, their complex production procedures exemplify the empress dowager’s intense engagement with court art production. The close relationship between wardrobe designs and porcelain patterns indicated a new cross-media collaboration in the last years of Chinese court art production that was initiated under Cixi’s supervision. A large vessel (possibly a fish tank) from Cixi’s first and most personalized porcelain commission exemplifies the multi-faceted characteristics I detail in this chapter (fig.2.1). In addition, the aubergine enamel pigment of the background and the flower-and-bird motif denote the commissioner’s aesthetic preference; the same color and similar motifs also often appear in Cixi’s wardrobes. The personalized details and inscriptions reveal Cixi’s indisputable ownership of the porcelain and the political authority that made possible the production of this vessel.

In what follows, I examine the production and stylistic features of Cixi’s attire and porcelain wares. Given a lack of either dated or datable materials, the first section offers a typological analysis of Cixi’s attire, most of which were everyday garments. I scrutinize the

Layton, “Art and Agency: A Reassessment,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9.3 (2003): 447-464; Howard Morphy, “Art as a Mode of Action: Some Problems with Gell’s Art and Agency,” *Journal of Material Culture* 14.1 (2009): 5-27; Jeremy Tanner and Robin Osborne, “Introduction: *Art and Agency* and Art History,” in *Arts Agency and Art History*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 19-22.

three most distinct stylistic features through which Cixi's identities are most clearly reflected.

The second section is also divided into three parts, each focusing on one or two groups of porcelain commissioned by Cixi. Since most of these are well documented and show a stylistic change that parallels the evolution of the matriarch's self-expression, I present these pieces chronologically.

2.1 Auspicious and Dramatic Attire

Attire is a useful vehicle through which to depict one's social status, identity and persona at the day-to-day level. For Qing imperial women, informal robes were a particularly important medium of self-expression. These were one of the few items for which they were granted a degree of freedom within the strictly regulated life style and decorum of the imperial harem.¹⁰ As a relatively new branch in Chinese art history and material culture, most studies of Qing imperial clothing concentrate on their materialistic aspects, such as their style or techniques of production.¹¹ A systematic study of how Qing imperial women wove subjectivity into their clothing, however, is a difficult undertaking. Identifying owners of most extant objects can only

¹⁰ According to *Guochao gongshi* 國朝宮史 (Palace regulations of the Qing dynasty), which was compiled during the Qianlong reign, imperial women's allowance, food, clothes and belongings in their quarters were strictly regulated, and the Department of Imperial Household was the main supplier. Yu Minzhong 于敏中 (1714-1779) et al., *Guochao gongshi* 國朝宮史, *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* 近代中國史料叢刊 726 (1769; reprint, Taipei xian: Wenhai chubanshe, 1970), *juan* 17, 3-7.

¹¹ This tendency can be observed from the fact that most publications introduce court attire by their hierarchical orders and weaving techniques. See Zhang Qiong 張瓊, ed. *Qingdai gongting fushi* 清代宮廷服飾 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 2006); Gugong bowuyuan, ed. *Tianchao yiguan: Gugong bowuyuan cang Qingdai gongting fushi jingpin zhan* 天朝衣冠—故宮博物院藏清代宮廷服飾精品展 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008); Ming Wilson, ed. *Imperial Chinese Robes. From the Forbidden City* (London: V&A Pub, 2010). The institution of imperial weaving workshops is another focus of scholarly interest; see Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 189-209.

be done with great uncertainty. In addition, we lack documentation about the ways in which imperial women participated in the making of their clothes. The methodological discrepancy might perhaps be overcome by consulting more developed scholarship from earlier periods. Sarah Dauncey, for instance, argues that late Ming women distinguished their social status through the decoration and material of their attire.¹² The attire of Qing imperial women was, a vehicle for self-expression, and a sophisticated framework was already in existence by Cixi's time. Under the Qing regime's meticulous dress code, imperial women's formal attire for ritual and ceremonial occasions was strictly regulated, though the codes retained a flexible attitude with regard to women's *bianfu* 便服, "informal robes."¹³ Since clothes could be easily modified, imperial women could change and personalize the robes provided by the Department of the Imperial Household. Indeed, at least one scholar believes that, in some cases, imperial women collaborated with court artists in the design of their attire.¹⁴

Unlike her forebears, abundant textual and visual materials make it possible to contextualize Cixi's involvement in the design and production of her attire. Cixi regarded makeup and attire as the quintessential matters of daily life. This is clearly articulated in her motto: "A woman's life is meaningless if she does not make efforts to refine and enjoy self-

¹² Sarah Dauncey, "Illusions of Grandeur: Perceptions of Status and Wealth in Late-Ming Female Clothing and Ornamentation," *East Asian History*, 25/26 (2003): 43-68. A similar perspective on class distinction can be found in Dorothy Ko's research on Chinese women's bound feet as the pivotal mode of dress signifying their social status. She argues that the immobility resulting from foot binding called for the necessity of accompanying attendants, who thereby became a symbol of the owner's privilege. Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005), 199-202.

¹³ Imperial consorts' informal robes were not described in the *Daqing huidian*, suggesting the potential freedom and flexibility they enjoyed in wearing this kind of robe. Nonetheless, two conventions indeed existed: the patterns and fabrics of the daily dress followed seasonal change. Kungang 崑岡 et al., *Daqing huidian tu* 大清會典圖, *juan* 75, (1899; reprint, Taipei: Qiwen chubanshe, 1963), 2017; Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 185-86.

¹⁴ Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 200-201. Zong mentions this practice in her writing, but no textual evidence is provided.

adornment.”¹⁵ Taking full control of how her clothing was both designed and constructed, Cixi’s involvement in her personal attire was unprecedented. Small accessories were the first step toward her wide-ranging control. Cixi’s specific instructions appeared as early as the fifth month of the Tongzhi reign, when the twenty-seven-year-old empress dowager had just begun to act as her son’s regent.¹⁶ With the accumulation of power, her commissions rapidly extended to her clothes, shoes and an array of accessories. Ultimately, Cixi’s personal instructions were not restricted to the design of her personal items, as her predecessors had done, but included their very production. She frequently issued imperial orders for textile making to the Imperial Workshops and the Jiangnan san zhizao 江南三織造 (Three Imperial Manufactories in the Jiangnan Region). These institutes, however, often procrastinated and failed to meet her exacting expectations.¹⁷ To reinforce her direct control, the matriarch established a personal manufactory in Qihua guan 綺華館 (Pavilion of Elegant Flowers) in the Western Imperial Gardens on September 4, 1890.¹⁸ Given their production alongside one another, and Cixi’s oversight of all objects produced within her manufactory, I will examine not only the clothing but also the textiles depicted in the matriarch’s portraits.

¹⁵ Jin Yi, *Gongnü tanwang lu*, 17.

¹⁶ Cixi issued a design drawing of a white sandalwood pendant to the Imperial Workshop and requested it be made accordingly on May 16, 1862. “NZHD,” Box No.34_457_561.

¹⁷ Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 182-183.

¹⁸ The location of the Manufactory used to be a two-story Western-style building in Jiling you 集靈囿 (Garden of Gathered Spirit) in the Zhonghai Palace. The establishment of the manufactory began several months before the official announcement on June 6, 1890. One of Cixi’s eunuchs, Xin Xiuming, recalled that Cixi visited there on a daily basis when staying over in the palaces in Zhonghai and Nanhai. Therefore, we can be certain that she supervised the manufactory’s activities personally. Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan 中國第一歷史檔案館 ed, *Qingdai Zhongnanhai dang’an* 清代中南海檔案, *Xiujianguanli juan er* 修建管理卷二 (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanse, 2004), 248; Xin Xiuming, *Laotaijian de huiyi*, 38; Zong Fengying, “Cixi de xiao zhizao,” 44.

The intensified presence of auspicious symbols

As we saw in the last chapter, auspicious motifs show up often in the portraits depicting Cixi and her attire. Take the leg-crossing photo portrait of Cixi (fig.1.11), in which the sitter's jacket is divided into multiple layers of decorative bands, each embroidered with round *shou* (longevity) characters and chrysanthemums. The two symbols of longevity are the main decorations on the robe. A bat, an auspicious symbol homophonous with “good fortune” or *fu* in Chinese, appears on both ends of Cixi's headdress and becomes the third component of this auspicious symbol combination. Such an intense use of auspicious symbols is often interpreted as a reference to Cixi's wish for a long life to enjoy unbounded power.¹⁹ This assumption, however, also explains an aspect of her mindset, if considered together with her meticulously managed diet and frequent exercise, documented both in imperial archives and in her attendants' memoirs.²⁰ Wearing auspicious symbols to empower the wearer is by no means Cixi's invention but a common practice with a long history.

Auspicious symbols have been in Chinese artisans' pattern books for more than two thousand years.²¹ For the Han Chinese people, attire was always a vehicle to display auspicious

¹⁹ Zong Fengying, “Cixi de xiao zhizao,” 53-54.

²⁰ I was informed about the close relationship between the two rulers' diets during my discussion with Professor Chuang Chi-fa in July 2010. I appreciate his generosity in sharing his unpublished research.

²¹ Wishes for safety and prosperity were essential in ancient Chinese people's daily life, as is reflected in their literature. A good example of this is *Book of Odes* 詩經, an anthology rich with metaphorical plants and animals. These metaphors formed the reservoir of auspicious symbols up till the present day. Another important source for auspicious symbols comes from a different context, one that was initiated from a political agenda. Imaginary creatures and plants such as dragons and the phoenix became symbols of sage rulership and were further associated with auspicious symbolism. The phenomenon of using characters as the visual form of their auspicious meanings, began as early as the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E-220 C.E): think of the silk robe from the Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb No. 1 in Changsha 長沙, Hunan Province, which is dated to the mid-second century B.C.E. Against the dark brown background are repetitive motifs of a dragon's head descending from the cloud. The dragon is a symbol of longevity in ancient China, and the piece is recorded as the *changshou xiu* 長壽繡, “embroidery of longevity,” in the accompanying inventory, which confirms the decoration's auspicious symbolism. The phenomenon grew stronger during the Northern Song dynasty and became all the more popular with the advancement of literacy in the seventeenth century. Fu Juyou 傅舉有, Chen Songchang 陳松長, eds. *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu* 馬王堆漢墓文物,

symbols. The case is somewhat different with the Jianzhou Jurchens 建州女真, who established the Manchu state and later expanded it into the Qing Empire. These nomadic tribes did not develop such customs until the early seventeenth century, when they came to have frequent contact with their Han neighbors.²² During the course of expansion, the Jurchens incorporated and transformed cultural elements from regions they conquered to formulate a unique cultural identity, or “Manchu-ness,” a long process that was only completed during the Qianlong reign of the eighteenth century.²³ Han Chinese culture influenced evolving Manchu-ness in multiple ways, including, but not limited to, the use of auspicious motifs. Characters with positive meanings, such as *fu* (blessing) and *shou* (longevity), were most popular. Their presence in Qing court art can be traced back to at least the late seventeenth century. Emperor Kangxi, for example, bestowed his calligraphy of *fu* characters written on red papers to officials on New Year’s Day,²⁴ and several blue-and-white porcelain flower vases commissioned to celebrate his seventieth birthday are decorated with hundreds of *shou* characters.²⁵

(Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1992), 91-93; Jessica Rawson, “The Auspicious Universe,” in *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, edited by Jessica Rawson, Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain), and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), 358-359; Minato Nobuyuki 湊信幸, “Josetsu” 序説, in *Kisshō: Chūgoku bijutsu ni komerareta imi*, 吉祥—中国美術にこめられた意味 edited by Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 東京国立博物館 (Tōkyō: Tōkyō kokuritsu hakubutsukan, 1998), 7-8; Imai Atsushi 今井敦, “Chūgoku tōji no ishō ni nirareru imi to zōkei no renkan wo megutte” 中国陶磁の意匠に見られる意味と造型の連環をめぐって, in *Kisshō*, 19.

²² The Jianzhou Jurchens already wore clothes decorated with various patterns, most of which they traded with or looted from their Han neighbors in the early seventeenth century. However the use of patterns was casual, as the dragon, a prestigious symbol in the Han culture, was seen on the clothes of both aristocrats and commoners. Yi Min-hwan 李民奐 (1573-1649), “Jianzhou wenjianlu” 建州聞見録, in *Zhazhong rilu jiaoshi, Jianzhou wenjianlu jiaoshi* 柵中日錄校釋 建州聞見録校釋, ed. Liaoning daxue lishixi 遼寧大學歷史系 (Shenyang shi: Liaoning daxue lishixi, 1978), 43.

²³ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 134, 221-222.

²⁴ Zuo Buqing 左步青, “Shu ‘fu’ bansi” 書「福」頒賜, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, 1 (1981): 35-37.

²⁵ For a reproduction of this vase, see Jessica Rawson, Royal Academy of Arts (Great Britain), and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, cat. 302.

Manchu women also embraced Han Chinese auspicious symbols, integrating them into their clothing. For instance, a yellow informal robe embroidered with pairs of butterflies facing each other, a symbol of *xi xiangfeng* 喜相逢 signifying joyful omens,²⁶ was excavated from the tomb of Princess Rongxian 榮憲 (1673-1728) (fig.2.2).²⁷ The fact that the ruling classes adopted this motif, suggests the strong popularity of Han Chinese auspicious symbols in Manchu visual culture during the eighteenth century. A century later auspicious symbols were indispensable decorative elements in Qing imperial attire for both men and women. Emperor Daoguang's family portrait *Autumn Garden Brimming with Joy* 喜溢秋庭 testifies to this popularity. Cranes appear on the green vest of the princess at the center of the painting, and peonies and orchids are found on the pink and grass-green robes of the two imperial consorts standing in the foreground (fig.2.3). Based on the attire Cixi and other imperial women wore in paintings or photographs, the same practice endured throughout the empress dowager's time. Such images not only show the pervasiveness of the popular concept "every image always contains a meaning, and the meaning is always auspicious" 圖必有意, 意必吉祥, but also provide important materials to examine the fashion of imperial attire at the time. Similarly, though the overwhelming presence of longevity motifs on Cixi's garments in her later years was perhaps a visualized wish for longevity, such motifs had appeared as early as 1865 in her first attire commissions when she was in her early thirties. Indeed, in several instances Cixi demanded that more *shou* characters

²⁶ For the evolution of this symbol, see Hsieh Ming-liang 謝明良, "Lüetan duidie wen" 略談對蝶紋, *Gugong wenwu yuekan*, no.260 (2004): 24-35.

²⁷ Sun Yanzhen 孫彥貞, *Qingdai nüxing fushi wenhua yanjiu* 清代女性服飾文化研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 33, color plate 13.

be added to the design drawings of her robes.²⁸ Beyond their auspiciousness, such floral motifs also echoed seasonal change. For instance, the robes worn by Yu Deling and Rongling, Cixi's two ladies-in-waiting on a late autumn day were embroidered with chrysanthemums. The flower is a common symbol of longevity, however living a long life was certainly not a major concern for young women (fig.2.4). For the young sisters, the chrysanthemum was rather a motif appropriate to the season.

Though Cixi continued to follow these conventions when designing her clothing, some significant changes can also be observed. First, new combinations of auspicious symbols drawn from homophonous puns increased the variety of the pattern pool. A navy blue satin waistcoat produced in 1863 is decorated with one of these popular new sets: a butterfly and *shou* (longevity) character (fig.2.5). It is embroidered with butterflies and the border includes bands of square *shou* characters and butterflies. Butterfly, pronounced *die* 蝶 in Chinese, is a homophone of *die* 耄, which refers to an elderly person who has reached the age of eighty, while the *shou* character further strengthens the butterfly's symbolic ties to longevity. Cixi was fond of the butterfly motif and used it extensively in her attire (fig.2.6). She also commissioned robes decorated with butterflies and *xi* 囍, "joy," characters.²⁹ In addition, floral motifs, such as chrysanthemums and narcissuses, developed into new variations of homophonous puns. Often they were combined with *shou* characters to emphasize longevity. For instance, a narcissus, or *shuixian* 水仙, and *shou* characters form the phrase *xianshou* 仙壽, which literally means as long-lived as an immortal. This motif set appears on the yellow robe that Cixi wears in the St. Louis portrait (fig.1.30B).

²⁸ "NZHD," Box No. 36_73_582, entry of December 30, 1865.

²⁹ "NZHD," Box No. 37_393_546, entry of March 4, 1870.

Second, new motifs, such as bamboo, orchids and glossy ganoderma, were incorporated into Cixi's auspicious symbol system. If butterflies and flowers won Cixi's favor with their colorful appearance, bamboo was welcomed for its cultural significance. Its evergreen quality, tenacity and hollowed heart were metaphors for selflessness and clear-mindedness. In the context of popular visual culture, bamboo's vitality and its ability to sprout overnight made it a common symbol for spring.³⁰ As a subject for painting, the plant appeared as early as the tenth century,³¹ but as an individual decorative motif, bamboo was rare until the seventeenth century when the market for scholarly stationery and collectables thrived. The trend also influenced Qing court art production.³² Nevertheless, the late-Qing adoption of the bamboo motif in garment design carried a more vernacular meaning. It was often paired with *shou* characters to symbolize the auspicious phrase "wishing for someone's longevity": bamboo's Chinese pronunciation, *zhu*, resembles the verb *zhu* 祝, or "to wish." It was this vernacular symbolism, rather than bamboo's association with seventeenth-century literati, that Cixi enthusiastically embraced.³³ In one of her photographic portraits, we can see extensive use of the motif. In this instance she wears a robe embroidered with bamboo branches and round *shou* characters (fig.2.7).

³⁰ Miyazaki Noriko 宮崎法子, *Kachō, sansuiga wo yomitoku: Chūgoku ega no imi* 花鳥画を読み解く：中国絵画の意味 (Tōkyō: Kadokawa Shoten, 2003), 222-24.

³¹ According to a fourteenth-century book on famous paintings, it is said that Madame Li of the Five Dynasties (907-979) created the subject of ink painting. Xia Wenyan 夏文彦 (fl. mid fourteenth century), *Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 814, 36b-37a.

³² For instance, the porcelain statuary of the Yuqichang 御器廠 (Imperial Kiln, hereafter; renamed Yuyaochang 御窯廠 in 1711) in Jingdezhen manufactured during the Kangxi reign is particularly well known for its elegant ink bamboo decorations. For exemplary works, see Liu Wei, *Diwang yu gongting ciqi*, figures, 23-3, 23-5.

³³ According to the calculation of extant fabrics, the bamboo motif is one of the most common decorations the Qihuaguan Manufactory produced. Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 184.

Another new motif was comprised of orchids and glossy ganoderma. A symbol for virtue and elegance, the orchid was used as an individual motif. It can be seen, for instance, in the pink robe Emperor Daoguang's consort wears in the painting *Autumn Garden Brimming with Joy* (fig.2.3). The depiction of the orchid motif gradually transformed into the entire plant and was paired with glossy ganoderma, a mushroom associated with good fortune and longevity, thus making an even stronger auspicious symbol.

The first character of glossy ganoderma, *zhi*, and the character of orchid, *lan*, form another pun in Chinese: the term *zhilan* 芝蘭 refers to a person's nobility and grace. Orchid-related motifs were quite common in Cixi's attire. In several of her photographic portraits, she wears robes embroidered with orchid plants and *shou* characters or orchid-glossy ganoderma decorations. Her personal manufactory in the Pavilion of Elegant Flowers also produced a large number of textiles decorated with orchid and glossy ganoderma patterns, orchid plants and orchid blossoms. Scholars often propose that Cixi favored the orchid motif for her personal connection with the flower's name. Her first official title, Lan Guiren, literally means the "Worthy Lady Orchid." Cixi confirms this connection in the portraits.³⁴ As I noted in the first chapter, she often held the branch of an orchid blossom as if wielding a prop, one that alluded to her first and destiny-changing role in her political performance. Though it remains unclear whether this motif was specifically reserved for her, for Cixi the orchid motif was not only (like other auspicious motifs) an empowering symbol but also a staged device for self-projection. The abundance of this motif in other artistic media Cixi patronized, especially the interior decorations in the palace, supports such an assumption, a question I return to in Chapter Four.

³⁴ Ibid, 184.

The influence of stage costumes

Cixi followed the convention of decorating her robes with auspicious symbols, but she also appropriated theatrical elements, which not only had a stunning visual effect but also influenced late Qing fashion. The Qing imperial household persistently patronized the theatrical arts, and this provided the most exclusive environment for Cixi to cultivate her connoisseurship of performance art. During the early Qing, the court followed the Ming administration system and kept its own performers and troupes that excelled in various kinds of performance. These entertainers were often summoned to perform in the imperial precincts.³⁵ The inner court later established its own troupe, the Nan fu 南府 (Court Theatrical Bureau, later renamed the Shengping shu 昇平署 in the early Daoguang reign), an institution comprised of eunuch performers that continued to exist until the end of the dynasty.³⁶ Emperor Xianfeng was especially fond of theatrical performance. For him, this art form was an escape from the tumultuous domestic upheavals and foreign challenges of his time. Under his support and direction the Court Theatrical Bureau performed so frequently that they were even summoned to Jehol, when Xianfeng was in hiding during the Second Opium War.³⁷

Exposed to such an environment, Cixi swiftly developed an expertise in various aspects of the theatrical arts, including performance and stage costuming, and made full use of her skills in her long-term religious practice embodying Guanyin. According to Yuhang Li, Cixi designed her own Guanyin drag, a complex outfit incorporating theatrical, fashion and ethnic elements,

³⁵ Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, Ding Ruqin 丁汝芹, *Qingdai neiting yanju shimo kao* 清代內廷演劇始末考 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2007), 1-3.

³⁶ Xiaoqing Ye, "Imperial Institutions and Drama in the Qing Court," *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2 (2003): 344-51.

³⁷ For the archives recording Xianfeng's direction and order to the Shengpingshu, see Zhu Jiajin, Ding Ruqin, *Qingdai neiting yanju shimo kao*, 247-318.

when preparing for the costume photograph in 1903. In order to reinforce this theatrical element, Cixi looked to the stage, adapting costumes for the Guanyin character and choosing to wear a “five Buddhas hat” with a robe decorated with bamboo motifs (fig.1.23). This unique costume also carries strong elements of Manchu fashion, such as three layers of borders on the sleeves and high-heeled shoes, both of which were common to Manchu women’s attire.³⁸

Cixi’s Guanyin costume in the portrait painting also combines contemporary fashion and theatrical elements. Her “five Buddhas hat” and pearl mantle are both standard accessories for the Guanyin character, while the high heels, decorated with lotus petals, are undoubtedly an index to her gender. The dragon robe is a unique mixture of the theatrical and the everyday. Golden *fo* (Buddha) characters decorate her robe, an embellishment inspired by the common stage costume design of using particular motifs on a character’s costume that allow the audience to easily recognize the role. Consider the robe the Sakyamuni Buddha character wears, which is embroidered with the red *fo* characters (fig.2.8). Aside from the *fo* characters, the accurate depiction of the dragon robe details brings the image back to the realm of the real world. To avoid offending the authorities, a dragon robe costume usually had large flowers on five-color clouds and two dragons on the chest presented from the side view instead of a single frontal view dragon. The decoration on Cixi’s robe, however, was based on a genuine dragon robe.³⁹

Cixi also appropriated the theatrical elements of enlarged decorative motifs on stage costumes. This appropriation is not as dramatic and easy to detect, but was instead a long-term development that reached its pinnacle through her patronage. It should be noted that the imperial troupe’s stage costumes, along with the attire for the imperial household, were all designed in the

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of Cixi’s Guanyin costume and the purposes of making these dresses, see Yuhang Li, “Oneself as a Female Deity,” 85-96.

³⁹ For an example of the dragon robe costume, see *Qinggong xiqu wenwu*, 198.

Imperial Workshops and sewn by the Imperial Manufactories. It is perhaps unsurprising to find, then, stylistic similarities between the stage costume and the garments for the imperial family members, even though the former were often decorated with outlandish motifs to strengthen their visual effect on stage. It seems the decorative style of these stage costumes changed when the imperial troupe was renamed the Shengping shu.⁴⁰ Unlike the varied fabrics and refined needlework characteristic of stage costume prior to the Daoguang reign, later stage costumes stand out for their opulent decorations and numerous auspicious patterns.⁴¹

In addition, decorative patterns grew larger and larger during this period, as we can see in the album *Paintings of Characters in Plays* produced during the Xianfeng reign.⁴² This album documents the stage costumes of various plays, showing that even though the Daoguang predilection for denser decoration prevails, many patterns were enlarged. The red robe costume for Meng Liang 孟良 and black robe costume for Jiao Zan 焦贊 in the play *Cave of Hongxiang* 洪祥洞 exemplify this new style. They are both covered with large and colorful round patterns (fig.2.9).

It was also during the Daoguang era that the decorations on imperial women's attire became more dramatic. First, such decorative motifs gradually became stylized and flat. As

⁴⁰ Despite the small number of extant stage costumes prior to the Guangxu era, the Shengpingshu's activities are excellent archival sources for our reconstruction of the evolution of stage costume. Scripts, stage costumes and props were stored and documented, and the character costumes in some plays were even painted into the pictorial documentations. Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, "Qingdai de xiqu fushi shiliao" 清代的戲曲服飾史料, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 4 (1979): 26-32.

⁴¹ Zhang Shuxian 張淑賢, "Qinggong yanxi qingkuang yu xiangguan wenwu" 清宮演戲情況與相關文物, *Qinggong xiqu wenwu*, 22-23. A comparison of the two costumes for the same character in the play *Jiang Gan Stealing the Book* 蔣幹盜書 made in the Qianlong and Daoguang reigns clarifies such a change. The former has a plain collar and scattered plants and butterflies on the robe, while the latter's collar is embroidered with blue bats and flowers, and the decorative patterns are arranged in a much denser. Another stylistic change is the enlarged size of the decorative pattern, which can be found in the album *Paintings of Characters in Plays* 戲曲人物畫 produced during the Xianfeng reign. For reproductions of these two costumes, see *Qinggong xiqu wenwu*, 52-53.

⁴² Zhu jiajin, "Qingdai de xiqu fushi shiliao," 29-30.

William Watson noted, it was during this period that the eighteenth-century standard of naturalistic, scattered and seldom-repeated decorative composition went out of fashion; repetitive, stylized patterns and symmetrical designs were suddenly *à la mode*.⁴³ For example, the aforementioned Princess Rongxian's robe is decorated with several large paired butterflies, with smaller butterflies dispersed between the main patterns (fig.2.2). By contrast, the butterfly motifs on Cixi's robe are so enlarged that the base color of the robe is largely covered. The butterflies have also lost the naturalistic quality of their predecessors. Whereas several different kinds of butterflies can be identified on Princess Rongxian's robe, Cixi's attire is simply embroidered with the same butterfly pattern in two sizes.

Second, as we can see in the robes of Daoguang's two consorts in the imperial family's portrait painting, the patterns are denser and larger than those featured on eighteenth-century robes (fig.2.3). The trend is less obvious during the Tongzhi reign: the waistcoat made in 1863 is also decorated with dense yet small butterfly patterns (fig.2.5). This might have been an extension of the policy of Cixi's counterpart, Ci'an, who was less impressed with theatrical performance and kept the imperial troupe from expanding throughout her regency. Such a suppression of the theatrical arts also made the interaction between stage costume and informal robes less likely.

Cixi's desire to enjoy the theater was not fully unleashed until her senior's death in 1881.⁴⁴ From that point on the lone empress dowager enthusiastically promoted theatrical performance. She watched and practiced performances and brought elements of stage costume to her informal robes—something seen most clearly in the stage costumes and informal attire

⁴³ William Watson, "Textiles—The Universal Craft," in *The Arts of China After 1620*, William Watson, Chuimei Ho (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 196.

⁴⁴ Zhu Jiajin, Ding Ruqin, *Qingdai neiting yanju shi mo kao*, 319.

popular during Guangxu's reign, both of which are covered with extraordinarily large and ornate decorations. Since Cixi was the most influential imperial patron and a theatrical-art connoisseur, such a connection was very likely a result of her promotion. The stylistic similarity between Cixi's butterfly-and-*shou*-character robe and a female ceremonial robe for the stage character of an aristocratic woman demonstrates this assumption (figs.2.10, 2.6). The stage robe is densely decorated with auspicious patterns, such as gourd vines symbolizing multiple descendants, narcissuses and butterflies. The golden butterflies have replaced the dragon patterns on the traditional design of a formal gown and thus appear disproportionately large. The butterfly patterns on Cixi's robe were also designed into eye-catching sizes that could clearly be seen from afar.

The third element of Cixi's appropriation of theatrical elements in her daily wear was reflected in the motif of bamboo behind a garden rock. Originally very common in painting, the bamboo and garden rock motif gained religious significance with the rise of Guanyin belief. By the thirteenth century, the new iconography of Guanyin sitting among the natural surroundings of bamboo and rocks was already well established.⁴⁵ The iconography grew more complex and sophisticated thereafter. One of the many sets of the Guanyin iconography is described in the seventeenth-century text, *The Precious Scroll of Xiangshan* 香山寶卷, which noted that the female deity "may appear together with the bird and the pure vase, or with purple bamboo and green willow, or with Sudhana and the Dragon Princess."⁴⁶ A Guanyin costume from the Tongzhi reign exemplifies how popular these new iconographies were at the time. The decorative motifs closely follow the text. The blue satin is embroidered with a garden rock on

⁴⁵ Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 189.

⁴⁶ Cited from Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, 388. The text is attributed to Master Puming 普明 of the Northern Song dynasty, but its earliest printing can only be traced to 1773.

the lower front, with bamboo branches stretching behind it. The robe's back carries the detail of a white parrot holding a rosary in its beak (fig.2.11).

The bamboo and rock motif appears on Cixi's attire in a relatively simplified form. She wore a waistcoat with this decoration in one set of photographs, with the waistcoat partially covered by a cape (fig.2.4). A nearly identical piece provides a full view (fig.2.12). Unlike stage costumes, which are decorated with a single large composition, the decoration on the waistcoat only occupies the centerpiece. The purple bamboo grove and the pink lotus blossoms that emerge from the foreground both coincide with the Guanyin iconography and plainly signal Cixi's affiliation with the cult of Guanyin. Here again, Cixi appropriated the role-identification function of stage-costume decoration. If, as I argued in the first chapter, dressing up as Guanyin was a staged performance to showcase the matriarch's dual identity as both deity and ruler, wearing attire that used theatrical elements was an extension of her performance in daily life. Such assertive appropriation could not have been achieved without expertise in performance art; Cixi's gesture of blurring the boundary between the theatrical and the real should therefore be thought of as the formulation of a "theatrical reality" between these two spheres.

Visual coherence with daily accessories

The auspicious and dramatic characteristics can also be seen in other subcategories of Cixi's attire, all part of an unprecedented visual coherence. Pairing accessories with clothing is a common practice, and, in the same way, Cixi's accessories always cohere with the decorations on her robe. A sea-green robe with crane patterns would be worn with the same pearl headdress, and butterfly-shaped pins would be used to accent gowns with butterflies.⁴⁷ But rather than

⁴⁷ Yu Deling stated that she was to take care of Cixi's accessories and thus the empress dowager's dress was often recorded in detail. When describing the dress decorated with cranes, Yu mistook the pattern for a stork. Yu, *Two*

merely choosing from existing objects, Cixi played a much more spontaneous role in the design and production of her own accessories. For instance, the chief eunuch in Cixi's palace, Liu Deyin 劉得印 (fl. late 19th century), once brought two fragments of a large jade rockery and a drawing of the *yaojie* 腰結 (a hanging accessory bounded with the ribbon) in the shape of the *xi* (double joy) character to the Painting Workshop, which was also known by its location Ruyi guan 如意館 (Pavilion of Fulfilling Aspirations). The drawing was painted in red ink, which meant that it was drawn by the highest authority, in this case Empress Dowager Cixi. She ordered the court painters to copy her design, and also presumably to refine its details, and to use the jade rockery to make ten pieces of her designed accessory.⁴⁸

In addition to ordering custom-made jewelry, Cixi also involved herself in the design and production of porcelain ware, another prominent craft in Qing court art. Under her patronage, designs from imperial attire became an important point of reference for imperial porcelain, which was unprecedented. The phenomenon is especially distinct in the consistency of the colors and decorative motifs between one and the other. I discuss in the next section how Cixi involved herself in the porcelain making process and its political significance; here I simply focus on how she engaged with these two crafts and their visual effect.

It was common in Ming and Qing court art for different media to share the same decorative motifs from time to time. During the Ming dynasty objects made for the imperial household, such as porcelain, lacquer and silver wares, were often similarly decorated. The Qing Imperial Workshops were larger and more institutionalized and thus the sharing of pattern books

Years in the Forbidden City, 67-68, 193. For a reproduction of the dress consistent with her description, see *Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City*, edited by Ming Wilson (London: V&A Pub. 2010), 73.

⁴⁸ “NZHD,” January 20, 1867, Box No.36_553_583.

was not unusual among a variety of craft arts.⁴⁹ However, when it came to more sophisticated requests placed directly by the imperial commissioner, such convenience was often not the case.

As mentioned earlier, every design drawing had to be approved before the court artisans could proceed to make the final product. Given the process, the completed works are often regarded as the crystallization of an imperial patron's agency. By this logic, the similarity between Cixi's clothing and her porcelain ware, for which she was directly involved in both the design and production, was indeed a representation of her comprehensive control of the Imperial Workshops. How, then, did Cixi connect these two forms? After all, they are drastically different media and were managed by different workshops under the Imperial Workshop and produced in different manufactories. To overcome these difficulties, Cixi rearranged the responsibilities of the Xiuhuo chu 綉活處 (Embroidery Workshop), a branch of the Imperial Workshop, making it the coordinator of attire and porcelain design.

Established in the early Kangxi reign to serve as the court art agency, the Imperial Workshops gradually developed into a complex institution in charge of various workshops, each of which was responsible for the production of a specific kind of craft. The Embroidery Workshop first appeared in the "Documents of the Imperial Workshops in the Department of the Imperial Household" as the Xiuhuo zuo 繡活作 (Embroidery Studio) in 1731, and it received its first direct commission for making small silk bags three years later. These had nothing to do with design because, in most cases, the court painters in the Painting Workshop created a design

⁴⁹ For instance, the orchids and cranes on the dresses of the child and imperial consort in *Emperor Daoguang Enjoying the Autumn* also appear on imperial porcelainware from the same period. For reproductions of these porcelains, see Liu Wei 劉偉, *Wanqing guanyao ciqu shizhen* 晚清官窯瓷器識真 (Nanchang shi: Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 2007), 79; Xu Huping 徐湖平, ed. *Gongting zhencang: Zhongguo Qingdai guanyao ciqu* 宮廷珍藏：中國清代官窯瓷器 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2003), 399-400.

for the imperial patron.⁵⁰ In 1865 when Cixi requested that the Imperial Workshops make informal outer gowns decorated with many *shou* (longevity) characters, however, it was the Embroidery Workshop that presented the drawings. This incident suggests that the workshop was assigned a design function rather similar to that of the Painting Workshop.⁵¹ Although court painters were still summoned to design garments in the years to come, artisans in the Embroidery Workshop continued to share the court painters' duties in providing design drawings.⁵²

Another new function of the Embroidery Workshop was the responsibility for designing Cixi's porcelains. Originally, this also was the responsibility of the artists in the Painting Workshop. As early as 1866, when Cixi ordered that the standard reign mark be written on the imperial wares of the Tongzhi reign, another imperial order was included in the edict on dressmaking addressed to the Embroidery Workshop.⁵³ It included the designs for Emperor Tongzhi's wedding wares and porcelains that Cixi commissioned. It is still unclear why she chose to work so closely with this workshop, but considering her frequent wardrobe requests, it is likely that Cixi was most familiar with the Embroidery Workshop and considered it more convenient to make this body responsible for designing these two closely related materials. Such

⁵⁰ Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, ed. *Yangxin dian Zaoban chu shiliao jilan (Yongzheng chao)* 養心殿造辦處史料集覽 (雍正朝) (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2003), 210-11, 287-88. Emperor Qianlong was arguably the most dominant art patron in China. His commissioned patterns best explain how all-encompassing an imperial commissioner's agency was. Taking the production of the documentary long handscroll *Emperor Qianlong's Southern Inspection* 乾隆南巡圖 for example, multiple monochrome drawings were produced and presented to the emperor for instruction. Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Qingdai gongting huihua gaoben shukao" 清代宮廷繪畫述考, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 3 (2004): 88-90.

⁵¹ "NZHD," Box No. 36_73_58w2, entry of December 30, 1865.

⁵² For example, on May 11 1869 Cixi had the Embroidery Workshop design ceremonial robes for her, and ordered the court painters to draw one ceremonial robe and seven informal robes on September 29. "NZHD," Box No. 37_173_546; 37_174_546; 37_303_546.

⁵³ "NZHD," entry of June 1, 1866. Box No. 36_204_582; 36_205_582.

modifications helped Cixi imprint her aesthetic preferences for attire design on her porcelains, another surface that allowed for the representation of multiple colors and decorative patterns.

Under Cixi's direction, the color schemes, decorative motifs and visual effects of her porcelain objects highly resemble her attire. In general, large flower-and-bird motifs against bold high-chroma ground colors, such as blue, purple, green and yellow, were common among objects made in both materials. This did not necessarily reflect Cixi's personal tastes but was related to the conventional dress code Manchu women adopted from Han culture. When the Manchu conquered the Ming territory, Han Chinese women's attire was left unchanged, though their male counterparts were forced to follow the Manchu hairdos and clothing. The rich design of Han woman's clothing soon attracted the attention of Manchu women, fueling a stylistic transformation of Manchu attire from fit and simple, the signature of nomadic clothing, to loose and ornate.⁵⁴ The change in fashion along with the Manchu bannermen's newly adopted Han habits against their forebears' martial tradition were so popular that it alarmed the authorities, who issued bans against the imitation of Han customs, including the wide and loose cutting of women's clothing.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, violations only occurred more frequently and fundamentally changed Manchu women's fashion in the nineteenth century.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ During the Qianlong reign, the sleeves of Manchu women's robes grew wider and wider, and several bands were added to the sleeve edge to enhance luxuriousness. Annie Yin, "Women's Informal Wear at the Imperial Court in the Qing Dynasty," in *Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City*, 67.

⁵⁵ Pei Huang, *Reorienting the Manchus: A Study of Sinicization, 1583-1795* (Ithaca: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 2011), 213-222.

⁵⁶ Early writings on Qing costume often tie the stylistic change to the loss of Manchu ethnic purity and dynastic decline. However, in recent years scholars have gradually turned to socio-economic causes and the long-term cultural interaction between the Han and Manchu cultures. John E. Vollmer, "Clothed to Rule the Universe: Ming and Qing Dynasty Textiles at The Art Institute of Chicago," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 26. 2 (2000): 35, note 61.

As a part of this sartorial assimilation, the Manchu also adopted the Han convention of distinguishing the wearer's domestic and social role by the color of their clothes.⁵⁷ During the mid- to late Qing period, a sumptuary code centered on this ideology was instituted. The late Qing Manchu writer Chongyi 崇彝 (1885-1945) recorded the specific Manchu color schemes assigned to the robes of married women and widows in the late nineteenth century:

其次禮服則襯衣、氅衣皆挽袖者（即緣以花邊，將大袖卷上）。氅衣分大紅色、藕荷色、月白色（皆有繡花，或淨面，分穿者之年歲、行輩定之）。以上皆雙全婦人所着者。若孀婦氅衣或藍色，則醬色，襯衣則視外氅衣顏色配合之。

[Second,] in terms of the formal costume, both the informal robe and the informal outer gown have rolled sleeves (this is because women decorate the sleeves with patterned borders and roll them up [to reveal the borders]). The informal outer gowns can be bright red, reddish purple and pale white (they are either embroidered with patterns or plain, depending on the wearer's age and rank in the family tree). These colors are for those married and have children. A widow's informal outer gown is usually blue, while her informal robe is usually purple but can be other colors to go with the outer gown.⁵⁸

According to this convention, a married Manchu woman's attire was confined to dark or pale colors. It seems that late Qing imperial women fully complied with this dress code, which can be seen in the portraits of the two widowed empress dowagers, Ci'an and Cixi (figs.1.2, 1.3). Ci'an is in a blue gown, while Cixi's robe is brownish red, both being the dark colors Chongyi mentions. Widowed when young, they were deprived of the pleasure of wearing bright, cheerful colors. These rules on decorum were so strictly imposed that however powerful Cixi became she still followed these conventions throughout her life. According to scholars of Qing textiles, Cixi usually wore light reddish purple, bluish green, grayish white and light yellow garments in middle age, while the manufactory in the Pavilion of Elegant Flowers produced a large number

⁵⁷ Sun, *Qingdai Nüxing Fushi Wenhua Yanjiu*, 86.

⁵⁸ Chongyi 崇彝, *Dao xian yilai chaoye zai* 道咸以來朝野雜記 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1982), 33.

of aubergine, dark blue and gray textiles.⁵⁹ These studies substantiate the pictorial evidence. Cixi wears a blue informal robe and a light-reddish purple riding jacket in the *go*-playing portrait (fig.1.6A), while the centerpiece of the waistcoat, which she wore frequently in her later years, is decorated with purple bamboo and a grayish-white garden rock motif (fig.2.14).

Scholars have often concluded that Cixi's favorite color was *ouhe se* 藕荷色 (the color of the lotus root) and its dark shade *shen ouhe se* 深藕荷色, which resembles aubergine, and was particularly common in the matriarch's wardrobe.⁶⁰ Although documented in Chinese terms, the color *shen ouhe se* is in effect a foreign import. Discovered in 1856 by William Henry Perkin (1838-1907), Perkin's Purple (also known as aniline purple or mauveine), a kind of purple with a bluish hue, was the first synthetic organic chemical dye. It appeared frequently in late Qing court costumes.⁶¹ Scholars have not directly connected Perkin's Purple and the *shen ouhe se*, but the hues of these two colors are very similar. No textual evidence has yet been discovered that definitively pins down the exact year this dye was first introduced to China. However, since the Yue haiguan 粤海關 (Guangdong Customs Superintendent) regularly offered various domestic and foreign luxuries, including textiles, to the inner court, fabrics bearing this color possibly

⁵⁹ For the complete list of the designs Qihuaguan Manufactory produced, see Zong Fengying, "Cixi de xiao zhiao--Qihua guan," 47-48.

⁶⁰ Zong Fengying, *Qingdai gongting fushi*, 183-4.

⁶¹ Schuyler Cammann, "Costume in China, 1644 to 1912," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 75, no. 326 (October 1, 1979): 16-17. Unlike traditional organic dye in China, which is often made from the purple gromwell, Perkin's Purple is cheaper, and the coloration is more stable. These two factors are critical to textile production and directly resulted in the enthusiastic acceptance of aniline dyes in China.

entered the court through this channel even before the aniline dye began to be officially imported to China in 1871.⁶²

Interestingly, around the time when aubergine became popular in Cixi's wardrobes, the same color also began to appear on various imperial porcelain objects. Scholars have identified the connection between Cixi and the use of aubergine for imperial objects and costumes, interpreting it as a reflection of her aesthetic tastes.⁶³ Aubergine, in fact, was also new to the potter's palette. Despite its regular presence in Qing imperial porcelain ware, prior to the late nineteenth century the purple enamel pigment usually had a red hue, as can be seen on the lotus on the bowl made during the Xianfeng reign (fig.2.13).⁶⁴ This bluish aubergine color first appeared on Qing imperial wares in the group comprising Emperor Tongzhi's wedding wares (1868-72). In Figure 2.14, the ground color on the rectangular flowerpot is an elegant deep purple with a blue hue, which highly resembles Perkin's Purple. The appearance of this color is hardly a coincidence. Cixi was the director of wedding wares, as will be discussed below, and it is thus not surprising to find her preferences displayed in these objects. There were also other elements indicating the matriarch's taste. Her favorite bamboo and orchid motifs are also present in the new designs for wedding wares. Previously, bamboo was depicted naturalistically, showing in detail the plant's branches and leaves. Cixi's new designs emphasized the leaves and eliminated the branches (fig.2.14).⁶⁵ This same depiction also appears in Cixi's Guanyin robe

⁶² For an early customs record of aniline dye importing, see Rachel Silberstein, "'Vicious Purple' or a 'First Class Dye'?: Finding a Place for the Foreign in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Dress Culture," 12, n.73. Paper presented at College Art Association 2013 Annual Conference, New York City, Feb 16, 2013.

⁶³ Zheng Hong 鄭宏, "Daya zhai ciqu" 大雅齋瓷器, in *Guanyang yuci*, 152.

⁶⁴ For an early eighteenth-century example of purple enamel bowl, see Feng Ming-chu 馮明珠 ed., *Yongzheng: Qing Shizong wenwu dazhan* 雍正：清世宗文物大展 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2009), 155.

⁶⁵ Dong Jianli 董健麗, "Tongzhi dahunci yanjiu" 同治大婚瓷研究, *Gugong Bowuyuan Yuankan*, 149 (2010):111, 119.

(figs.1.21, 1.23). The combination of butterflies and the double *xi* (happiness) character might also reflect Cixi's preferences, as she commissioned blue informal outer gowns with the same motifs around this time.⁶⁶

After this initial experiment in the Tongzhi wedding wares, the shared designs between attire and daily accessories became more mature. This shows clearly in Cixi's patronage of the Dayazhai wares, a commission for her personal objects. Daya zhai 大雅齋 (Studio of Utmost Grace) refers to Cixi's studios in the imperial precincts. The Dayazhai wares are a set of colorful over-glaze enamel porcelains containing fifteen variations of plain white, bluish green, aubergine, yellow, green and blue ground colors.⁶⁷ Unlike the small-scale experiment of the Tongzhi wedding wares, these new enamel colors inspired by new dyes were applied to various shapes and produced in large quantities. Most of these enamel colors come from a palette developed during the eighteenth century, but on average the chroma of these nineteenth-century pigments is much higher.⁶⁸ Aubergine is only one of more than two-thirds of the colors that match the palette of Cixi's attire (fig.2.1, 2.15). Taking design number three, which depicts hydrangeas and other flowers against an aubergine ground color, as an example, the yellow instruction tag attached to the drawing paper calls for nine differently shaped wares totaling 473 pieces.⁶⁹ The rich dark blue enamel, whose color is brighter than the common cobalt blue glaze, also reminds

⁶⁶ "NZHD," Box No. 37_393_546, entry of March 4, 1870. For a reproduction of this design, see *Guanyang yuci*, 119.

⁶⁷ The color variations were documented in the order the Imperial Workshops sent them to the Imperial Kiln. For a reproduction of this archive, see Zhang Xiaorui 張小銳, "Qinggong ciqu huayang de xingshuai" 清宮瓷器畫樣的興衰, in *Guanyang yuci*, 43.

⁶⁸ Geng Baochang, *Ming Qing ciqu jianding*, 316.

⁶⁹ Gugong bowuyuan ed., *Guanyang yuci*, 200.

the viewer of robes made in the Guangxu reign and the empress dowager's blue Guanyin robe in the portrait painting (fig.2.16, 1.23).⁷⁰

To achieve the same powerful visual impact seen in Cixi's garments, artisans in the Embroidery Workshop used common motifs from her robes to decorate the Dayazhai wares. Although no composition from these porcelains is identical to those found in Cixi's robes, the two media share the same use of auspicious flower-and-bird motifs and the same strong visual impact representations. New floral auspicious symbols, such as hydrangeas and wisteria, both rare motifs in wardrobes and on porcelain before Cixi's time, are popular among Dayazhai wares and Cixi's robes. The round shape of a hydrangea flower, comprised of many smaller blossoms, visually represents the literal meaning of the phrase *yuanman* 圓滿: round and full. The term also refers to feelings of satisfaction and contentment. The eye-catching hydrangea flowers fit her preference for visually stunning decorations. In addition to the Dayazhai wares, these flowers also appear on the light purple riding jacket Cixi wears in her portrait painting (fig.2.1, 1.6A).

Wisteria, another flower with glamorous blossoms, had been popular in Qing imperial visual culture.⁷¹ This motif was more common in painting than in porcelain and textile production, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that the flower was widely used in other artistic media. Wisteria appears, for instance, on three design drawings of the Dayazhai wares and on Cixi's robe in one of the oil portraits Katharine Carl painted (fig.2.33).

⁷⁰ For a reproduction of a navy blue robe from the Guangxu reign, whose color is comparable to this enamel color, see Gugong bowuyuan ed., *Shikinjō no kōhi to kyūtei geijutsu: Pekin kokyū hakubutsuin ten* 紫禁城の后妃と宮廷芸術 (Tokyo: Sezon bijutsukan, 1997), cat.28.

⁷¹ The most renowned example of wisteria is the *trompe l'oeil* painting on the ceiling of the interior theater of the Juanqin zhai 倦勤齋 (Lodge of Retirement) located in the northeast corner of the Forbidden City. The painting, completed during the Qianlong reign, was restored to its original condition in recent years.

My analysis thus far has shown the double-faceted characteristic of Cixi's attire. Clothing was a critical means of self-expression for Cixi, and just like every other imperial woman, and her fondness for auspicious motifs was in line with nineteenth-century visual culture. The color scheme for the matriarch's attire also coincided with the common Manchu dress code. Despite largely following the tradition, the empress dowager's direct control of the Imperial Workshops enables a close reading of her agency as embodied in the new designs. By appropriating dramatic elements of stage costume, including the enlarged decorative patterns and motifs referring to character, the boundary between reality and theater was blurred. Furthermore, Cixi commissioned everyday accessories such as jewelry and porcelain wares in the same style as her attire, which enriched her visual coherence on the stage of everyday life. The significance of the matriarch's porcelains, however, does not merely rest on the level of visual effect. In the following section, I describe the gendered dimensions and political property of imperial porcelain production in relation to her porcelain patronage.

2.2 Porcelain Ware as an Index of Femininity and Power

In the realm of politics, objects a ruler wielded or specially commissioned often take on rich political meanings because of their "rarity."⁷² Cixi certainly understood the use of such objects to enforce distinctions, and her porcelain patronage best illustrates such a strategy. The number, material and decoration of every Qing imperial woman's personal belongings signified her rank in the inner court. As far as porcelain wares were concerned, when Cixi was the

⁷² Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne Bubolz Eicher, "Dress, Gender and Age," in Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne Bubolz Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson, eds. *Dress and Identity* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 103-4.

Honored Consort, 141 pieces of white porcelain decorated with yellow, the most prestigious color, and other colors were assigned to her palace. After she advanced to the junior dowager empress, the number and type of her porcelain possessions increased to 1,014 porcelain pieces in yellow and other colors.⁷³

Unlike textiles and accessories that could easily be altered, porcelain objects from the Imperial Kiln's annual production carried no potential for personalization. The only way to order personalized works was through special commissions. However, porcelain commission was a privilege reserved for the emperor, who had access to the knowledge needed for porcelain making and who controlled the budget of the Imperial Kiln. Professional industrial knowledge is required to understand porcelain making, and unlike painting, calligraphy and embroidery which could be learned and practiced in one's quarters, the kiln site was beyond the range of access. These factors also made the craft of porcelain making and its connoisseurship relatively rare for a woman.⁷⁴ In this regard, Cixi's inclusion of porcelain objects into a subcategory of her attire was unprecedented in the Qing court or the entirety of Chinese court art: it had always been material beyond an imperial woman's access. If she wished to have anything specially commissioned, only the emperor had authority to make commissions to the imperial kiln, and it is unclear how much Cixi's own preferences would be reflected on the completed works.⁷⁵

⁷³ Yu Minzheng, *Guochao gongshi*, juan 17, 3-4, 6-7.

⁷⁴ Among the rare examples, it is said that Lady Liu (fl. mid-12th century), a concubine of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r.1127-1162) of the Southern Song dynasty, used to be the owner of some precious Ru ware vessels of the Northern Song dynasty because the inscription on these wares, "fenghua" 奉華, coincides with the title of her residence. Hsieh Ming-liang 謝明良, "Qianlong de taoci jianshang guan" 乾隆的陶瓷鑑賞觀, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊, 21.2 (2004):7-8. Gentry women's participation in commissioning porcelains is quite rare, too. Only a few examples inscribed with their studio names exist today. See Ming Wilson, Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, and Victoria and Albert Museum, *Rare Marks on Chinese Ceramics* (London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1998), cat 52, 58.

⁷⁵ Zhao Congyue 趙聰月, "Huanhuan hou Gong, yuyong jiaci: Wanqing houfei yuyong tangmingkuan ciqu" 嬛嬛後宮·御用佳瓷：晚清后妃御用堂銘款瓷器, *Zijin Cheng* 3 (2013): 84.

Within the context of court art, porcelain making was also a political affair. For Chinese rulers, the political significance of pottery was initiated in the historian Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145 or 135-86 B.C.E.) words and later coined by Emperor Qianlong. Sima Qian tied high-quality pots to the legendary sage king Shun 舜, which were linked to his personal virtue:

(舜)陶河濱，河濱器皆不苦麻。

(Shun) made pots in Hebin, and thus all the pots from Hebin were not rough and coarse.
⁷⁶

By extension, a piece of exquisite imperial pottery was the crystallization of the ruler's virtue and thus an appropriate prop to underline his rulership.⁷⁷ Emperor Qianlong was certainly not the first ruler to associate pottery and politics, but he was the most enthusiastic. As Yu Pei-chin observed, Qianlong's enthusiastic direction and strict demand of the Imperial Kiln pushed its productivity and creativity to its apex, and it was such intense, personal involvement that enabled the emperor to imprint characteristics of his rulership onto his commissioned porcelains.

In the Qing convention, the imperial kiln produced two classes of porcelains. One was its usual task of making wares according to a fixed number of patterns that would continue across

⁷⁶ Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 BCE), *Shiji wudi benji* 史記 五帝本紀 (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1957), *juan* 1, 34. The sentence is actually extended from *Lü's Spring and Autumn* 呂氏春秋, an encyclopedic text composed around 239 B.C.E. It should be noted that the original text only mentions that Shun made pottery in Hebin without commenting on the quality of the pots or their relation to Shun's virtue. See Lü Buwei 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE) et al., *Lüshi chunqiu*, in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan wu bian* 筆記小說大觀五編 (1910; reprint, Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1974), 192.

⁷⁷ Hsieh Ming-liang's seminal article on Emperor Qianlong's porcelain patronage and connoisseurship has introduced this perspective and thus led to much research of this kind. Hsieh Ming-liang, "Qianlong de taoci jianshang guan," 1-38. Liu Wei's *Diwang yu gongting ciqi* is the latest attempt at this approach, but its emphasis on the patron's agency simplifies the complexity of the imperial commission, which was often a result of negotiation between the commissioner and the Imperial Kiln. For instance, he only identifies the types of Cixi's porcelain wares and interprets their style and high quality as being the result of "the empress dowager's higher aesthetic standard towards the imperial ware." Liu Wei, *Diwang yu gongting ciqi*, 465-79.

multiple reigns. The other was fulfilling special orders that the emperor placed with sophisticated instructions on the design, number and inscription.⁷⁸ It is this second type of porcelain that carries the commissioner's will. That is, to build the dual image of a sage ruler who inherited the refined Han Chinese literati culture and a contemporary, innovative sovereign, antiquarian works were frequently produced while new techniques and decorations were invented to establish a novel period style.⁷⁹

Qianlong's successors continued this practice, but ironically, modesty, the most outstanding characteristic of rulers, posed a negative impact on the Imperial Kiln. Imperial patronage to porcelain making was reduced to merely covering annual needs, and no further investment was made to experiment with and sharpen the potters' skills.⁸⁰ It was not until Cixi's regency that imperial porcelain played a renewed role on a scale comparable to the Qianlong reign. Cixi is arguably the first, and only, imperial woman to directly patronize the Imperial Kiln. Having been involved in porcelain making from the beginning of the Tongzhi reign, she was a major patron of imperial commissions, including the wedding wares of the Tongzhi and Guangxu emperors, and the porcelain wares produced for her decennial birthday celebrations. Below, I first contextualize Cixi's engagement with the affairs of the Imperial Kiln and then discuss the matriarch's first personally commissioned porcelain—the Dayazhai wares. This will

⁷⁸ Peter Lam ed, *Imperial Porcelain of Late Qing from the Kwan Collection* (Hong Kong: The Gallery of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983), 2-5.

⁷⁹ Yu Pei-chin 余佩瑾, "Qianlong 'Taoye tuce' huizhi de beijing yu chuangzuo yitu" 乾隆『陶冶圖冊』繪製的背景與創作意圖, *Gugong wenwu yuekan*, 326 (2010): 19-20.

⁸⁰ Patronage of porcelains for Emperor Daoguang's residence palace Shende tang 慎德堂 (Hall of Prudent Virtue) in the Gardens of Perfect Brightness is a rare post-Qianlong example of using porcelain wares to visualize the emperor's rulership. Late Qing porcelains, imperial and commercial wares alike, have attracted limited and little positive scholarly attention. For the few publications focusing on late Qing imperial wares, see Henri Albert Van Oort, *Chinese porcelain of the 19th and 20th centuries* (Lochem: Tjdstroom, 1977); Chinese University of Hong Kong ed., *Imperial Porcelain of Late Qing from the Kwan Collection* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Art Gallery, 1983).

be followed by discussions of Cixi's strategies to connect her regency with the heyday of the Qing regime.

Cixi's acquisition of porcelain-making knowledge

Cixi's active involvement in porcelain making did not emerge out of a personal interest but rather began as an urgent duty to secure the Imperial Kiln's supply of ritual and daily objects. Since the Ming regime established an official kiln in Jingdezhen in 1426, the supply of ceramics to the imperial household had become an obligation directly controlled by the central government.⁸¹ Often when the new emperor ascended the throne, commissions were made to the official kilns to produce wares bearing the new reign mark symbolizing the new era. The Manchu continued this tradition. After conquering most of the Ming territory, Emperor Shunzhi also established the Qing regime's Imperial Kiln in Jingdezhen in 1655. It remained in service until the Taiping Rebellion, which began to sweep across much of southern China in 1856.⁸² The rebellion force occupied Jingdezhen for nearly a decade, wiping out the local population and economy. Facilities were destroyed, skilled potters were killed or exiled, and the Imperial Kiln was left in a devastated condition that required a long recovery when the Qing military force resumed control of the area in 1864.

⁸¹ Although scholars have debated when the Ming's official kilns in Jingdezhen were established, it is now generally agreed that the institute did not appear until 1426. Sakuma Shigeo was the first to make this claim and point out that the early Ming Imperial Kiln in Jingdezhen shared responsibility for imperial porcelain ware with the other Imperial Kiln in Chuzhou 處州, present-day Zhejiang Province. Eventually, it became the only Imperial Kiln in 1465. Sakuma Shigeo 佐久間重男, *Keitokuchin yōgyōshi kenkyū* 景德鎮窯業史研究 (Tokyo: Daiichi shobo, 1999), 199-210.

⁸² Wang Guangyao 王光堯, "Qingdai yuyaochang de jianli yu zhongjie--Qingdai yuyaochang yanjiu zhi yi," 清代御窯廠的建立與終結—清代御窯廠研究之一, in *Zhongguo gudai guanyao zhidu* 中國古代官窯制度 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2004), 158; Guan Shanming 關善明, "Wanqing guanyao ciqu" 晚清官窯瓷器, *Guanshi suocang Wanqing guanyao ciqu* 官氏所藏晚清官窯瓷器 (Hong Kong: Art Gallery of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1983), 5.

Since the Imperial Kiln was the most important supplier of the imperial household's daily ceramic objects and its technical capability to carry out special commissions could not be replaced by common commercial kilns, its reestablishment became one of the court's most urgent projects for Cixi's court. In order to meet immediate needs after the imperial family returned to the Forbidden City, Cixi ordered the existing local kilns to fire 55 different kinds of porcelain according to the quantity and type of annual porcelain supplies in 1864.⁸³ The following year, she appointed Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), the then Liangjiang zongdu 兩江總督 (Governor-general of Jiangsu 江蘇, Jiangxi 江西 and Anhui 安徽 Provinces) to reestablish the Imperial Kiln with an ample budget of 130 thousand taels, roughly equaling 4.13 million U.S. dollars today.⁸⁴ Cixi's second act of direct involvement in kiln operations was to issue the new reign mark for imperial wares. In the Qing convention, it was more usual for the emperor to personally decide the style of his reign mark for imperial wares.⁸⁵ Since Tongzhi was still a child, the Regent Cixi decided on his behalf. In 1866, she ordered that the four-character

⁸³ “Jiujiang yingshao ciqi jiqi zhonglei” 九江應燒瓷器祭器種類 (Types of porcelain wares and ritual vessels [the magistrate of] Jiujiang should make), in the First Historical Archives, Beijing, no.05-0825-050; “Cuizao yingshao ciqi jiqi zhonglei” 催造應燒瓷器祭器種類 (Types of porcelain wares and ritual vessels need to be produced urgently), in the First Historical Archives, Beijing, no.05-0825-049. The list was also published in the *Jiangxi tongzhi* 江西通志, see Liu Yi 劉繹, et al. *Chongxiu Jiangxi Tongzhi* 重修江西通志 (China, 1880), *juan* 93, 13b-16a.

⁸⁴ According to the *Jiangxi tongzhi*, the restoration of the Imperial Kiln was directed by the local supervisor Cai Jinqing 蔡錦青 (1813-1876) and completed in 1866. The budget for reestablishment was exceptionally generous at the time. The Imperial Kiln had been receiving ten thousand taels a year since 1739, but the court reduced that by half in 1799, with a further cut to merely two thousand taels in 1847. *Jiangxi tongzhi*, *juan* 93, 8a; Jingde zhen taoci yanjiusuo 景德鎮陶瓷研究所 ed., *Jingde zhen taoci shigao* 景德鎮陶瓷史稿 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1959), 300; Wang Guangyao, “Qingdai yuyaochang de guanli yu shengchan zhidu” 清代御窯廠的管理與生產制度, *Zhongguo gudai guanyao zhidu*, 205-206.

⁸⁵ For instance, Kangxi ordered that the reign marks on the over-glaze enamel porcelains must be painted in the imperial workshop using the four-character “Kangxi yuzhi” 康熙御製 (imperialy made by Kangxi) in standard script and framed by a double-line square. See Shih Ching-fei 施靜菲, “Shiba shiji dongxi jiaoliu de jianzheng -- Qingong huafalang gongyi zai Kangxi chao de jianli” 十八世紀東西交流的見證—清宮畫珐瑯工藝在康熙朝的建立, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 24. 3 (2007): 45-94.

mark, *Tongzhi nian zhi* 同治年製, literally meaning “made in the reign of Tongzhi,” had to be written in standard script on the base of all imperial wares.⁸⁶

However, it was the production of Tongzhi’s wedding wares (including objects for the ceremony and the imperial couple’s daily use) that provided Cixi with the opportunity to acquire knowledge of porcelain making through communication with the local supervisors of the Imperial Kiln. The most important point Cixi learned from the memorial of Jiangxi Xunfu 江西巡撫 (Governor of Jiangxi Province) Liu Kunyi 劉坤一 (1830-1902) was the *tianhuang* 填黃 filling-in technique. His step-by-step explanation vividly depicted the difficulty of the technique. According to Liu’s memorial, to produce a yellow bowl patterned with green bamboo leaves, like the one shown in figure 2.16, the potter first had to make a bowl coated with transparent glaze before painting the leaves with green enamel. Next, the potter would cover the rest of the surface with yellow enamel and bake the bowl to solidify the enamel pigment. The pigment’s density was critical to the result. A too-thick layer of enamel would flow over the pattern whereas a too-thin layer would cause uneven coloring.⁸⁷ The filling-in technique was once a point of pride among potters in Jingdezhen, but after the old generation withered during the Taiping Rebels’ siege, new potters had to learn the method from scratch. They were ill-prepared, however, when Cixi commissioned the wedding wares. Liu Kunyi included a detailed description of the filling-in technique because the Imperial Kiln’s first submission of the wedding wares in 1868 and 1869 was anything but satisfactory to Cixi. She demanded that the

⁸⁶ NZHD, Box No.36_205_582, entry of June 1, 1866.

⁸⁷ “Jiangxi xunfu Liu Kunyi wei chongxin shaozao Tongzhi huangdi dahun ciqi zouzhe” 江西巡撫劉坤一為重新燒造同治皇帝大婚瓷器奏摺 (Imperial Inspector Liu Kunyi’s memorial of the re-production of Emperor Tongzhi’s wedding wares). Archives housed by the First Historical Archives, Beijing. For a reproduction of the memorial, see Zhang, “Qinggong ciqi huayang de xingshuai,” 42, fig.8. Also see Liu Kunyi 劉坤一, *Liu Zhongcheng Gong (Kunyi) yiji* 劉忠誠公 (坤一) 遺輯, in *Jindai Zhongguo shilao congkan* 近代中國史料叢刊 vol. 251-259 vTaipei Xian Yonghe zhen: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 883-8.

Imperial Kiln redo the porcelains and punished the kiln supervisor by requesting he pay for the cost of the second firing. Three years later the Imperial Kiln eventually met her exacting standards and completed the commission. Thanks to Cixi's pressure and the court's ample financial support, the Imperial Kiln revived the filling-in technique within a short period of time. The technique might well be regarded as a trophy of Cixi's intervention in imperial porcelain making.

Cixi also learned about and monitored porcelain decoration. The following imperial order exemplifies how sophisticated her instructions could be:

其有過牆花樣者，務須將所燒之花，仍由外面通過裡面，不准燒造半截花樣。各項瓷器總要端正，毋得歪斜，其裡外花釉以及顏色均著燒造一律精細鮮明，勿使稍有草率。

For those [porcelains] bearing *guoqiang* patterns, [the potters] must make the patterns extend from exterior to interior; a pattern that is not consistent on either side is forbidden. All kinds of porcelains must [be made] in [a] proper and correct shape without distortion. All glazed patterns and colors must be exquisitely painted and fired. Carelessness will not be tolerated.⁸⁸

This passage includes instructions in three areas: the unity of the pattern on each piece of porcelain, the overall shape, and the colorings, Cixi also used the term *guoqiang* to describe the pattern (in most cases a floral spray) that crosses over the inner and outer surfaces of the vessel. A teacup exemplifies the matriarch's demands. The main pattern is the so-called *guoqiang* design in the imperial order. It is decorated with the vine and fruit of balsam pear, which covers

⁸⁸ "Neiwufu zajian" 內務府雜件 (Miscellaneous reports of the Department of Imperial Household), housed in First Historical Archive, Beijing. Cited from Zhang Xiaorui, "Qinggong ciqi huayang de xingshuai," 41.

both sides of the cup and serves to integrate the exterior and interior into a single composition (fig.2.17).⁸⁹

In addition to monitoring the quality of the porcelains produced, Cixi also experimented with new styles in the Tongzhi wedding wares. The commission comprises three kinds of decoration: the future empress's items decorated with the pattern of *baizi tu* 百子圖, "picture of one hundred children;" the wares for the ceremony that contain various decorative subjects; and the group with the four-character inscription *yanxi tonghe* 燕喜同和, "swallows stay harmoniously together."⁹⁰ They amount to 23 combinations of ground color and decorative subjects, and many of them, such as the abovementioned balsam pear and butterfly, might have come from existing pattern books. Cixi's preferred decorative motifs and colors are present among the new designs. For example, the *fu* (blessing) and *shou* (longevity) characters, the butterflies against a yellow ground, the green bamboo leaves in front of a yellow ground, and orchids on an aubergine ground. They all share similar features with the decorations and colors used in her attire. Later, some of them were possibly incorporated into the pattern book for annual production, as the Imperial Kiln continued to produce porcelains bearing these decorations throughout the Guangxu reign.⁹¹

Personalization and appropriation

⁸⁹ However, Cixi's standards were lower than those of her role model, Qianlong. Balsam pear, a symbol of multiple decedents, appeared as early as the Qianlong reign and was continuously produced during succeeding years. The Tongzhi version is nearly identical to its predecessor in shape and pattern, although the overall rendition is rather stylized and somewhat stiff in detail. The contour of vines is less naturalistic as the fine thorns are eliminated; neither are the shades of leaves and fruits as variable or subtle. For an example of the same kind of cup made in the Qianlong reign, see Xu Huping, *Gongting zhencang: Zhongguo Qingdai guanyao ciqi*, 218.

⁹⁰ Dong Jianli, "Tongzhi dahunci yanjiu," 119-20.

⁹¹ Geng Baochang, *Ming Qing taoci jiating*, 321.

Cixi's engagement with the Tongzhi wedding wares laid the foundation for her own porcelain patronage in the years to come. This invaluable learning experience made more sophisticated appropriation and personalization possible. This was immediately reflected in her patronage of the Dayazhai wares. The title 'Dayazhai' is directly linked to Cixi. It first appeared in 1855 on a tablet she was given from Xianfeng. She then held the title of the fourth rank, Yi Pin 懿嬪 (Concubine Virtue). Cixi later adopted it to name her studio and made several kinds of seals to stamp on her paintings and calligraphies.⁹² The Dayazhai wares were designed for the interior setting of Cixi's new residence, the Tiandi yijiachun 天地一家春 (Spring United in Heaven and Earth, hereafter Spring Palace) palace compound in the Wanchun yuan 萬春園 (Gardens of Myriad Springs). The reconstruction of this palace was a part of the controversial reconstruction project of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness that Emperor Tongzhi initiated as a token of filial piety to the two retired empress dowager regents in 1873.⁹³ Although the project was called off, the Dayazhai wares were still produced and Cixi continued to stamp the seals of Dayazhai on her artwork throughout her regencies.

The commission of Dayazhai wares was placed after Cixi handed power back to Tongzhi, which implies that she still directed the Imperial Workshops and continued to oversee imperial patronage. Following the previous emperors' practices of ordering specially designed porcelains for their palaces, such as Emperor Daoguang and his Shendetang wares, Cixi special-ordered the Dayazhai wares when preparing for the reconstruction of the Spring Palace. On May 15, 1874, the Embroidery Workshop sent 31 design drawings for the Dayazhai wares to the Imperial Kiln,

⁹² Zhou Suqin 周蘇琴, "Dayazhai bian de suozai di jiqi shiyong tanxi" 大雅齋匾的所在地及其使用探析, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 136 (2008): 56–71.

⁹³ Cixi's involvement in the renaming and redesigning of the Garden suggests her unusual engagement with the project. This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

along with Cixi's orders to complete the commission by October.⁹⁴ The commission totaled 4,922 pieces, including tableware, large fish tanks and flower vessels.⁹⁵ Efficiency and quality were the matriarch's main concerns: she planned to move into the Spring Palace and celebrate her fortieth birthday there in November. However, the reconstruction project and the porcelain commission became a double frustration. Tongzhi called off the former on July 29, due to strong opposition from his high officials in the court.⁹⁶ The Imperial Kiln also failed to meet Cixi's deadline. Despite being issued in May, the imperial order did not arrive at the Imperial Kiln in Jingdezhen until August 14. This time Liu Kunyi again pledged to postpone the commission, reporting that the Imperial Kiln was already at the end of its annual work cycle.⁹⁷ Furthermore, he pointed out that the size of the large fish tanks were beyond what the newly established kiln in the Imperial Kiln could handle, and thus the potters had to look for other kilns large enough to fire them.⁹⁸ It is very likely that by the time Liu Kunyi submitted his memorial, Cixi had lost interest in this commission. Tongzhi was diagnosed with smallpox at the end of October and had to ask Cixi to review memorials for him on November 10.⁹⁹ Liu's memorial was responded to by Her Majesty on the same day. Contrary to her heated reaction to the delay for Tongzhi's wedding wares, Cixi certainly agreed to Liu's proposal without blame or punishment. After all,

⁹⁴ "NZHD," Box_No. 41_47_588.

⁹⁵ Zhang Xiaorui, "Qinggong ciqi huayang de xingshuai," 42.

⁹⁶ Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 232-46.

⁹⁷ Liu's account reveals that in principle, kilns in Jingdezhen began to work in the second month of the lunar year when the snow melted, and ended their working cycle in the eighth month because potters did not have enough warm water to shape clay bodies in the cold. For the reproduction of Liu's memorial, see Zhang Xiaorui 張小銳, "Qinggong dang'an: jiekai Daya zhai ciqi niandai zhi mi" 清宮檔案：解開大雅齋瓷器年代之謎, *Zijincheng*, 126 (2004):122-123. Also see Liu Kunyi, *Liu Zhongcheng gong (Kunyi) yiji*, 1317-20.

⁹⁸ Zhang Xiaorui, "Qinggong dang'an: jiekai Daya zhai ciqi niandai zhi mi," 122-23.

⁹⁹ Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 251.

her only child's life was at stake and nothing was more important to her than looking after him and securing her political power. Moreover, because the Dayazhai wares had already lost their original destination, the Spring Palace, this commission mattered little to her anymore. At any rate, the Dayazhai wares were completed in 1876 and thus became the only realized part of the reconstruction project of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness.

If the ritual purpose of the Tongzhi wedding wares restricted the scale of Cixi's experiment in personal style, Cixi's personally patronized Dayazhai wares granted her ultimate freedom in design. The following imperial order exemplifies her direct involvement in the design stage:

長春宮太監劉得印傳旨著造辦處畫做各式大小花瓶紙樣八件、各式元花盆紙樣七件，再燙合牌胎長方花盆樣五件、各式合牌胎水仙盆樣三件。俱四面滿畫各色花卉代翎毛草蟲，要細要好。趕緊成做。

The eunuch, Liu Deyin, from the Palace of Eternal Spring delivered an imperial edict: "Have the Imperial Workshops make eight design drawings of flower vases in a variety of sizes and patterns, and another seven drawings of round flower basins in various designs. In addition, make five [ironed] cardboard models of rectangular flower basins and three cardboard models of narcissus basins in various designs. All [the models must be] fully painted with various flowers, birds and insects on the vessel's flour sides. [These patterns] must be carefully and finely painted. Complete the models as soon as possible."¹⁰⁰

The edict contains three pieces of information critical to understanding Cixi's porcelain patronage. In the first place, the record represents her direct participation in the design stage, because it was issued from the Changchun gong 長春宮 (Palace of Eternal Spring), her residence in the Forbidden City. Second, to ensure that the completed products matched the approved drawings, Cixi followed the common practice of quality control by ordering the Imperial

¹⁰⁰ "NZHD," Box No. 41_116_588, entry of June 8, 1874.

Workshops to make both cardboard models and drawings, as seen in design number nine in fig. 2.18. The drawing contains textual and pictorial instructions: the design is elegantly painted in the center; the red tag in the upper left indicates the number of the design and the yellow tag on the right lists the required size, color and number of vessels. Third, the imperial order reveals the patron's highly sophisticated preference for flower-and-bird subjects. Such decoration distinguishes the Dayazhai wares from other specially commissioned Qing imperial porcelain.

The Dayazhai wares contain 31 designs, most of which have common features, including seals, inscriptions and flower-and-bird decorations. The red square seal that reads *yongqing changchun* 永慶長春, "forever celebration of the eternal spring," is written on the base of each vessel. The inscription of *Dayazhai*, paired with a red oval seal of *tiandi yijiachun* 天地一家春 (spring united in heaven and earth) in the seal script, also appears on the vessel (fig.2. 19). There are eight kinds of flower vases that do not have this inscription-seal element on the surface and have thus been excluded from the category of Dayazhai wares in the *Guanyang yuci* catalogue,¹⁰¹ even though their drawings are rendered in the same style as the other Dayazhai-ware drawings. Additionally, the numbering and instructions written on the red and yellow tags, both pasted on the drawings, resemble those on the inventory list. Having matched the complete inventory list of Dayazhai wares with the drawings for these vases, I am convinced that these vases belong to the Dayazhai wares and include them in the following discussion.

Of the 31 kinds of flower-and-bird decoration, each is paired with several colors and is painted onto various kinds of vessels. Unlike the Tongzhi wedding ware, which usually used several decorative units on one object, the decorations on the Dayazhai ware are of a single exquisite painting of a flower, bird or insect that transforms the porcelain surface into a miniature

¹⁰¹ The eight design drawings are listed as numbers 98 through 104 in *Guanyang yuci*.

garden.¹⁰² A comparison with the Shendetang ware further clarifies the unusual focus on this subject observed among the Dayazhai ware. The former consist of a variety of porcelains ranging from traditional blue-and-white to over-glazed enamelware decorated with landscapes, flowers, abstract botanical patterns, and mundane events, such as a dragon boat festival or children at play.¹⁰³ Conversely, the decorations on the latter are solely pictures of nature during the four seasons, which double as ingenious pictorial representations of auspicious phrases. Most of them refer to the wish for longevity, but some also allude to familial harmony and abundant offspring. Take one of the longevity images, for instance, with black paradise flycatchers, *shoudai* 綬帶 in Chinese, perching on the blossoming plum tree (*mei* 梅). These comprise the pun of *meishou* 眉壽, a common description of the elderly (fig.2.20). Several other paintings carry multi-layered symbols, such as the drawing on the high neck vase in fig.2.20. The magpie, a symbol of happiness, and the plum blossom, which represents wintertime, are combined to suggest a joyful, auspicious beginning of the year. The lotus and its seedpod, containing multiple seeds, beneath the magpie imply the wish for abundant offspring.

Aside from these common symbols, there are several unusable images on the Dayazhai wares. A close-up image of a farming garden, a rare representation in the pattern pool of Qing imperial wares, depicts a ripe radish and insects, such as a grasshopper and a ladybug (fig.2.21). This harmonious autumn landscape is a coy allusion to Cixi's birthday, which falls in the same season. Another feature of the Dayazhai wares is their bold, high-chroma background colors. In addition to the most common color, white, the wares use five ground colors—green, purple, yellow, red and blue—each of them appearing in several shades. The blue enamel, for example,

¹⁰² For a reproduction of the complete list of designs, see Zhang, "Qinggong ciqi huayang de xingshuai," 43, fig. 10.

¹⁰³ For reproductions of these wares, see Zhao, "Shende tang yu Shende tang kuan ciqi," 113-129.

is divided into navy, dark, turquoise and sky blue.¹⁰⁴ As noted above, many of these colors are identical to those used in Cixi's attire and suggest her intention to build a coherent representation of her wardrobe.

The features above are certainly a reflection of Cixi's aesthetic preferences, but they are also a stylistic and technical reinterpretation of the high-Qing tradition. The decoration of botanical patterns against a bright background appeared during the Kangxi reign, when enamel pigments were introduced in China and changed the palette of over-glazed porcelain.¹⁰⁵ Since enamel pigments contain a much broader spectrum of colors than traditional mineral glazes and do not change color when heated, these pigments brought about a revolution in the Chinese porcelain industry. That is, a colorful painting could now be transferred to a porcelain surface without the uncertainty of glaze color after firing, a major disadvantage of mineral glaze.¹⁰⁶

Owing to the new technology, potters soon expanded their decorative motifs to include more complex polychrome figures, architecture and landscapes. Among them a particular type of ware was decorated with the literati ideal of the Three Excellences: poetry, calligraphy and painting. A good example is a yellow bowl decorated with orchid, rock, glossy ganoderma, two lines of poems on the auspicious spring scenery, and three seals from the bowl's owner, Emperor

¹⁰⁴ Zheng Hong, "Daya zhai ciqi," 152.

¹⁰⁵ Emperor Kangxi had the Jesuit missionaries experiment in applying these pigments to porcelain, and the fruit of this endless trial and error was a new porcelain ware that remained the most exquisite and rare type among the imperial wares: the over-glazed enamelware. Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood, *Science and Civilisation in China, pt 12 Ceramic Technology* (Cambridge, Eng: University Press, 2004), 639-49.

¹⁰⁶ The filling-in technique was inspired by the pigment application of copper enamelware, and the introduction of enamel pigment to the porcelain industry.

Yongzheng (fig.2.22). His successor, Qianlong, more enthusiastically produced over-glaze enameled wares and commissioned quite a number of them.¹⁰⁷

The Dayazhai wares design stands within this genealogy. Like the Yongzheng example, a Dayazhai bowl also displays a color background and a flower-and-bird decoration. The owner's seals have also been painted. Another intriguing similarity is the forceful visual contrast between the high-neck Kangxi and the Dayazhai vase. Similar in size, the former is painted with peonies in front of a dark pink ground color, while the latter is decorated with Chinese crabapple flowers and bees against an aubergine ground (figs.2.23, 2.24). Such a similar execution implies that the designer of the Dayazhai ware possibly took inspiration from this group of porcelains, which represented the highest achievement of the Qing Imperial Kiln.

It should be noted that eighteenth-century elements are not completely replicated in Dayazhai ware. They are, to a certain degree, appropriated to suit the patron's aesthetic preferences and identities. The format of Three Excellences is simplified into a combination of painting, a seal and a studio title. The poetic essence is missing thanks to the elimination of the poem echoing the painting. Instead, the ownership of the piece matters more to the patron. This formal simplification is visible on some of the Dayazhai vases, too. For instance, although the shape of the green vase alludes to an antiquarian bronze vessel, its handles are made into uncertain curves, as if the designer was undecided about the style he wanted to represent (fig.2.25). Unlike eighteenth-century vases with similar shapes, the Dayazhai vase loses the

¹⁰⁷ Both Emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong had a strong interest in the production of over-glazed enamelware and supervised the Imperial Kiln closely. This group of exquisite porcelains was produced in small quantity and has always been cherished, even today. For research on how their involvement generated new decorative styles, see Yu Pei-chin, "Tang Ying yu Qian Yong zhiji guanyao de guanxi – yi Qinggong falang caici de huizhi yu shaozao wei li" 唐英與乾隆之際官窯的關係—以清宮琺瑯彩瓷的繪製與燒造為例, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 24.1 (2006): 1-44. Also see Shi Ching-fei 施靜菲 and Peng Ying-chen 彭盈真, "Cong wenhua mailuo tantao Qingdai youshangcai mingci—falangcai yu fencai" 從文化脈絡探討清代釉上彩名詞—琺瑯彩與粉彩, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 29.4 (2012): 1-4.

sophisticated reference of the original handles, which were shaped into dragons or other imaginary creatures common among antiquarian bronze vessels (fig.2.26).

Such formal simplification or ambiguity has to be considered from the perspective of the patron and the designers. As previously noted, the artisans in the Embroidery Workshop followed Her Majesty's orders in designing these porcelain wares. Unlike their colleagues in the Painting Workshop, who had the experience designing porcelain of all kinds, artisans in the Embroidery Workshop might be unfamiliar with the literati motif of the Three Excellences or the common features of antiquarian vessels. It seems that the patron did not meticulously value the traditions of the literati, either. She cared little for the accuracy of antiquarian style and the Three Excellences; she never displayed an interest in either of them. Instead of imitating the tastes of the literati, the matriarch embraced the popular culture, with which she was most familiar. Given this ideology, the visibility of popular culture was maximized in the Dayazhai wares and late Qing court art as a whole, which is reflected in the overwhelming majority of auspicious symbols decorating these porcelains.

Reclaiming past glory

As if echoing her ultimately unchallengeable authority, Cixi's porcelain patronage during the Guangxu reign became a regular activity. Porcelains for her banquet or personal use were often produced in large quantities. The Imperial Kiln made tens of thousands of wares for her decennial birthdays of fifty, sixty and seventy.¹⁰⁸ Among them, four groups of porcelain inscribed with the titles of her residence palaces, Tihe dian 體和殿 (Hall of Embodied Harmony), the Palace of Concentrated Beauty [Map 2-N], the Palace of Eternal Spring [Map 2-I], and

¹⁰⁸ Lü, Chenglong, "Duju fengge de 'Tihe dian zhi' ciqu," 220.

Leshou tang 樂壽堂 (Hall of Pleasant Longevity) [Map 2-Q], exist today.¹⁰⁹ The matriarch launched a major renovation of the Palace of Concentrated Beauty in celebration of her fiftieth birthday, in 1884, and the Chuxiugong wares were very likely commissioned as a component of this project.¹¹⁰ Located within the palace compound was the Hall of Embodied Harmony. It was named and renovated as Cixi's dining hall in the same year. The Tihedian wares must therefore have been produced for this occasion.¹¹¹ Ten years later, Cixi used the opportunity of celebrating her sixtieth birthday to renovate the palace compound of the Hall of Pleasant Longevity in the Forbidden City, where Qianlong lived after retirement, and the Leshoutang wares were made for this palace.¹¹²

Although the focus on flower-and-bird decoration prevails, these special commissions are different from the Dayazhai ware in a number of aspects. The palace titles are no longer inscribed on the vessel surface but in a conventional way. They are usually written in the seal script on the base of the porcelain. The characteristics of the decoration are also different. Unlike the more diverse symbolism seen on the Dayazhai wares, auspicious symbols and motifs of longevity dominate the surface of each piece. It seems to represent the patron's changed

¹⁰⁹ Liu Wei, *Diwang yu gongting ciqi*, 465. There were two locations named Leshoutang, one in the Forbidden City and the other in the Yiheyuan. They were both Cixi's residential palaces. To my knowledge none of the porcelain with the Leshoutang inscription has been published, and it is only mentioned in Liu Wei's publication.

¹¹⁰ Before scholars clarified Cixi's pattern of combining porcelain commissions with palace renovation, the date of the Chuxiugong wares was unclear. It was sometimes stated that these products were made either in the early Tongzhi or early Guangxu reign; on another occasion they were described merely as Cixi's personal objects without providing a date. Peter Lam ed., *Imperial Porcelain of Late Qing from the Kwan Collection* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Art Gallery, 1983), 11-12; Henri Albert Van Oort, *Chinese porcelain of the 19th and 20th centuries*, 54, 56.

¹¹¹ Lü Chenglong, "Duju fengge de 'Tihedian zhi' ciqi," 220. Liu Wei also mentions the renovation and naming in her introductory essay in *Wanqing guanyao ciqi shizhen*, but she describes the Tihedian wares as a commission Cixi placed in 1870 without evidence. Liu Wei, *Wanqing guanyao ciqi shizhen*, 7, 134.

¹¹² Liu Wei, *Diwang yu gongting ciqi*, 475.

psychology. By the time these commissions were placed, she had withdrawn the wish for a harmonious and prosperous family after the death of Tongzhi, while the advancement of age resulted in a more self-centered aspiration for her own longevity. Most intriguingly, a close resemblance with eighteenth-century style is observed in some of these new porcelains, particularly the Chuxiugong wares.

The Chuxiugong wares are mainly comprised of plates, whose diameters are as long as ninety centimeters. It is said these objects were fruit plates, many of which appear in Cixi's photographic portraits.¹¹³ Plates of such a large size were rare after the Yuan dynasty; in the eighteenth century, during the Qing dynasty, the Imperial Kiln only made a few works of this kind. In addition to their large size, the Chuxiugong wares also display a type of unique ware whose technique is in line with those for which the Kangxi imperial wares were renowned. Although a plate painted with garden rocks and flowers is nearly twice as large as its Kangxi prototype, both pieces have incised dragons and fireballs on the biscuit with painted decorations on the vessels that are in the same color scheme of green, brown and yellow (figs.2.27, 2.28). Such porcelain has been called *susancai* 素三彩, or on-biscuit enamel, which first appeared during the mid-Ming dynasty. It was popular during the Kangxi period, then disappeared from

¹¹³ Liu, *Wanqing guanyao ciqi shizhen*, 7. Presumably due to the fragility resulting from their large size, all the authentic Chuxiugong wares in the publications are smaller plates whose diameters are around fifty centimeters. To my knowledge only two kinds of the Chuxiugong wares have been published. One is the tri-colored plate, shown in Fig.2.29; the other is a plate decorated with dragon patterns. For the reproduction of the latter type, see Xu Huping ed., *Gongting zhencang: Zhongguo Qingdai guanyao ciqi*, 473. The Kwan Collection in Hong Kong has published a brush washer in pale blue glaze inscribed with the *Chuxiugong zhi* in the seal script as well, but the inscription appears tighter and the strokes are generally squarer than the works in the Palace Museum and Nanjing Museum. Therefore, I refrain from discussing it before more examples of the Chuxiugong wares are published. For reproductions of the brush washer and the inscription, see Chinese University of Hong Kong ed., *Imperial Porcelain of Late Qing from the Kwan Collection*, cat. 100.

¹¹³ Liu Wei, *Wanqing guanyao ciqi shizhen*, 7-8.

imperial wares after the Yongzheng reign.¹¹⁴ No direct textual evidence proves Cixi's involvement in the design of the Chuxiugong wares, yet the fact remains that these wares were produced for her use, while her direct participation in the making of the Dayazhai wares makes it possible to view the style of these wares as a reflection of the matriarch's preferences.

Such a connection with the eighteenth century is more evident in other imperial wares exhibiting Guangxu-reign marks. They are either copies of eighteenth-century models or a combination of previous reign marks and contemporary design. A globular vase decorated with peach and bats exemplifies the first pattern. The nineteenth-century replica's clay body and glaze are almost as refined as the original, but it has been enlarged by one-third of its original size (fig.2. 29, 2.30). The color variations of the peach fruit and the different angles of the leaves are properly rendered, too. Instead of the Guangxu-reign mark, the reign mark *Daqing Qianlong nian zhi* 大清乾隆年製, "Made during the Qianlong reign of the Great Qing," in the seal script is written on the base.¹¹⁵ The second pattern connecting the piece with the past is the combination of contemporary design and older reign marks. This can be seen on a lidded teacup and flowerpot. The lidded teacup is inscribed with the characters *Shende tang zhi* 慎德堂製 to refer to the famous Shendetang wares Emperor Daoguang commissioned for his residence palace Shende tang 慎德堂 (Hall of Prudent Virtue) in the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. Even so, the work is undoubtedly a Guangxu reproduction (fig.2.31).¹¹⁶ Its decoration, a magpie singing

¹¹⁴ Geng Baochang, *Ming Qing ciqi jian ding*, 219.

¹¹⁵ When closely compared to the original Qianlong globular vase, the difference can still be discerned. The replica's curve connecting the straight neck and globular body is less smooth, and the strokes and dots emphasizing the texture of the trunk and peaches are relatively mechanical and repetitive. Ultimately, the Guangxu vase is enlarged by one-third in size, and the Qianlong reign mark is not as neatly and squarely written as the original.

¹¹⁶ Regardless of its post-Duangxu stylistic features, the lidded cup is still dated as a Daoguang piece in the publication. See Liao Baoxiu 廖寶秀, *Yekeyi qingxin: chaqi, chashi, chahua* 也可以清心：茶器、茶事、茶畫 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2002), 195.

between wisteria and Chinese roses against a blue ground, is from design No. 2 of the Dayazhai wares (fig.2.32).¹¹⁷ The same design has also been applied to a round flower basin inscribed with the Qianlong reign mark, though it possesses a white instead of a blue ground (fig.2.33).¹¹⁸ In fact, the decoration is unknown among Qianlong imperial wares, and the round flowerpot is a later shape that did not exist during the Qianlong reign. Additionally, the inscription on the flowerpot is similar to that under the Guangxi globular vase: both of them are less precise square reign marks in a seal script.

It should be noted that imitating earlier artworks was a common practice in Qing court art and it occurred across various media, including painting and porcelain. However, producing works in the style of previous Qing Imperial Kiln products rather demonstrated the continuation of the Qing imperial genealogy. The Imperial Kiln's production of eighteenth century-style porcelain, reveals its main patron Cixi's goal of associating her regency with the Qing lineage. An American journalist's report from 1887 acutely captured such an atmosphere and stated that Cixi had "proven herself to be the ablest ruler of China since the days of Kien-lung [Qianlong]." ¹¹⁹ Indeed, she had accumulated enough knowledge and experience of performing power and authority by directing court art during her first regency. By closely following her role model, Qianlong, Cixi must have come to understand over the years how porcelain could symbolize one's power and sovereignty. No evidence shows that Guangxu was interested in

¹¹⁷ Another design drawing without the Dayazhai inscription and seal and several bowls inscribed with the *Daqing guangxu nian zhi* 大清光緒年製 (made in the Gaungxu reign of Great Qing) mark also testify to the post-Daoguang origin of this design. For a reproduction of the design drawing, see Gugong bowuyuan ed, *Guanyang yuci*, 324.

¹¹⁸ I am grateful to Dr. Yu Pei-chin, who informed me of this work in the National Palace Museum, and to Prof. Hsieh Ming-liang, who confirmed its post-Qianlong date.

¹¹⁹ William D. Foulke, "Administrative Ability of Women," *Friend's Intelligencer*, Philadelphia, September 17, 1887, sec. 44.

patronizing court art production; he never commissioned either personalized porcelain or other craft arts. Such indifference stands in stark contrast to Cixi's enthusiastic patronage. As a result, while most of the antiquarian-style porcelains bear the Guangxu reign mark, they are presumably products of Cixi's instruction. Soame Jenyns claimed that Cixi used to send some Qianlong pieces to the Imperial Kiln to be copied without providing textual evidence. Nevertheless, Cixi's dominant control of the kiln activities and the existing antiquarian works make such an assumption highly possible.¹²⁰ Of course, although making forgeries of eighteenth-century imperial wares was a popular business in Chinese porcelain production at the time, the circulation history of the four antiquarian porcelains I mentioned guarantees their imperial origin.¹²¹ Today they are housed in the original collection of the National Palace Museum, which holds artworks of Qing imperial possession from the Forbidden City, instead of later donations or the Museum's own purchases. Through these eighteenth century-style porcelains, therefore, Cixi crafted the image of a ruler reclaiming the Qing Empire's past glory.

It should be noted that such an attempt to glorify the regime with advanced craft arts can also be observed in nineteenth-century Japan, China's emerging East Asian rival. However it was operated at the much more ambitious scale of promoting the image of a modern country rather than a regime that sought to retrieve past glory. The Meiji government took pains to

¹²⁰ Soame Jenyns, *Later Chinese Porcelain: The Ch'ing Dynasty, 1644-1912* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1971), 76.

¹²¹ Making antiquarian porcelains was a common business in Jingdezhen. Forgery quality improved significantly during the Guangxu reign, and works from the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns were particularly popular targets for imitation. According to the ceramic connoisseur, Xu Zhiheng, the loosened restrictions on imitating imperial wares and the frequent information and labor exchange between the Imperial Kiln and local kilns were important factors that resulted in significant technical improvement of forgeries during the late Guangxu reign and early Republican era. Japanese technicians visiting there also reported seeing porcelains with the Guangxu reign mark sold in local shops, and that it was not difficult to purchase genuine imperial wares. From this perspective, the antiquarian trend in the court helped the development of the forgery market. Xu Zhiheng 許之衡 (1877-1935), *Yinliuzhai shuoci yizhu* 飲流齋說瓷, trans. Ye Zhemin 葉喆民 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2005), 160-61; Kitamura Yaichirō 北村弥一郎 (1868-1926), *Shinkoku yōgyō chōsa hōkokusho* 清国窯業調査報告書 (Tokyo: Nōshōmushō shōkōkyoku, 1908) 52-53.

transform the traditional craft arts into modern industries that would become an important export commodities. As a part of this agenda, an eight-volume official pattern book was produced to direct the making of works to be exported or exhibited in the international expositions.¹²² The fundamental control of design and production shaped the decorative arts of this era into a sophisticated robust, sharp and ornate style that bespoke the thriving industries of craft arts under Emperor Meiji's (r.1868-1911) rule.

By contrast, the Qing rulers, including Cixi, did not display the same ambition. Their concerns were restricted to the refinement of craftsmanship in the Imperial Workshops. Restoring past glory in porcelain production was not a strategy aimed at the international public or the Qing Empire's subjects-at-large; rather it was a self-content presentation only for Cixi and the high officials invited to the imperial banquets. In this regard, the empress dowager's manipulation of the Imperial Workshops to represent her symbolic sovereignty still followed the orbit of tradition without audacious creativity as seen in the thoughtful concern of the Meiji government, which used the craft arts to promote a national image to the international public.

Conclusion

Cixi's control of the Imperial Workshops and her direct participation in the design and production of craft arts enabled her to create personalized attire and daily accessories that bespoke the empress dowager's dual identities as a woman and a ruler. She continued the Qing imperial practice of women expressing themselves through the decoration and cutting of attire,

¹²² The pattern book is titled, *Onchi zuroku* 温知図録. For the introduction and analysis of this pattern book, see Tōkyo kokuritsu hakubutsukan ed., *Meiji dezain no tanjō: chōsa kenkyū hōkokusho "Onchi zuroku"* 明治デザインの誕生：調査研究報告書“温知図録” (Tokyo: Tōkyo kokuritsu hakubutsukan, 1997).

but she also elevated this traditional form of self-expression to a new level and adopted a more intense use of auspicious symbols. Further, the matriarch appropriated features of stage costume to reinforce her attire's dramatic and forceful visual effect. She also ventured into porcelain making, a craft art whose production and collection traditionally excluded Chinese imperial women. By patronizing works that shared the same stylistic features as her attire, the imperial wares took on a new, and now feminine, outlook. Cixi also extended her patronage of the arts to the political context of imperial porcelain making. Imitating earlier masterpieces was common among Qing emperors: the practice visually linked both different eras and the past to the present, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the current sovereignty. In the same vein, the matriarch defined her regency during the Guangxu reign as a legitimate continuation of the Qing imperial genealogy by commissioning eighteenth-century replicas or works inspired by earlier Qing pieces.

In all of her efforts, Cixi projected through her attire and daily accessories a complex image of a matriarch whose patronage was both female and male. The rich and dramatic decoration of her attire emphasized her identity as a Manchu imperial woman. In the traditionally masculine realm of porcelain making, Cixi created an unprecedented female aesthetic. Even so, when it came to claiming her political authority, Cixi continued to embrace porcelain's preexisting visual language, which implied her capability of exercising authority like any other male ruler. The matriarch's comprehensive control of the Imperial Workshops was not limited to the craft arts, though. Her manipulation of the workshops as related to the fine arts will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Performing High Arts:

Production and Use of Painting and Calligraphy

After talking with her head eunuch [Empress Dowager Cixi] said, “I am having prepared a scroll for each lady present and I will write upon them the characters ‘Long Life’ and ‘Happiness’.” We then returned to her reception room, where she stood by a table and wrote these characters with a master hand. When she had finished her eighteenth scroll she sat down in a yellow chair and other chairs were brought for her guests.

Sarah Conger, *Letter from China*, 245.

The wife of the U.S. ambassador to China, Sarah Conger, wrote to her daughter about the private ladies’ audience Empress Dowager Cixi hosted for members of the foreign legations on December 28 1902. The hostess entertained her guests with a delightful banquet and an impressive performance of calligraphy. The written imperial traces were Cixi’s gifts to them. No extant work is directly related to this occasion, although two pieces of calligraphy written on silk the Conger family received in the same year and later donated to the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, offer a glimpse of the kind of calligraphy Cixi might have written and bestowed on her guests.

The red silk squares, each measuring sixty-four by sixty-six centimeters, are hand-painted with gold and silver dragons on the corners. They are rolled up and wrapped with a small red paper, which has the same character as what is written on the silk in the standard script for identification (fig.3.2B). A brief note, “written by H.I.M. Empress Dowager of China 1902” is marked on the back of both square papers (fig.3.2C). The characters *fu* (blessing) and *shou* (longevity) radiate the writer’s forceful vigor. The viewer can easily imagine the calligrapher’s

powerful wrist moving a heavy, large brush against the paper on seeing the dark, rich ink as well as the impressive size of the characters.

However, forceful vigor is not the only quality displayed in the empress dowager's artworks. There are also instances of tenderness and refinement among the gifts she bestowed on the Conger family,¹ as seen in a hanging scroll of a blooming peony and a folding fan decorated with delicate goldfish. The former depicts a peony flower in full bloom; the latter a pair of carefree goldfish swimming among the waterweeds (figs.3.3A, 3.4A). Both paintings are executed in the *mogu* 沒骨 or boneless technique that represents objects without contouring to produce delightful and impressionistic visual effects. Interestingly, although both paintings are dated and inscribed with the characters *yubi* 御筆, "the imperial brushwork," they are obviously done by different hands. The characters on *Peony* are rather loosely composed and the line moves slightly leftward, reflecting the easy mood of the writer. The calligraphy on *Pair of Gold Fish*, in contrast, is carefully written, with each line cautiously placed as if to avoid any mistake. (figs.3.3B, 3.4B).

The Conger family was by no means the only one showered with such imperial favors. In fact, paintings and calligraphy frequently appeared on Cixi's gift list. Many individuals, Chinese and foreigner, received artwork bearing the name of the empress dowager. The phenomenon evokes many questions about the matriarch's production and use of the fine arts. What motivated her to perform calligraphy in public, and how did these works function in her image-making strategies? In spite of the fact that most of Cixi's works of painting and calligraphy, both by herself and by ghost artists, were produced as imperial gifts, they have not been studied in this

¹ It is unclear how many gifts the Conger family had received from Cixi. While some were donated to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the majority of the artworks the family collected in China were auctioned in 1908. Although an accompanying catalogue was published, it requires further investigation into which were gifted by the empress dowager. See American Art Association, *Catalogue of the important private collection of Mrs. E.H. Conger, widow of the Hon. Edwin H. Conger ... Minister Plenipotentiary to China* (New York: American Art Association, 1908).

context. Stylistic analysis and authentication are the most popular topics among the limited scholarship on these works. For instance, although Li Shi pointed out the prevalence of auspicious subjects and the functions of Cixi's artworks,² her ultimate concern was to distinguish the empress dowager's genuine brushwork from that of ghost painters. She came to the conclusion that Cixi herself was less skillful than the latter, who usually appears to have been professional artists capable of creating work of high quality.³ Ka Bo Tsang also focused on these quality differences but with a much harsher attitude, stating that Cixi relied on sketched outlines prepared for her by more able calligraphers. In Tsang's words, "only the naïve and audacious empress dowager could have produced such work."⁴

These two scholars' research exemplifies the common impression of Cixi's participation in the realm of the fine arts, where the empress dowager is found to be "a most hypocritical historical figure, who hired the most ghost writers and painters to assume a cultured image."⁵ However, this view is in conflict with the fact that the art produced in court required an understanding beyond individual artistic creativity. After all, painting and calligraphy are elite arts that Chinese rulers often manipulated to present a specific image of their rulership and personae. The Qing rulers carried on this tradition and developed court art into a highly sophisticated visual field to display their Manchu identities and to manifest their legitimacy to rule over the Han Chinese people, who comprised the majority of the Celestial Kingdom's population. They not only created works of art but also commissioned large-scale painting

² Li Shi 李滢, "Qingdai guige huajia yu gongyie huajia bijiao" 清代閩閣畫家與宮掖畫家, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu* 明清閩閣繪畫研究 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008), 182.

³ Li Shi, "Cixi kuan huihua ji gongyie nü huajia," 94-96.

⁴ Ka Bo Tsang, "Receiving Imperial Favor: Paintings by Cixi, the Empress Dowager," 214. I shall conduct a close reading of this work in response to Tsang's argument in the second section of this chapter.

⁵ Li Shi, "Cixi de shuhua yu qi daibiren" 慈禧的書畫與其代筆人, *Shoucangjia* 收藏家 4 (2000): 62.

projects recording and propagating the Empire's grandeur.

Cixi took a similar approach to the function of court art. This formidable imperial woman never positioned herself as an accomplished artist. As I will elaborate presently, for her, high art served as a vehicle to display her rulership rather than showing pure cultural cultivation. In her operationalization of this kind of cultural performance, she closely followed the precedent of previous Qing emperors' practices. A historically contextualized study focusing on the representation of sovereignty will therefore offer an objective and fruitful understanding of the empress dowager as a practitioner and patron of the fine arts. This approach also makes possible the study of a plethora of artwork produced under her name as a meaningful entity. There are roughly seven hundred paintings dated between 1888 and 1908 under her name in the Palace Museum, Beijing,⁶ and more than half of the title plaques in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony are attributed to her.⁷ Despite their huge numbers, the calligraphic traces and paintings share highly similar subject matter, styles, compositions and formats, and most of them were Her Majesty's gifts. The coherence in visual presentation and function makes it sensible to study all of them indiscriminately as Cixi's works, regardless of their original authorship.

Aside from her personal involvement in the making of painting and calligraphy, Cixi as a patron also enthusiastically carried on the Qing imperial tradition of making documentary paintings. The most spectacular example is her ambitious commission of four battle painting series in 1885. This project continued the convention, established by Emperor Qianlong, of commemorating the regime's victorious military campaigns by making documentary paintings of

⁶ Li Shi, "Cixi kuan huihua ji gongyi nü huajia," 92.

⁷ There are 172 plaques in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony. Except for a few of Emperor Qianlong's calligraphic traces, the majority of the plaques are stamped with the seals of Empress Dowager Cixi. There are 83 plaques that bear Cixi's seals. For the complete photographic reproductions of the plaques in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, see Yifang 一方 ed., *Beijing mingsheng yinglian bian'e xuanbian: Yiheyuan bianlian* 北京名勝楹聯匾額選編：頤和園 (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2005).

them.⁸ The four series include the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), Nian 捻 Rebellion (1851-68), Muslim Rebellions in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan 雲南 and Guizhou 貴州 (1856-72), and the Muslim Rebellions in the northwestern provinces of Shaanxi 陝西, Gansu 甘肅 and Xinjiang 新疆 (1862-73).⁹ Sixty-seven paintings measuring about 135 by 305 centimeters were completed in 1890,¹⁰ and displayed in the Ziguang ge 紫光閣 (Pavilion of Purple Effulgence), a palace complex for military and diplomatic events, until the Boxer Uprising in 1900.¹¹ They embodied the passionate sentiment of celebrating the Empire's military campaigns and the restoration of social order in the late Qing court. More importantly, these projects revealed

⁸ Emperor Qianlong commissioned eight battle painting series during his long sixty-year-reign. Emperor Daogong also had two battle painting series made, but unlike his grandfather's commissions, these paintings have not received much scholarly attention. For the research on Qianlong's battle paintings, see Paul Pelliot, "Les Congquêtes de l'empereur de la Chine," *T'oung Pao* 20 (1912):183-274; Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Qing gongting banhua 'Qianlong pingding Zhunbu Huibu zhantu'" 清宮廷版畫「乾隆平定准部回部戰圖」, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 4 (1989): 61-64; Ma Ya-Chen 馬雅貞, "Zhanzheng tuxiang yu Qianlong chao dui diguo wugong zhi jiangou – yi 'Pingding Zhunbu Huibu desheng tu' wei zhongxin" 戰爭圖像與乾隆朝（1736-95）對帝國武功之建構—以“平定準部回部得勝圖”為中心, MA thesis, National Taiwan University, 2000; Muo Xiaoye 莫小也, "Tongban zuhua 'Pingding Miaolang zhantu' chutan" 銅版組畫「平定苗疆戰圖」初探, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 125 (2006): 52-64; Li Tai-han 李泰翰, "Qing Qianlong nianjian Taiwan zhantu zhizuo jingwei" 清乾隆年間臺灣戰圖製作經緯, *Gugong xueshu jikan* 25.2 (2007): 139-78.

⁹ For studies of this painting project, see Hongxing Zhang, "Studies in Late Qing Battle Paintings," *Artibus Asiae* 60.2 (2000): 265-296; Zhang Hongxing 張弘星, "Liusan zai haineiwai de liangzu Wanqing gongting zhantu kaolui" 流散在海內外的兩組晚清宮廷戰圖考略, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 94 (2001): 1-13; Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Kan Wanqing jishi huihua zhantu dahua ji" 看晚清紀實繪畫戰圖大畫記, *Shoucangjia* 6 (2012): 13.

¹⁰ For the reference to and reproductions of these paintings, see Zhang Hongxing, "Studies in Late Qing Battle Paintings," 271-3; <http://www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn/e/hist.htm>; <http://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5003314783/>; Roger Keverne Gallery, *Summer Exhibition 2000 – Fine and Rare Chinese Works of Art and Ceramics* (London: Roger Keverne Gallery, 2000), 82-83; John E. Vollmer, Jacqueline Simcox, *Emblems of Empire – Selections from the Mactaggart Art Collection* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Museums, 2009), 166-167, 170-171; Beijing gugong bowuyuan ed., *Qingshi tudian* vol.10, 71-80; Ssu-yü Tseng, *The Nian Army and Their Guerrilla Warfare, 1851-1868* (Paris: Mouton, 1961), 21-25; <http://www.battle-of-qurman.com.cn/listlit/aSothebysNY-2011.pdf>; <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.N08974.html/f/449/N08974-449.pdf>; <http://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5003314783/>; <http://auction.artron.net/paimai-art70763651/>.

¹¹ When Di Baoxian, the owner of the Shanghai-based newspaper *Shibao* 時報 (*Eastern Times*), traveled to the looted Ziguang ge soon after 1900, the series of *Nian Rebellion* and *Muslim Rebellions in Shaanxi and Ganxu* were still on the wall. Unfortunately, they were soon lost and sold to different collections overseas. Di Baoxian 荻葆賢 (1873-?), *Pingdeng ge biji* 平等閣筆記 (China: s.n., 1922), 3b.

Cixi's enthusiasm for modeling her artistic patronage after that of the previous Qing imperial patriarchs. Due to my focus on the paintings and calligraphy works as Cixi's imperial gifts, however, this equally important body of materials will not be discussed in this chapter. I shall explore their importance as the bond between the empress dowager's regency and the Qing imperial lineage separately. Based on the rationale of studying Cixi's painting and calligraphy as an entity, therefore, this chapter is not dedicated to the connoisseurship of artworks under Cixi's name. I shall instead examine what images she projected through these imperial gifts and how she utilized them as a vehicle to harness the gift recipient's respect for her rule.¹²

Gift giving, a common human behavior, is an important topic for scholars in the humanities and social sciences.¹³ Although studies on gift exchange and reciprocity of Chinese art often focus on the practice in literati circles, in the realm of courtly demeanor, the political agenda replaces the literati's cultural alliance and becomes the essence of gift giving.¹⁴ That is, imperial

¹² Compared to the large number of Cixi's extant imperial gifts, the attention paid to her gift giving practice is disproportionately scattered. Lydia Liu's essay on the gift exchange between Cixi and English and American female missionaries in 1895 is a rare case study. Yet it has nothing to do with the fine arts. The author's concern lies in the problem of translation in the formal letters and announcements on both sides rather than the power relation reflected on the choice of gift and the pattern of gift exchange. Lydia Liu, "The Secret of Her Greatness," *The Clash of Empires, the Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-46.

¹³ Marcel Mauss's study *Essai sur le don* is the first in-depth contemplation of gift giving as a social practice governed by particular norms and obligations. It laid the foundation for later scholarship on this subject, and some of the author's arguments still hold great value. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reasons for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 67. For a comprehensive review of and comment on Mauss's theory and contribution, see Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University, 1996), 4-6.

¹⁴ Sherman Lee was the first to point out the "obligation system" that dominated the circulation of pictures during the Ming dynasty. Strengthened by his insight, scholars continued to explore how painting and calligraphy were disguised as gifts to avoid the tainting of commodity relations, and how the circulation of artwork helped form the local social and cultural networks. Sherman Lee, "Chinese Painting from 1350 to 1650," in William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts ed., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: the Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1980), xxxv-xlv. For other outstanding case studies of gift exchange in literati circles, see Shi Shou-ch'ien, "Calligraphy as Gift: Wen Cheng-ming's (1470-1559) Calligraphy and the Formation of Soochow Literati Culture," in Cary Y. Liu et al., *Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton, NJ.: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 255-83; Bai Qianshen, *Fu Shan's World: the Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

gifts materially demonstrate the gift giver's abundant material and human resources. They also redound to his/her reputation and honor as a ruler.¹⁵

For this practical reason, choosing an imperial gift was always carefully calculated. Compared to jewelry and other craft arts, painting and calligraphy have an intimate property rendering them more prestigious than other imperial gifts. As Craig Clunas puts it, bestowing works from his/her own brush is the ruler's gesture of granting the recipients a more personal bond, which is also a greater status marker.¹⁶ Since the obligation to receive was hierarchically structured in the Confucian discourse that "a prince should employ his minister according to the rules of propriety; ministers should serve their prince with faithfulness" 君使臣以禮，臣事君以忠，¹⁷ the recipient of the imperial brushwork is obliged to reciprocate with extraordinary loyalty.

The relationship between Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (r.1426-1435) of the Ming dynasty and the eminent scholar official Xia Yuanji 夏原吉 (1366-1430) exemplifies such a dynamic. To demonstrate admiration and respect for his mentor, Xuanzong painted an immortal of longevity to celebrate Xia's birthday, and the recipient returned Xuanzong's favor with excessive adherence, which is evidenced in his posthumous name, Zhongjing 忠靖 (loyal and clarity), which was granted by the emperor.¹⁸

University Asia Center, 2003); Craig Culnas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Glenn Richardson, "Personal Gift-Giving at the Field of Cloth of Gold," in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance* ed. Thomas Betteridge and Suzannah Lipscomb (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 59.

¹⁶ Craig Clunas, "Gifts and Giving in Chinese Art," in *Transactions of the Oriental Ceramic Society* 62 (1997-8):13.

¹⁷ He Yan 何晏 (-294), *Lunyu zhushu* 論語註疏, in *Jingyin Wenyuange sikuquanshu* vol.195, 310. Translation see Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (1938, reprint. New York: Routledge, 2005), 166.

¹⁸ Guo Li-cheng 郭立誠, "Zengli hua yanjiu" 贈禮畫研究, in National Palace Museum ed., *Zhonghu mingguo jianguo bashi nian Zhongguo yishu wenwu taolunhui lunwenji shuhua xia* 中華民國建國八十年中國藝術文物討

The research above unveils only a part of the nexus of gift circulation in China, as women's roles and practices remain obscure. In fact, women artists' works also functioned as gifts in literati circles, but only a fraction of them are preserved or recorded.¹⁹ Late Ming courtesan painters' gifts to their lovers, clients or literati friends settle in this nexus because they were active in literati circles and wielded the brush in ways gentlemen recognized. As for women painters from the gentry, their works were sometimes given through male family members. Taking the example of the woman painter Li Yin 李因 (1610-85), whose boneless flower-and-bird ink paintings were praised to represent the *shiqi* 士氣 or “quality of a literatus,” her husband often gave out her paintings to friends to promote his wife's talent.²⁰

As regards imperial women giving their own paintings and calligraphy, recent scholarship has shown that most of the extant works done by imperial women had been created for the emperors. These gifts were presented privately and often carried personal rather than public characteristics. The most famous case is the talented spouse of the Southern Song Emperor Ningzong 寧宗 (r.1194-1224), Empress Yang (1162 or 1172-1233) and her collaboration with the court artists. As Hui-shu Lee has argued, the empress commissioned paintings of specific subject matters from the court artists and inscribed her own calligraphy before presenting the paintings to the emperor. These exquisite fans or albums often appeared to function as a means of communicating conjugal love between the imperial couple. Empress Yang's gifts also went to her relatives who served in the court as a gesture to represent favor and

論會論文集 書畫 (下) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1991), 756. Emperor Xuanzong is known for his artistic and literary interaction with officials in the court, which is illustrated in detail in Cheng-hua Wang's dissertation. Cheng-hua Wang, “Material Culture and Emperors,” 309-51.

¹⁹ He Junhong 赫俊紅, *Danqing qipa—wan Ming Qing chu de mvxing huihua* 丹青奇葩—晚明清初的女性繪畫 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2008), 107-8, 159.

²⁰ Li Rihua 李日華 (1565-1635), *Liuyanzhai san bi* 六研齋三筆 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2008), 15.

a symbol of her family's glory.²¹

Cixi's painting and calligraphy are distinct from those of both women painters in the literati circles and other imperial women in multiple aspects. She played a proactive role in the making and circulation of gifts. Embedding personal messages in her artwork before presenting them to the emperor accounted for only a minor part of her artistic practice. Consequently, this chapter contextualizes Empress Dowager Cixi's production and use of fine art works from the perspective of gift giving and image making. The first section discusses her strategies of visualizing the connection with the imperial genealogy through her own creation and commission of painting. Her inspirations from previous imperial Qing patriarchs, Shunzhi, Qianlong and Xianfeng in particular, will be detailed. The second section examines Cixi's most common imperial gift: calligraphy. In addition to investigating the stylistic features of these works, the contexts in which she gave away calligraphy, and the purpose and effect of such gifts are all investigated.

3.1 Painting Legitimacy

As mentioned in the Introduction, Cixi was from an affluent Manchu family that was undoubtedly able to provide a certain literary education to its young daughter before she was selected into the imperial harem. Artistic education in the inner courts had a long tradition, as it enabled the imperial women to entertain the emperor with their participation in the fine arts. However, painting and calligraphy did not seem to be popular among the Manchu imperial consorts. There are twenty painters recorded under the category of *gongye* 宫掖, "court," in

²¹ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 209, 214.

History of Painting from Jade Terrace 玉臺畫史, a biography of women painters from ancient times to the Qing dynasty.²² None of them were Qing imperial women. The fact that the editor, Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉 (fl. 18th century), was a gentry woman in the Jiangnan region with limited knowledge of the activities of her contemporaries in the inner quarters might have resulted in a lack of information. Yet even in *Record of Painters in the Eight Banners* 八旗畫錄, a late nineteenth-century biography dedicated to bannermen and bannerwomen artists, only four names are listed under this category. Cixi is one of these four women artists: the other three are all her juniors.²³

The rarity of talented women painters in the inner quarters thus explains why Cixi, the then young Lan Guiren, stood out from their counterparts.²⁴ One anecdote also mentioned her enthusiasm for learning to paint. According to Miriam S. Headland, based on a conversation with the empress dowager's favorite female court artist and painting mentor, Miao Jiahui 繆嘉蕙 (1841-1918), Cixi began to learn painting soon after she became the imperial consort:

Shortly after [Her Majesty] was taken into the palace she began the study of books, and partly as a diversion, but largely out of her love for art, she took up the brush. She studied the old masters because they were reproduced using woodcuts in books,

²² Tang Shuyu 湯漱玉, *Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史 (1803, reprint: Qiantang: Zhenqi tang, 1831), 1-8a. *Gongyie* has a narrower definition in Li Shi's discourse, which only refers to the professional women court painters in the inner quarters. In this chapter I follow Tang Shuyu's rather broad definition, which groups together Cixi and the women court painters she recruited. For Li's definition, see Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huajia huihua yanjiu*, 182.

²³ The other three women painters were Emperor Tongzhi's noble consort Lady Yu 瑜貴妃 (1856-1932), who was known for landscape and ink orchid paintings; Prince Gong's eldest daughter Princess Rongshou 榮壽 (1854-1924), who excelled in flower-and-bird painting, and Li Fang 李放 (1883 or 1884-?), *Baqi hualu* 八旗畫錄, in Wang Zhaoyong 汪兆鏞 ed., *Qingdai zhuanji congkan* 清代傳記叢刊, vol. 80 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985-86), 481-2. Also see Wu Shijian 吳士鑒 (1868-1934), *Qing gongci* 清宮詞 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1986), 17.

²⁴ Cixi's early interest in art is recorded in several memoirs of late Qing court culture. For instance, Huang Jun recorded that Cixi practiced calligraphy and painting when living in the Yuanming yuan with Emperor Xianfeng. Huang Jun 黃濬 (1891-1937), *Hua sui ren sheng an zhiyi bu pian* 花隨人聖庵摭憶補篇 (Hong Kong: Dahua chubanshe, 1970), 4.

and from the paintings preserved in the palace collection. Soon she exhibited rare talent.²⁵

Miao's account provides a rare glimpse of the artistic education in the Qing inner quarters. Those interested could learn from woodblock prints of painting manuals as well as masterpieces in the imperial collection, a privilege to which every art student aspired. As will be detailed presently, with the help of the women court painters, these learning channels continued playing an important role in Cixi's painting practice in later days. No dated work is extant to evaluate the young Lan Guiren's art, but the exclusive learning environment must have been helpful because she was able to charm Emperor Xianfeng with her painting skills soon after entering the inner quarters. In 1855 the emperor once ordered the Painting Workshop to mount Lan Guiren's painting.²⁶ While painting reflected the future Cixi's love of the beautiful and her cultivation, she soon realized that the fine arts had political potential, as is shown through the strategic inclusion of opened books and sniffing snuff powder, two motifs suggesting knowledge and political struggles, in her portraits (fig. 1.1, 1.8A). Nonetheless, not until the matriarch's second regency did her paintings reveal a strong tendency towards political purposes.

Appointment of female court painters

Although she began to learn paint when young, Cixi ceased practicing during the early years of the regency. Then in 1882, a year after Ci'an's death, she picked up the brush again. Before then only one record of the matriarch's painting during the Tongzhi reign is found in the "Documents of the Imperial Workshops in the Department of the Imperial Household." It is an

²⁵ Isaac T. Headland, *Court Life in China*, 87.

²⁶ NZHD, Box No.111_34_538. Also see Wang Cheng-hua, "Zhouxiang 'gongkaihua'," 249.

order sending fifteen of her paintings of orchids, bamboo, peonies and chrysanthemums to the Imperial Workshops for mounting on August 23, 1870.²⁷ By contrast, the Workshop mounted 122 *yubi* (imperial brushwork) paintings in 1882. This marked the beginning of Cixi's frequent orders of this kind sent to the Imperial Workshop.²⁸ Two factors suggest that the paintings to be mounted were drawn by the empress dowager instead of the emperor. First, the painting subjects are either flowers or auspicious symbols such as pine trees and cranes, which are not likely to have been of interest for the twelve-year-old emperor. Second, each request includes meticulous instructions as to the style, color and material of the mounting paper. More importantly, the timing coincides with Cixi's practice of presenting paintings as gifts, as will be detailed presently. It also implies the empress dowager's practical view of her artworks.

However productive Cixi was, it would have been impossible for her to paint all the imperial gifts with her own hand. To ensure a steady supply of paintings, she actively participated in the selection of court painters. In the Qing convention, a court painter had to submit a painting demonstrating his skill for the emperor's examination before receiving tenure in the Painting Workshop.²⁹ Emperors Tongzhi and Guangxu were either too young or not as interested in directing the court art institutions as their imperial forefathers. Their involvement in the Imperial Workshops can hardly be found in the "Documents of the Imperial Workshops in the Department of the Imperial Household and other documents." Cixi thus assumed the role and turned it into her own resource. She decided whom to keep and what her court painters

²⁷ "NZHD," Box No. 37_522_546. In fact there are multiple records for mounting paintings "of the imperial brush," but they are small pieces to be used for decoration. Since Cixi was already able to paint a single painting, such records may refer to her son Tongzhi's works. In fact, Emperor Tongzhi's calligraphy and drawings were indeed collected and put together into hanging scrolls. For an example of such work, see Gugong bowuyuan ed., *Qingshi tudian: Qingchao tongshi tulu*, vol. 10, 283.

²⁸ "NZHD," Box No.44_22, 23, 24, 27, 47, 61, 72, 74, 82, 83, 114, 120, 121, 125, 128, _571.

²⁹ Nie Chongzheng, "Qingdai gongting huihua jigou, zhidu ji huajia," 52.

should produce.³⁰ In addition to making paintings for interior decoration and other imperial commissions, they also worked as the empress dowager's ghost painters.

Cixi's favorite male painter, Guan Nianci 管念慈 (?-1909), once described Her Majesty's ghost-painting order to Isaac T. Headland:

When Her Majesty excused me from appearing at the palace...she required that I paint for her a minimum of sixty pictures a year, to be sent about the time of the [important festivals]. These she [stamped] with her seals, and with appropriate sentiments written by members of the College of Inscriptions, and she gave them, as she gave her own, as presents during the feasts.³¹

Guan's account provides very useful information that unveils how Cixi's painting gifts were made. She did not leave all the responsibility of making painting gifts to the court painters but combined her own work with theirs. The paintings were usually made for important festivals such as the New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month in the lunar calendar, and the Mid-Autumn festival.

As an enthusiastic practitioner of painting, Cixi had great expectations of court painters. In addition to serving as her ghost painters, the empress dowager also wanted them to help improve her own painting skills. However, due to restrictions on men's presence in the inner quarters, it was inconvenient to learn from male court painters. Cixi's solution to this issue is unprecedented. She recruited professional women painters to be her ladies-in-waiting and painting mentors. The recruitment might appear to be a political act demonstrating her

³⁰ Li Shi, "Tongzhi Guangxu chao Ruyiguan," 100, 102-15.

³¹ Isaac T. Headland, *Court Life in China: The Capital, Its Officials and People*, 89-90.

determination to retire from politics when Emperor Guangxu began direct rule.³² However, considering the painters' responsibility as the empress dowager's ghost painters, I contend that this imperial order of recruiting female professional painters was to fulfill Cixi's need for painting mentorship and the production of paintings that could be used as gifts. No official record of this recruitment can be found now, but anecdote has it that she issued the imperial order in 1889, the year Emperor Guangxu began his direct rule, in preparation for her retirement recreation.³³ Several female painters were soon selected. Ka Bo Tsang mentioned that Cixi chose four painters: a Manchu bannerwoman Gua'erjia Huanliang 瓜爾佳畫梁 (fl. mid to late 19th century); and three Han Chinese women Miao Jiahui, Ruan Yufen 阮玉芬 (fl. mid 19th to early 20th century) and Wang Shao 王韶 (fl. mid to late nineteenth century).³⁴ However, to the author of *Record of Painters in the Eight Banners* does not mention that Gua'erjia Huanliang had served in the court, and thus there may have only been three Han Chinese women painters recruited in the empress dowager's court.

The following palace-style poem 宮詞 describes the dynamics between the female painters and the empress dowager as well as the paintings they created:

大雅齋中寫折枝，
丹青勾勒仿荃熙。
江南供奉雖承旨，
不及滇南女畫師。

³² Li Shi 李滉, "Wanqing gongzhong huajia qun: Ruyiguan huashi yu gongyie huajia" 晚清宮中畫家群：如意館畫士與宮掖畫家, *Meishu guan cha* 美術觀察 9 (2006): 101.

³³ Jin Liang 金梁 (1878-?), *Qinggong shilue* 清宮史略 (China: s.n., 1933), 212.

³⁴ Ka Bo Tsang, "In Her Majesty's Service: Women Painters in China at the Court of the Empress Dowager Cixi," 40, Li Fang, *Baqi hualu*, 481-2.

In the Studio of Utmost Grace [Empress Dowager Cixi] depicted branches of flowers,
The colors and outlines [of the depicted subjects] are after [the styles of] Huang Quan and
Xu Xi.

Although the Service Providers from the Jiangnan region fulfilled the imperial order,
[They] did not receive as much favor as the woman painter from Yunnan.³⁵

The poem mentions the stylistic connection between the works of Cixi and those of the tenth-century masters Huang Quan 黃筌 (ca. 903-965) and Xu Xi 徐熙 (886-975), who laid the foundation of the flower-and-bird painting genre. Huang Quan and his son Huang Jucai 黃居寀 (922-993) were the court painters of Former Shu 前蜀 and Latter Shu 後蜀 (907-965), two successive local regimes in modern day Sichuan 四川, who later served in the Painting Academy of the Northern Song court after the region was included into the territory of the Northern Song.³⁶ Xu Xi, in comparison, represented a different painting tradition. Coming from an eminent family in the region of the lower Yangzi River controlled by the Southern Tang 南唐 (937-975) regime before that part of China was conquered by the Northern Song, Xu remained an artist outside of the court. He preferred ink over colors and was known for the *luomo* 落墨 technique, which refers to painting the branches and leaves with ink and using color pigments to depict flower petals.³⁷

³⁵ Wu Shijian, *Qing gongci*, 12.

³⁶ Huang Jucai's *Blue Magpie and Thorny Shrubs* 山鷓棘雀圖, now in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan, is the representative of the Huang family style. For the introduction to the Huang family style and this painting, see Li Yumin 李玉珉, "Huangjia tizhi de daibiaozuo – Huang jucai *Shanzhe jique tu*" 黃家體制的代表作—黃居寀《山鷓棘雀圖》, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 277(2006): 32-38.

³⁷ Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (fl. 11th century), *Tuhua jianwen ji* 圖畫見聞記, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2009), 449. Also see Chen Chuanxi 陳傳席, "'Xichu Xu Xi luomohua' kaoshi—jiantan Xu Xi de huafa" 「洗出徐熙落墨花」考釋—兼談徐熙的畫法, *Dongnan daxue xuebao zhexue shehui kexue ban* 東南大學學報哲學社會科學版 6 (2003): 82-83.

The two different styles converged in the next generation of Huang Jucai and Xu Xi. It is said that, in response to the popularity of the Huang family's refined coloring, Xu Xi's son, Xu Chongsi 徐崇嗣 (fl. second half of the 10th century), modified the *luomo* into the boneless technique of painting directly with colors without drawing contours in advance.³⁸ The boneless technique became the most common technique of flower-and-bird painting after the seventeenth-century painter Yun Shouping 惲壽平 (1633-1690) developed a style balancing between refinement and expressiveness.³⁹ Cixi preferred this boneless technique, as most of the flower-and-bird paintings under her name are painted in that manner. *Peony* is a typical example of this kind. The large square seal in the upper middle of the painting and the inscription of *yubi*, "imperial brushwork," suggest Cixi's authorship. The boneless technique, together with the watery brushwork and light coloring, resulted in the impressive image of a blooming peony branch. The painter self-consciously demonstrated her efforts of practicing this technique through the color variation on the turning leaves and the petals (fig.3.3A).

The last two lines turn to the women painters and clearly point out that the one from Yunnan is Her Majesty's favorite. The "painters from Jiangnan" refer to Wang Shao and Ruan Yufen, who were both accomplished painters in the flower-and-bird genre from the lower Yangtze River. The two painters might have stayed in the palace for about a decade,⁴⁰ but Wang left first and died soon afterward, while Ruan retired later and spent the rest of her days by West

³⁸ Shen Gua 沈括 (1031-95), *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談, in *Jingyin Wenyuan ge siku quanshu* vol.864, 590.

³⁹ Tong Wen-o 童文娥, "Yun Shouping qiren qihua" 惲壽平其人其畫, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 133 (1994): 58-69.

⁴⁰ Li Shi, "Wanqing gongzhong huajia qun," 101.

Lake in Zhejiang 浙江 Province.⁴¹ In comparison, Miao Jiahui, a widowed woman painter from Yunan, earned Cixi's admiration and enjoyed imperial favor even after the empress dowager's death. She was a mature, well-mannered woman, enabling her to keep the empress dowager at ease when in her company and survive the rigors of court life.⁴²

Miao specialized in boneless flower-and-bird painting and was a professional painter before Cixi's recruitment. Her painting, *Peony*, demonstrates the painter's professional skills. It was a gift to celebrate the eighty-first birthday of a certain Madame Luo. The elegant bouquet of pink, red and yellow peony flowers are painted with light washes of colors. The pink peony in full bloom is surrounded by other buds and blooming flowers to serve as the focus of appreciation, and the bound branches curve slightly to create a pleasant variation in the lower part of the painting (fig.3.5).

Peony also shares a strong similarity to the paintings under Cixi's name. Compositionally, they both depict flower branches. In terms of the technique and motifs, both are composed in the boneless technique, and the painted motifs always represented auspicious symbolism. The resemblance is perhaps the result of Cixi's close relationship with Miao Jiahui. She kept the women painters in the inner quarters, and as Miao described to Mrs. Headland, the two often "spent a large part of the daytime either with brushes, or studying the history of art, the examples in the books, or the works of the old masters in the gallery."⁴³

Miao Jiahui's account of how she studied painting with the empress dowager is evident by

⁴¹ Zhang Mingke 張鳴珂 (1829-1908), *Hansong ge tanyi suolu* 寒松閣談藝瑣錄 (1908, reprint: *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 14), 144-45.

⁴² Li Shi, "Wanqing gongzhong huajia qun," 101-2. Miao left a manuscript *Gong feng hua gao* 供奉畫稿, possibly a visual record of what she painted for Cixi, but so far no copies have been found. For the record of this book, see Kuang Zhouyi 況周頤 (1859-1926), *Meilu conghua* 眉廬叢話 (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1995), 41.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 88.

the books stored in Cixi's residence, the Palace of Eternal Spring, in the Forbidden City. According to the "Documents of Settings" 陳設檔, the inventory of all the palaces in the Forbidden City was kept by the Department of Imperial Household and updated regularly during the Qing dynasty. There was also a good-sized painting-related book collection in Cixi's residence. Ten classic book titles on the history of painting, such as *Famous Paintings through History* 歷代名畫記, *Record of Painting of the Xuanhe Era* 宣和畫譜, and *History of Painting* 畫史, as well as an unspecified painting manual 畫譜 and a set of *Wielding the Brush with Ease* 揮毫自在, a copperplate printing of a painting manual published by the Japanese painter Mori Kinseki 森琴石 (1843-1921) in 1881.⁴⁴

How did the women painters teach painting to Cixi? *Smartweeds, Mantis, and a Kind of Chrysanthemum* 蓼、螳螂、菊之一種 is the fruit of the matriarch's painting sessions offering a rare glimpse into the artistic practice in the Qing inner quarters. It is an ink drawing of three flower motifs and an insect. A branch of smartweed extends across the pictorial space from the lower right to the upper left corner, on which a mantis heroically stands. A branch of blooming chrysanthemum is painted behind the smartweed to enrich the composition and create a sense of depth. Two of Cixi's seals are stamped on the paper. One is the large square seal *Cixi huangtaihou yubi zhibao* 慈禧皇太后御筆之寶, "Treasure of Empress Dowager Cixi's imperial brushwork"; the other is a small oval seal on the right edge of the paper. The title of this work is inscribed on the left of the painting. The painting mentor's comments appear in red ink. The overall quality is written on the upper right, which reads: "fine treatments are found in the

⁴⁴ Gugong bowuyuan ed, *Gugong bowuyuan cang Qinggong chenshe dang'an* 故宮博物院藏清宮陳設檔案 vol. 44 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2013), 29, 31-32.

movement of the ink” 運墨甚有佳處. She circles the properly drawn details and comments with characters *hao* 好, “good,” and the comment of “calligraphic strokes are represented” 有筆意. However, the monitor does not merely offer flattering admiration. A cross is marked in the center, near which a comment of “a leaf is missing” 缺一葉 is written (fig.3.6).

The mantis in the center of the pictorial space serves as the visual focus of this drawing. Raising its grasping, spiked forelegs as if ready for praying, the predator’s animated posture rises beneath Cixi’s square seal. The mantis is often associated with people who lack foresight, and it is also known as a metaphor for overrating one’s ability, an allegory from the story of a mantis attempting to stop a chariot.⁴⁵ Yet when depicted in a flower-and-bird painting, the creature is as an efficient killer of injurious insects harmful to crops and plants. A garden scene rich with insects is not unfamiliar to Cixi; two designs of her Dayazhai ware are decorated with crickets (figs.2.22, 2.26). The context indicates that it is not the negative symbolism of the mantis but its common presence and practical function in the garden scene that is represented in this drawing. Interestingly, the female mantis is famous for its fierce survival strategy of eating the male mantis after intercourse. This scientific knowledge might not have been available in *fin-de-siècle* China, but in the eyes of the contemporary viewer this biological feature of the female mantis offers a coincidental reading that associates it with Cixi’s trajectory of accumulating power – each accomplishment is accompanied by an imperial male figure’s death.

Smartweeds, Mantis, and a Kind of Chrysanthemum is also significant as a work painted by a woman under the instruction of another woman. It demonstrates Empress Dowager Cixi’s enthusiasm of refining her painting skill to the degree that she made an unprecedented decision

⁴⁵ Williams Charles Alfred Speed, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs: A Comprehensive Handbook on Symbolism in Chinese Art Through the Ages* (1960. Reprint: Boston, Mass.: Tuttle, 2006), 215.

of recruiting women court painters to teach her and was willing to accept their criticism. Her determination is also reflected by the teacher's judicious comments. After all, how can anyone criticize the painting of the most powerful person in the Empire without her consent? The dynamics can also be discerned from the matriarch's generosity to Miao and other women court painters. For instance, Ruan Yufen's given name was Cixi's gift to her, and Miao Jiahui was especially showered with excessive imperial favor: she was exempted from having to perform the *koutou* ritual before Her Majesty and given a salary that compared to that of a third rank official.⁴⁶ It was such respect and trust from Cixi that enabled the painters to teach her with less constraint. In this regard, *Smartweeds Mantis, and a Kind of Chrysanthemum* is a piece of invaluable representation of female agency that fundamentally changed the operation of male-centered Chinese court art.

Modeling after the founding patriarch

The matriarch of the Qing Empire's strategy to visualize her sovereignty through the fine arts is not limited to the recruitment of professional female painters. Her own artistic creations were also at play. Cixi modeled her actions after the artistic activities of previous emperors, especially Emperor Qianlong. He coined the representation of sovereignty with which the preceding Qing emperors experimented and systematically expanded. It was this system and the imperial tradition he coined that Cixi adopted and adapted, as made evident through the various comparisons between the two rulers throughout this dissertation. Although the material I gathered presents no direct evidence pointing to Qianlong's influence on Cixi's painting creations, we can still observe traces of how closely the matriarch followed her role model's path.

⁴⁶ Li Shi, "Cixi kuan huihua ji gongyie nü huajia," 96-97.

For instance, on February 13, 1886, Cixi ordered eunuchs to bring Qianlong's painting of bamboo and orchids displayed in the Ningshou gong 寧壽宮 (Palace of Tranquility and Longevity) in order to study it.⁴⁷

In comparison, the artworks of the Qing dynasty's first post-conquest ruler Emperor Shunzhi and Cixi's husband Emperor Xianfeng are clearly imprinted in her painting activities. This connection enables a close examination of how the matriarch visually linked her regency with the imperial lineage. Emperor Shunzhi was significant to Cixi not only because he was the only Qing ruler assisted by a female regent prior to Emperor Tongzhi but also because his birth mother and regent, Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang, was a respected Qing imperial woman. During Emperor Shunzhi's reign the Qing regime conquered the Ming dynasty, thus rising to become the last imperial dynasty in China.⁴⁸ With the Qing bureaucracy just beginning to develop at this time, experiments to express the Manchu emperor's sovereignty emerged and later became the tradition throughout the Qing dynasty. By the same token, Shunzhi's art was regarded as the origin of the Qing emperor's artistic representation of authority and in turn became an indispensable element in Cixi's artistic practice. This is reflected in her art which uses two methods to imitate the founding patriarch's paintings as well as her adoption of the finger painting method promoted by Shunzhi.

The painting *Grapes* 葡萄圖, a copy of Emperor Shunzhi's painting, exemplifies Cixi's

⁴⁷ "NZHD", Box No. 46_120_590.

⁴⁸ The Manchu regime was established by Emperor Shunzhi's grandfather, Nurhaci (1559-1626), and his father Hong Taiji (r.1626-43) officially transformed the regime into the Qing dynasty. However, the Qing did not move its capital from Shengjing 盛京 (modern day Shenyang 瀋陽 in Liaoning Province) to Beijing until 1644. Thus Shunzhi was often introduced as the first Qing emperor after the regime replaced the Ming dynasty.

attempt to model her efforts after those of the founding patriarch of the Qing Empire.⁴⁹ It depicts several grape branches extending upward diagonally from the lower right corner, while vines laden with ripe grapes fill the upper left corner and stretch down the right side of the painting to form an oval composition. The large square seal of the painter, Empress Dowager Cixi, is stamped in the upper middle of the painting. The inscription to its right reads, “[I] respectfully imitated the brushwork spirit of Emperor Shizu Zhang. An imperial copy painted [on a day during] the last ten days of the first summer month in the year *jichou* of the Guangxu reign” 敬仿世祖章皇帝筆意，光緒己丑孟夏下澣御臨 (fig.3.7). Dated 1889, *Grapes* is a work exemplifying the matriarch’s painting skills before recruiting women painters as her painting mentors. The forceful twists and turns of the grape vines reveal characteristics of calligraphic strokes, which are also found in *Smartweeds*, *Mantis*, and *a Kind of Chrysanthemum*.

For a practitioner of painting, without proper instruction it was by no means an easy task to copy a painting that requires precise calculation of composition and experienced control of brushwork. Why would Cixi make such an effort to imitate Shunzhi’s painting? It seems that, in addition to practicing painting skills, the empress dowager also aimed at making a public display of these efforts. The late Qing high official Yuan Chang 袁昶 (1846-1900) left a poem titled “Respectfully Viewing Empress Dowager Cixi’s Imitation of Shimiao’s (the posthumous title of Emperor Shunzhi) Imperial Brushwork of Grapes” 恭閱慈禧皇太后仿世廟畫蒲桃御筆, which shows that such works were shown or presented to Cixi’s high officials.⁵⁰ The poem is rich with

⁴⁹ The painting was in American dealer James Freeman’s ownership and auctioned in Hangzhou, China on July 16, 2006.

⁵⁰ Yuan Chang was a progressive Han Chinese official in the late Qing court. He enforced policies of modernization in Anhui Province. As a reward for his service, Yuan was promoted to the second rank in 1898. Yuan opposed the Qing government’s military action against foreigners in Beijing during the Boxer’s Uprising in 1900 and was decapitated that same year. Zhao Erxun, *Qing shigao*, 395.

symbolism and shows that the painter's message of authority was detected and admired:

幕天匝地起濃陰，
馬乳垂垂密葉深。
氣勢開通玉門堠，
遠規廟略挾靈襟。
似出橫風密雨中，
生香活色奪天工。
不須更護龍孫竹，
勁倚西天玉一叢。

Like curtains over the sky and blankets covering the land the thick shadow [of the grape vines] arises;
The fruit of *maru* grapes is ripe and hangs heavily amidst the dense leaves.
The [strong] impetus [under the lead of the empress dowager] opened the Yumen battlement;
[She] guided the stratagem of the court and unfolded [her] breath of vision from afar [in the capital].
It is as if [the fruit] is coming out of the fierce wind and heavy rain,
Yet still [appears] so lively and fragrant that they surpass the work of nature.
While [Her Majesty] needs not the protection of the “dragon grandson bamboo” [anymore],
[She is like] a vigorous jade bamboo grove that leans against the Western Paradise.⁵¹

The poem describes a picture of grape vines heavy with ripe fruit. Bamboo groves are possibly part of the painting as well. The poet interpreted the elements of the painting into metaphors suitable for the rhapsodization about the empress dowager's rule. The first two couplets point to the dual gender characteristics of Cixi's authority. The term *maru* 馬乳 refers to a rare grape species from Inner Asia.⁵² It also means horse milk, and thus highlights the painter's gender.

The second couplet, on the other hand, refers to her imposing persona and vision as a ruler.

⁵¹ Yuan Chang 袁昶 (1846-1900), “Gongyue Cixi huangtaihou fang Shimiao hua putao yubi” 恭閱慈禧皇太后仿世廟畫蒲桃御筆, *Anban yiji* 安般彙集, in *Baibu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成, vol. 78 (1894: Reprint: Taipei: Yiwen chubanshe, 1959), 91.

⁵² According to the eighth century book, *Fengshi wenjian ji*, the Oghuz Yabgu State in Inner Asia paid tribute to the Tang Emperor Taizong (r.626-49) with *maru* grapes. Feng Yan 封演 (fl. 8th century), *Fengshi wenjian ji* 封氏聞見記 in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* vol.862, 140.

While *Yumen hou* 玉門墩, an important fortress on the Silk Route in Gansu Province, echoes the origin of the *maru* grape, it also reminds the reader of the recent Qing military campaign in northwestern China including the suppression of Muslim rebellions in the provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu (1862-73) and the creation of Xijiang Province (1884).⁵³ Both campaigns were regarded as an important contributions of Cixi's regency.

The last couplet cleverly depicts the power relations between the Empress Dowager Regent and Emperor Guangxu. *Longsun zhu* 龍孫竹 is a bamboo specimen in western Hunan 湖南 Province, and it is also a metaphor for Guangxu. Soft and short, the bamboo/emperor was at one time protected by the jade bamboo grove that leans against the Western Paradise, a metaphor unmistakably referring to the West Empress Dowager Cixi.⁵⁴ Since, however, the jade bamboo grove no longer had to protect the *longsun* bamboo, it is possible that by the time Yuan viewed the painting and wrote his poem, Guangxu had begun his direct rule. Even so, the retired Empress Dowager Regent, according to the last line, is still vigorous and powerful. Such emphasis on Cixi's energy coincides with the liveliness represented in *Grapes*. Indeed the forceful representation of the grape vines, the vivid green leaves, and the ripe grapes creates a vigorous scene. Although Cixi had already handed power to Guangxu in the beginning of 1889, she demonstrated her still active energy in this painting. Therefore, the production of *Grapes* carried two layers of significance. It was both an artistic strategy positioning Cixi as the person who continued the imperial tradition and a still vigorous, active newly retired sovereign.

The other strategy Cixi used to connect her rule with that of Shunzhi was the production of

⁵³ For the military campaign and the impact of the establishment of Xinjiang Province, see William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 209-11.

⁵⁴ For the introduction of the *longsun* bamboo, see Fan Zhen 范鎮 (1007-1087), *Dongzhai jishi* 東齋記事, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* vol. 1036, 281.

finger painting. Finger painting was not a Manchu creation,⁵⁵ but Emperor Shunzhi played a critical role of popularizing it among the literati and in the commercial arts during the Qing dynasty. His interest in and promotion of finger painting is recorded in the following paragraph:

...萬幾之暇，寄情圖繪，間寫山水，以賜近臣...得之者珍逾球貝。又嘗以指上螺紋蘸墨作渡水牛，神肖多姿。自後臣高其佩等皆擅長指墨，其法實始自世廟也。

When [His Majesty] had spare time amidst myriad political affairs, he placed his feelings on painting. Occasionally he painted landscape paintings and bestowed them on close officials... Those who received [His Majesty's paintings] cherished them more than large, round pearls. [His Majesty] also inked the whorls in his fingerprints to paint water-crossing buffaloes. [The animals] looked lively and [were painted with] various appearances. Thereafter, officials such as Gao Qipei, all excelled in ink painting, but the painting technique in effect originated from Shimiao.⁵⁶

This anecdote reveals two important aspects of Shunzhi's art and early Qing politics. He presented his own works, mostly landscape paintings, as gifts to his officials as a sign of privileged imperial favor. He also promoted finger painting that replaced the brush with fingers. The former was a strategy to solidify the cultured image of Shunzhi and the Qing dynasty he embodied. Giving his paintings to his closest allies in the style of literati art helped the Manchu emperor showcase his comprehension of the elite culture and showed his capability to rule the highly cultured Han Chinese people. The latter, by contrast, has been interpreted as an example of how the Manchu authority used an alternative art form parallel to the Han Chinese literati art

⁵⁵ This painting technique remained obscure until the seventeenth century when pursuing unconventional methods to render a visualization of the image in the mind became essential to literati art, and some eccentric painters began to paint with their fingers. Klaas Ruitenbeek, "Discarding the Brush: Gao Qipei (1660-1734) and Chinese Finger Painting," *Discarding the Brush: Gao Qipei (1660-1734) and the Art of Chinese Finger Painting* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1992), 20.

⁵⁶ Zhang Geng 張庚 (1685-1760), *Guochao huazheng lu* 國朝畫徵錄, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* vol. 1067, 266.

tradition to help formulate a distinct Manchu-ness in visual culture.⁵⁷

Shunzhi's efforts soon made finger painting a popular art form among the ruling class. The Chinese bannerman, official and painter, Gao Qipei 高其佩 (1660-1734), further developed the form into an individual painting genre.⁵⁸ The popularity of finger painting among noble bannermen is evident in *Baqi hualu* and the now-lost nineteenth-century text "Record of Finger Painting Painters" 指頭畫人錄 which listed more than one hundred painters, many of whom were bannermen, including a female painter, Jiewen 介文 (1767-1827) from the Sakda Hala 薩克達 clan.⁵⁹

Emperor Shunzhi's successors were not as enthusiastic about the form as the founding patriarch, and none of them were known for producing paintings of this kind. The phenomenon makes Cixi's practice of rewarding officials with her finger paintings during the second and third regencies an intriguing revival of early Qing practices. By the nineteenth century, finger painting was already a widely practiced genre among Han Chinese and bannermen artists. Both the media and subjects of the empress dowager's works still revealed a strong connection with the Manchu imperial genealogy. Her three extant finger paintings all demonstrate the painter's attempt to carry on the tradition of representing symbolic sovereignty through this art form. The short inventory of paintings includes: an undated painting of Zhong Kui 鍾馗, the legendary demon queller (fig.3.8), a cinnabar rubbing of a painting of a chrysanthemum dated January 8,

⁵⁷ Klaas Ruitenbeek, "Discarding the Brush: Gao Qipei (1660-1734) and Chinese Finger Painting," 20, 24.

⁵⁸ The term Chinese bannermen refers to the Han Chinese people who resided in or moved to northeast China when the Jurchen rose to power. Although ethnically Han Chinese, they were included into the eight banner system. Therefore they enjoyed higher social status than their other Han Chinese counterparts and shared the same privileges as the Manchu.

⁵⁹ Li Fang, *Baqi hualu*, 440-41.

1887 (fig.3.11), and a painting of a phoenix perching on a *wutong* 梧桐, or Chinese parasol tree, dated 1888 (fig.3.12).

The subject matter and medium of Cixi's Zhong Kui finger painting represents a double connection with Emperor Shunzhi. She adopted the finger painting technique that Shunzhi promoted and carried on the tradition of giving out the image of this deity. The belief in Zhong Kui emerged as early as the Tang dynasty (618-907). Since that time, hanging his image to expel evil spirits became deeply rooted in Han Chinese popular culture.⁶⁰ When the Manchu adopted the Han Chinese religions and popular culture, the Zhong Kui cult also became part of their spiritual daily life. The Qing court followed the Han Chinese tradition of making, giving and decorating images of Zhong Kui during the New Year and the Dragon Boat Festival that took place on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month.⁶¹ A painting attributed to Shunzhi using expressive brushwork exemplifies this type of gift from the emperor to high officials (fig.3.9).⁶² In it, the legendary demon queller is depicted as a man in a wide-sleeved robe saluting towards the left side. Such a representation counters the typically heroic portrayal of this deity and makes a connection with the civil official to whom the painting was given. This less militant

⁶⁰ In her essay on the images of Zhong Kui, Liu Fangru offered a comprehensive review of the emergence of the Zhong Kui cult, images of it and how it subsequently grew popular. For its early development, see Liu Fangru 劉芳如, "Gugong guicang Zhong Kui huihua zhi xiangguan yanjiu" 故宮度藏鍾馗繪畫之相關研究, in National Palace Museum ed., *Yingsui jifu: Yuancang Zhong Kui minghua tezhan* 迎歲集福: 院藏鍾馗明畫特展 (Taipei: Guoli Gugong bowuyuan, 1997), 85-88.

⁶¹ The practice of a ruler giving images of Zhong Kui can be traced to the Tang Dynasty. Poems eulogizing this imperial favor are collected in *Complete Collection of Tang Poetry* 全唐詩. See *Yingsui jifu: Yuancang Zhong Kui minghua tezhan*, 114. Since Zhong Kui was such a popular Daoist deity, his images were widely circulated as gifts among commoners, too. For instance, a painting of Zhong Kui is included in the powerful Ming official Yan Song's 嚴嵩 (1480-1567) gift inventory book. See Guo Licheng, "Zhengli hua yanjiu," 762.

⁶² The characters *yubi* 御筆, "imperial brushwork," are written on the center top of the painting, and a line of inscription on the right mentions that it is a present to the Minister of Revenue Dai Mingyue 戴明說 (?-1660). Although some scholars state that this work was very likely produced by Shunzhi's ghost painter, since he was only eighteen years old, it remains a hypothesis because the true authorship cannot be verified. National Palace Museum ed., *Yingsui jifu: Yuancang Zhong Kui minghua tezhan*, 152.

representation of Zhong Kui was popular among Ming literati painters and projects how closely the early Qing ruling class followed the Han Chinese elite culture. Belief in Zhong Kui remained popular in late Qing court visual culture. Like her imperial forefathers, Cixi produced and presented the image of this popular deity to her officials as gifts. The renowned late Qing scholar-official and connoisseur Pan Zuyin 潘祖蔭 (1830-1890), for instance, received a cinnabar rubbing of Zhong Kui from the empress dowager in the New Year of 1886.

As regards Cixi's own Zhong Kui painting, *Blessing Come from Heaven* in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing is an invaluable example for examination (fig.3.8).⁶³ It is a combination of the finger painting Shunzhi promoted with the use of cinnabar pigment frequently seen in popular culture paintings and the compositional resemblance with woodblock prints. Carrying a sword in his right hand, the deity stares at a bat to his left. Such compositional form and the sharp turns of the strokes are similar to woodblock prints. Indeed this painting is comparable to a late Qing New Year's print. Both figures carry the sword and stare at a bat, whose Chinese pronunciation *fu* is homophonous with the character of good fortune, an echo of the popular saying during the New Year, "blessings arrive from heaven" 福自天來, inscribed on top of the painting by Cixi. The only difference is that the body of the printed figure turns in the same direction as his gaze while the lower body of Cixi's Zhong Kui twists in the opposite direction (fig.3.10). As such, *Blessing Come from Heaven* was the matriarch's endorsement of popular culture, and she lifted its visibility to an unprecedented degree by personally creating images combining the finger painting technique that was promoted by the imperial forefather and the elements of popular visual culture.

⁶³ Pan Zunian 潘祖年 (1870-1925), *Pan Zuyin nianpu* 潘祖蔭年譜, in *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* 近代中國史料叢刊, vol.181 (Taipei xian Yonghe zhen: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 112.

The same savvy appropriation of imperial tradition is seen in *Phoenix Resting on the Chinese Wutong Parasol Tree*, a painting that epitomizes the empress dowager's confident self-expression (fig. 3.12). It was painted in 1888, a year after she nominally handed imperial power to Emperor Guangxu. The flamboyant phoenix occupies the picture's center. Standing on a branch of the Chinese *wutong* parasol tree, the legendary bird is depicted from the back while turning its head towards the viewer and showing off its long tail feathers. The painter's signature, written with her finger, is on the left side, and a poem composed by Cixi's scholar-official upon her demand fills the space between the phoenix and the tree. The phoenix is regarded as the king of all birds, and its symbolism is often tied to female power. The motif of a phoenix standing on the Chinese parasol tree also symbolizes a wise ruler who respects the able and the virtuous, or those who choose to serve the ruler who recognizes their talent and value.⁶⁴ The subject grew wildly popular in late Qing court art and was directly related to the two empress dowagers' regency.⁶⁵ More suggestive uses of the phoenix motif are found in Cixi's later commissions. Her portrait for the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, the first oil portrait that introduced her as the Qing Empire's empress dowager and *de facto* ruler to the international public, contains a number of phoenixes. This symbol of female power appeared on the standing screen, on the top of the two decorative fans, and there is a pair of phoenix incense burners in the foreground (fig.1.31B). Cixi's phoenix painting is therefore her metaphorical self-portrait. The technique of finger painting is connected with Emperor Shunzhi; the image of the phoenix represents Cixi's preeminent female power. Together they present an image of Cixi as a wise female Manchu

⁶⁴ The allusion of the phoenix originated from Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127-200) interpretation of a poem in the classic poetry collection *Book of Odes* with poems dating from the 11th to 7th centuries B.C.E. Mao Heng 毛亨 (fl. 2nd century B.C.E.), *Mao shi zhu shu* 毛詩注疏, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* vol.69, 511.

⁶⁵ Li Shi, "Tongzhi Guangxu chao Ruyiguan," 110.

ruler.

Interaction with her emperor husband, Xianfeng

Compared to earlier emperors, Emperor Xianfeng's influence on Cixi's sovereign leadership in the high arts seems most direct and discernible. She followed his appreciation and gifts of art closely. As a capable painter of landscapes and horses,⁶⁶ Xianfeng once ordered one of his horse paintings made into a stone carving and he presented the rubbings to his officials.⁶⁷ Cixi followed her late husband's unique way of rewarding high officials and ordered the Imperial Workshops to make rubbings based on her paintings for the same purpose. The cinnabar rubbing of *Chrysanthemum* is one such work (fig. 3.11). Instead of being a form of self-expression, this work of virtuous subject functions more as a common imperial favor than a vehicle to voice the painter's persona. Although produced in the same year as *Phoenix Resting on the Chinese Wutong Parasol Tree*, it lacks the painter's personal attachment in the form of her own inscription. The composition is conventional as well. A group of stones stand on the lower right corner, from which three stems of chrysanthemum extend upward.⁶⁸ The inscription, "Finger-written by Empress Dowager Cixi," assumes a third-person's tone to indicate that it was not her own writing.

Cixi again demonstrated her bond with the imperial tradition through the practice of finger

⁶⁶ The Palace Museum, Beijing keeps several paintings the emperor painted before and after he ascended the throne. For reproductions of these works, see Gugong bowuyuan ed., *Qingshi tudian* vol. 10, 279-81.

⁶⁷ Pan Zuyin was one of the recipients of Xianfeng's rubbings. Although the rubbing is not mentioned in his diary and chronology, Li Ciming recorded viewing this imperial gift at Pan's place and composed a poem to praise the rubbing. Li Ciming 李慈銘 (1830-95), *Baihua jiangfuge shiji* 白華絳榭閣詩集, *juan gui* (China: s.n. 1890), 8B, 9A.

⁶⁸ The image, inventory number "gu (故) 248084-24," has not been published, but it can be found in the museum's internal digital database. I believe this work might be the original painting of the rubbing.

painting, but it is the subject matter and color that make *Chrysanthemum* an adequate New Year's gift. The flower is commonly associated with longevity, and the visually striking cinnabar, a common ingredient in Chinese alchemy, was long regarded as a magical mineral that expelled evil and enhanced longevity. During the Ming dynasty, cinnabar rubbings were often made when a *stele* was completed to entice good fortune. To strengthen the talismanic property of the image, cinnabar pigments were used to paint Zhong Kui during the Qing dynasty. Therefore, making cinnabar rubbings of Cixi's imperial brushwork again demonstrates her personal support of popular culture. The number of the empress dowager's cinnabar rubbings peaked in 1888 and 1889. The Imperial Workshop made 159 cinnabar rubbings during the fifth and the last lunar months in 1888 alone.⁶⁹ Most of them were birthday or New Year related auspicious images such as chrysanthemums, plum blossoms and *shou* characters. Probably they were prepared as part of Cixi's largess to officials on the occasion of her fifty-fifth birthday celebration in 1889. Considering the reproducible nature of these rubbings, it is reasonable to assume that, compared to the imperial paintings, they were more convenient for the empress dowager when she had to present many gifts to officials at important festivals. This may be why *Chrysanthemums* was transformed from a painting into rubbings and given out at the New Year.

Emperor Xianfeng's influence on Cixi's painting practice before she recruited her own female painting mentors was also significant. This is best illustrated in her copy of a painting Xianfeng admired and for which he inscribed a colophon. It is *Fragrant Dreams of Luofu* attributed to Tang Zhengzhong 湯正仲 (fl. second half of the 12th to early 13th centuries) (fig. 3.13). The painting depicts an elegant evening scene. A blooming plum tree stands against the full moon; a pair of magpies rests amidst the branches in the center of the painting. The twisted

⁶⁹ "NZHD," 47_271_565; 47_274_565; 47_370_565; 47_371_565; 47_466_565; 48_44_565; 48_48_565.

trunk, vertical branches and white plum blossoms dotting the branches are interwoven into a dense composition that brings vigor instead of tranquility to the scene.

Fragrant Dreams of Luofu is recorded in the third sequel of *Precious Book Box of the Stone Drain* 石渠寶笈, a catalogue of the imperial art collection compiled in the late eighteenth century. The painting carries the seals of Emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 (r.1796-1820).⁷⁰ It was presumably a present to Emperor Qianlong, or his successor Jiaqing, from the collector and official Chen Huai 陳淮 (1731-1810). This is because his seal is the last record of a private collection in the imperial catalogue. The fact that it was simply named *Plum* and no inscription of the two emperors is recorded, implies that this painting was not highly regarded after it entered the imperial collection. After all, the dense composition was atypical of any of Tang Zhengzhong's extant works or the textual description of his other works. The connoisseurs in the court were possibly aware of this and thus paid little attention to the painting. It was not until Emperor Xianfeng inscribed his compliment that it was given a title.

Cixi's tracing copy was completed on February 13, 1889, and given to Pan Zuyin the next day (fig. 3.14).⁷¹ Her inscription is written on the upper right corner of the painting. Marking the date of production, the empress dowager made it clear that the painting was a copy of Tang Zhengzhong's work without doubt of its authenticity. This tracing copy shares an intriguing similarity to the aforementioned *Grapes*. First, both paintings have unusual compositions; the former is extremely dense while the latter leaves the center of the pictorial space blank. Second,

⁷⁰ Yinghe 英和 (1771-1839) et al. *Shiqu baoji san bian* 石渠寶笈三編 vol.3 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1969), 1502.

⁷¹ Wu Hufan 吳湖帆 (1894-1968), *Wu Hufan wengao* 吳湖帆文稿 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 376. Wu was Pan's descendent and a famous artist collector. He inherited this painting and kept it for decades before his family auctioned it in 2008.

Cixi's large square seal is imposingly stamped in the center top, even though in the case of the former the seal is stamped at the expense of overlapping with the painting. Third, and most important, they were either imitations or copies of former emperors' works and were later displayed or given away. Such consistency points to the empress dowager's particular agenda in the representations of her rulership. If *Grapes* is a painting visualizing the painter's Manchuness and connection with the Qing dynasty's founding father, the tracing copy of *Fragrant Dream of Luofu* is a display of Cixi's effort to execute the gentleman's art and express her marital bond with a Qing emperor.

Indeed Tang Zhengzhong was the renowned Southern Song plum painter Yang Wujiu's 楊無咎 (1097-1171) nephew; he painted in the style of his uncle.⁷² Even though he was an official and a renowned artist for plum and bamboo paintings during his time, Tang's name and works were largely neglected in later days.⁷³ It is unlikely that Cixi learned Tang's name by herself and so made the tracing copy of *Fragrant Dream of Luofu* due to its creator's artistic prominence. Emperor Xianfeng's appreciation of this painting was probably the real factor behind Cixi's decision. After all, following her past emperor husband's connoisseurship did not only reduce the risk of impropriety. Whether Xianfeng had a good eye and taste matters little, as the point of following his lead was to emphasize her position as a close consort of Xianfeng. Moreover, like the context of *Grapes*, the choice of making an association with the imperial patriarch and the effort as well as the capability of producing a faithful copy had to be seen and remembered. That is why Cixi made the unusual move of presenting both the original and the traced copy of

⁷² Xia Wenyan 夏文彥 (fl. 14th century), *Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑 in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* vol. 2, 876.

⁷³ An album leaf with his signature in the National Palace Museum's collection is one of the very few works attributed to this painter. The album leaf is carefully painted and richly colored, which is quite different from this ink plum hanging scroll. For a reproduction of this leaf, see Guoli gugong bowuyuan 國立故宮博物院 ed., *Gugong shuhua tulu* 故宮書畫圖錄 vol.29 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1989), 372-77.

Fragrant Dream of Luofu to the eminent official and connoisseur Pan Zuyin.

The legitimacy of Cixi's ruling power was thus justified through the continuation of the painting tradition laid by the previous Qing imperial patriarchs. Be it producing finger paintings that Emperor Shunzhi had promoted, or transforming the imperial brushwork into rubbings to distribute as gifts, Cixi assumed the emperor's role to carry out these traditions. The recruitment of women court painters, on the other hand, revealed the matriarch's creative manipulation of the symbolic sovereignty. Like previous rulers, she participated in the examination of the court painters, and it was in this tradition that she selected professional women painters to teach her and ghost-paint for her.

3.2 Writing Authority

Chinese calligraphy is, as Richard Curt Kraus astutely pointed out, a system of power that comprises the power of magic over superstition, the power of ideological control over the Chinese state, and the power of cultural tradition over the individual.⁷⁴ This power system also covers the realm of aesthetics. It is generated from the close connections among calligraphy, the human body and vigor, or *qi* 氣, in Chinese epistemology. In this system, it is believed that one's vigor and persona are transmitted from the body to the written character the moment the brush touches the surface of the paper. Therefore reading one's calligraphy includes multiple aspects. Beyond the content is the writer's calligraphic skill and persona embodied in strokes that are the focus of appreciation or criticism. This power system is so tightly woven into sovereignty that quite a number of Chinese rulers were also accomplished calligraphers. Some

⁷⁴ Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3-5.

of them even earned better reputations as artists than as political figures.⁷⁵

Compared to painting, writing was more common among imperial women as it was both practical and artistic. Writing was directly linked with literacy, but it required a different kind of education to enable the artist-writer to represent figures, creatures or nature with the same brush. In the section that follows, the empress dowager's writing will first be discussed within the tradition of women's presence in imperial calligraphy. I shall then compare her calligraphic performance with that of other Qing emperors to observe the public image Cixi constructed through calligraphy and how this image was publicized to the ruling class in the Empire.

Presence of women in imperial calligraphy

Although imperial women's calligraphy is an understudied subject in the field of Chinese art, current scholarship has unveiled its cultural, religious and political significance.⁷⁶ Using this expressive art form, imperial women left traces of their cultural practice and religious devotion. The connection between calligraphy and cultural cultivation is based on calligraphy as a visual demonstration of the writer's persona, skill in wielding the brush, and command of literature. For imperial women, being a good calligrapher was a display of virtue as well as ability because

⁷⁵ For example, Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song dynasty and Emperor Zhangzong 章宗 of the Jin 金 dynasty (r. 1189-1208) are both commonly recognized as the kind of artist rulers who achieved high artistic accomplishments at the expense of the fall or decline of their regimes.

⁷⁶ Hui-shu Lee's review of imperial women's calligraphy prior to the fourteenth century is the most comprehensive writing of this subject. Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 117. Also see Hui-shu Lee, "The Emperor's Lady Ghost Writers in Song Dynasty China," *Artibus Asiae* 64.1 (2004): 61-101. Among the fragmentary research on this subject, Li E's *History of Calligraphy of the Jade Terrace* 玉台書史 collects the biographies of female calligraphers prior to the Qing dynasty, and is the foundation of modern scholarship, including works such as Jiang Lingling's book on Chinese female calligraphers. Li E 厲鶚 (1692-1752), *Yutai shushi* 玉台書史 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2012); Zhou Xiaoru 周小儒, Jiang Lingling 蔣玲玲, *Zhongguo lidai nü shufajia* 中國歷代女書法家 (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2012).

her artistic achievement reflected positively on the emperor and his court.⁷⁷ Another way of enacting virtue through calligraphy was the transcription of Buddhist sutras. This practice has long been regarded as an effective method to accumulate one's good deeds and merit and send them to the other world. Many imperial women are famous for their sutra transcriptions.

According to *Yutai shushi*, legend has it that Noble Consort Yang 楊貴妃 (719-756) was the first imperial woman recognized as a calligrapher for her sutra transcriptions, and Noble Consort Zheng's 鄭貴妃 (1565-1630) sutra transcriptions even became a literati collectable during the Qing dynasty.⁷⁸

Other than the abovementioned examples, sometimes imperial women also performed the art of writing as "public calligraphy." "Public calligraphy" is an anthropological term referring to calligraphic traces that are intended to be seen/read by people other than the person who wrote them, and that are often written in response to a request.⁷⁹ In the case of imperial women's calligraphy, I narrow the definition of public calligraphy to calligraphic works specifically intended to be displayed to a wide public instead of only an intimate family or literary circle. Thus public calligraphy often appears in relatively large and impressive sizes. Imperial women's works of this kind are usually title plaques on architecture or temples, and in rare cases, stele. Empress Wu of the Tang dynasty (624-705) was most attuned to the power of this kind of art among Chinese imperial women. Her high profile activities included creating special characters and erecting *Stele Inacription Commemorating the Shengxian Taizi Miao* carved with her robust

⁷⁷ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art, and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 76-80.

⁷⁸ Li E., *Yutai shushi*, 29, 47-48.

⁷⁹ Here I adopt Yen Yuehping's definition of public calligraphy in which she discussed the convention of *tizi* 題字 or inscribing in modern and contemporary China. Yen Yuehping, *Calligraphy and Power in Contemporary Chinese Society* (London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 17.

flying-white script.⁸⁰

Powerful imperial women in later days continued to partake in the production of public calligraphy, although not with such a high profile as Empress Wu.⁸¹ Textual evidence shows that the masculine quality of their works often caught the eyes of male connoisseurs, and such works were often associated with a male hand. For example, it is said that a Song literati collected Empress Cao's 曹皇后 (1016-79) large single character *mei* 美, "beauty," and praised the energetic, vigorous representation of the strokes.⁸² Similarly, the large twelve-character tablet written by the Ming Empress Dowager Li, that was the prototype for the image *Nine Lotus Bodhisattva* discussed in Chapter One, entered the discourse of calligraphy due to the imposing, forceful strokes that the viewer could have mistaken for her son Emperor Shenzong's work.⁸³ Sometimes the virtue of the calligrapher is also considered a factor of appreciation. The phenomenon is exemplified by the commentary on the calligraphy of Lady Lou 婁妃 (fl. late 15th to 16th century), a consort of the fifth generation of Prince Ning 寧王 (? - 1521) in the Ming dynasty. She opposed her husband's plot against the throne and committed suicide after the Prince was decapitated for treason.⁸⁴ Although the Prince's family was demoted to commoner status after the incident, local people did not remove the tablets Lady Lou had inscribed for two

⁸⁰ Hui-shu Lee, *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 70-75.

⁸¹ Many accomplished imperial female calligraphers prior to the 14th century served as the emperor's ghostwriters. They remain largely understudied due to the difficulty of separating their works from the emperors' to analyze their artistic individuality. Such writing does not fit into the category of public calligraphy though and thus is not my material of discussion here. For the representative scholarship of this subject, see Hui-shu Lee, "The Emperor's Lady Ghostwriters in Song Dynasty China," 61-101; *Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China*, 70-76.

⁸² Tuotuo 脱脱 (1313-1355) et al, *Song Shi* 宋史, *juan* 242, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vol. 282, 472; Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 50.

⁸³ Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 (1606. Reprint: Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 47-48.

⁸⁴ Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672-1755) et al., *Ming shi* 明史, in *Jingyin Wenyuange sikuquanshu* vol.301, 472.

temples and the city gates in order to commemorate her virtue and chastity.⁸⁵

When the nomadic Manchu conquered the Ming territory, its ruling class soon realized that writing with an ungainly hand was considered an unfortunate demonstration of one's lack of erudition, discipline and authority. Therefore they came to understand calligraphy as a critical tool to substantiate the ruling power over the Han Chinese people. This is reflected in the fact that all Qing emperors had themselves portrayed wielding brushes (fig.1.6), and almost every Qing emperor was a studious calligrapher. Although little is known about the Qing imperial women's involvement in calligraphy, the tradition of writing calligraphy was unlikely to diminish. The emperor's enthusiasm for the genre and the aforementioned calligraphic practice in the imperial inner quarters were important factors encouraging women to wield the brush. The consistency between the patterns of Cixi's calligraphic activities and those of pre-Qing imperial women also suggests a prevailing tradition of writing in the Qing imperial inner quarters.

Cixi's calligraphy art and public performance

From the extant works it appears Cixi used calligraphy to express her religious piety and performed public calligraphy as well. The latter had relatively stronger variations in style and format. She revealed a much more enthusiastic persistence in calligraphy art than her counterpart Ci'an. Whereas the former wielded the brush continuously throughout her years in the inner quarters, the latter only wrote at special occasions such as the New Year and otherwise showed no particular interest towards it.⁸⁶ The earliest extant piece of Cixi's calligraphy is

⁸⁵ Zhu Mouyin 朱謀壘, *Xu shushi huiyao* 續書史會要, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 493.

⁸⁶ The Imperial Workshops sometimes collected auspicious phrases and couplets Ci'an wrote for the New Year celebration, but no other works of textual evidence show that she wrote calligraphy in daily life. "NZHD," Box NO.37_318_546; Box No.38_49_572, 38_50_572.

utterly political. It is an 1865 draft of the edict Cixi composed on behalf of her son Emperor Tongzhi to divest Prince Gong of his political power. Although the content was in the first-person's voice (*zhen* 朕, "I the emperor"), Tongzhi was only ten *sui* and was not yet prepared to be a ruler. He probably left all political affairs to the two dowager empress regents because a high official expressed concern about the emperor's readiness for direct rule in a memorial presented to the regents in 1870.⁸⁷ As a result, it is reasonable to attribute this draft to Cixi's hand.

Written in small standard script, the draft is evidence of both the empress dowager's capability to compose an edict and her moderate command of calligraphy. In general, each character takes a square shape and the strokes show that the writer knew the principles of wielding a brush, regardless of the overall childlike quality, the varying character sizes, and some wrongly written words (fig. 3.15).

Cixi was also a diligent transcriber of Buddhist sutras. She began to transcribe the *Heart Sutra* after Emperor Xianfeng died, and continued the practice until her late years. An example of her *Heart Sutra* transcription, dated 1904, is in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing. Compared to the edict draft written nearly 40 years before, the *Heart Sutra* demonstrates the empress dowager's improvement, achieved through continuous practice. The characters are evenly sized and spaced; the strokes are fuller and neatly executed (fig. 3.16). These transcriptions, however, were not merely for religious piety. They were also a means of self-promotion and showing intimate imperial favor. As discussed in the first chapter, Cixi often bestowed on high officials her sutra transcriptions, decorated with her portraits in the costume of Guanyin. Demonstrated in these special imperial gifts were her religious piety, the bond with

⁸⁷ Zhao Zhongfu ed, *Weng tonghe riji*, vol.2, 528.

and affection for her deceased emperors, husband and son, as well as the matriarch being deified as the embodiment of bodhisattva Guanyin. Furthermore, the rarity of these imperially transcribed sutras created a strong connection between the gift giver and the recipient and presumably elevated the receiver's sense of honor and faithfulness toward the former.

The empress dowager's most effective strategy for displaying power and authority lies in her public calligraphy. It can be divided into two types. One is the plaque for the imperial space; the other is the mobile imperial gift on paper and silk, most of which is for the New Year associated special occasions. A palace poem and its notes composed by Wu Shijian 吳士鑿 (1868-1934), a high official familiar with the events and anecdotes of the inner quarters, vividly introduces these two types of imperial calligraphy:

庫箋滑笏擘窠書，
龍虎盤拏勢卷舒。
朝罷熏修惟禮佛，
大圓寶鏡映雕疏。

孝欽皇后喜作大字，用丈余之庫蠟箋，書龍虎松鶴等字，每歲多至數百幅。宮中西苑、頤和園喜以大圓寶鏡四字為匾額。⁸⁸

On the smooth waxed paper of the Imperial Workshops are [Her Majesty's] large characters,

[Her calligraphic strokes] fold and unfold forcefully like curling dragons and crouching tigers.

Retired from the court audience, she burns incense and cultivates her mind, concentrating on practicing Buddhism and paying respect to the Buddha,

[The plaque of] "Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness" [she wrote] is reflected through the intricate open-latticed carvings.

Empress Dowager Xiaoqin (a.k.a. Cixi) was fond of writing large characters. She used waxed paper produced by the Imperial Workshops that measured more than one *zhang* (3.2 meters) long to write characters such as dragon, tiger, pine and crane. She could write up to several hundreds of them every year. In the palaces of the West Imperial Gardens and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony [Her Majesty] liked to use the four characters

⁸⁸ Wu Shijian, *Qinggong ci*, 12.

“Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness” as the plaques.

Wu Shijian’s description is exemplified by the plaque “Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness” 大圓寶鏡 that hung on the gate of the audience hall Renshou dian 仁壽殿 (Court of Benevolence and Longevity) in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony (fig. 3.18). Cixi’s large square official seal “Treasure of the Imperial Brushwork of Empress Dowager Cixi” 慈禧太后御筆之寶 as well as two other unofficial personal seals are above the characters. The characters are written in the standard script, whose stylistic features remind the viewer of the works of the Tang official-calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-85), who defended the court against the rebelling troops *An Lushan* 安祿山 (703-57) and was killed by another late Tang rebel, Li Xilie 李希烈 (?-786).⁸⁹ Taking the characters *bao* 寶 in the plaque and in Yan’s *Prabhutaratna Pagoda Stele* 多寶塔碑 written in 752 as examples, the strokes of the latter appear sharper and thinner, while the rectangular structure and the straightness of each stroke in both characters are comparable (fig.3.24).

The forceful, weighty and stable characteristics of Yan Zhenqing’s calligraphy was combined with his personal history as an upright Confucian martyr and became a popular model in the Northern Song dynasty.⁹⁰ It remained important in the Qing dynasty and was admired by calligraphers of both the Northern School (that followed the stele rubbings) and the Southern

⁸⁹ Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72) et al, *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, *juan* 153, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* vol. 273, 355.

⁹⁰ For the promotion of Yan’s style among the Northern Song literati, see Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing’s Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 120-30.

School (that mainly modeled itself after the model books).⁹¹ In the realm of imperial calligraphy, Yan Zhenqing was one of the calligraphers from whom Emperor Qianlong learned. He practiced Yan's works for over fifty years and through such practice revealed his appreciation for the calligrapher's art and political intentions reminding his officials to be loyal to him and to the empire because of how Yan had served the Tang regime.⁹² Cixi's choice of a calligraphic style, close to that of Yan Zhenqing, might well have been out of a similar rationale. After all, the plaque was hung above the formal audience hall, Court of Benevolence and Longevity, where the ruler received high officials, and thus the upright calligraphy on the plaque was an adequate reminder of their loyalty.

The name of the plaque is thoughtfully chosen as well. As Wu Shijian's poem suggests, the term "Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness" also carries religious implications. It probably originated from the "Great Bright Mirror of Wisdom" 大圓鏡智, the wisdom of the Buddha that reflects all the principles satisfactorily like a great bright mirror.⁹³ The term can also be extended to sovereignty—a good ruler should have the wisdom and clarity of mind to make good judgments and decisions. Therefore, the plaque functioned as the empress dowager's public display of her devotion to Buddhism and capability as a ruler.

The *shou*, "longevity," character written on a large waxed paper (181 x 92 cm), on the other hand, exemplifies the Cixi' mobile imperial gift. In contrast to the solemnity reflected in

⁹¹ Sha Menghai 沙孟海, *Jin sanbai nian de shuxue* 近三百年的書學 (1928. Reprint: Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chunbanshe, 1987), 61.

⁹² Liang Ji 梁驥, "Qianlong dui Yan Zhenqing shuji de linmo he tiba—yi *Shiqu baoji zhulu weli*" 乾隆對顏真卿書跡的臨摹和題跋—以《石渠寶笈》著錄為例, *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guankan* 中國國家博物館館刊 10 (2013): 90-100.

⁹³ *Guangshi puti xin lun* 廣釋菩提心論, *juan 4*, in Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 ed, *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 vol.32 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō Kankōkai, 1925), 572a.

the Yan style as seen on the title plaque, the inky strokes and the *feibai* 飛白, “flying white,” an effect in which the flight of the brush leaves traces of the ground visible, were chosen to represent the vigor of the writing hand (fig.3.17). The stylistic difference between the plaque “Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness” and the *shou* character shows the calligrapher’s awareness of the different functions of these two styles. While the plaque was a title board for a formal space, the character was a performance piece. They demonstrate both the diversity of calligraphic styles seen on the works under Cixi’s name and her awareness of the need to choose the appropriate calligraphic style for the specific occasion.

Cixi’s participation in the making of public calligraphy began as soon as she assumed the title of junior dowager empress. She gave Pan Zuyin the characters of *fu* (good fortune), *shou*, *long* 龍, “dragon,” and *hu* 虎, “tiger,” on January 10, 1864.⁹⁴ Since no evidence exists to show that she had prior experience writing such imperial gifts, it is likely that the empress dowager carried on the convention of giving away imperial calligraphy by bestowing Pan Zuyin with pieces ghostwritten by the erudite scholar officials serving in the Nanshufang 南書房 (South Study). The earliest record of Cixi’s own public calligraphy appeared in the following year. She wrote a *fu* character and three couplets to celebrate the lunar New Year.⁹⁵ After that, the Imperial Workshops received numerous pieces of the matriarch’s calligraphy every year, most of which were New Year’s couplets and large auspicious characters.

Since many of Cixi’s calligraphic works are undated and were very likely disposed of soon after they were displayed (such as the New Year’s couplets), it is difficult to trace the development of her skills in writing large characters. Several dated works provide a glimpse into

⁹⁴ Pan Zunian, *Pan Zuyin nianpu*, 48.

⁹⁵ “NZHD,” Box No.36_146_582, 36_151_582.

her learning progress. The earliest dated piece is *Blessing, Fortune and Longevity*, an image celebrating the Chinese New Year of 1888. It is a whimsical fusion of the characters *fu* (blessing), *lu* 祿, “fortune,” and *shou* (longevity) in the form of a birthday immortal (fig. 3.19A). The *fu* character forms the contour of the immortal of longevity, and the *lu* and *shou* characters are included in the immortal’s torso. The diagonal long stroke of the *shou* character is extended to form the immortal’s attribute: a long staff decorated with tassels. Similarly, the dot of the *lu* character above the immortal’s shoulder is written into the shape of a peach, which is also a symbol of longevity. The protruding turn of the *fu* character, which is written with the effect of flying white, becomes the deity’s head. Eight dots form his facial features, and fine lines are painted to represent his wrinkles and beard.

Combining auspicious characters or figures into a single image and painting with cinnabar pigment are both common to auspicious images of the New Year in everyday life for people of all strata.⁹⁶ The playfulness of intertwining characters and images into a new form of graphic art was also common to popular visual culture. This work is thus further evidence of the empress dowager’s personal affection for popular culture. It is also a powerful display of her calligraphic skills, representing her confidence and familiarity with wielding large brushes. Although the painter added extra lines to make the image/character more appealing, such as the two overlapping lines representing the tassels hung on the staff and the additional stroke to thicken the hook (figs. 3.19B, 3.19C), the overall movement of the brushwork was smooth and well planned.

The matriarch’s preference for making decorative details is present in this work as well.

⁹⁶ Such compositions seemed to appear in the Ming dynasty as the *shou* characters in the shape of a pine tree became a common decoration in late 16th to early 17th century blue-and-white porcelains. For examples of these works, see Guoli gugong bowuyuan ed., *Fushou kangning: jixiang tuan ciqi tezhan tulu* 福壽康寧: 吉祥圖案瓷器特展圖錄 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1995), cats. 45, 48.

The dotted contour of the immortal's head is a purposeful treatment in an attempt to produce the flying white visual effect. Another decorative line is in the *shou* character, formed by connecting the third horizontal stroke and the diagonal long stroke that formed a part of the immortal's stick, and making a decorative oval shape. The same writing habit also appears on the character *you* 有 from the inscription of a fish painting Cixi painted in 1904 (fig. 3.19B). The hesitation in brushwork and the minor adjustment of strokes disappear from the *shou* character the Conger family received from the empress dowager in 1902. Each line is forcefully composed and the smooth movement of the brushwork also suggests the calligrapher's more advanced skills of writing large characters (fig. 3.17).

Compared to the clarity of function and stylistic characteristics of the aforementioned works, the three calligraphy pieces attributed to Cixi are rather complex. They are the identical phrase *hongchou xishou* 鴻疇錫壽, "may longevity be conferred upon those of vast attainment," each of which is mounted onto paintings under the name of the empress dowager. The first is the *Peony* that only carries Cixi's large square seal in the central top; the second is the *Plum Blossom* painted in 1889 but given away much later on February 27, 1896; the third painting, *Pine and Fungi*, depicts a pine tree painted into the shape of the *shou* character (figs. 3.21, 3.22A).⁹⁷ The three paintings, along with another attributed to Cixi but mounted differently, entered the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum through the fur merchant, George Crofts (1872-1925), in the early 20th century. According to Crofts, the paintings were originally from Prince Qing's 慶親王 (1838-1917) family collection.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For the reproduction of the *Peony*, see Ka Bo Tsang, "Receiving Imperial Favour: Paintings by Cixi, the Empress Dowager," fig.3.

⁹⁸ For the collection history and reproductions of the other two paintings, see Ka Bo Tsang, "Receiving Imperial Favour: Paintings by Cixi, the Empress Dowager," 207, 211.

In her examination of these characters, Ka Bo Tsang discovered traces of sketched outlines under the calligraphy; the uneven ink tones of some strokes further suggest that they were not written as single strokes (fig.3.22B). Tsang's observation led to the conclusion that Cixi was an incompetent artist who aimed at achieving "a satisfying sense of intellectual superiority over all womenfolk residing in the imperial palace."⁹⁹ The dismissive argument ignores the fact that the empress dowager was an acute operator of the fine arts in the shaping of her image. It should also be noted that imperial women never formed the main body of Cixi's gift recipients; it was the male officials in the outer court who were frequently showered with the matriarch's imperial brushwork gifts. It seems clear that male officials were the empress dowager's intended viewers. Since imperial painting and calligraphy were vehicles of the ruler's symbolic sovereignty, it is understandable that Cixi would make every effort to project an appropriate image of a vigorous and capable female ruler through her artwork. Therefore, the inscriptions on these three paintings should be understood as a demonstration of the matriarch's endeavor to achieve this goal.

Stylistically the three calligraphy pieces are in clerical script. This archaic script was popular among late Qing literati, and its square structure and thick lines are also appropriate for public display. Yet it is rare in Cixi's calligraphy oeuvre. Her public calligraphy is either in the standard script that often appeared on plaques (fig.3.17) or in the creative running script that allows for expressive visual representation, as is exemplified in the *shou* character (fig.3.18). Could these tracing copies be the empress dowager's earlier practice pieces? The dates of the creation and bestowal of *Plum Blossom* support the hypothesis. The painting is dated 1889, but according to the inscription on the mounting, it became a present to Prince Qing in 1896. The

⁹⁹ Ibid, 214-215.

time lapse suggests that Cixi did not always give away her most recent works; earlier painting and calligraphy might be selected if they served the purpose well.

While more evidence is needed to decipher whether the three paintings produced, mounted and given away in different years bear the same colophon and tracing copy, together with her other painting and calligraphy works, reveals the gift giver's effort to participate in the gentlemen's arts. When we consider these paintings as the vehicle on which Cixi projected her images, it matters little whether she wrote or trace-copied the calligraphy. It was the forcefulness and the connection with the late Qing scholar's taste that the gift giver intended to deliver through choosing the clerical script and utilizing the Qing imperial tradition of bestowing imperial brushwork on officials as the channel to publicize her desired image of an energetic, powerful and cultured ruler.

During the Qing dynasty, giving imperial calligraphy was a common imperial favor in the court, and it was codified during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In his examination of the material function and reception of Kangxi's calligraphy, Jonathan Hay unveiled how the ruler who inaugurated a century of the Qing dynasty's heyday utilized his calligraphic traces as an alternative to his bodily presence to evoke the recipient's awe and submission to his sovereignty.¹⁰⁰ Like his father Emperor Shunzhi, Kangxi faced suspicion of his credibility to rule from the Han Chinese elite. Shunzhi had already incorporated painting and calligraphy into the inventory of his imperial gifts to ease such doubts. His son went one step further to perform calligraphy to a wider public. In addition to bestowing his hand-written

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Hay, "The Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces: Calligraphy, Writing, and the Art of Imperial Authority," in Wu Hung ed., *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 311-44.

auspicious characters on high officials during the New Year,¹⁰¹ Kangxi also performed calligraphy in front of local Han Chinese cultural elites at the audience during the southern inspection tours. The standardized ceremony of giving auspicious characters for the New Year took place in the Qianqing gong 乾清宮 (Palace of Heavenly Purity), the most important space of the outer court in the Forbidden City. All the chosen imperial gift recipients lined the courtyard and waited for the emperor's summons. The recipient entered the hall and knelt before the emperor's desk when his name was called. After the emperor completed the character, the official performed kowtow once as thanks for the imperial favor and exited with the imperial calligraphy.¹⁰²

The ritualistic presentation of Kangxi's calligraphic performance is vividly described under the pen of early Qing scholar official, Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718). There is a paragraph in his well-known account of the Emperor's visit to Qufu 曲阜, Shandong Province on such an occasion:

門外仰窺行幄，銀臺紅燭高五尺許。上脫冠憑几擬寫衍聖公毓圻祖母一品太夫人陶氏八十節壽牌額。衍聖公等俱跪下。少頃書完乃節並松筠四字，侍衛捧出，群臣仰觀，龍翔鳳翥，翰香淋漓。命尚任高聲宣示，衍聖公毓圻暨弟五經博士毓挺長跪接受，三叩頭謝恩。

From outside of the door I lifted my head to peek into the imperial tent where there were red candles on silver stands over *five chi* (1.6m) high. His Imperial Majesty took off his headdress and leaned on the table to write a celebratory placard for the eightieth birthday of Lady Tao of the First Rank, the grandmother of His Honor Shengyan, Yuxin. His Honor and others were all kneeling. In a short while, the four-character inscription "Her Virtue Matches That of Pine and Bamboo" was completed. The imperial guards respectfully held it outside [of the imperial tent]. All the officials lifted their heads to view

¹⁰¹ Zuo Buqing, "Shu 'fu' banci," 35.

¹⁰² Qinggui 慶桂 et al., *Guochao gongshi xu bian* 國朝宮史續編, *juan* 46, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu*, vol. 824, 243.

[the inscription]. The calligraphy ascended like a dragon and soared like a phoenix; the ink was suffused with fragrance. I was ordered to recite it aloud as His Honor Yansheng, Yuxin and his younger brother Doctor of the Five Classics, Yuyan, knelt to receive it and performed three kowtows as thanks for the imperial favor.¹⁰³

Kong recorded a performance containing profound visual and acoustic effects from which the local Han Chinese elites witnessed the emperor's command of their highly sophisticated culture and demeanor. Furthermore, the tradition of associating one's personhood with his/her handwriting enabled the viewers of Kangxi's calligraphy to *see* the emperor's imperial persona through appreciation of his calligraphy that, according to Kong's flattering words, resembled dragons and phoenixes, the two symbols of Chinese imperial authority.¹⁰⁴ When the Han Chinese elites paid the ultimate respect to Kangxi's calligraphy, which was the embodiment of his sovereign power, they also participated in this performance and thereby submitted to the emperor's authority.

It should be noted that Kangxi's calligraphic performances were not completed upon the end of the gift-giving ceremony. They were in effect an interactive political show of favor and reciprocation that required the gift recipient to reciprocate by being faithful to the throne and worshipping before the imperial calligraphy in their households by burning incense and kowtowing before the imperial brush traces. Such "fetishism" of the imperial calligraphy, to borrow Jonathan Hay's description of the practice, was the gift recipient's response to the ruler's

¹⁰³ Kong Shangren 孔尚任, *Chushan yishu ji* 出山異數記 (1685, reprint. Shikai tang, 1876), 22a. Also see Richard Strassberg, *The World of K'ung Shang-jen: A Man of Letters in Early Ch'ing China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 112-13.

¹⁰⁴ In his seminal essay on the intertwined relationship between calligraphy and body, John Hay detailed how calligraphic traces are regarded as an extension of the human body and its energy by analyzing the terminologies of calligraphic aesthetics. The deep-rooted body vis-à-vis calligraphy ontology continues to exist in contemporary practice without much change, which is reflected in the common notion of one's handwriting as his/her "Second face." John Hay, "The Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck eds, *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74-102; Yuehping Yen, *Calligraphy and Power in Contemporary Chinese Society*, 64-72.

absolute power as embodied in his calligraphy.¹⁰⁵

The rigidly enacted protocol of imperial calligraphic performance strengthened the power relationship between the emperor and his subjects. Beyond the ephemeral performance, the written calligraphy served as a visible reminder of the ruler's power and his imperial favor. The ritual was codified after Kangxi's performances and became a Qing imperial tradition. Imperial gifts of auspicious characters and couplets for the New Year were composed annually, and almost every successor to the throne bestowed placards to officials or distinguished subjects as a special imperial reward. The practice even prevailed after the Aisin Gioro family was expelled from the Forbidden City in 1924.¹⁰⁶

Cixi was an enthusiastic practitioner of projecting sovereignty through public calligraphy. As mentioned above, she carried on this tradition as early as the second year of her regency when she presented the imperial calligraphy to Pan Zuyin. Similar to the situation with her paintings, the matriarch gave more calligraphy gifts after Ci'an died, as evidenced by the numerous pieces of single large characters she composed every year. The aforementioned note of the palace poem stating that she would write several hundred characters a year is no exaggeration. Her enthusiasm posts an intriguing contrast to the reserved attitude of Emperors Tongzhi and Guangxu. While the former only ruled personally for less than two years and showed no interest in high culture, the quietness of the latter, who was on the throne for 34 years, seems unusual. Guangxu practiced painting and calligraphy, but other than the seasonal routine of producing

¹⁰⁵ Jonathon Hay, "The Kangxi Emperor's Brush-Traces: Calligraphy, Writing, and the Art of Imperial Authority," 331-32.

¹⁰⁶ The practice continued until the Aisin Gioro family was removed from the Forbidden City in 1924. According to Puyi's memoir, he had not realized the worthlessness of his "imperial" calligraphy until he moved to Tianjin without the title of emperor in the next year. Zuo Buqing, "Shu fu banci," 37, also see Puyi 溥儀 (1906-67), *Wo de qian bansheng* 我的前半生 (Hong Kong: Xianggang wentong shudian, 1964), 97.

imperial calligraphic gifts he seldom bestowed his own brush traces on others.¹⁰⁷ The tepidity is reflected in the difference between the gift inventories he and Cixi presented to Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909), a high official and key promoter of the late Qing reform movement, on his sixtieth birthday in 1896. Although the kinds of their gifts largely overlapped, such as the sculptures of Buddha and the imperial calligraphy of *fu*, *shou* characters, the empress dowager made a distinction by adding an elongated *shou* character, a visual pun of long *shou* (longevity), and three paintings with birthday-related subjects.¹⁰⁸

The elongated *shou* character may be similar to the piece Cixi presented to the Conger family in 1902 (fig.3.17). Measuring 170 centimeters tall, the imposing size and expressive brushstrokes of the work overpower the viewer. One can easily imagine the strength the calligrapher possessed to command the large brush and the body movement required to move it on the paper. The eminent scholar official Weng Tonghe's words capture the characteristics of the empress dowager's brush traces. He received the large calligraphy of *song he* 松鶴, "pine and crane," in cursive script in 1894 and commented in his diary that it was *ji xionghou* 極雄厚, or utterly heroic, robust and substantial.¹⁰⁹ Other recipients of her imperial calligraphy used similar terms to describe the matriarch's works. The aforementioned palace poem compared her calligraphy with dragons and tigers. Cixi's close courtier, Qu Hongji, also admired the imperial brush traces as *hunhou xiongqiu* 渾厚雄邁, which literally translates to mean substantially robust

¹⁰⁷ A rare example is Yu Deling's brother Yu Xunling, who received a fan inscribed with Emperor Guangxu's calligraphy in cinnabar pigment as a reward of his knowledge of photography. Yu Xunling 裕勳齡, "Gongting shenghuo zhi huiyi — Yuxiang piaomiao lu daiba—" 宮廷生活之回憶—御香飄緲錄代跋—, in Yu Deling, Qin Shouou 秦瘦鷗 trans., *Yuxiang piaomiao lu* 御香飄緲錄 (Shanghai: Shenbaoguan, 1936), 2.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909), *Zhang Wenxiang gong quanji* 張文襄公全集, in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* vol. 1561, 1222-3.

¹⁰⁹ Weng received Cixi's calligraphic work of "pine" and "crane" in the running script on January 12, 1894 and described the style of the imperial gift using these words. Weng Tonghe, *Weng Tonghe riji* vol.4, 1858.

and heroically vigorous.¹¹⁰

Vitality and strength are common physical credentials for a capable ruler. As a female regent, the presentation of manly physical quality and determination in public calligraphy was an ideal strategy for Cixi to display her capability to rule the Qing Empire like a male ruler. Using the brush traces as an alternative to her actual presence, the empress dowager found a solution to the gender segregation that prohibited a woman's bodily appearance in the outer court. In fact, the powerful strokes were a more effective medium than her modest female figure in achieving that goal as it allowed the viewer to imagine the power and authority this woman commanded. Furthermore, Cixi's calligraphy promoted her energetic and cultured image to every corner of the Empire when her works were presented to magistrates and high officials in the provinces. These imperial traces received the same respect and awe as an emperor's calligraphy. As Emperor Kangxi's subjects had done to his brushwork, recipients worshipped before Cixi's calligraphy and viewed it as an ultimate imperial favor.¹¹¹

In addition to domestic subjects, foreign imperial powers were another audience to whom Cixi strove to showcase her authority and power because the stability of sovereignty was critical in warding off possible foreign influences on the Qing Empire. When the court returned to Beijing after sojourning in Xi'an during the Boxer Uprising, she began to include foreign political figures into the nexus of imperial gift giving. Calligraphy, as well as the performance of calligraphy writing on some occasions, was one of her most frequent gifts to foreign guests. The

¹¹⁰ Qu Hongji, *Shengde jilue*, 17. Of course a courtier's comment on the ruler can be flattering, but it should be noted that Weng and Qu used similar words to describe Cixi's calligraphy, which implies that they were aware of the empress dowager's strategy of embedding her desired image in the calligraphic traces.

¹¹¹ For instance, Zhang Zhidong, who received the imperial calligraphy and other gifts for his 60th birthday in 1889, served as the Viceroy of Huguang 湖廣總督 in Wuchang 武昌, Hubei Province at the time. He reported that he "respectfully set up an incense table and kowtowed facing the Forbidden City" in his separate memorials of thanking the imperial gifts celebrating his sixtieth birthday. Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Wenxiang gong quanji*, 1222-3.

ladies' audience Cixi hosted on December 28, 1902 was the empress dowager's first attempt at making the symbolic demonstration of power and authority. It impressed the male Chinese officials at the scene. Qu Hongji was one of them, and his account was very close to Gao Shiqi's record of Kangxi's performance.¹¹² Unfortunately, the performance did not arouse the expected awe from the foreign guests because Sarah Conger's description, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, makes no remark on Cixi's calligraphy.

Katharine Carl, the American painter staying in the imperial precincts for nine months from 1903 to 1904, appreciated the empress dowager's confident and precise brushwork. Carl's sketch captures the eunuchs and ladies-in-waiting watching Cixi confidently wielding the brush in the palace (fig.3.23). The complementary text accompanying the illustration included her conversation with Cixi:

I asked Lady Yu-Keng (Yu Geng's wife) to tell [Her Majesty] that I thought her large brushes were more suitable for my hands...[Her Majesty] laughingly replied that...her hands, small as they were, were able to wield them very satisfactorily, which was no vain boast... I was amazed to see the firmness of [Her Imperial Majesty's] wrist and the beautiful clearness of her stroke, which deviated not a hair's breadth from the line she wished to follow.¹¹³

As a painter Carl knew the difficulty of handling a large brush and thus was able to recognize the firmness and strength embodied in Cixi's calligraphy. Although the American painter might not have interpreted such quality as characteristic of the calligrapher's rulership, her visual and textual records offer invaluable first-hand evidence of the empress dowager's public performance inscribing authority in her calligraphic traces. Ultimately, the account of foreign

¹¹² Qu Hongji, *Shengde jilue*, 18.

¹¹³ Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 135-136.

viewers evidenced the effort Cixi made to wield symbolic sovereignty, that is, the fine arts, at an international level. It was an unprecedented development of court art, and in so doing Cixi also distinguished her practice from those of other imperial patrons in Chinese court art.

Conclusion

The close readings of Cixi's painting and calligraphy in this chapter have worked to determine the empress dowager's practices and strategies for making high arts serve political purposes. While imperial women prior to her time had engaged the fine arts as a means of self-expression, Cixi maximized the scale of performance and did it before a much wider audience. In the realm of painting, the empress dowager overshadowed Emperors Tongzhi and Guangxu to direct the Painting Workshop. Under her supervision, the appointment of female court painters was both an unprecedented official recognition of talented female professional painters and a creative tactic to recruit painting tutors for herself. If the female painters helped Cixi improve her painting skill, the former Qing emperors were her models of representing sovereignty in painting. Producing finger paintings that Emperor Shunzhi had promoted and imitating his paintings strengthened the Manchu-ness and the connection between her regency and the Qing imperial lineage. Her husband, Emperor Xianfeng, on the other hand, was Cixi's direct inspiration for presenting the rubbings of imperial brushwork to subjects. His artistic activities also became the material used to display her effort of and confidence in participating in the gentlemen's fine arts.

The empress dowager was equally enthusiastic about inscribing authority in calligraphy. Her forceful calligraphy was a vivid presentation of the determination and vigor that enabled her to preside over political affairs. Although performing powerful public calligraphy was not a

novel nineteenth-century invention for imperial women, Cixi's adoption of the Qing imperial tradition elevated the practice to a higher level. She transformed her brush traces into imperial gifts, making them a substitute for her real presence and a vehicle that represented her authority in a more imposing manner. In fact, in addition to producing imperial calligraphic gifts, the matriarch also fervently inscribed her presence on the imperial space. Many title boards in the Forbidden City and about half of those in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony are imprinted with her seals, and some of the furniture pieces in the Forbidden City are even inscribed with her calligraphy and inlaid with jade.¹¹⁴ Yet the empress dowager's ambition was greater than merely inscribing authority on the existing imperial space. Her ultimate aspiration was to *create* her own space. In the chapter that follows, I shall examine the two imperial gardens where Cixi's stages of power rose, were destroyed, and eventually reconstructed to meet her needs.

¹¹⁴ For the reproduction of the Qianlong emperor's and Cixi's commissions, see Gugong bowuyuan gujianzhu guanlibu 故宮博物院古建築管理部 ed., *Gugong jianzhu neiyang zhuangxiu* 故宮建築內檐裝修 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008), 97.

Chapter Four

Stage:

Reconstruction and Renovation of Imperial Space

Her Majesty was to receive the prostrations of the Emperor and Empress, Princesses, and members of the Imperial Family, on a Throne in the Palace [of Dispelling Clouds], that was built half-way up the terraced hill crowned by the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas...The elevation of this Palace permitted all who were allowed to enter the Precincts to...get a glimpse of Her Majesty.

Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 197.

When Cixi's oil portrait painter, Katharine Carl, was invited to Empress Dowager Cixi's seventieth birthday celebration in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony [Map 1-3] in November 1903, she acutely recognized the unique geography of the ceremony venue, the Paiyun dian 排雲殿 (Court of Dispelling Clouds, Map 3-5). Located in the Wanshou shan 萬壽山 (Longevity Hills), the altitude of the palace is second only to the Wanfo si 萬佛寺 (Temple of Myriad Buddhas), but its significance went beyond its prominent location. It was constructed expressly *for* the matriarch's birthday celebration. Perhaps due to her pride at having a palace compound dedicated to her, the empress dowager took a group photograph with her entourage in front of the palace gate and made the mirror-looking pose – an ultimate celebration of femininity – a few days before the birthday reception (fig.1.14).¹

That Cixi's celebration was narcissistic is understandable. She was the mastermind behind her own persona, accoutrements and the performances of making and presenting works of art to assert the ruling power she exercised. Similar strategies of self-expression had been

¹ Although the photograph is not dated, the carpeted floor and the decorations on the structure (such as the silk ribbons and large, round lanterns inscribed with *shou* characters) suggest that preparations for Cixi's birthday celebration had already been completed.

practiced amongst Chinese imperial women before her. However where this formidable matriarch outshone her predecessors was in her effort to design and construct her own space and transform it into the stage for her performance. The concluding chapter of this dissertation, therefore, focuses on the imperial space imprinted with Cixi's agency. In what ways did she manipulate space to visualize power and identities? How did her reconfiguration impact the Qing imperial space? These are the critical questions this chapter attempts to answer.

Regardless of her formidable presence in modern Chinese history, Cixi's enthusiastic participation in the renovation and reconstruction of the Qing imperial space has not drawn scholarly attention. When the Qing imperial precincts were opened to the public after the dynasty fell in 1911, people could get a glimpse into the mysteries of palace life for the first time. Only a few of those visitors realized that before their eyes was late Qing court life as presented by Cixi. In fact, orbiting the Forbidden City, which located in the heart of Beijing, China's capital, almost all the imperial precincts in the greater Beijing area are also inscribed with Her Majesty's influence. Among them, the Forbidden City and the two garden palace courts, the Gardens of Perfect Brightness [Map 1-4,5,6] and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony [Map 1-3], are the three most important sites.² Each of these was renovated or reconstructed for her fortieth, fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays.³

² While conventionally called the imperial gardens, the two precincts in effect served as the Qing imperial family's summer retreat. The precincts were comprised of palace complexes amidst a scenic landscape. From here, the emperor held audiences and ruled the empire. Therefore, it is most appropriate to understand the two sites as multi-functional "garden palace courts."

³ In addition to these three sites, Cixi ordered the maintenance and renovation of the palace compounds in the Sanhai 三海 area to the west of the Forbidden City. The character *hai* 海, or sea, refers to lake or pond in Mongolian. The Manchu adopted the term, and the lakes in Beijing were thus named as such. The Sanhai region used to be an important garden palace court in late Qing imperial life because when the imperial family moved from the Yihe yuan to the Forbidden City they lived in the Sanhai for most of the time and only stayed in the Forbidden City when performing rituals. However, due to the fact that this area is now China's heavily-guarded political center, few of the palaces here have been properly explored. Therefore, I exclude the Sanhai garden court from my analysis. For a rare glimpse of the existing palaces here, see Wu Kong 吳空, *Zhongnanhai shiji* 中南海史跡 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1998).

The Forbidden City held the foremost symbolic significance in Chinese imperial architecture. Traces of Cixi's influence are most distinct in the renovation of the two palace compounds in which she lived: the Palace of Concentrated Beauty [Map 2-N] and the Palace of Eternal Spring [Map 2-I]. Each has been restored to appear as it did when she celebrated her fiftieth birthday in 1885; in this way, the two palace compounds provide reliable materials for the visitor to imagine the empress dowager's everyday activities.⁴ Except for the small-scale expansion of the Palace of Concentrated Beauty, the renovation of these two palace compounds mainly focused on interior decoration. Elaborate partitions carved into the shapes of complex auspicious motifs were installed to echo the birthday celebration and bespeak the occupant's preference for popular culture. Decorative paintings of flowers, orchids in particular, were also pasted on the walls and in between the partitions.

In comparison, the scale of the reconstruction projects for the Gardens of Perfect Brightness and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony was much more comprehensive. The two garden palace courts, both located in the western part of Beijing, were destroyed in the Second Opium War in 1860. As I will elaborate in what follows, the same filial piety rationale was employed to initiate and justify their reconstructions. Emperor Tongzhi ordered the reconstruction of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness as a token of filial piety to thank the two empress dowagers for their regency. The project was abruptly called off and left unrealized, but the ample blueprints, plans and architectural models enable a re-contextualization of this project. The reconstructed Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, on the other hand, were dedicated to Cixi in

⁴ The project of palace restoration in the Forbidden City, now the Beijing Palace Museum, began in the late 1970s. Curators consulted the meticulous "Document of Setting" 陳設檔 recorded by the Department of Imperial Household, which includes the settings of various palaces in different periods. The documents itemized objects in the palace. Thus the curators could choose objects most closely resembling the descriptions in order to restore the interior setting. Zhu Jiajin, *Ming Qing shinei chenshe*, epilogue, 199.

honor of her retirement as regent and her sixtieth birthday celebration in 1888. Similar to the restoration in the Forbidden City, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony is currently displayed in a manner reminiscent of the late Qing ambiance. It is also one of the most important sites of late Qing politics and imperial everyday life.⁵ Unlike the Gardens of Perfect Brightness, which Cixi was to share with Tongzhi and Ci'an, this imperial precinct was the fruit of her persistent pursuit of building her own garden. Unlike the Forbidden City's limited potential for renovation, which was due mainly to its rigid design concept and narrow space, rebuilding a garden from scratch released the imperial architects from most restrictions and allowed them to design in accordance with the patron's preferences. Consequently, investigating these two imperial gardens facilitates a compendious understanding of how Cixi manipulated spatial concepts. I will focus my analysis on these two sites in this chapter.

Space comes into being through numerous factors including the occupant's gender, class, and social and economic circumstances. Issues of gender and space have been widely investigated in the West for the past three decades, and women's relationships to their physical spaces have come under scrutiny in these studies.⁶ Some research on the relationship between gender and space in late imperial China reveals women's mobility inside and outside of their quarters. It is now clear that women of different social strata enjoyed differing degrees of

⁵ Due to lack of documentation, the restoration of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony was not as precise as that of the Forbidden City. Most spaces are now decorated with late Qing objects left in the palaces, offering visitors a rough idea of the Qing imperial family's daily life.

⁶ Stemming from the rediscovery of women's participation in architecture and interior design, scholars in the late 1990s began to pay attention to women's patronage of space and their spatial arrangements. See Joan Rothschild and Victoria Rosner, "Feminism and Design: Review Essay," in *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*, ed. Joan Rothschild (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 7-33; Helen Hills, "Theorizing the Relationships between Architecture and Gender in Early Modern Europe," Helen Hills ed., *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003), 3-12.

freedom to venture beyond their inner quarters.⁷ Yet the physical space, or more precisely the tangible entity of the inner quarters where women spent most of their private and social lives,⁸ remains understudied. What did these spaces look like? How did women who ruled cultural and economic capitals express themselves in terms of decoration and spatial arrangement?

A few writings penetrate the Confucian ideology that women's space should be protected from any gaze. The nineteenth-century Japanese book, *Recorded Accounts of Qing Customs* 清俗紀聞, reports information on the layout and basic components of the inner quarters of a merchant's household in Southern China, but how and why the space was organized remains unanswered.⁹ Contrary to the scarcity of writings on women's inner quarters, a gentleman's space has long been regarded as a critical venue for him to showcase his persona and taste. A plenitude of know-how books, such as *Superfluous Things* 長物志, provide rich resources for the study of interior design and material culture among the male literati.¹⁰ On occasion, mention is made of artifacts related to women, largely in a negative context. For instance, Cao Zhao 曹昭

⁷ Dorothy Ko's illuminating research on women in the seventeenth-century literati circle elaborates various activities these women undertook in their chambers and in the outside world. Similarly, Francesca Bray contextualizes the system that produces ideas about women, gender and about hierarchical relations in general. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 179-218; Gao Yanyi 高彥頤 (Dorothy Ko), "'Kongjian' yu 'jia' -- lun Mingmo Qingchu funü de shenghuo kongjian" '空間'與'家'—論明末清初婦女的生活空間, *Zhongguo jindai funü shi yanjiu* 中國近代婦女史研究 3 (1995): 21-50; Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xix-lxv.

⁸ Wu Hung offers a useful definition of this term for the study of feminine space, describing the feminine space as "a spatial entity – an artificial world comprised of landscape, vegetation, architecture, atmosphere, climate, color, fragrance, light and sound". Wu Hung, *The Double Screen—Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 211.

⁹ Nakagawa Tadahide 中川忠英 (d.1830), *Shinzoku kibun* 清俗紀聞 (1800, reprint: Taipei: Tali chubanshe, 1983), 114-115. Also see Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 74-77; Francesca Bray, "The Inner Quarter: Oppression of Freedom?" in Ronald G. Knapp and Kai-Yin Lo eds, *House, Home, Family: Living and Being Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 268-71.

¹⁰ Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585-1645), *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (reprint; Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936). For a comprehensive study on this book, see Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

(fl. 14th century) claims that a cloisonné incense burner, vase, and small box “are suitable for a woman’s boudoir but not for a literati to appreciate in his studio” 但可婦人閨閣中用，非士夫文房玩也。¹¹

Although women’s spaces are overlooked in writings of the male literati, they have an abundant presence in literature, painting, printing, and even on the surfaces of artifacts. Novels such as *Plum in the Golden Vase* 金瓶梅 and *Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢 contain vivid descriptions and illustrations of women’s quarters.¹² Additionally, the *gongti* 宮體, “palace-style,” poetry, a literary genre that emerged in the sixth century, is known for its rich portrayal of life in the boudoir.¹³ It also nurtured the painter’s imagination when painting a beauty painting. However, be it a palace-style poem or a beauty painting, it should be noted that the described/depicted environment was a stage constructed to satisfy or stimulate the viewer’s voyeuristic desire.¹⁴ Such art is often created to suggest a lady’s persona, thus making the scene something between a real and fabricated feminine space. In an eighteenth-century painting of the woman poet Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1085-1155), there is a duck-shaped incense burner and its

¹¹ Cao Zhao 曹昭 (fl.14th century), *Gegu yaolun san juan* 格古要論三卷, in *Jingyin wenyuange siku quanshu* vol. 871, 6:50a.

¹² For the collection of *Dream of the Red Chamber* illustrations from their various editions, see Guojia tushuguan ed., *Guben Honglou meng chatu huihua jicheng*. Much research on the space in *Honglou meng* has been conducted. For instance, Li Xiaodong and Yeo Kang Shua focus on the general concept of architecture and space in this novel, while Huang Yunhao reconstructed many pavilions in the novel as three-dimensional floor plans. See Li Xiaodong, Yeo Kang Shua, “The propensity of Chinese Space: Architecture in the Novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*,” *Traditional Dwellings & Settlements Review*, 13.2 (2002): 49-62; Guan Huashan 關華山, *Honglou meng zhong de jianzhu yu yuanlin* 紅樓夢中的建築與園林 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2008); Huang Yunhao 黃云皓, *Tujie Honglou meng jianzhu yixiang* 圖解紅樓夢建築意象 (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2006).

¹³ In fact, palace-style poetry emerged as a response to Buddhist teachings, such as illusion and meditative concentration, and it attempted to present the environment as observed in living moments. It was not until later that palace-style poetry fell into the stereotypical impression of a literary form devoted to life in the inner boudoir.

¹⁴ Wu, Hung *The Double Screen*, 211-212, 220. Also see Anne Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace: An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry* (London; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 16-17.

presence was discussed by Ellen Johnson.¹⁵ James Cahill analyzed the subject of the painting *Nymph of the Lo River*, that hung in a woman's boudoir in a seventeenth-century painting album.¹⁶ Both analyses exemplify the interpretive property of pictorial and literary sources in constructing the material functions of a woman's boudoir. Still, these materials and the current scholarship only open a window to peek into Ming and Qing women's spaces.

Contrary to the discrepancy of other research, due to the scarcity of reliable textual and visual evidence, ample archives and historical records related to Cixi's pivotal role in reconstruction and renovation enable an unprecedented, concrete case study of this imperial woman's sophisticated choices to visualize her identities and social relations in space. The architectural models, blueprints and work diaries of the imperial architect family are particularly important.¹⁷ These materials, now mostly in the collection of the National Library of China and the Beijing Palace Museum, are the primary sources for the study of late Qing imperial space.¹⁸ Most of the imperial orders for the small-scale renovations in the Forbidden City are recorded in the "Documents of the Imperial Workshops in the Department of the Imperial Household."

¹⁵ Laing argues that the austere interior echoes her scholarly characteristics, yet the duck-shaped incense burner, a symbol of conjugal love, is the painter's or commissioner's moral condemnation of Li's remarriage. Ellen Johnson Laing, "Chinese Palace-Style Poetry and the Depiction of a Palace Beauty," *The Art Bulletin* 72.2 (1990): 288.

¹⁶ James Cahill's re-contextualization of the kinds of paintings women hung in their chambers is an exemplary attempt to approach the materiality of their living environments. James Cahill, "Where Did the Nymph Hang?" *Kaikodo Journal* 7 (1998): 8-16.

¹⁷ The Lei 雷 family served as imperial architects from the late Kangxi reign, and the family was in charge of the design and maintenance of imperial spaces during Cixi's regency. The family began to preserve their materials at work as early as the 1860s. For the lineage of the Lei family, see Wang Qiheng 王其亨, Xiang Huiquan 項惠泉, "'Yangshi Lei' shijia xinzheng" '樣式雷'世家新證, *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 2 (1987): 52-57.

¹⁸ The Lei family began to sell these materials in the early Republican era, but with the effort of the Society of the Study of Chinese Architecture, headed by architects and scholars including Zhu Qiqian 朱啟鈞 (1871-1964), Liang Sicheng 梁思成 (1901-72) and Liu Dunzhen 劉敦楨 (1897-1968), most of the archives and architectural models were soon gathered again and have enriched research on Qing imperial architecture, such as the virtual reconstruction of the Gardens of Great Brightness. See Liu Dunzhen 劉敦楨, "Tongzhi chongxiu Yuanming yuan shiliao" 同治重修圓明園史料, in *Liu Dunzhen wenji* 1 劉敦楨文集 一 (1933; reprint, Nanjing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1982), 287-390; Guo Daiheng 郭黛姮 and He Yan 賀艷, *Yuanming Yuan de "jiji yichan"* *Yangshi fang tudang* 圓明園的「記憶遺產」樣式房圖檔 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2010).

Additionally, most of the sites, except for the Gardens of Perfect Brightness, are still in existence and are thus available for examination. As a result, my contextualization is based on textual, visual and spatial evidence.

The first section analyzes the Gardens of Myriad Springs [Map 1-6], the southwestern part of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. These gardens were part of the reconstruction project during 1873 and 1874. Cixi avidly participated in the design and construction of her residence, the Spring Palace [MAP 5-A].¹⁹ Although the project was unrealized, the rich material in the design phase enables a close analysis. The second section turns to the matriarch's reconfiguration of patriarchal space through a detailed study of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony. After historicizing the site's transformation from the Qingyi yuan 清漪園 (Gardens of Clear Ripples) to the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, I shall scrutinize the most prominent designs and uses of space that clearly show evidence Cixi's preferences in the reconfiguration of the Qing imperial patriarchal space.

4.1 Blueprint of a Feminine Space

Cixi's participation in the repair and maintenance of imperial space, which had been a crucial aspect of the Qing emperor's rulership, began immediately after she assumed the position of junior empress dowager regent. When the imperial family returned to Beijing in 1861, it faced the debris of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness and the Gardens of Clear Ripples, which

¹⁹ The first section is based on my essay of the reconstruction project of the Gardens of Great Brightness. Ying-chen Peng, "A Palace of Her Own: Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) and the Reconstruction of the Wanchun Yuan," *Nan Nü* 14.1 (2012): 47-74.

had been ruined at the hands of British and French troops the year before.²⁰ The smaller Western Imperial Gardens next to the Forbidden City became a convenient substitute for the imperial family's summer retreat. Cixi ordered the Department of Imperial Household to make small-scale repairs to the buildings in 1863,²¹ but the imperial family spent most of the time in the Forbidden City instead. The two empress dowagers paid more attention to their residence palaces in the Forbidden City and often requested repairs and maintenance.

Cixi revealed a much stronger interest in interior decoration than Ci'an. The latter only ordered the repair of existing furniture and gave minimal instructions when commissioning new pieces of furniture, while the former took a comprehensive concern about interior design.²² For instance, the renovation of the Tiyuan dian 體元殿 (Hall of Manifest Origin [Map 2-K]), which was the major palace maintenance project in 1866, included Cixi's orders to add perspective paintings on the exterior walls of the palace hall and install new interior partitions, painted glass panels and furniture.²³ Frequent communication with the imperial architects had helped her acquire sufficient experience to command large-scale constructions of almost all the imperial precincts in and near Beijing.

²⁰ Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost : The Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 133-160.

²¹ Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan, *Qingdai Zhongnan hai dang'an* vol.28, 1-9.

²² For instance, Ci'an ordered a table on March 21, 1862, and ordered repairs to furniture on June 11, 1863. "NZHD," Box No. 34_395_561, Box No. 35_114_583.

²³ Ibid, Box No. 36_161_582, Box No. 36_198_582, Box No. 36_259_582.

Reconstruct the Gardens of Myriad Springs

Located in the western suburbs of Beijing, the Gardens of Perfect Brightness were once the jewel of Qing imperial space. First constructed in 1709 as a gift from Emperor Kangxi to his fourth son, Yinzhen, who became the succeeding Yongzheng emperor, the gardens experienced numerous expansions and remodeling. Before being destroyed during the Second Opium War in 1860, it had become a vast combination of land and waterways integrating three garden palace areas: the Gardens of Perfect Brightness proper, the Changchun yuan 長春園 (Gardens of Eternal Spring [Map 1-5]) and the Qichun yuan 綺春園 (Gardens of Variegated Spring ([Map 1-6]).²⁴ The plan of rebuilding the ruined imperial garden had hovered in Cixi's mind. The site was meaningful to her for two reasons: it was a place filled with memories of Xianfeng, and it had previously been the emblem of the Qing regime's glory. Cixi first made an attempt to improve the gardens by having the censor Detai 德泰 (fl. 19th century) propose the reconstruction in 1868. Unfortunately, the proposal received only negative responses from other officials due to their concerns about the fragile economy, forcing her to retreat.²⁵

It was not until Emperor Tongzhi began his direct rule that this project again emerged. Tongzhi proposed the Gardens of Perfect Brightness reconstruction project for complex reasons. It was both a token of filial piety and a strategy to distract his birth mother from politics. Compared to loving and mild Ci'an, Cixi was a strict taskmaster to Tongzhi. She had high expectations for her son and arranged three imperial mentors for him. In his diary, Weng Tonghe, one of Tongzhi's mentors, documented Cixi's frequent inquiries into and anxiety for the

²⁴ Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost*, 51-70.

²⁵ Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (184-1918), *Donghua xulu* 東華續錄, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 382 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 237.

young emperor's slow learning progress.²⁶ No matter Cixi's dissatisfaction, Tongzhi began direct rule in 1873. It was time the two Empress Dowager Regents resigned from their positions behind the curtain. In order to show his gratitude and distance himself from Cixi's presence in administration, Tongzhi soon decided to follow his ancestors' trajectory of building a garden dedicated to the Dowager Empresses as a token of filial piety.²⁷

Early Qing emperors usually constructed palaces in their imperial gardens for the dowager empresses. When Kangxi built the Chàngchun yuan 暢春園 (Gardens of Joyful Spring ([Map 1-7]) near the Gardens of Perfect Brightness, a palace compound was dedicated to Empress Dowager Xiaohui 孝惠 (1641-1718).²⁸ The Gardens of Joyful Spring was later transformed into the residence of Emperor Qianlong's birth mother, Empress Dowager Chongqing 崇慶 (1693-1777).²⁹ The garden was deserted after Chongqing died, and the Gardens of Variegated Spring functioned as the residence garden for the dowager empresses during the Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns. It should be noted that as yet no record has shown these imperial women's involvement in the construction or renovation of their garden residences. They were passive recipients of the emperor's offers of filial piety, and their submissiveness marked a stark contrast to Cixi's enthusiastic participation in the Gardens of Perfect Brightness reconstruction project.

²⁶ According to Weng's diary, Cixi began to fiercely monitor the imperial tutors in 1870. Her anxiety came from the fact that Tongzhi could neither express himself clearly nor read reports correctly, and even had incorrect characters in his writings. See Zhao Zhongfu ed., *Weng Tonghe riji paiyin ben* vol.2, 528, 531, 589, 606.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the Qing imperial family's filial piety practices, see Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 122-3.

²⁸ Details of the palace are rather obscure in the historical record, and as the Garden of Exuberant Spring is no longer extant we can only assume its existence through indirect reference. Jia Jun, "Ligong yuyuan zhong de taihou qin'gong qu jianzhu chutan," 33-34.

²⁹ *Qing shilu Gaozong shilu* 清實錄 高宗實錄 21 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968), 15079.

Such was the backdrop against which Tongzhi's plan stood. Following the imperial tradition, his act of filial piety was sufficiently legitimate to muffle objections in the court, and Cixi's fondness for the gardens guaranteed that this project would receive her support.³⁰ On October 12, 1873 Tongzhi issued an edict announcing the purpose and the scale of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness reconstruction project:

...兩宮皇太后保佑朕躬，親裁大政，十有餘年，劬勞倍著，而尚無休憩遊息之所，以承慈歡，朕心實為悚仄，是以諭令總管內務府大臣設法捐修，以備聖慈燕憩，用資頤養...安佑宮系供奉列聖聖容之所，暨兩宮皇太后駐蹕之殿宇，并朕辦事住居之處，不得過於華靡，其餘概無庸興修，以昭節省。

The two empress dowagers have protected me the sovereign and directly supervised political affairs for the past ten-odd years. However, regardless of their exertions and extraordinary contribution, [I the sovereign] have not yet offered a place for rest and amusement to please them. Feeling disconcerted, I the sovereign ordered the chief officials in charge of the Department of Imperial Household to make efforts to encourage donations for the reconstruction [of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness] for the sacred mothers' rest and comfort. The Palace of Tranquility and Blessing, where the portraits of our imperial ancestors are offered, the residence palaces for the two empress dowagers, and the palaces for I the sovereign to rest and administer shall not be too luxurious. Other [parts of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness] need not be reconstructed, so as to illuminate the thriftiness [of this project].³¹

Stating that the reconstruction was based on his gratitude to the two empress dowagers, Tongzhi justified the project by emphasizing the importance of his imperial filial piety. In order to ease the officials' concern about the costly expenditure, Tongzhi also drew a clear boundary for the

³⁰ For a nuanced analysis of Tongzhi's political agenda in the Yuanming yuan reconstruction project, see Emily Mokros, "Reconstructing the Imperial Retreat: Politics, Communications, and the Yuanming Yuan Under the Tongzhi Emperor, 1873-4," *Late Imperial China* 33:2 (2012): 76-118.

³¹ *Qing shilu Muzong shilu* 清實錄 穆宗實錄 10 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1963), 3. The official edict, whose content is nearly identical to this comment, was issued on November 17. See Wu, Xiangxiang *Wangqing gongting shiji*, vol.1, 106.

reconstruction project. On November 20, he issued a follow-up edict to rename the gardens and the main palace compounds. The Gardens of Variegated Spring was renamed the Gardens of Myriad Springs. The Fuchun tang 敷春堂 (Hall of Spreading Spring) palace compound became the Spring Palace and was dedicated to Cixi, and the palace compound of the Qingxia zhai 清夏齋 (Chapel of Cool Summer) received the title Qingxia tang 清夏堂 (Hall of Cool Summer [Map 5-B]) and became Ci'an's palace.³²

The “Documents of the Imperial Order” 旨意檔 and the “Documents of Instructions of the Headquarters Archive and the Office of Palace Construction” 堂諭司諭檔, two work notes kept by the imperial architect family, record Cixi's and Tongzhi's fervent enthusiasm for the reconstruction project. These archives also reveal that while Tongzhi monitored the Gardens of Perfect Brightness proper closely, it was Cixi who directed the design of the Gardens of Myriad Springs. The following record presents Cixi's active role in the design of the Spring Palace:

[同治十二年十一月初五日]...董總管云，今晚遞天地一家春大木樣時，將此裝修前事奏明皇太后、皇上，再聽諭旨，更改各款樣式，初九日交呈進。

“[On December 24, 1873]... Manager Dong said that when submitting the grand wood model of the Spring Palace this evening we must report the preparatory work to the empress dowager and His Majesty. [We] will revise the style of decoration after receiving the imperial instruction and submit [the revision] on December 28.”³³

Theoretically, Tongzhi was the head supervisor and decision maker of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness reconstruction project, but when it came to the Spring Palace Cixi received the

³² “Neiwu fu dang” 內務府檔, entry of November 20, 1873, printed in *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan* ed., *Yuanming yuan*, 628.

³³ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of December 24, 1873, YMY, 1117.

imperial architects with him and gave her own instructions. Other entries in the “Documents of the Imperial Order” also show that when she was absent from discussions about her palace, Tongzhi withheld the final decision until he consulted his mother.³⁴

Such enthusiastic participation reveals Cixi’s eagerness to create a space of her own. Her desire was so strong that she even revoked the design plan her son made. Tongzhi drew the interior décor of the Spring Palace on December 27, 1873 and ordered the architect team to make an architectural model. After several rounds of revisions, the architect team submitted the model a few days later.³⁵ Nevertheless, the team was told to disregard this model:

萬春園中一路各座燙樣奏准，奉旨依議，交下（存內務府堂上）。皇太后自畫再聽旨意。天地一家春四捲殿裝修樣，並各座紙片畫樣均留中。

[We] presented the architectural models of the palaces along the central axis of the Gardens of Myriad Springs to the throne for approval. Her Majesty agreed and ordered the models to be transferred and preserved in the hall of the Department of the Imperial Household... Her Majesty will draw [sketches by herself]. Wait for further imperial orders. The furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace that has four rolled-up-mat roofs and other paper sketches and designs will be kept in the inner court.”³⁶

The inner court issued much more detailed new instructions for the interior décor of the Spring Palace, along with nineteen drawings, on January 8, 1874.³⁷ It is unclear whether these drawings were from Cixi’s own hands, but she did give some of her own drawings to the architect team at a later date:

³⁴ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of December 28, 1873, Ibid, 1119.

³⁵ “Zhiyi dang,” entries of December 27, 28, 29 in 1873, January 2, 3, 6 in 1874. Ibid, 1118-1122.

³⁶ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of January 7, 1874. Ibid, 1123.

³⁷ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of January 8, 1874. Ibid, 1124.

交下天地一家春明間西縫碧紗櫺單扇大樣，皇太后親畫瓶式如意上，梅花要疊落散枝，下掏環人物另畫呈覽，御筆應恭繳。

“[The inner court] issued the full scale drawing of a single panel of the *bishachu* 碧紗櫺 partition wall for the west side of the entrance room in the Spring Palace. The branches of plum blossoms on the vase-shaped *ruyi* 如意 ornament Her Majesty painted should be criss-crossed; figures beneath the vase’s round handles should be painted separately and submitted for instruction. Her Majesty’s imperial drawing should be respectfully returned.”³⁸

This imperial order shows that Cixi provided rough drawings first and worked out the ideal design with the imperial architects. This design can be found on the two architectural models. They are both used to decorate the west side of the throne room (figs.4.3B, 4.3C). In contrast to her counterpart’s active participation, Ci’an maintained a conventionally passive attitude toward the design of her residence palace. She issued instructions and comments on her palace residence only occasionally, and she usually accepted the presented designs without objection.³⁹ Utilizing Ci’an’s acquiescence, Cixi thereby transformed the Gardens of Myriad Springs from their residence to a space where she visualized her power struggle with the Qing imperial patriarchy.

Visualized power struggle in spatial arrangement

Under the dogma of the Qing imperial patriarchy, imperial consorts were usually promoted if they produced children, but rarely to the premier rank of empress. The only

³⁸ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of February 8, 1874. Ibid, 1140.

³⁹ Among the few entries regarding the Hall of Cool Summer, only one entry on January 15, 1874, shows that the inner court requested the imperial architects to make various design sketches for the interior décor of the palace and submit the architectural model. On January 18, the architectural team was informed that their design proposal was approved. Ibid, 1129, 1131.

condition was if the new emperor announced his desire to honor his birth mother with the title of dowager empress.⁴⁰ It was this convention that empowered Cixi to become the junior dowager empress. By contrast, the superior status Xianfeng's Empress Ci'an held in the Qing imperial lineage made her the senior dowager empress and closest to power without dispute, even though she had no interest in politics. This irreversible hierarchy was surely an irony to an imperial consort with political ambition like Cixi. Ruling for a decade before Tongzhi began his direct rule had enabled Cixi to accumulate enough political capital to compete with, or even supersede, Ci'an's symbolic superiority. It was such confidence that motivated her to utilize the reconstruction of the Gardens of Myriad Spring as a symbol of her victory over the dogma of the Qing imperial patriarchy.

The Gardens of Myriad Spring, formerly called the Gardens of Variegated Spring, was the product of the Qing imperial family's filial piety tradition. Ever since the Daoguang Emperor dedicated this garden palace to Empress Dowager Xiaohe 孝和 (1776-1850) in 1821 it had been the residence for dowager empresses. Originally Xiaohe's palace compound was the Spring Palace, the former Hall of Spreading Spring (fig.4.1A), while the Chapel of Cool Summer, a much smaller, minor palace compound at the west end of the garden, was assigned to Daoguang's consort Gongshun 恭順 (1778-1860) during the Xianfeng reign (fig.4.2A). Consequently, the difference of scale and location between the two palace compounds indicated the hierarchical difference between the two occupants. By this logic, since throughout his edict Tongzhi did not specify the reconstruction project as a dedication to his birth mother but to the two Dowager Empresses, the arrangement of the palaces should have followed the original order. That is, Ci'an would have dwelt in the major residence while Cixi would reside in the minor

⁴⁰ Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 119.

palace compound. Yet the order was reversed in the aforementioned edict. Although this critical change was issued under Tongzhi's name, Cixi's personal connection with the title of Spring Palace indicates her influence on her son's decision. The original Spring Palace was in the east of Qianlong's residence in the Gardens of Perfect Brightness proper, functioning as one of the residences for the imperial consorts. Cixi lived in this palace during the Xianfeng reign, which might be the reason why her new palace was renamed as such.⁴¹

In addition to the location, the difference in the scale of the two palace compounds also showed Cixi's transgression of the Qing imperial tradition. The reconstructed Hall of Cool Summer basically followed the original plan. In order to upgrade this small palace, Tongzhi added a new south-facing main gate, two bridges, roofed corridors connecting the front and rear palace apartment, and several buildings for eunuchs and attendants (fig 4.2B).⁴² In terms of the interior décor, twenty-eight partitions carved into the shapes of various auspicious and floral motifs were to be installed in the front and rear halls of this seven-bay wide palace.⁴³ Regardless of the efforts to upgrade the Hall of Clear Summer, however, an important space for a dowager empress was still missing: it did not have an independent front hall for formal receptions, which was a standard component of a dowager empress's palace compound. Therefore, although the south-facing orientation granted the palace the same symbolic authority as the Spring Palace, it was still unsuitable for Cixi's status as the senior dowager empress.

⁴¹ Cheng Yansheng 程演生 ed., *Yuanming yuan kao* 圓明園考 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1928), 16B. This anecdote can be confirmed by tracing the whereabouts of the plaque "Daya zhai" 大雅齋 (Studio of Great Elegance), which Cixi later chose as the name of her studio. In 1855, Xianfeng ordered that two plaques bearing this name be hung in the original Spring Palace and the Forbidden City's Room of Peace and Safety (Ping'an Shi 平安室) palace room in the Palace of Mental Cultivation. Archival documents show that Cixi occupied the Room of Peace and Safety during this period, thus it is reasonable to assume that the original Spring Palace also belonged to the same occupant at that time. See Zhou Suqin 周蘇琴, "'Daya zhai' bian de suozai didian ji qi shiyong tanxi," 61-63.

⁴² "Zhiyi dang," entry of December 17, 1873, YMY, 1115-6.

⁴³ "Tangyu siyu dang," entry of March 21, 1873, YMY, 681.

The following changes to Cixi's palace pose a stark contrast to the renovation of the Hall of Clear Summer. The Spring Palace was modified five times and became a very different space (fig.4.1B).⁴⁴ The west part of the palace compound was redesigned into a spacious courtyard with a stage and included buildings for theatrical purposes so Cixi could gain more convenient access to her favorite theatrical performances. The main palace apartment was modified, too. Neither replicating the small palace apartment of the original Spring Palace nor following the original layout of the Hall of Spreading Spring, Cixi expanded the measurements of the main palace apartment. It integrated the front and rear buildings into a large central structure surrounded by roofed corridors, adding two courtyards to its east and west. The gigantic main apartment adopted the layout previously seen in the Luxurious Prudent Virtue Hall [Map 5-D] in the Gardens of Perfect Brightness proper, which is a five-bay wide apartment covered by three continuous gable-and-hip roofs.⁴⁵ Such a design resulted in an interior space deeper than its width and provided much greater space for the placement of partitions.⁴⁶ It should be noted that the Luxurious Prudent Virtue Hall had previously been the residence of Emperors Daoguang and Xianfeng, and now Tongzhi planned to live there as well. Under the circumstances, Cixi's choice of this layout should not be dismissed as simply a personal preference. Rather, it is a conscious declaration of authority. Moreover, one more gable-and-hip roof was added to make room for a spacious veranda, which would make Cixi's residence the largest among all

⁴⁴ In addition to the imperial order on December 17, imperial orders on November 28, 29, December 3 and 4 in 1873 detailed the revision of buildings in the compound of Spring Palace. Ibid, 1115-6, 1119-1122.

⁴⁵ Another model house of the Spring Palace is covered by a different kind of roof, but the measurement and partition remain the same as in the blueprints. For the image of the roofed model, see Zhou Xiaorui, "‘Daya zhai’ bian de suozai didian ji qi shiyong tanxi," 69, fig.17.

⁴⁶ Jia Jun 賈琚, "Qingdai ligong yuyuan chaoqin kongjian yanjiu" 清代離宮御苑朝寢空間研究, Ph.D. diss., Qinghua University, 2001, 130-31.

residential palace apartments in the Qing imperial space.⁴⁷ The interior décor of the Spring Palace was no less luxurious. Aside from the 24 partitions, it was equipped with 175 pieces of furniture, which was much more than the 128 pieces housed in the Hall of Cool Summer.⁴⁸

As such, the Gardens of Myriad Springs became a site for Cixi's power display. Compared to Ci'an's symbolic supremacy based on the Qing imperial patriarchy, Cixi established authority through the practical experience of regency. Therefore, such an arrangement was not so much a personal competition with Ci'an as a provocative challenge to the Qing imperial tradition.⁴⁹ On the one hand, the reversal of location and scale of the two Dowager Empresses' palace compounds signified Cixi's intention to overthrow the tradition Ci'an embodied. On the other hand, the fact that Cixi made her residence palace larger than the emperor's (another violation of the Qing imperial tradition) revealed her strong self-recognition as an accomplished and retired ruler who had handed the power back to her son.⁵⁰

Projected identities in interior design

If the layout and scale of the Spring Palace compound signify Cixi's subversion of Qing imperial tradition, the interior of its main apartment is the projection of her complex identities. As mentioned above, no one else could decide how Cixi's residence should look, not even her son. This is understandable because Tongzhi's version of interior décor revealed not Cixi's

⁴⁷ Ibid, 131.

⁴⁸ "Neiwu fu dang," entry of May 6, 1874, YMY, 681-691; Guo Daiheng 郭黛姮, *Huatang yicai: Zhongguo gudian jianzhu neiyuan zhuangxiu yishu* 華堂溢彩：中國古典建築內檐裝修藝術 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 2003), 92.

⁴⁹ The imbalance might not have influenced the two Dowager Empresses' personal relationship, but Cixi was always conscious of her senior's symbolic superiority. For the dynamics between the two Dowager Empresses, see Wu Xiangxiang, "Cixi yu Ci'an," 2.

⁵⁰ Jia Jun, "Qingdai ligong yuyuan zhong de taihou qingong qu jianzhu chutan," 38-39.

preference but his own – bright with many windows and transparent glass panels installed in the interior partition.⁵¹ He also designed a wall of display cases with doors, and left some space for painting or wallpaper.⁵² Giving a clear design instruction was not easy for an inexperienced, amateur commissioner like Tongzhi. Although the architectural team documented his requirements, it is hard to follow his random and somewhat unspecific descriptions without a drawing. By contrast, as a seasoned instructor, Cixi gave orderly instructions that usually moved from the south to the north; she covered the central bay first and then the east and west wings respectively. Such a sequence of description also suggests that Cixi had clear ideas about the intended visual effect of these decorations.

There are two architectural models of the Spring Palace. Both use the same set of partitions, but in a slightly different order. The unfurnished model represents an earlier version of the interior décor while the furnished model most likely represents the final version, and thus the following discussion is based on the furnished model (fig.4.1). In principle, the palace embodies the nineteenth-century taste of interior décor in and out of the Forbidden City. Its decorative motif and style are comparable to other imperial spaces, while less luxurious versions appear in the mansions of aristocrats and wealthy families. The throne room is located at the center of the south entrance and the room to its immediate east is indirectly divided by a *langanzhao* 欄杆罩 or balustrade frieze. According to Cixi's instruction of installation and the character *fó* (Buddha) on the *pilumao* 毘廬帽, "vairocana hat partition," above the niche, it seems that the far east room was designed to be the occupant's meditation room (fig.4.3B).⁵³

⁵¹ Tongzhi stated that he preferred bright space when instructing the interior design of his own residence, the Palace of Prudent Virtue. "Zhiyi dang," entry of January 7, 1874, YMY, 1123.

⁵² "Zhiyi dang," entry of December 27, 1873, Ibid, 1118-9.

⁵³ "Zhiyi dang," entry of February 8, 1874, ibid, 1140.

The two bays in the west are combined into a spacious reception room, divided from the entrance room by a partition wall. A large display case is installed on the west wall, which results in a similar effect to that seen in the Shufang zhai 漱芳齋 (Study of Fresh Fragrance [Map 2-P]) in the Forbidden City (fig.4.3C, 4.2).⁵⁴ The floor-length frieze to the north of the display cases is carved into an elaborate openwork pattern of magnolia. It only partially divides the space, making the two rooms behind the reception space a possible extension of it (fig.4.3D). In contrast to such openness, the architectural model shows that Cixi's sleeping chamber is enclosed for privacy and security. Located behind the meditation room, it has a small door on the west wall. The north side has a round doorway frieze decorated with pine trees and the moon, which is merely for decoration because a glass panel is installed in the round opening (fig.4.3E).

Compared to the interior design of the Emperor's residence, such as the Yangxin dian 養心殿 (Hall of Mental Cultivation) in the Forbidden City [Map 2-E], the spatial division of the Spring Palace is much simpler. The corners of the former are divided into small chambers or penthouses. They are designed to function as studios for study, meditation or rest (fig.4.3A). The Spring Palace rather resembles palace compounds in the imperial harem, which are comprised of a front hall for public use and a rear hall for private purposes. Its rooms in the south side are equivalent to the front hall, while the other rooms are similar to the rear hall, only more spacious and luxurious.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The display case remains the same in both architectural models. Because the fact that the case is not shown in the image of the furnished model, I used the unfurnished model to show the detail and visual effect of the display case.

⁵⁵ The meditation room can be found in Cixi's Palace of Concentrated Beauty in the Forbidden City, too. According to the "Document of display" in 1756, the front hall of this palace did not have any religious objects. However, there was a meditation hall during the Tongzhi reign because Cixi ordered that a painting be stored in the *jingshi* 靜室 (meditation room) of the front hall in 1870. See Zhu Jiajin, *Ming Qing shinei chenshe*, 57-58; "NZHD," Box No. 37_399_546.

Despite such simplicity of space allocation, the decoration of the Spring Palace is dazzling. One hundred black *shou* (longevity) characters are written on every lozenge-shaped golden porcelain tile on the east and west exterior walls, and red bat patterns line the top and bottom of the walls (fig.4.4).⁵⁶ Although characters had long been used as a mode of decoration in Chinese craft art, with increased literacy Chinese artisans' patterns of decoration expanded to include vernacular expressions.⁵⁷ Qing court art incorporated these new patterns as well. A famous example is the porcelain vase, now housed in the Palace Museum, Beijing, decorated with numerous *shou* characters. The characters were meant to celebrate Emperor Kangxi's sixtieth birthday.⁵⁸

It seems that auspicious characters were not integrated into interior décor before Cixi's time. They were instead seen on portable objects such as calligraphy scrolls or standing screens.⁵⁹ Cixi's bold idea reflects the extreme popularity of this trend in the late nineteenth century, echoing similar renderings in contemporary common households. The *zhaobi* 照壁, "spirit wall," inscribed with one hundred *shou* characters in the Qiao 喬 family manor in Shanxi

⁵⁶ Cixi originally intended to decorate the exterior walls with perspective landscapes. However, she changed her mind and decided on this luxurious design. "Zhiyi dang," YMY, 1131, 1137-9. This design appears on both of the models, and I used a view from the unfurnished model that best reveals the design.

⁵⁷ By "vernacular" I mean the use of popular patterns and images that require no literary learning to comprehend their meanings. For instance, the character *shou* and its straightforward auspicious meaning do not require the ability to understand literary allusions. James Cahill offers a similar definition of the term "vernacular" in the context of Chinese art history. By his logic, "occasional, decorative, narrative, auspicious, and otherwise functional pictures that were acquired and hung and used in well-off households, somewhat apart from the 'fine art' paintings" can be categorized as vernacular painting. James Cahill, "Paintings Done for Women in Ming-Qing China?" *Nan Nü* 8 (2006): 1.

⁵⁸ For the reproduction of this vase, see Evelyn S. Rawski and Jessica Rawson eds., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, cat. 302.

⁵⁹ An extant example is a birthday screen made in 1796 for the then Shidu Daxueshi 侍讀大學士 (Grand Secretariat Academician Reader-In-Waiting) Wang Erle 王爾烈 (1727-1802); it is collected in the Liaoning Provincial Museum. For the reproduction, see Wu Mei-feng 吳美鳳, *Shengqing jiaju xingzhi liubian yanjiu* 盛清傢俱形制流變研究 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2007), 288-90.

山西 Province, is another example of applying auspicious characters to architecture.⁶⁰ Although Cixi's wish of living in a space wrapped by numerous auspicious characters was unrealized, she had a persistent preference for this kind of decoration. Years later she set a screen inscribed with many *shou* characters behind her throne in the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity [Map 3-1] of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, where she and the Guangxu Emperor jointly received officials (fig.4.19).

The interior of Spring Palace was no less flamboyant. Various flower sprays occupy the twenty-four interior partitions of the palace, each addressing certain auspicious symbols. For instance, the balustrade frieze carved with gourd-laden vines in natural form refers to numerous descendants, and the frieze carved with grapevines heavy with grapes signifies many offspring. The partition decoration in Ci'an's Hall of Cool Summer shared the same characteristics: all its partitions were also to be decorated with auspicious floral patterns.⁶¹

Auspicious floral motifs enjoyed wide popularity in architectural decoration. They not only appeared in commoners' houses but also formed an important element of the interior décor in the imperial space, including its harem. Although none of the imperial women's spaces prior to Cixi's time remains intact, archival materials provide some clues about their appearance before renovations in the late nineteenth century. The Imperial Workshops often repaired or remounted wallpapers with floral motifs in Cixi and Ci'an's palaces during the Tongzhi reign, testifying to the fact that floral motifs were common decorations in women's quarters.⁶²

⁶⁰ This spiritual wall is part of a renovation and expansion performed during the Guangxu reign. The couplet flanking the *shou* characters was a gift from Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 (1812-1885). Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 110-11.

⁶¹ Guo Daiheng, *Huatang yicai*, 192-93.

⁶² For instance, the Imperial Workshop was ordered to "remount the extant painted wisteria and other wallpapers in the Changchun gong as soon as possible" on July 5, 1870. See "NZHD," Box No. 37_484_546.

In addition to the variety of decorative motifs, the advanced technique of decoration also enhanced the visual excitement of the palace space. Almost all compartments of the partitions were sculpted into an openwork of curving branches or vines dangling in the air. This technique appeared no earlier than the early nineteenth century but rapidly gained popularity, replacing the eighteenth-century preference for geometric decoration with naturalistic and curvy aesthetics.⁶³ Aristocrats, literati and commoners were all fond of the new style, but they usually mixed this costly decoration with other simpler partitions for economic or aesthetic reasons. Due to the limitations of budget and renovation scale, Cixi kept most of the original partitions in the Palace of Eternal Spring when she first renovated it in 1866. As a result, it still retains some classic eighteenth-century characteristics (fig.4.5). When directing the abundantly funded Spring Palace project that had abundant funds behind it, she ordered that all partitions in the new palace must be “sculpted into openwork.”⁶⁴ The same order must have applied to the simultaneous renovation of the Hall of Manifest Origin because it is decorated in the same style seen on the architectural model of the Spring Palace (fig.4.6).⁶⁵ Moreover, Cixi decorated the Taiji dian 太極殿 (Hall of *Taichi*), a palace apartment in the Palace of Eternal Spring, in 1884 and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony in 1888 using the same logic, as if to compensate for what was not realized in the earlier project.

The interior décor of the Spring Palace have been conventional as observed above, and it is difficult to further pin down the occupant’s identities without other removable decorative objects and daily utensils, which combine to form a unified entity. However, a series of Cixi’s

⁶³ Guo, *Huatang yicai*, 26.

⁶⁴ “Zhiyi dang,” entry of January 8, 1874, YMY, 1124.

⁶⁵ Liu Chang, Wang Shiwei, “Cong xiancun tuyang ziliao kan Qingdai wanqi Changchun Gong gaizao gongcheng,” 197-198.

orders over the course of designing the palace suggest her aspirations for power and religious piety. She gave particular attention to the partitions in the reception space, the meditation room and her sleeping chamber. The partition wall dividing the throne room and the reception space went through five revisions, changing from flowers of four seasons to pure plum blossoms based on the design she drew.⁶⁶ She also double-checked the size and format of the display case⁶⁷ and made an order to “enlarge the sculpted phoenix on the frieze of ‘phoenix resting on the Chinese parasol tree’” on the northeast wall of the space (fig.4.3E).⁶⁸ This motif has a double metaphor. Originating in the *Book of Odes*, it alludes to a virtuous person and the noble place where he stays,⁶⁹ the phoenix is also the symbol of the empress, signifying female authority.

Cixi had a strong preference for the phoenix in her court art commissions. In addition to the sculpted phoenix in the reception room, a cloisonné panel of the phoenix under a Chinese parasol tree was hung in her sleeping chambers in the Palace of Concentrated Beauty (fig.4.7). As mentioned in the previous chapter, her finger painting, *Phoenix*, depicting the same motif may well be the Dowager Empress’s metaphorical self-portrait (fig.3.12). More suggestive uses are found in Cixi’s later commissions. Her portrait for the St. Louis Exposition, the first oil portrait that introduced her as the Qing Empire’s empress dowager and *de facto* ruler to the international public, contains a number of phoenixes. This symbol of female power appeared on the standing screen, on the top of the two decorative fans, and there is a pair of phoenix incense

⁶⁶ “Zhiyi dang,” entries of January 18, 21, February 4, 8, 14, YMY, 1131, 1133, 1138, 1140, 1141.

⁶⁷ “Zhiyi dang,” entries of January 18, 24, 31, Ibid, 1131, 1134, 1137.

⁶⁸ “Zhiyi dang,” entries of April 6, Ibid, 1143.

⁶⁹ The poem referring to the phoenix and the Chinese parasol tree is collected in the series of “*Sheng min zhi shi*” 生民之什 under the chapter “*Da ya*” 大雅 in the *Shi jing*. See *Shi jing* 詩經 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1998), 255. For the English translation, see Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (1937, reprint: New York: Grove Press, 1996), 217-18.

burners in the foreground (fig.1.31B). Cixi's most assertive use of the phoenix symbol appears in her mausoleum, which also serves as a conclusive image of her life. The slab stone on the staircase in front of the main hall of her mausoleum is carved into a high relief representing a phoenix leading a dragon ascending upward (fig.4.8). As an explicit display of her superiority over the emperor, this relief signified the tomb occupant's efforts to supersede patriarchal power instead of transforming herself into a patriarch. After all, Cixi had always employed her female identities to climb the ladder of the Qing imperial power structure. Beginning as an imperial consort, her female fecundity brought her Xianfeng's only imperial heir. Therefore, Cixi's instruction to enlarge the phoenixes in the reception room of the Spring Palace was by no means purely the function of aesthetic preference. It was a revelation of her awareness of the phoenix's symbolism and her willingness to display such female authority in space.

In addition to projecting female power in space, Cixi embedded her religious passion in the Spring Palace's interior décor, which complemented her practice of emulating Guanyin. A vairocana hat partition was installed above the niche where a Buddha sculpture was positioned.⁷⁰ The same kind of partition carved with a character *fu*, or blessing, was seen on top of her bed (fig.4.3D). It first appeared with strong religious implications and gradually became an element of Qing palatial interior decoration. It seems that Cixi preferred this partition and all her spaces in the Forbidden City, the Yiluan Dian 儀鑾殿 (Hall of Imperial Pomp) in Zhonghai, and the Court of Dispelling Clouds ([Map 3-5]) in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony were decorated

⁷⁰ According to the Ming dynasty encyclopedia *Shiwu ganzhu* 事物紺珠, the vairocana hat was one of eight kinds of hats in Buddhist costume. Huang Yizheng 黃一正 (fl. late 16th to early 17th century), *Shiwu ganzhu* 事物紺珠 (1591) in *Siku guanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 200 (Jinan: Qilu shushe chubanshe, 1997), 403.

with one or two vairocana hat partitions.⁷¹ Fig.4.9 shows the vairocana hat partition that tops Cixi's sleeping chamber in the Palace of Concentrated Beauty. It is carved with flower sprays, and the center is carved into a round *shou* character.

The vairocana hat partition is named for its resemblance to a kind of hat in Buddhist dress. It was also a part of the Bodhisattva Guanyin character's costume in Qing theatrical performance. Such partitions first appeared in Buddhist shrines, capping the space where images of Buddhist deities were offered. In many cases it was not made of wood but fabric, such as the embroidered cloth in the *Fori lou* 佛日樓 (Temple of the Buddha Sun) of the Forbidden City [Map 2-O] (fig.4.10). The niche this partition creates was thereby transformed into the realm of deities, highlighting its religious and spiritual significance. In the context of Qing palatial architecture, the vairocana hat partition was often installed at the entrance of important palaces, such as the Hall of Mental Cultivation, to underscore the high rank of the palace and its occupant.⁷² When Cixi installed the vairocana hat partition in her palaces, she might well have had this partition's secular and religious significance in mind. It not only spoke to her supremacy. It was also a device that helped her emulate Guanyin, functioning in the same way as if Cixi wore the hat in her Guanyin costume. Interestingly, Ci'an did not show the same degree of fervency towards this Buddhist practice. Neither wearing Guanyin costume in her portraits nor commissioning the vairocana hat partition in her palaces, her religious beliefs were rather obscure, drawing a strong contrast to Cixi's practice.

⁷¹ Gugong bowuyuan 故宫博物院 ed., *Gugong jianzhu neiyuan zhuangxiu* 故宫建築內檐裝修 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2007), 276-277. For sketches of the interior decoration in the other three palaces, see Guo Daiheng, *Huatang yicai*, 182, 185, 193.

⁷² Gugong bowuyuan ed., *Gugong jianzhu neiyuan zhuangxiu*, 70.

The above analysis on the location, layout and interior décor of the Spring Palace has uncovered Cixi's acute sense of how to claim power and embed identities in space. Even though one of Cixi's projects was unrealized, the reconstruction of the Spring Palace offered Cixi the chance to create her own space without being confined by an existing layout or decoration. The project can thus be understood as the empress dowager's blueprint of a feminine space where the occupant celebrated her accomplishments by manipulating her sexual and social roles. However, circumstances changed when the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony were reconstructed. An imperial precinct dedicated solely to Cixi as it were, the gardens embodied Cixi's ultimate authority in both the public and domestic spheres. This time she not only constructed the blueprint of feminine space but went further to reconfigure patriarchal space in this imperial precinct.

4.2 Reconfiguring Patriarchal Space

In principle there was no large-scale court art commission during the early Guangxu reign. The renovation of the imperial precinct also shrank to a minimum during the official mourning period for Tongzhi's death and the intense day-to-day administration during the early stage of Cixi's second regency. Ultimately, there was no suitable occasion to justify another time and energy consuming architectural project, either. It was not until the mourning period was over and the regency stabilized that Cixi's interest in decorating space reemerged. The earliest sign lies in a series of orders to change the decorative calligraphies and paintings and to

repair the small roofed stage in her residence, the Palace of Eternal Spring, in 1879.⁷³ Two years later Ci'an's sudden death made Cixi the only dowager empress. As already mentioned, Cixi was left without a rival for comparison, and was also relieved of patriarchal scrutiny and restriction in many aspects of imperial life. Vigorous cultural activities were not limited to the court theatrical performances, or Cixi's creation and commission of artwork; they also included her more assertive spatial strategies for reconfiguring the patriarchal space in the imperial precinct.

The first event that granted the matriarch a legitimate excuse to renovate her space was the celebration of her fiftieth birthday in 1884. However the scale of the plan went beyond tradition. Cixi reconstructed the western section of the imperial harem to use as her personal palace compound. Although the Dowager Empress moved from the Palace of Eternal Spring to her earlier residence, the Palace of Concentrated Beauty, the former remained under her control and was transformed into a theater compound where theatrical performances took place daily for the entire tenth lunar month of 1884.⁷⁴ As for the palace compound, it became both Cixi's new residence and the place where she received birthday tributes, and thus this palace was expanded to meet the needs of multiple functions. The Yikun gong 翊坤宮 (Palace of Terrestrial Assistance [Map 2-L]) palace hall located to the south of the Palace of Concentrated Beauty was remodeled into the reception hall for the celebration ceremony and decorated with various ornately carved partitions.⁷⁵ Its rear hall was rebuilt into the Hall of Mental Cultivation, serving

⁷³ The stage was constructed in 1870, and it went through further expansion during 1873 and 1874. For a detailed analysis of the development of its structure, see Liu Chang, Wang Shiwei, "Cong xiancun tuyang ziliao kan Qingdai wanqi Changchun Gong gaizao gongcheng," 196-201. For Cixi's orders to renovate the Changchun gong in 1879, see "NZHD," Box No. 43_56_563, 43_47_563, 43_138_563, 43_145_563.

⁷⁴ Zhao zhongfu ed., *Weng Tonghe riji paiyin ben* vol.6, 179.

⁷⁵ For Cixi's orders as to the Yikun Gong's interior décor and furniture, see "NZHD," Box No. 45_150_617, 45_151_617, 45_182_617, 45_183_617, 45_186_617, 45_187_617.

as the formal dining room to house the occupant and her guests, and the Tihedian ware discussed in Chapter Two was produced for this new palace hall.

The new arrangement integrated the two palaces into a single large compound. At first sight it seems to be a sensible alternative to the expensive reconstruction of a garden palace, but the modification of the Forbidden City carried symbolic significance if we consider the design of its layout. While the renovated palaces could fulfill the dual functions of ceremony and residence, the renovation of the Hall of Mental Cultivation broke from the original layout of the Forbidden City. The design followed several sets of schema to visualize the ideal Confucian social order. For instance, the imperial harem is divided into three sections. The two palatial areas for the imperial consorts center on the Jiaotai Dian 交泰殿 (Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union [Map 2-F]), whose title refers to the point where *yin* 陰 (wife) and *yang* 陽 (husband) converge. The flanking palace areas are each designed in the shape of the trigrams *kun* 坤 that represent earth and the force of *yin*. Such a layout represented the ideal power relation between spouses in Confucian ideology; that is, wives were supposed to support and obey their husbands. It also emphasized the imperial consorts' most important function, producing imperial offspring (Fig.4.11).⁷⁶

The layout of the Forbidden City remained unchanged until 1859 when Emperor Xianfeng ordered the reconfiguration of the Palace of Eternal Spring, replacing its south entrance gate with the Hall of Manifest Origin in order to incorporate the Qixiang Gong 啟祥宮 (Palace of Brightness and Auspiciousness [Map 2-H]) compound into a part of the Palace of Eternal

⁷⁶ Wang Zilin 王子林, *Zijin Cheng Fengshui* 紫禁城風水 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2005), 15-154.

Spring.⁷⁷ It is unclear why Xianfeng initiated this project, but scholars suspect that since he was sick at the time, the palace compound was renovated into a complex for administration and residence for the frail emperor's convenience.⁷⁸ The reconfiguration underscored the seriousness of Xianfeng's health condition, and it also implied that the symbolic cosmic and social order embodied in the Forbidden City's original design was no longer considered unchangeable. Since Cixi's reconfiguration of the Palace of Concentrated Beauty was similar in nature to Xianfeng's renovation project, hers may be understood as a renovation project modeled after this case.

The expansion of the Palace of Concentrated Beauty was merely the prelude to Cixi's more comprehensive reconfiguration of the patriarchal space. When she later participated in the reconstruction of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, it resulted in the transformation of an emperor's garden into a space of her own. Located in the western suburbs of Beijing, it is the only former Qing imperial garden that preserves the glamour of the old days. For this reason, it is invaluable for the study of garden construction in the Qing dynasty.⁷⁹ However, among the

⁷⁷ Liu Chang, Wang Shiwei, "Cong xiancun tuyang ziliao kan Qingdai wanqi Changchun Gong gaizao gongcheng," 193-96.

⁷⁸ According to Zhu Jiajin, the Xianfeng Emperor mostly lived in Xianfu gong 咸福宫 (Palace of Complete Happiness) when he stayed in the Forbidden City. This palace compound is located in the northeast end of the western imperial harem, and the Palace of Eternal Spring stands to the Xianfu gong's immediate south. Such a convenient location in relation to Xianfeng's residence makes scholars believe that the renovation was planned to transform the Palace of Eternal Spring compound into an alternative to the Hall of Mental Cultivation. See Zhu Jiajin 朱家潜, "Xianfu gong de shiyong" 咸福宫的使用, *Gugong tuishi lu* 故宫退食录 1 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 416-417; Liu Chang and Wang Shiwei, "Cong xiancun tuyang ziliao kan Qingdai wanqi Changchun Gong gaizao gongcheng," 203.

⁷⁹ For earlier research on the Yihe yuan, see An Mi'er 安密邇, "Yiheyuan yu Zhongguo tingyuan zhi yanjiu" 颐和园与中国庭园之研究, Ph.D. diss., Zhongguo Wenhua daxue, 1975; Beijingshi Yiheyuan guanlichu 北京市颐和园管理处, *Yiheyuan* 颐和园 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1979). In recent years, more and more research on the history and design of the Yihe yuan has been published. The Architecture School of Qinghua University published a catalog with thoroughly detailed measurements of every structure in the garden, and an anthology commemorating its 250-year anniversary. These new materials have made possible the alternative cultural study of this site I conduct. See Qinghua daxue jianzhu xueyuan 清华大学建筑学院 ed., *Yiheyuan* 颐和园 (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2000); Beijingshi yuanlinju Yiheyuan guanlichu 北京市园林局颐和园管理处 ed., *Yiheyuan jianyuan 250 zhounian jinian wenji* 颐和园建园250周年纪念文集 (Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo chubanshe, 2000); Zhang Wei, "Tongzhi Guangxu chao Xiyuan he Yihe yuan gongcheng sheji yanjiu."

public this garden is associated with the luxurious life of its most famous inhabitant, Cixi.⁸⁰ This garden emerged as a site that embodied the Qing imperial family's filial piety tradition. It was constructed and reconstructed as a gift to Emperor Qianlong's mother Empress Dowager Chongqing and Emperor Guangxu's aunt Empress Dowager Cixi, respectively. The roles the recipients of this gift played, however, were fundamentally different. The former had no input in the design and construction, whereas the latter's avid participation made the garden into the grand stage for her display of power.

From the Gardens of Clear Ripples to the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony

The story of the Gardens of Clear Ripples begins with the construction of the Dabaoen yanshou 大報恩延壽寺 (Temple of Recompense and Longevity [Map 4-1]) on Wongsan 瓮山 hill. Emperor Qianlong commissioned the temple in 1750 in the name of celebrating the sixtieth birthday of his mother, Empress Dowager Chongqing. As an extension of the celebration, he also renamed the Wanshou shan Hill.⁸¹ Qianlong did not choose the site merely for the sake of filial piety. Other reasons, such as improving Beijing's water conservatory and his personal interest in garden construction, were also at play.⁸² The combination of these ceremonial, practical and recreational factors resulted in the transformation of the Gardens of Clear Ripples into a small-scale garden for the imperial family's day tour. When completed in

⁸⁰ Su Baodun 蘇寶敦, *Yiheyuan yu Xitaihou* 頤和園與西太后 (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1999), 19-21.

⁸¹ *Qing shilu Gaozong shilu* 22, 163.

⁸² On the one hand, the hill faced a body of water, West Lake (Xihu 西湖), which was an essential part of his grand project to ensure the water supply in the capital region. On the other hand, various scenic views in this area had called Qianlong's attention and triggered his desire to construct a garden of his own. Qinghua daxue jianzhu xueyuan ed., *Yihe yuan*, 32-34.

1764, there was only one palace apartment out of the one hundred and one structures in the garden.⁸³ At this point the Gardens of Clear Ripples served as an exquisite addition to the main imperial summer retreat, the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. Its secondary status remained during the post-Qianlong era until the gardens' destruction in 1860.⁸⁴ According to the inventory of the remains in the Gardens of Clear Ripples, compiled in 1864, most of the buildings in the main palace areas were destroyed by fire. Those that endured were deserted without maintenance efforts.⁸⁵

Unlike her explicit directions in the design of the Gardens of Myriad Springs, Cixi's involvement in the reconstruction of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony appears rather murky in the official documents. Still, the pattern of her participation is similar to the reconstruction project of the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. The voices of powerful imperial men were again manipulated to achieve her goal. Although she never spoke openly about it, Cixi had shown strong interest in constructing a palace of her own in various renovation projects. Her intention was very clear in the eyes of the officials, and they thus proposed the reconstruction of the gardens in exchange for their own political agenda. It is generally understood that Guangxu's birth father, Prince Chun 醇親王 (1840-1891), was the person who pushed for the reconstruction project. He had proposed it as early as 1877 to please Cixi and strengthen his status in the court.⁸⁶ However, Prince Chun's proposal can also be interpreted as an acute awareness of

⁸³ Ibid, 34-35.

⁸⁴ This is evident through the maintenance records from the Jiaqing to Xianfeng reigns, as no major construction was commissioned except for the renaming and renovating of individual buildings. Ibid, 36.

⁸⁵ For the list of the remaining buildings in the inventories, see Ibid, 36-37.

⁸⁶ Xu Che, *Cixi dazhuan*, 302. The author made this statement without providing concrete evidence. This incident is recorded in Prince Chun's memorial of pleading to resume the navy's practice on the Kunming Lake on September 14, 1886. Yet he only mentioned his proposal to establish a bureau of mechanics by the Kunming Lake in 1877, and thus I do not think this record can be extended to Prince Chun's intention to reconstruct the Garden of Clear Ripples.

Cixi's interest. It was such mutual manipulation that enabled Cixi to bypass patriarchal scrutiny when her agenda was in conflict with the Qing imperial tradition. The subtlety of the operation also makes unveiling Cixi's true agency a challenge, but Cixi's involvement can still be tracked down in the following re-contextualization of the project.

Prince Chun indeed officially proposed the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony reconstruction project. Cixi appointed him to lead the Haijun yamen 海軍衙門 (Board of Admiralty), the matrix of the modernized Qing navy, on October 12, 1885.⁸⁷ Before this appointment he had worked in the Fengchen yuan 奉宸苑 (Imperial Parks Administration) since 1863.⁸⁸ Combining his experience supervising the maintenance of the imperial precinct with this new position, Prince Chun made several proposals that pleased Cixi but surprised his colleagues. On September 14, 1885, he first suggested resuming the navy's exercises on Kunming Lake, which was routine during the Qianlong reign.⁸⁹ This was followed by another proposal to repair the remaining structures around Kunming Lake to accommodate Emperor Guangxu and Cixi when they inspected the navy exercise:

因見沿湖一帶殿宇亭台半就頹圮，若不稍加修葺，誠恐恭備閱操時難昭敬謹...擬將萬壽山暨廣潤靈雨祠舊有殿宇台榭并沿湖各橋座、牌樓酌加保護修補，以供臨幸。

[I] noticed that many of the halls and pavilions along the [Kunming] Lake have collapsed. If we do not repair [these structures], I am truly afraid that [the scenery]

Prince Chun's memorial, now housed in the Beijing First Archive, is reprinted in Zhang Xia 張俠 et al., *Qingmo haijun shiliao 2* 清末海軍史料 2 (Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 1982), 395-96.

⁸⁷ *Qing shilu Dezong shilu* 清實錄 德宗實錄 (Veritable records of the Qing emperors, the Dezong emperor) 50 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1964), 214.

⁸⁸ Prince Chun's association with the Bureau of Imperial Gardens and Parks first appeared in a document in 1863, see "Junji chu dang'an zhejian" 軍機處檔案摺件, no. 091214, archives collected in National Palace Museum, Taipei.

⁸⁹ Zhang Xia, *Qingmo haijun shiliao*, 395-96.

would hardly suffice to illuminate our respect and caution [to your majesty]. ...[Consequently,] I plan to repair and maintain the existing palace halls and pavilions in the Mountain of longevity and the Shrine of Extensive Embellishment and Efficacious Rain, as well as the bridges and archways along [Kunming] Lake for your majesty's imperial visit.⁹⁰

The proposal echoed Cixi's interest in large-scale garden construction. Since the court had already spent a considerable sum renovating the palaces in the Western Imperial Gardens, no new palace apartment was constructed during the reigns of Tongzhi and Guangxu. Knowing that mere remodeling would not satisfy the matriarch's appetite, Prince Chun and his brother Prince Qing 慶親王 (1838-1917) privately asked their close colleagues to support this proposal.

According to them, it was a strategy of "presenting the Kunming Lake [to Cixi] in exchange for [the navy's prosperity on] the Bohai Sea; giving [her] the Longevity Hills to [avoid another tragedy like escaping to] Jehol [in the Second Opium War]."⁹¹ Consequently, it is appropriate to credit Cixi with the initiation of the reconstruction project. After all, without her enthusiasm the two princes would not have made such a proposal.

Another clue to Cixi's involvement in this project is Emperor Guangxu's edict announcing the reconstruction project on March 13, 1888. It should be noted that Guangxu's direct rule at this time was only nominal because he was under "political tutelage," or *xunzheng*

⁹⁰ "Neiwufu dang'an" 內務府檔案, Fengchen yuan 奉宸苑 4602 *juan*. Cited from Ye Zhiru 葉志如, Tang Yinian 唐益年, "Guangxu chao Sanhai gongcheng yu Beiyang haijun" 光緒朝三海工程與北洋海軍, *Lishi dang'an* 歷史檔案 4 (1986):111. Also see Zhang Xia, *Tongzhi Guangxu chao Xiyuan he Yihe yuan gongcheng sheji yanjiu*, 42.

⁹¹ The original text in Weng Tonghe's diary is rather metaphorical: "Qingdi [Prince Qing] met Pu'an [Prince Chun] and discussed the *status quo* in detail. The former asked the latter to inform us to understand the difficulties he encountered. He used the Kunming [Lake] in exchange for the Bohai, the Wanshou shan in exchange for Luanyang." 慶邸晤朴庵，深談時局，囑其轉告吾輩，當諒其苦衷，蓋以昆明易渤海，萬壽山換灤陽也" See Zhao Zhongfu ed., *Weng Tonghe riji* 4, 2060.

訓政, and Cixi still wielded the power, finalizing all decisions.⁹² Such dynamics imply that the edict actually represents Cixi's voice. Furthermore, since the plan was initiated before Guangxu began his direct rule, his title was only present here to grant legitimacy to the reconstruction project. Such a context explains why the text was divided into two parts. The first section is a short statement of Guangxu's act of filial piety:

萬壽山大報恩延壽寺為高宗純皇帝侍奉孝聖憲皇后三次祝嘏之所...其清漪園舊名，謹擬改為頤和園，殿宇一切亦量加葺治，以備慈輿臨幸。躬逢大慶之年，朕躬率群臣同申祝悃，稍盡區區尊養微忱。

The Temple of Recompense and Longevity on the Longevity Hills was where Emperor Gaozong attended to Empress Dowager Xiaosheng Xian for three of her birthday celebrations... [I] respectfully plan to change the original name of the Gardens of Clear Ripples into the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony. The palaces and all other amenities shall be repaired modestly for Her Majesty's visit. In welcoming the year of great auspice, I the sovereign respectfully lead all the officials to express our sincere wish, hoping to fulfill my humble wish of supporting [Her Majesty].⁹³

The Gardens of Clear Ripples was officially renamed the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony and dedicated to Cixi. By mentioning the temple's past life as Qianlong's birthday gift to his mother, the legitimacy of making the garden the venue for Cixi's sixtieth birthday celebration was also granted. However, the second part of the edict turns abruptly to a lengthy quotation from the empress dowager herself, occupying two-thirds of the edict. In an authoritative tone, Cixi maintained that the gardens were an imperial gift she had turned down several times in order to deny her involvement in the project. She also stated that the financial source of the

⁹² Guangxu officially began his direct rule on February 15, 1887, but he did not hold the power until March 4, 1889. For the detailed description of this unprecedented system, see Zhu Shoupeng 朱壽朋 (1868- after 1922) ed., *Guangxu chao donghua lu* 光緒朝東華錄 2 (1909, reprint: Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 2180.

⁹³ *Qing shilu Dezhong shilu* 47, 37-38.

reconstruction came from the imperial family's own savings and that the project would not be extended to the Gardens of Perfect Brightness. The series of denials and explanations bolstered the public's awareness of Cixi's authority and her fondness for garden construction and led the public to believe the empress dowager must have been directly involved.

As such, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony was reconstructed amidst the censors' continuing criticism. The inauspicious fire in the Forbidden City during the course of the reconstruction finally forced the court to announce the "completion" of the gardens on May 27, 1891.⁹⁴ Cixi visited it eight days later and began to stay overnight as proof of the garden's completion.⁹⁵ Yet the construction was still ongoing. The main structures for the birthday ceremony and celebration, such as the Court of Dispelling Clouds, were not completed until 1895, while the grand theater Dehe yuan 德和園 (Garden of Virtuous Harmony [Map 3-3]) and the Foxiang ge 佛香閣 (Tower of Buddhist Incense [Map 3-6]) had only just begun.⁹⁶ Cixi's wish to hold her sixtieth birthday ceremony in the Garden of Nurtured Harmony went unrealized. The overall construction was ended after the Qing Empire's humiliating defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Her sixtieth birthday celebration ceremonies thus only took place in the Forbidden City to avoid more public criticism.

Manipulated architectural language

⁹⁴ Zhendumen 貞度門 (The Gate of Moral Conduct) was on fire on November 19, 1888. Such an incident was commonly conceived as inauspicious and viewed as an implication of the ruler's misconduct. Two years later there was another fire in the capital, and thus the censor Wu Zhaotai 吳兆泰 (1851-1910) pled the throne to reduce the budget of the Yihe Yuan project, which irritated Cixi and resulted in his punishment. Zhang Wei, "Tongzhi Guangu chao Xiyuan yu Yiheyuan gongcheng sheji yajiu," 43-44.

⁹⁵ *Qing shilu Dezong shilu* 清實錄 德宗實錄 vol.48 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1963), 76-78.

⁹⁶ The construction of the grand theater began in late 1890 and was completed in 1895. The Tower of Buddhist Incense was built even later in 1891, but it was also completed in 1895. Zhang Wei, "Tongzhi yu Guangxu chao Xiyuan yu Yihe yuan gongcheng yanjiu," 140-41, 144.

Did Cixi participate in the reconstruction? The frequent reports she demanded from the officials in charge not only show Her Majesty's anxiety about the progress of the project but also imply her involvement in the construction. The officials had to report to the throne every five days from 1891 to 1895. The majority of reports from this time have not yet been analyzed and published,⁹⁷ and thus for now it is impossible to utilize these archives to decipher Cixi's actual participation in the project. However, the garden's layout and architectural language still offer an answer to the question concerning the degree of Cixi's involvement in the reconstruction. When the work was terminated in 1895, the site had already been transformed from a small-scale garden for day tours to a multifunctional, imperial precinct for dwelling and administration. When compared side-by-side, it is clear that the structures of the Gardens of Clear Ripples are scattered in the garden, while the buildings in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony are concentrated on the southern side of Wanshou Mountain. They form three groups of the living and administration area to the northeast of Kunming Lake, the religious and ceremonial reception area to the north, and the entertaining area centered on the Tingli guan 聽鸝館 (Pavilion for Listening to Orioles [Map 3-7]) on the northwest of the lake. Architectural scholars have conducted detailed analyses on the technological and stylistic features of the structures in the garden, which laid the foundation for my observations of how buildings are arranged and used in relation to the main resident and user, Cixi. The garden's layout will be examined first, followed by a close comparison of the architectural decorations in Cixi's and Guangxu's palaces.

The two most prominent changes to the layout include the expansion of the administration area and the newly erected palace compound on the site of Gratitude and Longevity Temple. The architecture in the northeast part of the garden bespeaks the garden's

⁹⁷ Geng Liutong 耿劉同, "Yihe Yuan shi chadang gongzuo zongjie baogao" 頤和園史查檔工作總結報告, *Yihe Yuan wenhua yanjiu* 1 頤和園文化研究 (Xuzhou: Zhongguo kuangye daxue chubanshe, 2000), 125, 127.

functional change. During the eighteenth century, the entrance area of the Gardens of Clear Ripples was mostly vacant except for an east-facing gate and an audience hall (Map 4-2). This space was now transformed into the administration area, and the residence of the imperial family was located right behind it. The arrangement of the residence palaces signifies Cixi's authoritative political power over Guangxu. Cixi occupied the largest palace compound, the Hall of Pleasant Longevity [Map 3-4]), which had been one of Emperor Qianlong's post-retirement garden residences.⁹⁸ Guangxu's residence palace, the Yulan tang 玉瀾堂 (Hall of Jade Billows [Map 3-2]), was located on the same axis and next to the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity. Although both adopted the south-facing orientation, the former building is on the northeast corner of Kunming Lake, which grants the dweller a decent lake view, whereas the latter faces towards the edge of the lake. The relative location of these two palace compounds is also of significance. Cixi's palace sits behind Guangxu's residence, implying her role as the true authority that monitored and directed the emperor. The outer court space, the Court of Benevolence and Longevity, is constructed into a palace compound for the emperor's formal sessions and audiences.⁹⁹ Two rows of offices were newly built along its east-facing central axis. Before the *coup d'état* in 1898, Guangxu received officials alone in this hall when he visited Cixi.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Qianlong revealed his intention in the poem "Ti Leshou tang" 題樂壽堂 composed in 1764. Hongli, *Yuzhi shiji* 御製詩集, in *Jingyin Wenyuange siku quanshu* 1306, 609.

⁹⁹ Zhou Weiquan stated that according to the institutions of the imperial household, the construction of this audience hall is related to the court's concern about the imperial bans on foreign guests' unauthorized entrance to the imperial living quarters and gardens. However, when the design for the reconstruction was initiated in 1885, the Qing court did not seem to consider using the garden for any diplomatic purpose. It was more likely a preparation for the court sessions. Zhou Weiquan, "Summer Palace: Its Garden and Landscape Design," Beijing Summer Palace Administration Office and the Department of Architecture of Qinghua University ed., *Summer Palace* (Beijing: Zhaohua Publishing House, 1981), 117.

¹⁰⁰ Guangxu received the official here twice, once on February 28, and again on April 13, 1896. *Qing shilu Dezong shilu* 清實錄 德宗實錄 vol. 52 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1964), 233.

The religious and ceremonial area is also inscribed with Cixi's will. As mentioned above, the gardens were dedicated to the celebration of Cixi's sixtieth birthday, and the space for rituals and ceremonies were not present in their past life. The construction of the palace compound for the birthday ceremony and reception accounts for the most remarkable change of the garden's layout. The palace compound of the Court of Dispelling Clouds is constructed on the site of the Gratitude and Longevity Temple. Due to the palace's formal function, the compound is garnished with the highest rank of official architectural decoration, making it an equal to the palaces in the outer court space of the Forbidden City.¹⁰¹ The roof of the palace apartment is covered with yellow glazed tiles; its eaves are double-tiered and shored up with *dougong* 斗拱 (brackets with tiers of bow-shaped arms); the beams and lintels are decorated with so-called *hexi* 和玺, patterns of dragons and phoenixes in gold, red, blue, and green designs. The whole structure rests on a platform of white marble and is surrounded by marble balustrades (fig.4.12).¹⁰²

The Court of Dispelling Clouds proper is an unusual structure. The central part is a five-bay wide and two-bay deep hall, flanked by two smaller three-bay-wide halls on its east and west sides (fig.4.13). The design is typical of residence palaces in Ming and Qing imperial architecture. However, the Court of Dispelling Clouds did not belong to the inner palaces but rather served public, ceremonial purposes. Such inconsistency between form and function is against the rigorous regulations of imperial architecture. Scholars suspect that perhaps Cixi planned to use this palace as her residence in the design phase, but then abandoned the idea in

¹⁰¹ Zhang Wei, "Tongzhi Guangu chao Xiyuan yu Yiheyuan gongcheng sheji yanjiu," 142.

¹⁰² Zhou Weiquan, "Summer Palace: Its Garden and Landscape Design," in Beijing Summer Palace Administration Office and the Department of Architecture of Qinghua University ed., *Summer Palace* (Beijing: Zhaohua Publishing House, 1981), 127-28.

the midst of construction in order to avoid the criticism of occupying the realm of divinity, as the site had previously been the main hall of a Buddhist temple.¹⁰³ Considering the abrupt termination of the project in 1895 due to the failed Sino-Japanese War, it is likely that Cixi ran out of time to rebuild this palace compound into a reception hall, and thus left the building as it was. Although no textual evidence has emerged to support this hypothesis, the unique design of the palace, location and function suggest a departure from conventional spatial concept and the norm of Confucian patriarchy it embodied.

In addition to the main building of the Paiyu dian, the entire palace compound carried features that strongly suggest its outer court characteristics. The rectangular pond and the stone bridge in the courtyard between the main and the second gates are reminiscent of the Jinshui qiao 金水橋 (Golden Brook Bridge) in the grand courtyard to the south of Taihe dian 太和殿 (Hall of Supreme Harmony [Map 2-A]) in the Forbidden City (fig.4.15, 4.16). Therefore, when the officials passed the main gate of the Hall of Dispelling Clouds palace compound, it was as if they had entered a miniature outer court space.

Yet why was it necessary to construct a birthday ceremonial hall in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony in the first place? It should be noted that Cixi modeled her sixtieth-birthday celebration after imperial birthday celebrations during the Qianlong reign, especially those for Empress Dowager Chongqing.¹⁰⁴ When Qianlong held his mother's sixtieth birthday celebration in 1751, the empress dowager's procession departed from her palace, the Chunhui tang 春暉堂

¹⁰³ Zhou Wei-quan 周維權, "Yihe Yuan de Paiyun dian, Foxiang ge 頤和園的排雲殿、佛香閣," in Qinghua daxue Jianzhuxi 清華大學建築系 ed., *Jianzhushi lunji 建築史論集* 4 (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 1980), 21-22.

¹⁰⁴ An imperial order was issued to make a copy of Chongqing's carriage on July 29, 1891, and the Department of Imperial Household was consulted for the procession route and decorations along the way in the imperial birthday celebrations during the Qianlong reign. Both archives show evidence of the close tie between the birthday preparation between Cixi and her role model. *Qing shilu Dezong shilu 清實錄 德宗實錄* vol. 55 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1964), 950; *ibid* 56, 164-65.

(Hall of Spring Radiance), in the Gardens of Eternal Spring and ended in her residence, the Cining gong 慈寧宮 (Palace of Compassion and Tranquility [Map 2-C]), in the Forbidden City. Both palace compounds belong to the inner palace and had a standard front hall and courtyard for formal receptions.¹⁰⁵

The documentary painting that depicts Chongqing's sixtieth birthday in the palace, *Pleasant Banquet in the Palace of Compassion and Tranquility* 慈寧燕喜, shows the details of the banquet. Chongqing is seated on the throne in the front hall of the palace while her son hosts the ceremony. Meanwhile, the imperial consorts stand in the reception hall, and troupes of high officials stand in the courtyard to pay tribute to Chongqing and Qianlong (fig.4.17). Similar receptions might have been held in the Gardens of Eternal Spring earlier, and it was likely that Qianlong followed his grandfather's example and held banquets in the reception hall in the Hall of Spring Radiance. When Emperor Kangxi held the famous banquet for thousands of elderly people 千叟宴 in the same garden in the spring of 1713, there was a special occasion that involved treating senior women in their seventies or beyond to a visit to the courtyard and reception hall of "the dowager empress's palace" 太后宮 (fig.4.18).¹⁰⁶

The construction of the Court of Dispelling Clouds thus became a necessity because Cixi's residence palace, the Hall of Pleasant Longevity (whose title was the same as Emperor Qianlong's post-retirement residence palace in the Forbidden City), did not have a proper front hall and spacious courtyard to accommodate a large number of guests. The unique mixture of the inner and outer court space of the Court of Dispelling Clouds marks Cixi's more aggressive

¹⁰⁵ In addition to the textual material, there are two documentary paintings of Chongqing's sixtieth birthday celebration. One is the *Cining yaxi*, and the other is a set of four long handscrolls *Chongqing huangtaihou wanshou qingdian* 崇慶皇太后萬壽慶典 recording the procession from the Gardens of Beautiful Spring to the Forbidden City. Both works are now in the collections of the Palace Museum, Beijing.

¹⁰⁶ *Qing shilu Shengzu shilu* 清實錄 聖祖實錄 vol.6 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1964), 3392-93.

ambition when compared to other imperial women. In the Qing imperial tradition, the emperor received his officials' birthday tribute in the outer court, and the imperial women's birthday ceremonies were always held in the inner palaces.¹⁰⁷ Receiving officials in the Court of Dispelling Clouds, then, transgressed this boundary between the inner and outer quarters. Due to the architectural characteristics of this reception palace, Cixi's birthday became a public affair and enjoyed the same symbolic importance as that of an emperor.

Cixi also overturned the hierarchy of architectural language to make her Hall of Pleasant Longevity the most important residence palace in the garden. Although the Gardens of Clear Ripples were designed as a small-scale imperial garden, the Qing imperial family never stayed overnight because the original Hall of Pleasant Longevity was already designed as a residence palace. As previously mentioned, Qianlong revealed his plan to make the Gardens of Clear Ripples one of his post-retirement residences.

The original palace compound was comprised of three groups of buildings: the entrance hall, the main palace apartment, and the nine-bay-wide rear building. A small garden was also built to the west of the compound. Although the reconstructed palace apartment retained its original layout, the overall size of the compound was expanded because new buildings were erected to the east of the compound to accommodate Cixi's eunuchs and attendants (fig.4.20). Additionally, the grand theater house, Garden of Virtuous Harmony, was built to the northeast of the palace compound. Such an arrangement is reminiscent of the Spring Palace compound

¹⁰⁷ According to the *Guochao gongshi*, imperial women were not allowed to be present in the outer court. On the emperor's birthday, they waited in the Qianqing gong 乾清宮 (Palace of Heavenly Purity), the formal reception hall in the inner court, for the emperor's return from the birthday ceremony in the outer court. E'ertai 額爾泰 (1680-1745), Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1675-1755) eds., *Guochao gongshi* 國朝宮史 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1987), 69-72 .

layout, which also included a stage for theatrical performances 看戲台, to the northeast of the main palace apartment (fig.4.1B).

The architectural decoration of the Hall of Pleasant Longevity also spoke to its occupant's supreme status in the imperial clan. This palace compound, as well as most of the other palaces in the garden, adopts a lower rank of architectural language, as represented by its rolled-up-mat 卷棚 roof and bluish-grey roof tiles. However, its lintels and beams are decorated in the *xuanzi* 旋子 style painting whose rank is second highest in *hexi* style painting in Chinese architectural decoration (fig.4.21). By comparison, Guangxu's residence palace, Hall of Jade Billows, is inferior in multiple aspects. The original version was a five-bay wide palace compound for the Emperor to administer and dine. The reconstructed compound keeps the same layout, and thus it is smaller than the Hall of Pleasant Longevity. Furthermore, although the Hall of Jade Billows is also topped with the same kind of roof, the decoration on the lintels and beams is the so-called *sushi* 蘇式 style painting, a type of decoration with semicircular contours in which figure, landscape or flower-and-bird motifs are painted (fig.4.22).¹⁰⁸ *Sushi* style painting is ranked below *xuanzi* style painting and is widely used in imperial architecture. Such a difference in decorative painting might be the result of replicating the original eighteenth-century design, since the Hall of Jade Billows was once a less important administrative palace apartment. What makes the case unusual is that the decoration was not upgraded to reflect Emperor Guangxu's sovereign status when he moved into these quarters. It should be noted that in the Qing convention, the hierarchy of a dowager empress's residence was always lower than the emperor's.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the unsuitable scale and decorative paintings both implied an intention

¹⁰⁸ Jia Jun 賈珺, *Beijing Yihe Yuan* 北京頤和園 (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2009), 39.

¹⁰⁹ Jia Jun, "Qingdai ligong yuyuan zhong de taihou qingongqu jiazhu chutan," 42-43.

to diminish Guangxu's sovereign power while simultaneously emphasizing Cixi's role as the *de facto* ruler.

An arena of female agency

In addition to manipulating architectural language to visually display her superiority over Emperor Guangxu, Cixi also hosted various activities in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony to further lay claim to her dominance of this imperial space. Dowager empresses enjoyed highly respected status in the Qing imperial family. Emperors routinely paid visits to them and kept them company during various entertainments in the imperial garden.¹¹⁰ Emperor Qianlong even brought his mother when he went on the inspection tours.¹¹¹ Yet no matter how active the dowager empresses were, the outer court was beyond their realm of activities. The dynamics fundamentally changed once Cixi took regency. The foremost expansion of her stage is the transformation of the inner palace/domestic domain into a place that carried the public, administrative characteristics of the outer court. Before the *coup d'état* in 1898, Cixi officially retired from regency, although she still monitored Guangxu's administration and often advised the emperor directly and sometimes summoned high officials to the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony to discuss state affairs. However, the only formal reception hall there was the Court of Benevolence and Longevity, and it was the formal outer court space reserved for the emperor. As a compromise, the matriarch received officials in her residence palace. For instance, according to Weng Tonghe's diary, Her Majesty summoned him to discuss the venue and the guest ritual for the visit of Prince Henry of Prussia (1862-1929) on April 19, 1897:

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 42.

¹¹¹ Zhaolian 昭槿 (1780-1833), *Xiaoting zalu* 嘯亭雜錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 21.

今日皇太后見於樂壽堂，詳論洋務，擬先召見德王於樂壽堂（立見），然後上召見於玉瀾堂，仍賜游、賜食以盡邦交之禮。

Today Her Majesty received me in the Hall of Happiness and Longevity. We discussed the affairs of Westernization in detail. [Her Majesty] planned to receive the Prince of Prussia in the Hall of Happiness in Longevity first (the guest stands during the audience), and then His Majesty will receive [the prince] in the Hall of Jade Billows. [His Majesty will] also grant [the prince] a tour [in the garden] and a banquet to fulfill diplomatic etiquette.¹¹²

Weng's diary entry is significant in two senses. It reveals that the empress dowager had already transformed her residence, a part of the inner palace where men other than the emperor, imperial doctors and eunuchs should be strictly forbidden, into a place for residence and administration, like the Hall of Mental Cultivation in the Forbidden City. Cixi's plan for the audience is also a projection of her prevailing authority. Regardless of the fact that Guangxu was already in his direct rule, when it came to such an important meeting the retired empress dowager regent was still in command. For one thing, after Cixi made this suggestion to the emperor it was followed without dispute.¹¹³

Weng's account further implies that the publicity of the Hall of Pleasant Longevity was to be lifted to the international level. Planning for Prince Henry's visit had aroused a chain of debate in the court before Cixi intervened. The progressive-minded Emperor planned to host the imperial audience in the Yuqing gong 毓慶宮 (Palace of Nurturing Joy [Map 2-D]), which was

¹¹² Zhao Zhongfe ed., *Weng Tonghe Riji paiyinben* 5, 2164.

¹¹³ Mao Haijian 茅海建, "Wuxu bianfa qijian Guangxudi duiwai guannian de tiaoshi" 戊戌變法期間光緒帝對外觀念的調適, *Wuxu bianfa shishi kao* 戊戌變法史事考 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2005), 418.

the second most important palace hall in the outer court space of the Forbidden City.¹¹⁴ This arrangement was fundamentally against the protocol of Qing imperial guest ritual. The Qing imperial guest ritual was a rigorously practiced recipe for foreign envoys. The envoys and the lordship they represented were regarded as the Qing's minors/subjects, and they had to perform the same formal *koutou* ritual as the Qing emperor's subjects in China. As for the audiences, they were held in the Western Imperial Gardens instead of the Forbidden City.¹¹⁵ This set of rituals was condescending in the eyes of the Euro-American imperialist powers that held themselves as equal or even superior to the Qing Empire. In the course of negotiation bowing replaced the *koutou* ritual when the envoys from five foreign imperialist powers visited Emperor Tongzhi in 1873, but the Qing court continued to follow the tradition to set the venue in the Ziguang ge 紫光閣 (Hall of Purple Light) in the Western Imperial Gardens.¹¹⁶

Guangxu's initial decision thus was against convention, and his conflict with the conservative officials gave Cixi the opportunity to enhance the publicity of her inner court domain. Her rationale of holding the imperial audience for Prince Henry in her Gardens of Nurtured Harmony was that the garden campus was more important than the Western Imperial Gardens, and thus the arrangement could satisfy the foreign ambassador's request to have a more prominent audience venue without sacrificing the Qing imperial guest rituals. Yet, since the function and symbolic significance of the Court of Benevolence and Longevity was parallel to the most important palace in the Forbidden City's outer court, receiving a foreign prince in this

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 416-17.

¹¹⁵ The Qing emperor usually hosted imperial audiences and receptions for foreign princes and envoys in the Fengze yuan 豐澤園 (Garden of Abundant Marshes) in the Xi yuan. The activities were moved to the Ziguang ge 紫光閣 (Hall of Purple Light) in the same imperial precinct after 1761. See Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 152-3.

¹¹⁶ Mao Haijian, "Wuxu bianfa qijian Guangxudi duiwai guannian de tiaoshi," 414.

palace would still be in conflict with Qing imperial guest ritual. Hosting the audience in the imperial residence palaces was thus the most ideal alternative to resolve the dilemma. The question remains: why did the retired empress dowager regent have to hold a separate audience?

Cixi probably made the decision out of the belief that the Hall of Happiness in Longevity was comparable to the Hall of Mental Cultivation, whose dual function situated it in the grey zone between the private realm/inner palace and the public domain/outer court. As Cixi's trajectory of accumulating authority has shown, each step to assume greater power was carefully calculated to avoid direct conflict with the Qing imperial patriarchy. In the same vein, receiving high officials in the Hall of Pleasant Longevity was informal and a less provocative tactic than using the symbolic Hall of Benevolence and Longevity to publicly wield her political power. Hosting an important imperial audience for a foreign prince in her residence not only solidified her palace's dual function but also shaped an image of the Qing Empire as co-ruled by Cixi and Guangxu for the international public.

Such an image of co-rule was soon applied to domestic affairs. This time, the matriarch conquered the outer court space, the ultimate territory of patriarchy, in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony and other imperial precincts. When Cixi quelled the Hundred Days Reform in September 1899 she stripped off Guangxu's sovereign power and began her third regency. Audiences were still hosted in the Court of Benevolence and Longevity when the imperial family stayed in the garden, but now Cixi sat at the center of the throne, with Guangxu sitting to her right.¹¹⁷ Carl's sketch of the imperial audience in the Qianqing gong 乾清宮 (Palace of Heavenly Purity [Map 2B]) illustrates Cixi's dominance of the patriarchal space (fig.4.23). Her Majesty occupied the center of the throne set, engaging in communication with the kneeling

¹¹⁷ Yu Rongling, *Qinggong suoji*, 12.

official. In fact, Emperor Guangxu was so detached from the scene that the composition would not change if we were to erase his image. The sketch also reveals a crucial factor: the translucent yellow gauze screen was removed from Cixi's audiences. The device was used to separate the female regent and male officials and can be traced back as early as the Tang dynasty (618-907).¹¹⁸ Ruling uncovered in this palace apartment is therefore Cixi's public statement of her victory in the power struggle with the Qing imperial patriarchy.

In addition to reconfiguring and transgressing the patriarchal space in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, Cixi also supported various activities that lifted the visibility of female agency in and even beyond this garden palace court. The recruitment of women painters, as has been discussed in Chapter Three, was one of these moves. Cixi used the expanded Pavilion of Listening to Orioles as her salon and atelier. The original structure was a single small theater building with a south-facing stage.¹¹⁹ The reconstructed palace compound followed this layout, but the stage now faces north. A new courtyard titled Guishou wuji 貴壽無極 (Ultimate Nobility and Longevity) was constructed in the east of the palace compound. It functioned as Cixi's rest and change area when she came for performances.¹²⁰ This was also the place where she summoned the women court painters, such as Miao Jiahui, to practice painting.¹²¹ In so

¹¹⁸ According to the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, Empress Wu attended the audience with her husband Emperor Gaozong (r.649-83) when he fell ill. She sat behind the throne and a curtain was hung between her and the male officials. This format became standard for similar occasions until Cixi's time. Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946), *Jiu Tang shu*, *juan* 5, in *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu*, vol. 268, 185.

¹¹⁹ This stage is the only south-facing theater stage in the Qing imperial precinct, and this anecdote has it that its unique orientation was because Qianlong used to perform on stage for his mother. Qinghua daxue jianzhu xueyuan ed., *Yihe Yuan*, 126.

¹²⁰ Zhang Wei, "Tongzhi Guangu chao Xiyuan yu Yiheyuan gongcheng sheji yajiu," 146.

¹²¹ According to a late Qing imperial family member, Pujin, while Cixi lived in the garden she sometimes went to the Pavilion of Listening to Orioles in the afternoons. If she was in the mood for painting, the court painters, including Cixi's tutor Miao Jiahui, would be at her service. Pujin 溥忻 (1893-1966?), "Wanqing jianwen suoji" 晚清

doing the matriarch formed a female artistic circle in the inner palace. Moreover, since the paintings these women painters ghost-painted for her were widely presented, the publicity of this circle was pushed beyond the inner palace as well. Cixi's support also improved these female artists' popularity in the contemporary art market. The high demand for Miao Jiahui's paintings at the time exemplifies the influence her patron held among officials and collectors in Beijing.

Another remarkable reconfiguration of patriarchal space was the frequent diplomatic activities Cixi held in the inner palaces. The successful imperial audience for Prince Henry was likely her immediate inspiration of a new way to blend into the international diplomatic etiquette.¹²² Such activities became more frequent after she and Guangxu returned from their sojourn in Xi'an in 1902. The court came back to Beijing on January 7, and a reception for foreign women was soon held on February 1 in the Forbidden City. Mellow and regretful before her guests, Cixi's performance moved her guests and even the media in the United States. Sarah Conger recorded that Her Majesty "took my hands in both of hers, and her feelings overcame her."¹²³ The moment of interaction was then exaggerated into "Dowager Empress wept at reception [and] sobbed as she told Mrs. Conger of her sorrow over the siege" in the reportage in the next day's *New York Times*.¹²⁴

The event helped soften the international community's hostile public opinion of China, which perhaps encouraged Cixi to utilize this female circle to improve the image of herself and

見聞瑣記, in Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi 中國人民政治協商會議 ed., *Wanqing gongting shenghuo jianwen* 晚清宮廷生活見聞 (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1982), 49.

¹²² Cixi held her first ever private reception for female members of the foreign legations in Beijing on December 13, 1989. According to the memoir of one of the attendee's, Sarah Conger, Cixi made a good impression on the guests with her enthusiastic statement of "one family, all one family" and her friendly gestures of showering them with various gifts. Sarah Conger, *Letters from China*, 39-42.

¹²³ Ibid, 220.

¹²⁴ "Dowager Empress Wept at Reception," *New York Times*; Feb 2, 1902, 4.

the Great Qing Empire. In fact, with the opening of more legations women became quite active in the diplomatic scene in Beijing. The calls for luncheons or gatherings these legations hosted were an alternative event for informal, but arguably more effective, diplomatic talks. Joining this new type of activity, Cixi opened her inner palaces to guests from foreign legations. Visits of foreign women in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony thus became a common scene. Among them, the woman oil portrait painter Katharine Carl's nine-month stay in these garden palaces and the Forbidden City was the most significant. Cixi invited Carl to many of her private activities such as boating and banquets in the inner palaces, which allowed Carl to enjoy the scenic landscape in the imperial precincts and observe her sitter's persona closely. Needless to say, such events were all about performance for Cixi. Yu Deling's account informs us that the empress dowager ordered the Yu sisters to keep Carl company at all times so as to help the woman painter acclimate to the etiquette of court life and control what she saw and heard and with whom she interacted.¹²⁵ Carl's mind and her canvas thus became the media of Cixi's international image campaign. Everything refined was introduced to the painter, and the negative side of the empress dowager and the Qing court was filtered out. Consequently, under Carl's brush the Empress Dowager Cixi appeared young and benevolent; in Carl's memoir, Her Majesty was so humane and kind that a book review criticized her viewpoint as unbalanced.¹²⁶

Being held in the inner palaces, activities under Cixi's patronage ideologically and physically transgressed the physical barrier the Confucian patriarchy had set to restrict both women's mobility and agency in the public sphere. Overturning the subordination of women in

¹²⁵ Yu Deling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 205-8.

¹²⁶ "China's Dowager," *New York Times*, Nov 4, 1905.

space, Cixi transformed the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony into an arena of female agency, where women's political and cultural activities moved beyond the inner domain.

Conclusion

This chapter explored Cixi's self-expression in space and contextualized the trajectory of her strategies through a close reading of the two reconstruction projects of the Gardens of Myriad Springs and the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony. Motivated by a strong sense of resistance against Qing imperial women's subordination in their spatial mobility, Cixi appropriated the Confucian patriarchal norm of filial piety to transgress that boundary and eventually constructed a space of her own. In the earlier stage she experimented with the location and size of her residence palaces to claim authority. After these tactics were realized in the completed Gardens of Nurtured Harmony project, Cixi moved on to reconfigure the entire garden into her stage of power. An arena of female agency was thus born.

If the layout and architectural features of Cixi's palaces reveal her strategies of relating her space to an emperor's palace so as to showcase her authority, their interior spatial arrangement and decoration demonstrated the feminine side of her identity. They, in principle, copied the conventional format of the imperial harem in the Forbidden City, and the ornate decoration, rich with auspicious symbols, was not different from other imperial women's residences. On the other hand, the personalized decorative elements reveal the matriarch's two most prominent personae: the phoenix, embodying an empress's feminine power, frequently appeared in her spaces; and the vairocana hat partition, which appears in abundance in her palaces, represents the importance of religion in Cixi's spiritual and everyday life. In this regard, the space Cixi constructed represents her flexible identities as they moved between the two poles

of the masculine and the feminine. When she took the narcissistic mirror-gazing photograph in front of the Court of Dispelling Clouds, a combination of inner and outer court space, what the patron celebrated was her female agency that replaced the patriarchal space with a sophisticated mixture of femininity and masculinity. This characteristic not only empowered Her Majesty's political authority but also stood for the last wave of the major stylistic transformation of Qing court art.

Coda

Active in an era when female political figures played critical roles around the globe, Empress Dowager Cixi compared herself with the first modern media monarch, Queen Victoria of the British Empire. She also led the Great Qing Empire in the fight against the imperial ambition of the rising Japanese Empire, where Emperor Meiji's spouse Empress Shōken 昭憲皇后 (1849-1914) was the key icon for modern Japanese civilian women. The trajectories of these two foreign female political figures are drastically different from that of hers. Queen Victoria shaped her role as a populist ruler in the ubiquitous presence of the monarch and the royal family in public media including news, lithographs and photographs. As John Plunkett argued, the queen also performed various everyday activities with her family to present ordinariness, which marked a fundamental break from an autocratic past. Her enthusiasm in photography further connected the monarchy and modernity. As such, Victoria created her image as a modern ruler and moral model for the bourgeois. She was a sponsor of novel technology as was embodied in photography, and her role as a wife, a mother and a mourning widow was emphasized in her photographic portraits (fig.C.1).¹

By contrast, the images of Empress Shōken were shaped by the Meiji government into the embodiment of Japan's modernized society and Westernized civilization. Wakakuwa Midori's comprehensive research on this topic articulated four types of the empress's images. Shōken appeared in propaganda prints and paintings as the promoter of education and leader of modern textile industry. She was the icon of civilized monogamy that the modern Japanese

¹ John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 144-98. The J. Paul Getty Museum held an exhibition on Queen Victoria and Photography in 2014, which also introduced the photographs of the British monarch and her family from the topics of privacy, publicity and family life. Anne M. Lyden ed, *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014).

society practiced: although bearing no child for the emperor, she is depicted with Meiji, his princes and princesses other imperial consorts produced. The empress was also the embodiment of Japanese royalty comparable to its European counterparts. The iconography of her official photographic portrait in Western garment was modeled after the portraits of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European royal consorts to introduce her as the supporter of knowledge and virtue to the Western diplomatic scene. Her crown stood for royalty; the roses were a common symbol of royal consort; the books on the table unmistakably represented knowledge (fig.C.2). Interestingly, there was also an attempt of deifying the empress. The young patriotic artist Harada Naojirō (1863-99) appropriated Empress Shōken's image into a Kannon (Guanyin) riding on a dragon, a female deity protecting the Japanese Empire (fig.C.3).²

Empress Dowager Cixi's strategies of staging agency are thus a significant case in China's modern politics and gender studies. The modernity seen in the image making of Victoria and Shōken was only vaguely reflected in the materiality and distribution of Cixi's photographic portraits. Neither extending her patronage to new artistic styles/media nor using her images to define modern Chinese women, it seems that the empress dowager's artistic participation was as traditional as the sovereignty she held onto. If observed from the perspective of gender, however, Cixi's patronage expressed her flexible identity that was both feminine and masculine. My concentric examinations of the matriarch's portraits, attire and daily accessories, painting and calligraphy, as well as imperial garden palaces have illuminated such hybridity. The phenomenon appeared early in her regency, which is observed in her adoption of motifs suggesting an emperor's capacity to rule and adaptation of postures

² Wakakuwa Midori's comprehensive studies of Empress Shōken are the key scholarship of this topic. For her discussions on the empress's images in these contexts, see Wakakuwa Midori 若桑みどり, *Kōgō no shōzō* 皇后の肖像 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2001), 116-48; 253-81; 335-57; 412-22.

demonstrating her womanly identity. It turned mature with the advancement of the matriarch's age and authority and was represented by the images of her dressed as the Bodhisattva Guanyin and in the photographic portraits taken in 1903 and 1904. The former followed the precedent of Qing imperial patriarchs in terms of the paths to visualizing the authority of the ruler in both the mundane and sacred worlds. But by embodying Guanyin, a female deity widely worshipped by women, Cixi achieved the goal of showcasing patriarchal power while she simultaneously kept her feminine identity intact. In the official portraits, the empress dowager sits as rigidly and formally as in a ritual portrait and conceals personal characteristics to transform her body into the embodiment of the Qing regime. Yet pride over her body was unleashed in the private photographs in which she appropriated erotic postures to celebrate feminine beauty and fecundity.

The same hybridity was also applied to other facets of Cixi's patronage. Her participation in attire design and production was the continuum of imperial women's active involvement in this craft. What distinguished her from her predecessors were the degree of control she exercised and her ambition to extend her aesthetic taste in attire to other crafts. First, as the fashion leader in the inner quarters, she initiated new clothing designs. The intensified presence of auspicious symbols and the borrowing of stage costume elements are the two most prominent changes she introduced to Manchu women's robes. Second, impatient with the procrastination of the Imperial Manufactories in the Jiangnan Region, the matriarch set up her own manufactory in the Western Imperial Gardens and supervised it. The same level of devotion was brought to porcelain production, which demonstrated the matriarch's transgression of the gendered division in craft arts.

Imperial porcelain making had been a masculine and political craft, but Cixi's patronage transformed daily porcelain utensils into vessels symbolizing her authority. Decorated with the

same color schemes and patterns as those on her robes, the Dayazhai ware and other specially commissioned porcelain utensils reveal an unusual coherence with her attire. Imperial ware's political property was not abandoned either, as the matriarch willingly invested in the restoration of the imperial kiln and forged the revival of porcelain quality comparable to the exquisite eighteenth-century imperial ware.

As a practitioner of painting and calligraphy, it seems that Cixi treated the fine arts both as a means of cultivation and as a political tool. A plethora of paintings and calligraphy pieces under her name, most of which were in fact ghost-painted/written by court artists, were presented on various occasions. An artwork per se was a concrete form of imperial favor that required the gift recipient's reciprocity, while its surface served as the platform for the gift giver to deliver intricate messages. By imitating the preceding Qing emperors' paintings, Cixi positioned herself in the lineage of imperial patriarchy and thereby symbolically elevated her regency to sovereignty. The surface of imperial gifts also provided an effective and convenient channel for the matriarch to perform her rulership. She manipulated the common perception of calligraphic traces as an alternative to the writer's physical body and embedded her forceful energy in the strokes. Cixi's robust characters vividly visualized the strength and will she exercised, and eminent officials who had mastered calligraphy duly acknowledged their heroic quality.

The empress dowager's avid participation in the making of imperial space was perhaps the most radical strategy of claiming agency among imperial women. Constructing imperial palaces used to be the emperor's privilege, but it fell under Cixi's command after she and Ci'an advanced to empress dowagers. Compared with Ci'an's passive acceptance of the status quo, Cixi acted spontaneously to design her own living space. The reconstruction of the Gardens of Myriad Springs, the garden palaces dedicated to the two empress dowagers, provided her the first

opportunity to create her residence from the bottom up. Her ambition to override Ci'an's superiority in the patrilineal family structure and Tongzhi's sovereignty was reflected on the blueprints in terms of location, orientation and size of her residence palace. Yet it was the reconstruction of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony that eventually enabled Cixi to put these ideas into practice. Due to her unchallengeable authority at the time of reconstruction, the sites were built into the empress dowager's garden palaces. Her residence was the most prominent structure, and various audiences for foreign female guests were held in the garden. The benevolent impression she made on Sarah Conger, Katharine Karl and the Yu sisters was registered in their publications, which helped bleach her image as a cool-blooded, calculating female ruler.

As such, the late Qing court artists were fully available to Empress Dowager Cixi to stage her regency, in which her assertive self-expressions were most prominent spectacles. Yet how could her patronage grow to an all-encompassing scale without the criticism or even oppression of patriarchal power? Her political authority does not seem to be the sole answer to the question. After all, most officials in the court, her allies and enemies alike, were strong believers in Confucian value, and their objection to the sovereign's inappropriate behavior could well harm the throne's authority. I believe Cixi's role as the widowed matriarch was at play, and it represented a loophole of patriarchal control over women that Cixi acutely manipulated.

Widows were a distinct social group in imperial China. They were both female and male in the sense that they were woman and the head of the family, too. Such a sexually threatening and socially destabilizing condition triggered Confucian restriction of female fecundity as early as the eleventh century.³ For one thing, the death of the husband meant the termination of the

³ Birge contextualized the emergence of such ideas from the Cheng-Zhu School in the eleventh century and how the Mongolian tradition of not sending widows back to their natal families was combined with this Han-Chinese notion

bond between the widow and the extended family. The freedom for a widowed woman to remarry equaled the extended family's loss of her dowry and reproducibility. Therefore widow chastity was the patrilineal family structure's solution to keeping the widow and her value immobile.⁴ Yet both men and women felt the impact of this structure. It simultaneously resulted in the cult of widow chastity and filial piety, the latter working to strengthen the bond between widowed mothers and sons.⁵

During the Qing dynasty the government further promoted the widow chastity cult as part of the Manchu's goal of constructing a link with Confucianism to legitimize its regime and rule over the Han-Chinese people.⁶ However, widow chastity was always practiced with age, class and ethnic difference. While the sexual and economic subjectivity of young widows in the bottom of the social structure was the most oppressed target,⁷ upper-class widows with grownup sons had more freedom than subjugation. Their ability to reproduce had dwindled and thus the chastity requirement was of least meaning to them, and they further garnered status and power in the household from the filial piety tradition.⁸ Ethnically speaking, widow chastity was a

and eventually legalized. Bettine Birge, "Levirate Marriage and the Revival of Widow Chastity in Yuan China," *Asia Major* 8.2 (1995): 107-46.

⁴ Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46.1 (1987): 44-45.

⁵ Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity: Gender and Social Change in China, 1000-1400* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), ch. 4.

⁶ Mark C. Elliott, "Manchu Widows and Ethnicity in Qing China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 41.1 (1999): 33-34.

⁷ The completion of the legal framework supporting widow chastity in the fourteenth century deprived widows of property and court rights, which remained unchanged through then end of imperial China. Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yüan China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 174-84.

⁸ In terms of the class difference, Susan Mann argued that while commoners kept chastity vow and were awarded with reputation that would reflect favorably on their sons, the government tried to steer those from upper-class families away from chaste widow reward, as they were already over-ranked in this reward system. Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship," 49-50. Also see Susan Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 66-82.

welcomed substitute for the widow suicide tradition among the Manchu. It grew popular in the eighteenth century and became mainstream in the nineteenth.⁹ Filial piety was also practiced among the Manchu, which strengthened the status of senior Manchu women in the household. They were often the head of the family when the husbands served posts away from home, and sometimes even senior concubines could gain the same authority.¹⁰ Benefits came from the state too: bannerman widows were financially independent as they received pensions from the Qing government.¹¹

This brief history of the widow in China explains why Empress Dowager Cixi's self-expressions went unchecked in the court. For the Han Chinese, Manchu officials and public opinion at large, she was a widowed matriarch who moved freely between the two poles of the gender spectrum. Her patronage was the crystallization of this phenomenon. Cixi was aware of the privilege her widowhood had garnered. Anecdote has it that she was fond of the popular romance novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and identified herself with the matriarch Madame Jia 賈夫人 in the novel.¹² The saying of Cixi's familiarity with the novel echoes a striking but often neglected decoration in the Palace of Eternal Spring in the Forbidden City. There are eighteen wall paintings of scenes taken from *Dream of the Red Chamber* under the roofed corridors in this

⁹ Mark C. Elliott, "Manchu Widows and Ethnicity in Qing China," 60-62.

¹⁰ Lai Hui-min 賴惠敏, "Qingdai huangzu de jiazhu jiegou yu caichan fenpei" 清代皇族的家族結構與財產分配, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiushuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 23(1994): 77.

¹¹ Lai Hui-min, *Dan wen qimin: Qingdai falu yu shehui* 但問旗民：清代法律與社會 (Taipei: Wunan tushu gongsi, 2007), 54-77.

¹² Deng Zhicheng 鄧之誠, *Gudong suoji* 古董瑣記 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991), 201. The novel was written by eighteenth-century novelist Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715-63) and rapidly became popular reading among literati and commoners as well. It was perceived as a romance against Confucian value and therefore banned by local officials when they reconstructed the social order after the Taiping Rebellion was quelled. Yet this move only negatively proved the popularity of *Honglou meng*.

palace.¹³ No official record regarding this commission has been discovered, but it is believed that the wall paintings were done during or after the renovation of Palace of Eternal Spring in 1897.¹⁴

Although the paintings are seriously damaged by light, moisture and dust, some are still clear enough for identification. Among them, scenes centered on Madame Jia occupied the majority.¹⁵ For instance, scenes of her hosting the mid-autumn festival banquet and the retreat in the family's elaborate garden, Prospect Garden 大觀園, are included in the series. This scene is not clear enough for reproduction, but a similar depiction of this scene in the late Qing illustration of *Dream of the Red Chamber* vividly shows Madame Jia's dominance in the family household. Sitting at the most prestigious seat at the round table, the matriarch talks enthusiastically with her hands raised, and the two generations of her decedents at the table listen to her attentively (fig.C.4). This monumental novel contains 768 characters surrounding Madame Jia's grandson Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 and his cousin Lin Daiyu 林黛玉. The most powerful character in the novel, Madame Jia, is secondary in the narrative. The scenes centering on the matriarch of the Jia family instead of other classic episodes, such as Daiyu's burial of flowers, therefore imply the commissioner's sophisticated interest in Madame Jia. No direct evidence proves that Cixi was the commissioner of the wall paintings, but since the palace was her

¹³ Zhou Ruchang's article in 1981 was an early mention of these phenomenal wall paintings, but they have not raised in-depth scholarly interest until recent years. To my knowledge the most detailed discussion is Zhang Xiao's dissertation on the images of *Honglou meng*. Zhou Ruchang 周汝昌, "Honglou sibi zhu Changchun" 紅樓四壁駐長春, *Zijin Cheng* 6 (1981): 14-16; Zhang Xiao 張驍, "Qingdai *Honglou meng* de tuxiang shijie" 清代《紅樓夢》的圖像世界, (PhD diss., Zhongyang meishu xueyuan, 2012), 173-88. In terms of the painters involved in the commission, see Wang Zhongjie 王仲傑, "Changchun gong bihua de zuozhe" 長春宮壁畫的作者, *Zijin Cheng* 1 (1980): 7.

¹⁴ Liu Chang, Wang Shiwei, "Cong xiancun tuyang ziliao kan Qingdai wanqi Changchun gong gaizao gongcheng," 201-2.

¹⁵ For the identified subjects and the locations of the wall paintings, see Zhang Xiao 張驍, "Qingdai *Honglou meng* de tuxiang shijie," 175.

residence it is unreasonable to attribute the decoration to anyone other than the empress dowager.¹⁶

In other words, the matriarch of the Aisin Gioro family found the fictional matriarch of the Jia family an ideal character onto which her own identity and authority could be projected. Are these wall paintings not, then, Cixi's celebration of female agency that the widowhood had granted? Indeed, in the Confucian discourses women have been confined in various ways, such as foot binding and widow chastity. But as Dorothy Ko has carefully argued in her illuminating research on the history of foot binding, women's agency and subjectivity can be observed in the system, and upper-class women were able to transform such subjugation into meaningful self-expression.¹⁷ In the same vein, powerful matriarchs in late imperial China were positioned in an ambiguous corner of patrilineal society where they were free from the chains of chastity and legal deprivation and enjoyed respect from male descendants. Their presence in visual and material culture has not been examined with nuance, and I hope this dissertation has made Cixi's patronage a beacon for future research in this understudied field.

Cixi's self-expressions also help our consideration of how powerful modern Chinese women positioned themselves and exerted influence in the public domain. The two first ladies of modern China's rival regimes, the R.O.C. and the P.R.C., are the most intriguing examples.

General Jiang Jieshi's 蔣介石 (Chiang Kai-shek, 1887-1975) spouse Song Meiling 宋美齡

¹⁶ Wu Shijian recorded that Emperor Guangxu's consorts, Lady Jin 瑾妃 and Lady Zhen 珍妃, commissioned a large painting of the Dagan yuan and had the officials compose poems for the paintings. This has misled popular understanding as the consort sisters are often referred to as the commissioners of the wall paintings. This anecdote and the painting are neither found in NZHD nor in any public or private collection, and thus I take a reserved attitude toward the accuracy of this idea. Furthermore, Wu's account referred to a painting instead of wall paintings. Wu Shijian, *Qinggong ci*, 17.

¹⁷ In Ko's discussion, bound feet became status markers for women in the upper class. Feet binding thus gained momentum from women who sought to maintain or achieve the goals, which explained the fashions and the longevity of the seemingly cruel practice stemming from men's erotic desire. Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 199-205.

(Soong May-ling, 1897-2003) and Chairman Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 (1893-1976) wife Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-91) each inherited some aspects of Cixi's performance. On the one hand, although Wellesley-educated Song Meiling fashioned herself as a modern woman and gave a renowned speech lobbying for American aid for China's prolonged war with Japan in the U.S. Congress on February 18, 1943, she was also a keen practitioner of traditional Chinese art. She further developed this side of herself after the R.O.C. regime moved to Taiwan in 1949. When tradition underwent fundamental destruction during the Cultural Revolution in China, the first lady's performance of traditional art became a powerful propaganda, presenting the R.O.C. as the legitimate inheritor and keeper of Chinese culture. Amateur though she was, Song was an avid painter and learned from eminent painters such as Huang Junbi 黃君璧 (1898-1991). The channels used to publicize her works, stamps and coins for instance, may be new, but the attempt to construct a cultured, refined image of the *guomu* 國母, "mother of the state," was no different from what Cixi had done.¹⁸

Jiang Qing, on the other hand, is a controversial political figure whose participation in culture focused on popular and performance arts. The former actress's support of the *yangbanxi* 樣板戲, "revolutionary opera or Model Opera," has made her the godmother of the model theatrical works and harbinger of revolutionary art during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹ She also instructed cultural policies that deeply influenced the direction of Chinese art. The refusal of

¹⁸ Song Meiling's orchid painting was selected as one of the decorations on the back side of the one cent coin issued in 1971. Four of her paintings were chosen as the subjects of the stamp set in memory of Jiang Jieshi issued on October 31, 1975. Another eight works were turned into stamps in 1977 and 1987, respectively. For some of the original paintings reproduced into stamps, see Wang Yaquan 王亞權, Li E 李萼 eds., *Jiang furen guohua ce* 蔣夫人國畫冊 (Taipei: Zhonghua funü fangong lianhehui, 1980), 12, 13, 15, 16.

¹⁹ Paul Clark, "Model Theatrical Works and the Remodeling of the Cultural Revolution," in Richard King ed., *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-76* (Vancouver, Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 173-4.

tradition in her discussion with arts workers in November 1966 marks a stark contrast to Song's cultural agenda. "It is necessary to take a critical attitude toward our legacies, to weed through the old and bring forth the new, to make the past serve the present, and to make the foreign serve China," she claimed.²⁰ Furthermore, Jiang's populist ideology brought modern Chinese art to the ultimate dominance of realism and propaganda art, whose impact still lingers in contemporary Chinese art.

As such, Cixi's strategies of staging agency did not go to the mausoleum with her. They had been implanted in Chinese people's minds, ready for female political figures of later generations to adopt and adapt. While she concluded the self-expressions of powerful women in dynastic China, her legacy in the centuries that follow continues and awaits future exploration.

²⁰ "Jiang Qing's Discussion with Arts Workers," in Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian eds. *Art and China's Revolution* (New York: Asia Society; New Haven: In association with Yale University Press, 2008), 220.

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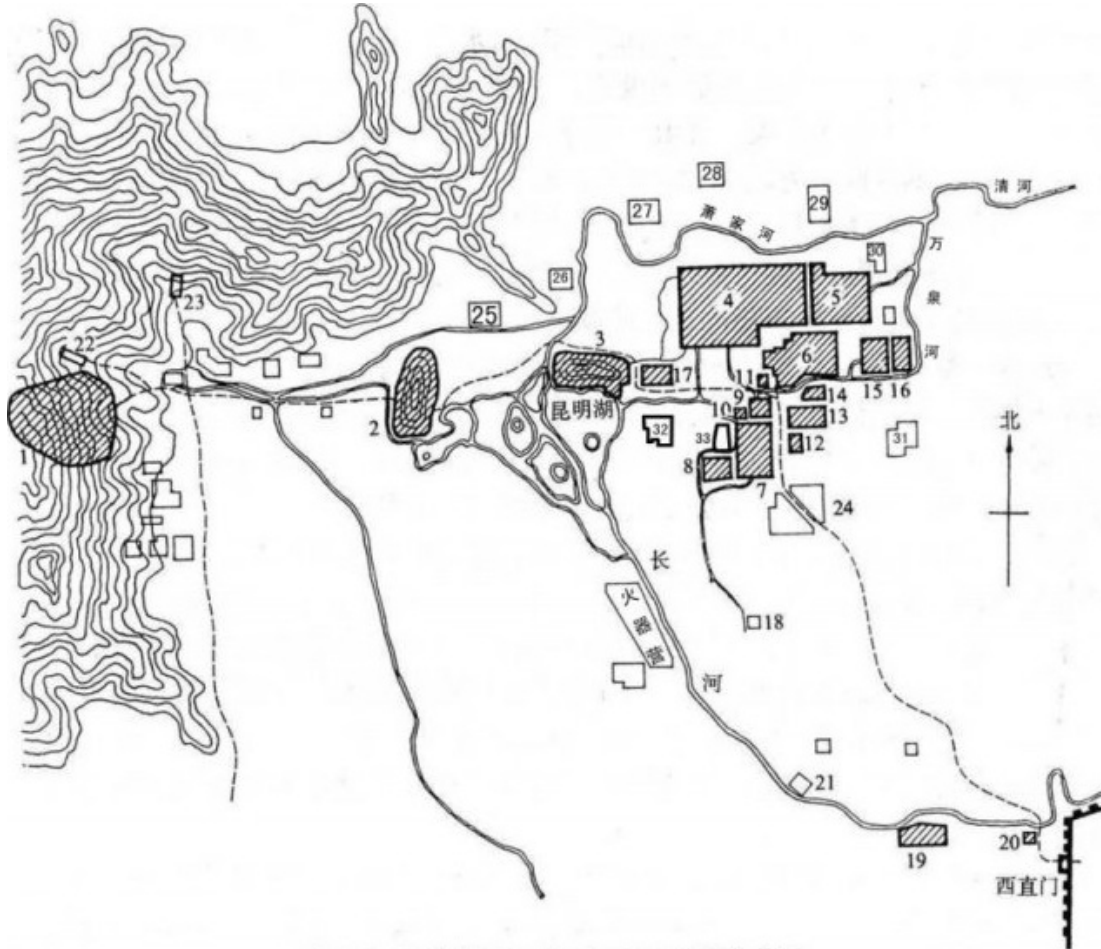
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<http://kande0.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ap/chinese-archi/index.html>

<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.pdf.N08974.html/f/449/N08974-449.pdf>;

Map 1

Qing imperial precincts in the western suburbs of Beijing



(After *Yihe yuan*, 2000, fig. 7-1)

3: Gardens of Nurtured Harmony (Yihe yuan 頤和園)

4-6: Gardens of Perfect Brightness (Yuanming yuan 圓明園) complex

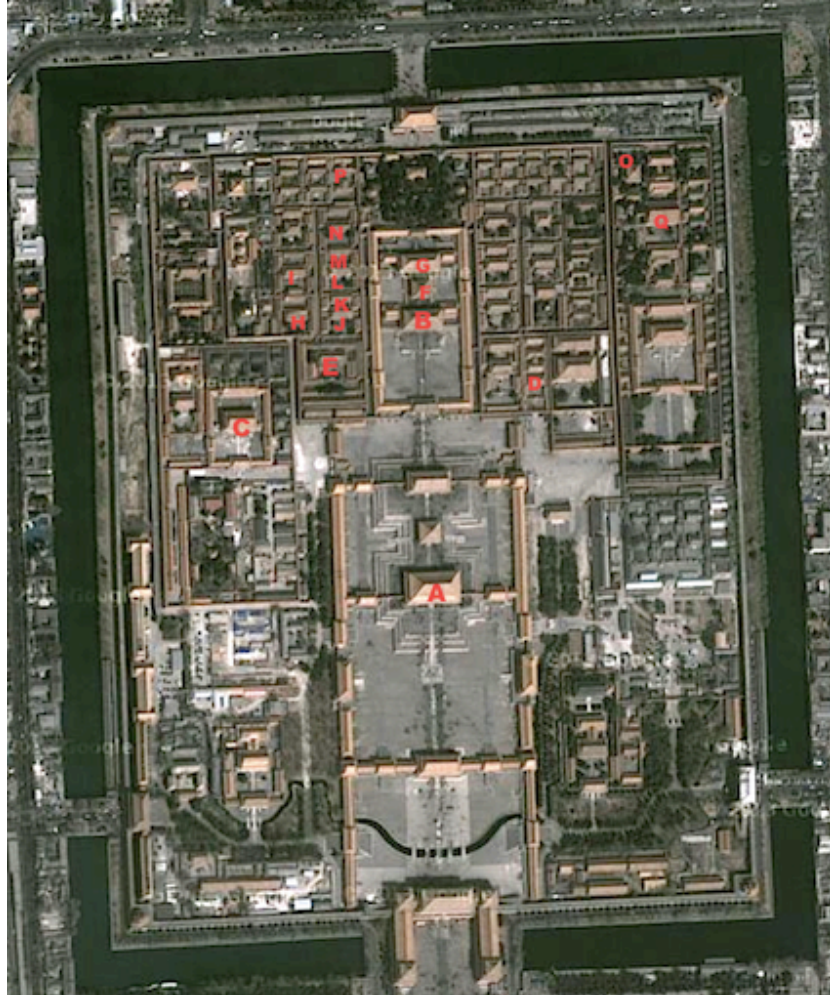
4: Gardens of Perfect Brightness proper

5: Gardens of Eternal Spring (Changchun yuan 長春園)

6: Gardens of Elegant Spring (Qichun yuan 綺春園); Gardens of Myriad Springs (Wanchun Yuan 萬春園)

7: Gardens of Variegated Spring (Changchun yuan 暢春園)

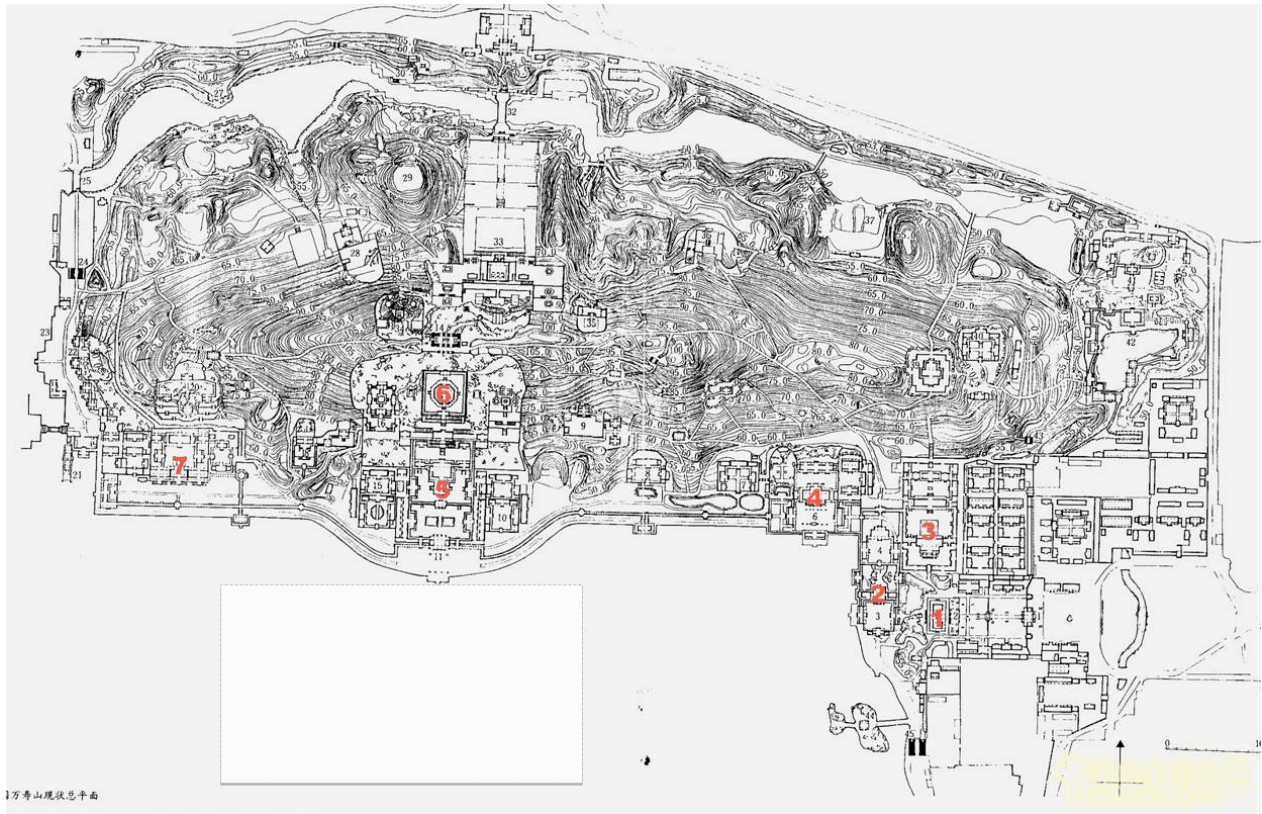
Map 2 Plan of the Forbidden City



- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>A: Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihe dian 太和殿)
 B: Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqing gong 乾清宮)
 C: Palace of Compassion and Tranquility (Cining gong 慈寧宮)
 D: Palace of Nurturing Joy (Yuqing gong 毓慶宮)
 E: Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxin dian 養心殿)
 F: Hall of Celestial and Terrestrial Union (Jiaotai Dian 交泰殿)
 G: Palace of Earthly Tranquility (Kunning gong 坤寧宮)
 H: Palace of Brightness and Auspiciousness (Qixiang Gong 啟祥宮)
 I: Palace of Eternal Spring (Changchun gong 長春宮)
 K: Hall of Manifest Origin (Tiyuan dian 體元殿)
 L: Palace of Terrestrial Assistance (Yikun gong 翊坤宮)
 N: Palace of Concentrated Beauty (Chuxiu gong 儲秀宮)</p> | <p>O: Temple of the Buddha Sun (Fori lou 佛日樓)
 P: Study of Fresh Fragrance (Shufang zhai 漱芳齋)
 Q: Hall of Pleasant Longevity (Leshou tang 樂壽堂)</p> |
|--|--|

Map 3

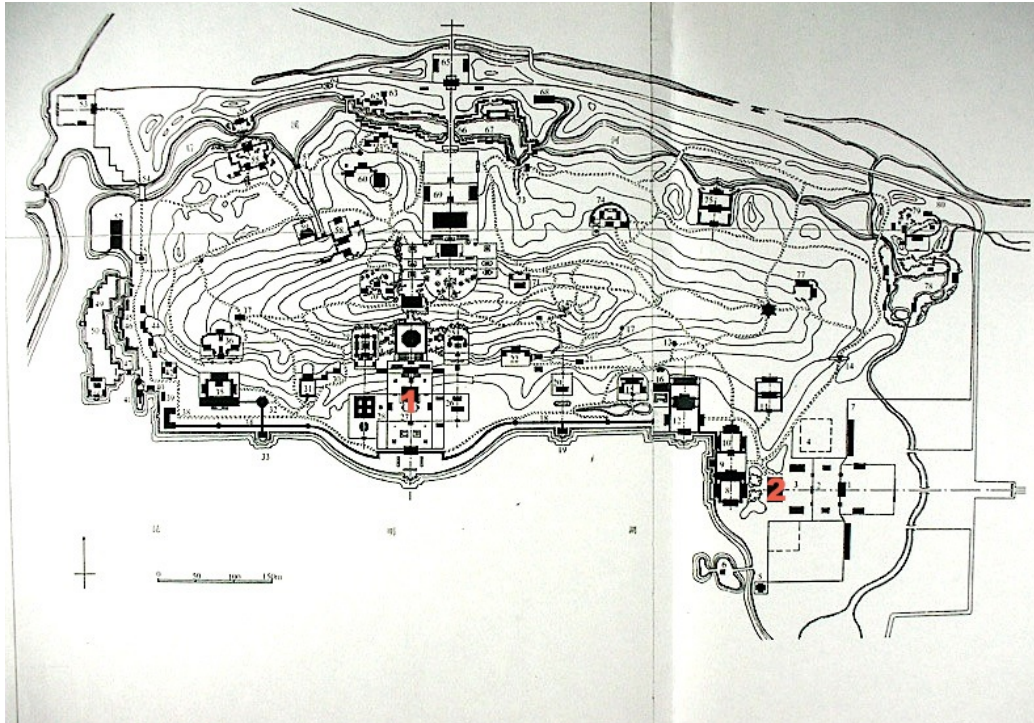
Plan of the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony



- 1: Hall of Benevolence and Longevity (Renshou Dian 仁壽殿)
- 2: Hall of Jade Billows (Yulan tang 玉瀾堂)
- 3: Garden of Virtuous Harmony (Dehe yuan 德和園) Theater House
- 4: Hall of Happiness in Longevity (Leshou tang 樂壽堂)
- 5: Hall of Dispelling Clouds (Paiyun Dian 排雲殿)
- 6: Tower of Buddhist Incense (Foxiang ge 佛香閣)
- 7: Pavilion for Listening to Orioles (Tingli guan 聽鷓館)

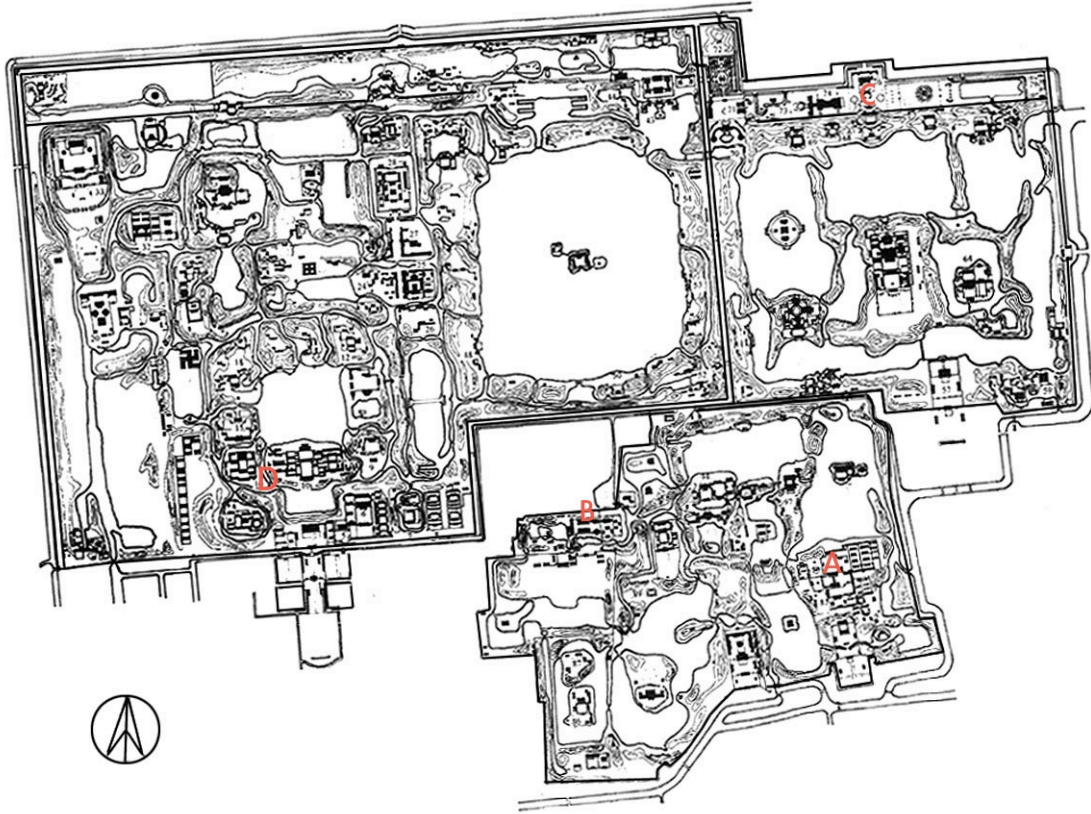
Map 4

Plan of the Gardens of Clear Ripples



- 1: Temple of Recompense and Longevity (Dabaoen yanshousi 大報恩延壽寺)
- 2: Hall of Benevolence and Longevity (Renshou dian 仁壽殿)

Map 5
Plan of the Gardens of Great Brightness



A: Hall of Diffuse Spring (Fuchun tang 敷春堂); Spring United between Heaven and Earth (Tiandi yijiachun 天地一家春)

B: Study of Clear Summer Qingxia zhai 清夏齋); Hall of Clear Summer (Qingxia tang 清夏堂)

C: Hall of the Calm Seas (Haiyan tang 海宴堂)

D: Hall of Prudent Virtue (Shende tang 慎德堂)

Figures

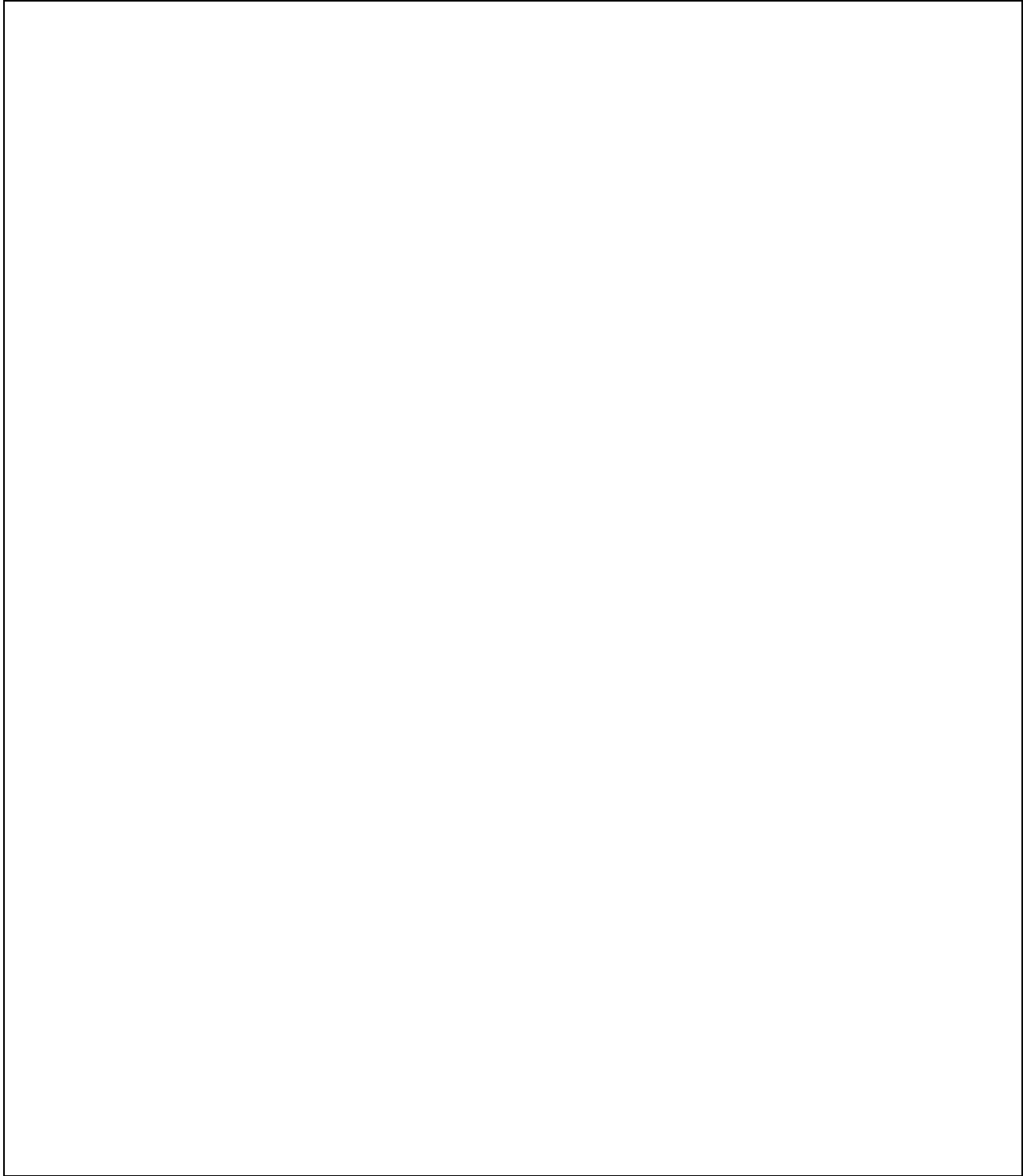


Fig.0.1

Hubert Vos, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1906
Oil on canvas, 196 x 123.6 cm
Fogg Museum at Harvard University, Boston
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

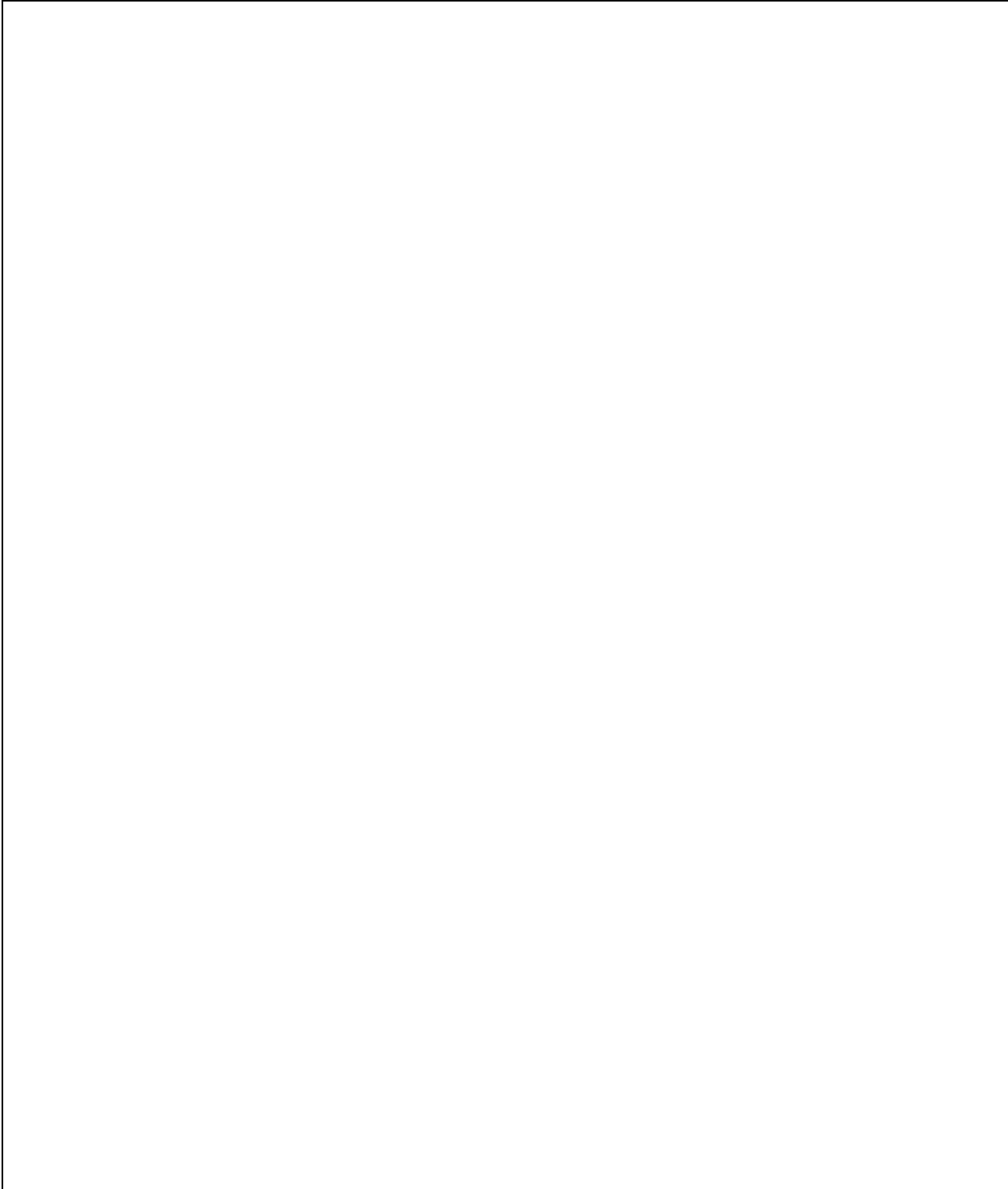


Fig.0.2

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1903
Hand-colored gelatin silver print, 23.1 x 17.2 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.0.3

Hubert Vos, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1905

Oil on canvas, 200 x 121.6 cm

Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, Beijing

(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.1

Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang*, early 17th century
Colors on silk.

Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 1.2

Anonymous court painter, *Portrait of Empress Xiaozhen*, c.1862-74.

Colors on silk, 130.5 x 67.5 cm

Palace Museum, Beijing

(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.3

Anonymous court painter, *Benevolent Bamboos and Extended Clarity*, c.1862-74

Colors on silk, 130.5 x 67.5 cm

Palace Museum, Beijing

(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.4
Anonymous court painter, *Empress Xiaoshen Cheng
Appreciating Bamboo*, c. 1790-1833.
Colors on silk
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.5
Anonymous court painter, *Emperor Kangxi Writing in
Daily Robe*, late 17th century.
Colors on silk, 50.5 x 31.9cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.6A
Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Cixi Playing Game with Prince Gong*, c. 1881-84
Colors on silk, 235 x 144.3cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.6B
Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Cixi Playing Game with Prince Gong*, detail

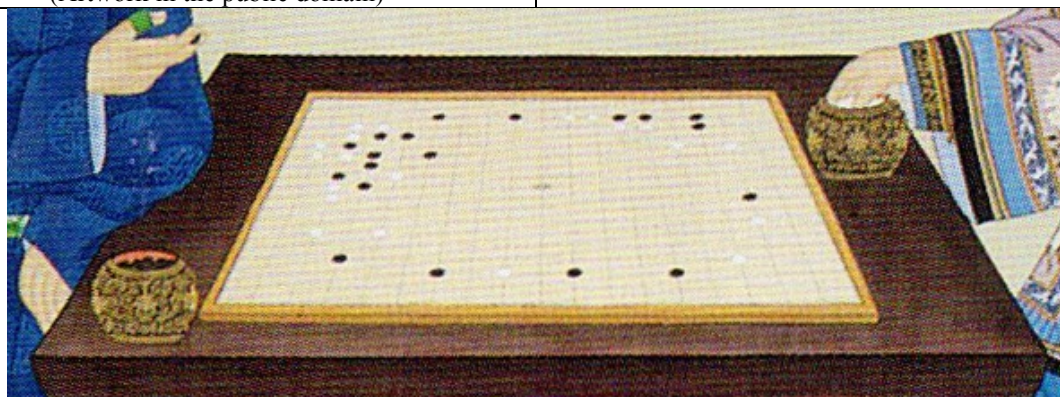


Fig.1.6C
Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Cixi Playing Game with Prince Gong*, detail.



Fig.1.7
Anonymous court painter, *Portrait of the Tongzhi Emperor in Daily Robe*, c.1875-6.
Colors on silk, 182.5 x 9 8cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

Fig.1.8
Felice Beato, *Photograph of Prince Gong*, November 2, 1860
Albumen print, 16.6 x 13 cm
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig. 1.9A
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Xiaogin in Ceremony Garments*, late 19th century.
 Colors on paper 130.5 x 67.5 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)

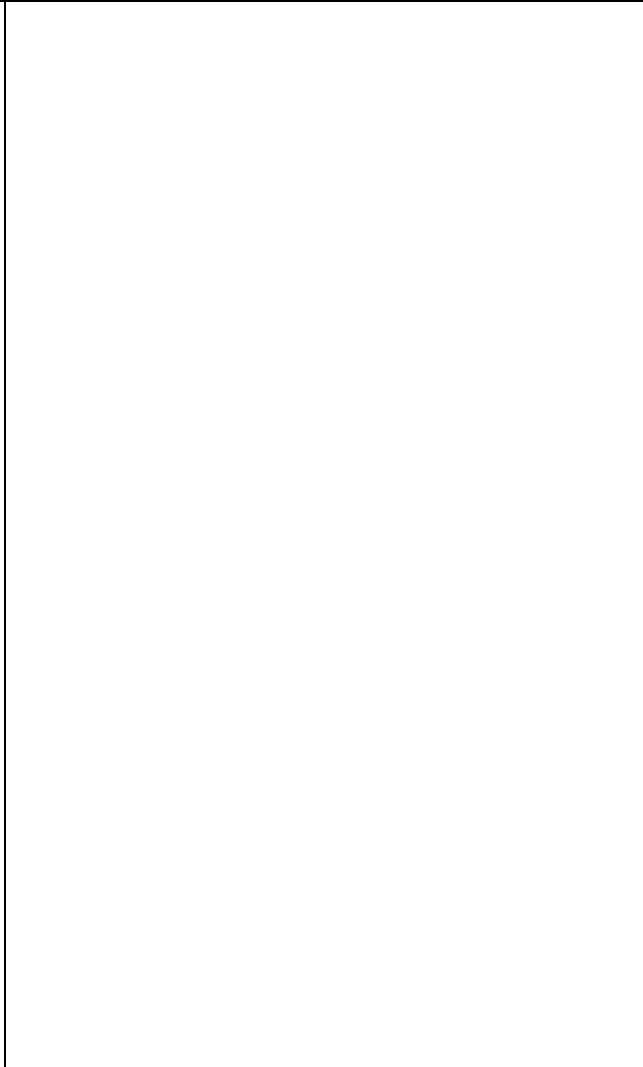


Fig. 1.10
 Attri. Shen Zhenlin, *Portrait of a Matriarch and Her Family in a Summer Garden*, c.1850s
 Colors on silk, 129.54 x 287.02cm
 Newark Museum, Newark
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig. 1.9B
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Dowager Xiaogin in Ceremony Garments*, detail



Fig.1.11

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1903
 Gelatin silver print, 18 x 24.3 cm
 Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.12

Anonymous court painter, *Twelve Beauties*, detail, 18th
 century.
 Colors on paper, 184 x 98 cm.
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.13

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi and the Entourage*, 1903
 Gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 17.8 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.14A

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1903-4
 Gelatin silver print, 17.9 x 24 cm
 Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.14B

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, detail.



Fig.1.15

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi and the Entourage*, detail, 1903-4
 Gelatin silver print, 18.5 x 24.5 cm
 Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.16

Illustration from chapter fourteen of *Record of the Spirit Returning to the Peony Pavilion* by Tang Xianzu with woodblock illustration by Huang Mingqi, 1617.
 20.9 x 12.5 cm
 National Palace Museum, Taipei
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.17

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, detail, 1903-4
 Gelatin silver print, 17.9 x 24 cm.
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)

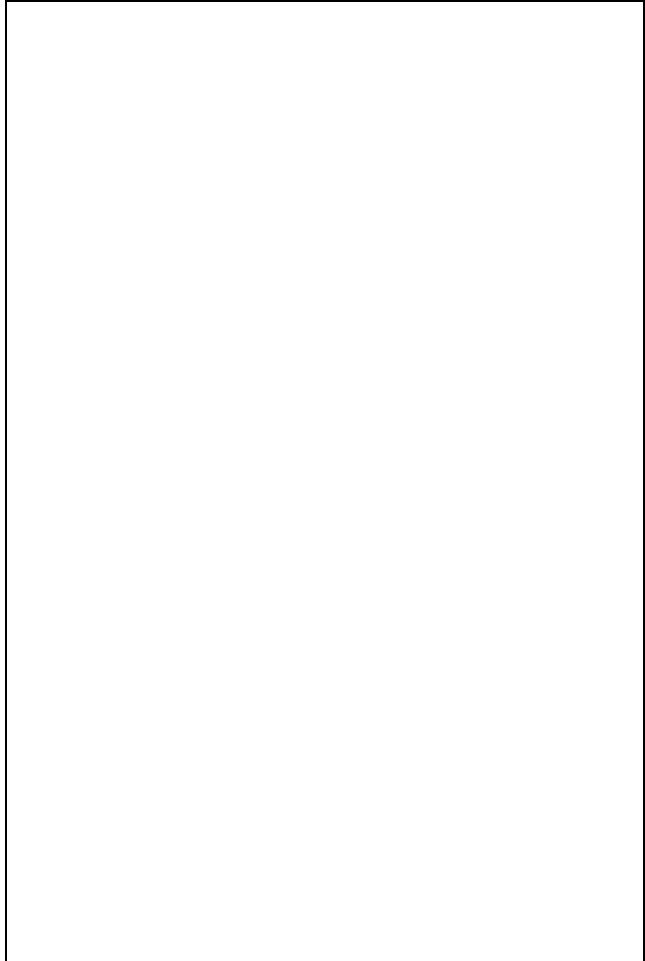


Fig.1.18
 Anonymous, *Bodhisattva of Nine Lotuses*, 1587.
 Ink rubbing, 234 x 145 cm
 National Library, Beijing
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig.1.19
 Anonymous court artist, *Portrait of Empress Xiaoquan Cheng*, detail, c.1821-35.
 Colors on paper
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (After *Qingdai dihou xiang* [1931], 77)

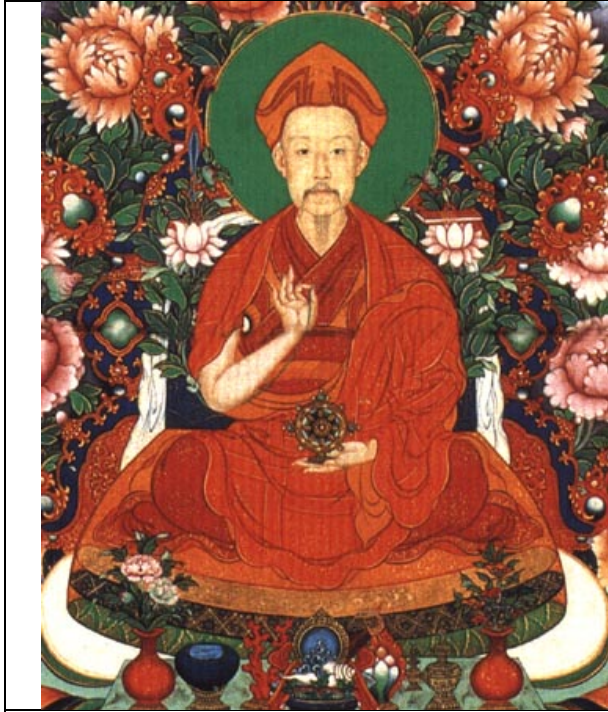


Fig. 1.20
Anonymous court painter, *Emperor Qianlong as the
Manjusri Bodhisattva*, detail, c.1736-95
Colors on silk, 132.9 x 66 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

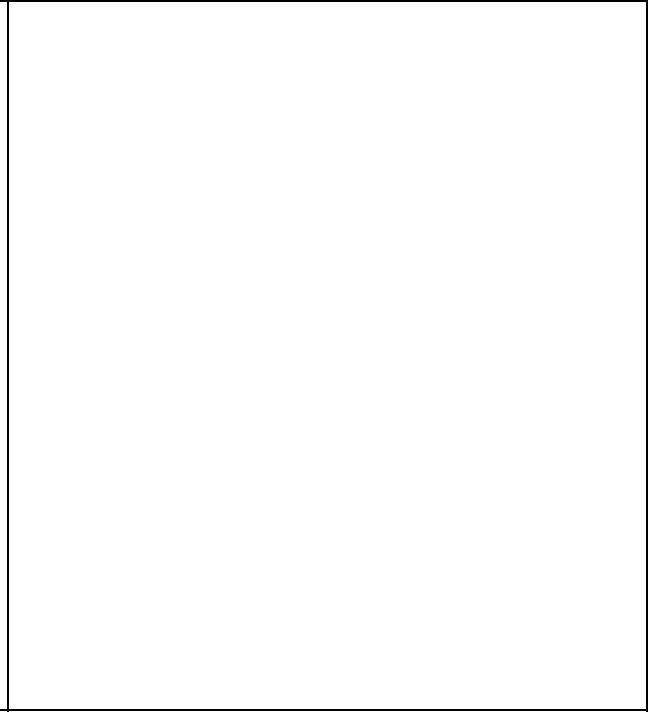


Fig. 1.21
Frontispiece of the *Heart Sutra* inscribed by Cixi. Late
19th to early 20th century
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.1.22A
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Xiaozhen in the Costume of Buddha*, late 19th to early 20th century.
 Colors on silk, 191.2 x 100cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.23
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Xiaozhen in the Costume of Guanyin*, late 19th to early 20th century.
 Colors on silk, 187.4 x 99 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing



Fig.1.22B
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Xiaozhen in the Costume of Buddha*, detail.

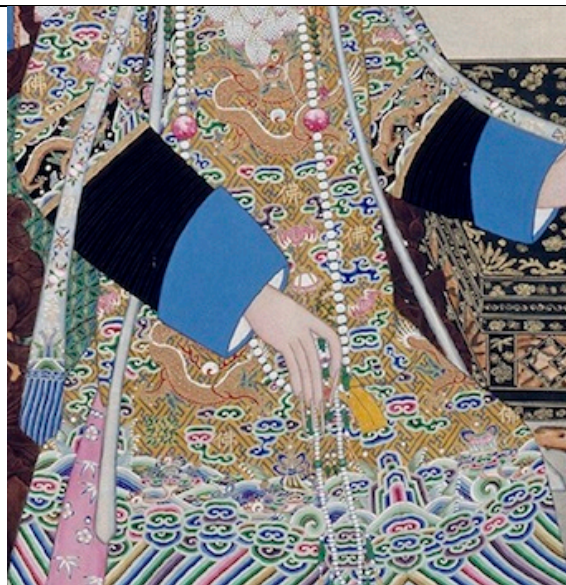


Fig.1.22C
 Anonymous court painter, *Empress Xiaozhen in the Costume of Buddha*, detail.



Fig. 1.24A

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi and the Entourage in Costume*, 1903
 Gelatin silver print, 23.5 x 16.3 cm
 Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 1.24B

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi and the Entourage in Costume*, detail, 1903



Fig. 1.25

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi and the Entourage in Costume*, detail, 1903
 Gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 17.8 cm
 Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.26 A

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager in the Guanyin Costume*, 1903.

Gelatin silver print, 17 x 24.3 cm

Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.

(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.1.26 B

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager in the Guanyin Costume*, detail, 1903.



Fig.1.27
Cover of *Le Rire*, July 1900



Fig.1.28
Frontispiece of *Letters from China*, 1911.

	
<p>Fig.1.29A Yu Xunling, <i>Empress Dowager Cixi</i>, 1903 Hand-colored print, size unknown Palace Museum, Beijing (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig.1.30 Yu Xunling, <i>Empress Dowager Cixi</i>, 1903 Hand-colored gelatin silver print, size unknown The Blair House, Washingto D.C. (Photograph: David Hogge)</p>
<p>Fig.1.29B Yu Xunling, <i>Empress Dowager Cixi</i>, detail, 1903 (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	



Fig.1.31A
 Katherine Carl, *Portrait of Her Majesty of Empress Dowager Cixi*, 1904
 Oil on canvas, 98.9 x 300.1 cm
 Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.
 (After *With the Empress Dowager* [1905], 304)



Fig.1.31B
 Katherine Carl, *Portrait of Her Majesty of Empress Dowager Cixi*, detail



Fig. 2.1
Aubergine porcelain fish tank decorated with flower-and-bird motif, 1875-76
D: 69cm; H: 55 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig 2.14
Woman's aubergine silk riding jacket, 1862-1908
L: 73 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

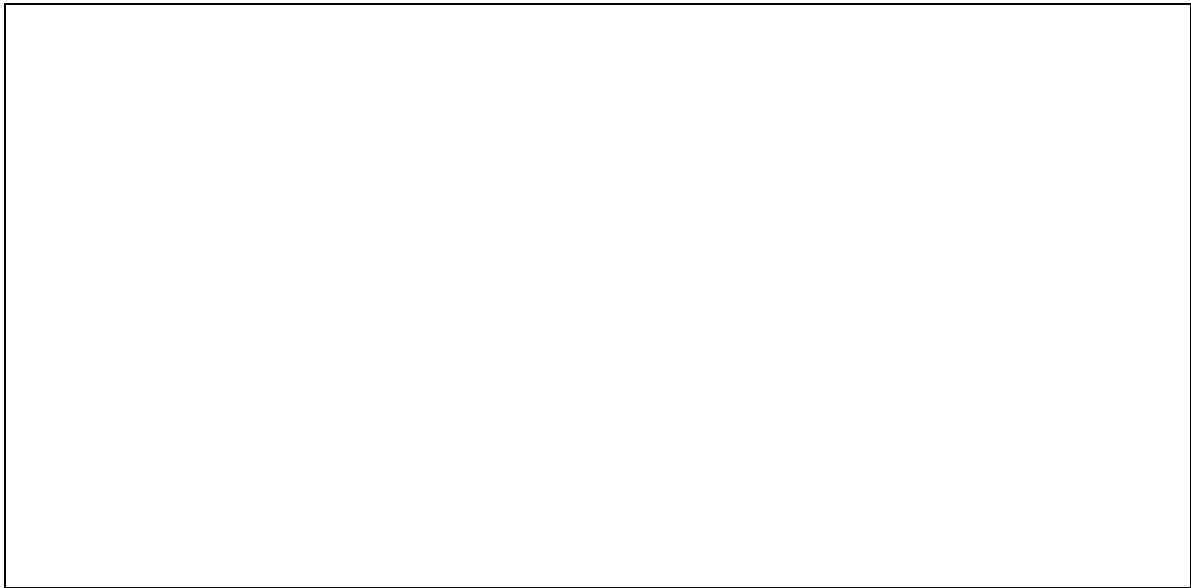


Fig. 2.2
Informal Robe, early 18th century
Excavated from the Tomb of Prince Rongxian
Chifeng Municipal Museum, China
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

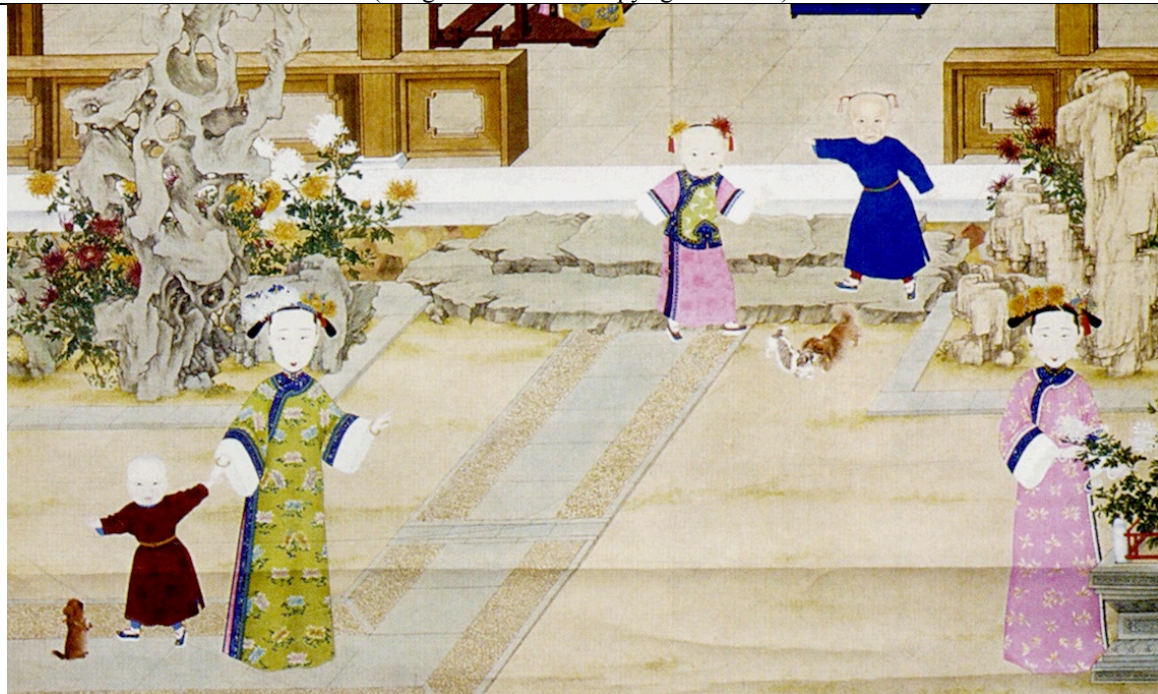


Fig. 2.3
Anonymous court painter, *Autumn Garden Brimming with Joy*, detail, early 19th century
Colors on paper, 181 x 202.5 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.4
Dark Navy Blue Satin Waistcoat, 1863
L: 138 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.5
Yu Xuling, Empress Dowager Cixi with Entourage, detail, 1904
Glass plate negative, 24.1 x 17.8 cm
Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.12
Woman's informal waistcoat, 1862-1908
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.6

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, detail, 1903-4
 Glass plate negative, 24.1 x 17.8 cm
 Freer Gallery, Washington D.C.
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.7

Yu Xunling, *Empress Dowager Cixi*, detail, 1903-4
 Gelatin silver print
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.13

Female python robe of purple satin, 1862-1908
 L: 133.5 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.8
Yu Xunling, Empress Dowager Cixi, detail, 1903-4
Gelatin silver print
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 2.9
Anonymous court painter, Stage Painting of *Cave of Hongxiang*, 1851-61
Colors on silk, 56.5 x 56 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig. 2.10
Stage costume of Buddha, 1875-1908
L: 147 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.11
Stage costume of Guanyin, 1862-74
L: 124 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.15
Yellow porcelain bowl decorated with bamboo, 1871-72
D: 20.7 cm; H: 9.7 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

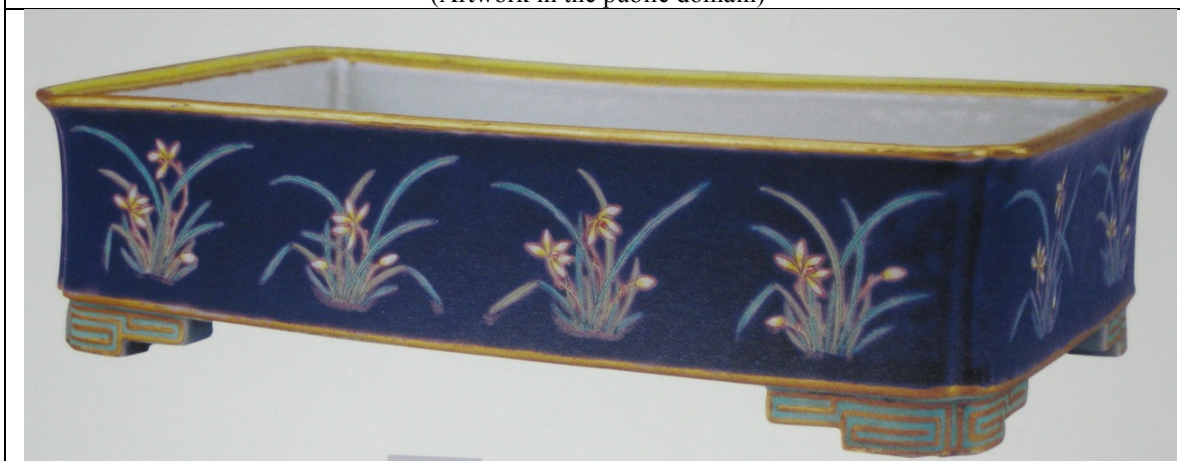


Fig. 2.16
Purple porcelain flower basin decorated with orchid, 1871-72
H: 6.7 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.17

Navy blue porcelain flower basin decorated with magpie and plum blossoms, 1875-76
D: 18.7 cm; H: 4.5 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.18

Green porcelain fish tank decorated with ink flower and bird, 1875-76
D: 42 cm, H: 45 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.19
 Porcelain cup decorated with balsam pears, 1871-
 72
 D: 7 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)

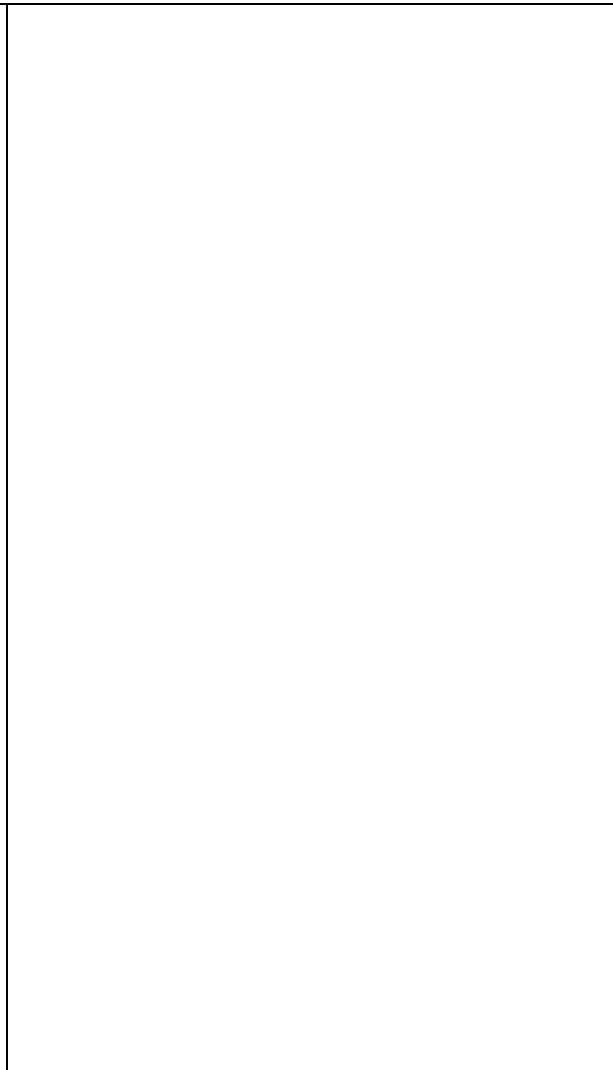


Fig. 2.20
 No. 9 design drawing of the Dayazhai ware, 1874
 Colors on paper, 48.1 x 25.3 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Image removed for copyright issues)



Fig. 2.21
 Yellow porcelain flower pot decorated with ink flower and bird, 1875-76
 H: 15.7 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.22
 Yellow-ground bowl decorated with orchid, rock and fungus, 1723-35
 D: 12 cm
 National Palace Museum, Taipei
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.23
Dark pink enameled porcelain vase with peony,
1654-1722
H: 23.7 cm
National Palace Museum, Taipei
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.24
Aubergine-ground vase decorated with Chinese crab
apple flowers, 1875-76
H: 24.5 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.25
 Green-ground vase decorated with peony and
 cricket, 1875-76
 H: 22.2 cm
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Artwork in the public domain)

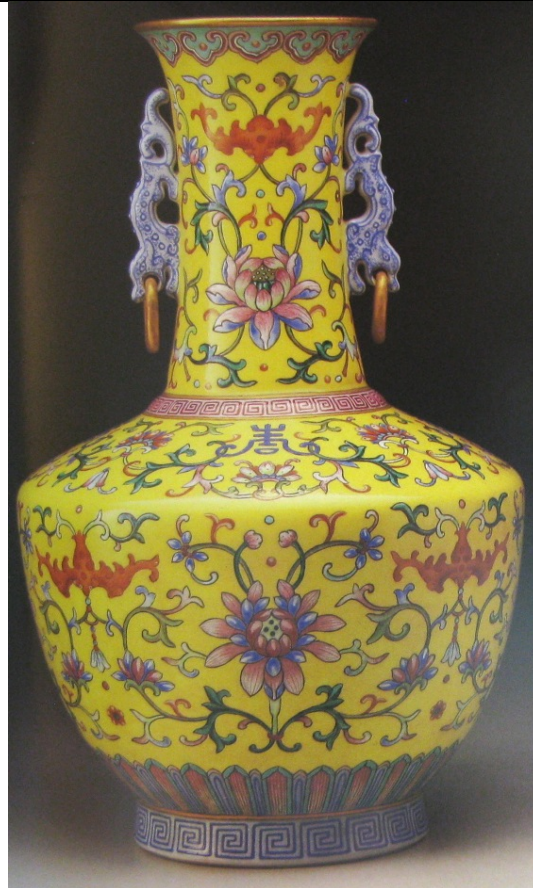


Fig. 2.26
 Yellow-ground vase with ring-handles, 1736-95
 H: 26.6 cm
 National Palace Museum, Taipei
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.27
Yellow-ground flowerpot with flowers
c.1884
H: 11.6 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.28
Porcelain brush stand, 1875-1908
H: 12 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 2.29
Porcelain plate incised with dragon on the biscuit and decorated with in rock and flower in yellow, green
and brown glazes,
1875-1908
D: 47.3 cm
The Kwan Collection, Hong Kong
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig. 2.30
Porcelain bowl incised with dragon on the biscuit and decorated with rare fruits in yellow, green and brown
glazes, 1654-1722
D: 24.9 cm
Nanjing Museum, Nanjing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.31
Porcelain globular vase with peach and bats,
1875-1908
H: 95.5 cm
Nanjing Museum, Nanjing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.32
Porcelain globular vase with peach and bats, 1735-99
H: 50.5 cm
National Palace Museum, Taipei
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.33

Lidded cup with wisteria and magpie, 1874-1908

D: 10.7 cm, H: 8.9 cm

National Palace Museum, Taipei
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.34

Lidded cup with wisteria and magpie, 1874-1908

D: 10.5 cm; H: 5.5 cm

Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig. 2.36
Porcelain flower pot with wisteria and magpie, 1874-1908
Size unknown
National Palace Museum, Taipei
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

<p>Fig. 3.1 Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Fu</i>, 1902 Ink on silk, 64 x 66 cm Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig. 3.2A Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Shou</i>, 1902 Ink on silk, 64 x 66 cm Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>
<p>Fig.3.2B Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Shou</i>, detail, 1902 (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig.3.2C Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Shou</i>, detail, 1902 (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>

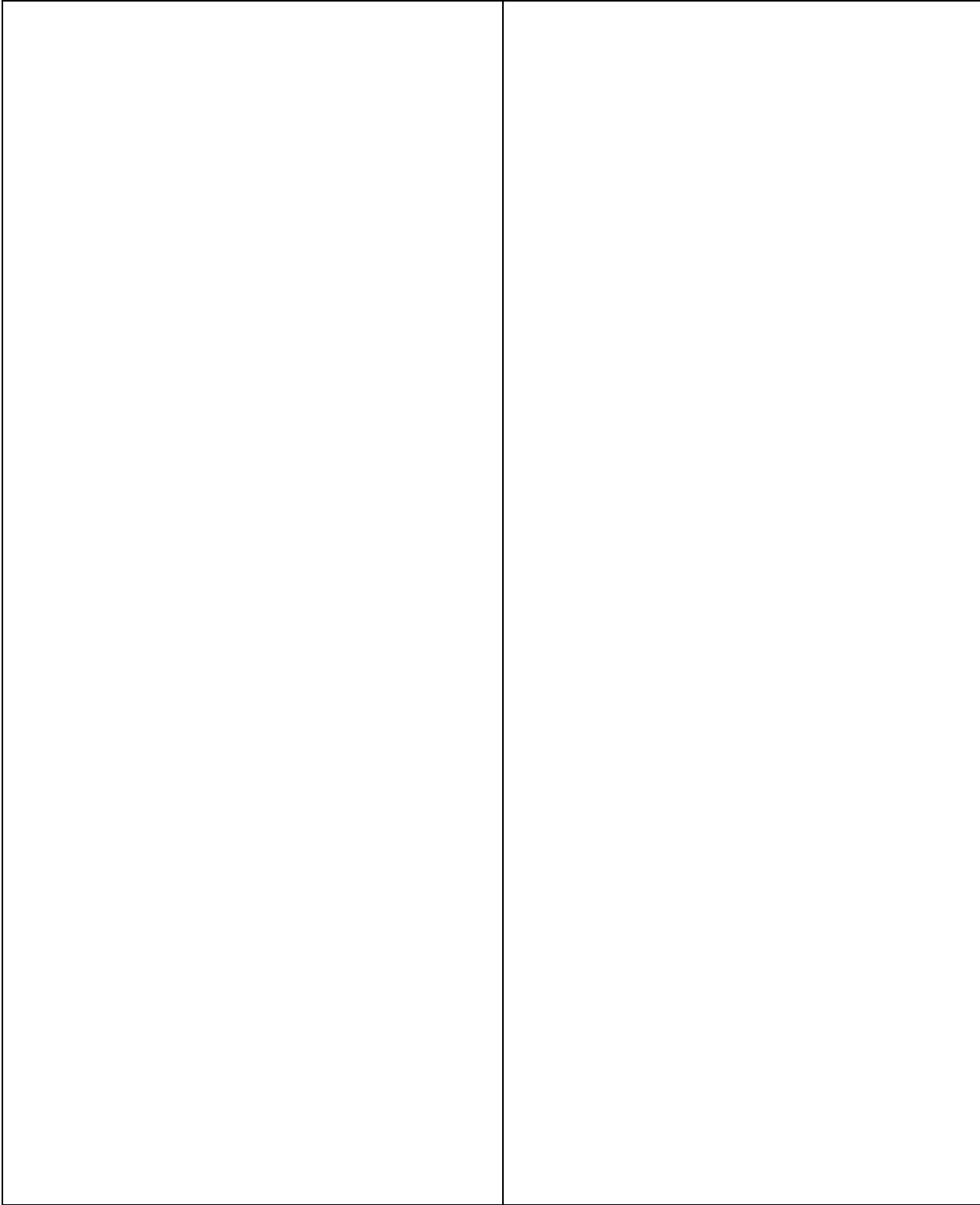


Fig. 3.3A
Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, *Peony*, 1902
Ink and color on paper, 62.4 x 37.6 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig.3.5
Miao Jiahui, *Peony*, 1904
Ink and colors in paper, 116.8 x 57.1 cm
Private Collection, Oxford, England
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

<p style="text-align: center;">3.3B Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Peony</i>, detail (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3.3C Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Peony</i>, detail (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Fig 3.4A Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Pair of Goldfish</i>, 1890 Ink and color on silk, 17.5 x 44.2 cm Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Fig 3.4B Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Pair of Goldfish</i>, detail, 1890 Ink and color on silk, 17.5 x 44.2 cm Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>



Fig.3.6
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Smartweeds Mantis*, and a Kind of *Chrysanthemum*, late 19th to early 20th century
Ink on paper, 19.5 x 27 cm
Denver City Museum
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

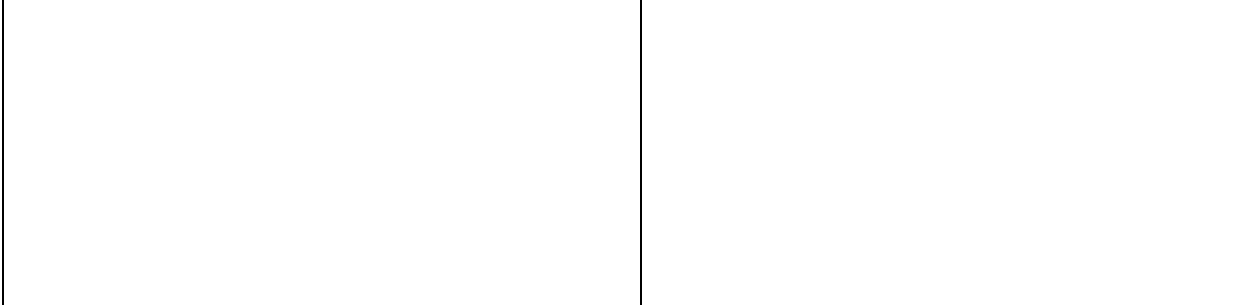




Fig. 3.7
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Grapes*, 1889
Ink and colors on paper, 128 x 65.5 cm
Private Collection, China
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig. 3.9
Attri. Shunzhi Emperor, *Zhong Kui*, 1655
Ink on paper, 132.4 x 63.6 cm
National Palace Museum, Taipei
(Artwork in the public domain)

<p>Fig. 3.8 Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Blessings Arrive from Heaven</i>, c.1882-1908 Cinnabar on paper Palace Museum, Beijing (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig. 3.10 Anonymous, <i>Prints of Zhong Kui</i>, late 19th century Color prints, 41. X 53.5 cm Private Collection, Taiwan (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>

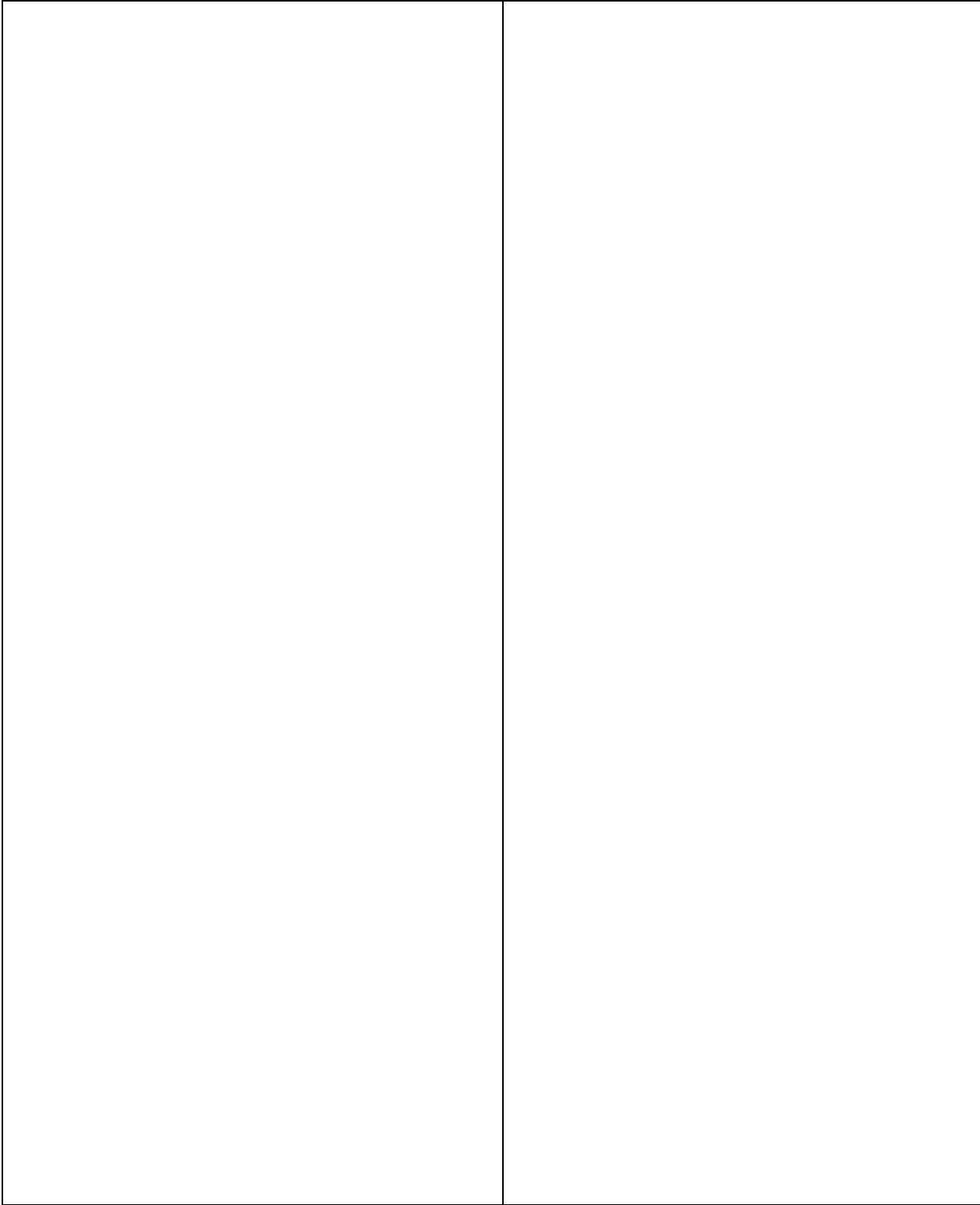


Fig. 3.11
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Chrysanthemums*, c.1887-8
Cinnabar rubbings
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig. 3.12
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Phoenix Resting on the
Chinese Wutong Parasol Tree*, 1888
Ink on paper
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

<p>Fig. 3.13 Attri. Tang Zhengzhong, <i>Fragrant dreams of Luofu</i>, 1206 Ink and color on silk, 136 x 65 cm Private Collection, China (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig. 3.14 Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Copy of the Fragrant Dreams of Luofu</i>, 1889 Ink on paper, 130 x 65 cm Private Collection, China (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>

諭在廷王大臣等同看朕奉兩宮
 皇太后懿旨本月初五日據蔡壽祺奏恭
 親王辦事徇情貪墨多招物議種種情形
 等弊嗣此重情何以能辦公事查辦雖無
 實據是出有因究屬請察知事難以懸揣
 恭親王從議政以來妄自尊大諸多狂放
 以仗爵高權重目無君上看朕沖齡諸多
 挾致往、諳始離間不可細問每日名見
 趾高氣揚言語之間許多取巧清聖朝談話道此情形
 以後何以能辦國事塔不即早宣示朕歸
 政之時何以能用人正嗣此種、重夫
 情形姑免深究方知朕寬大之恩恭親王
 著毋庸在軍機處議政革去一切差使不
 准干預公事方是朕保全之至意特諭

Fig. 3.15

Empress Dowager Cixi's edict draft written in 1865
 National Palace Museum, Taipei
 (Artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 3.16

Empress Dowager Cixi, *Heart Sutra*, detail, 1904
 Cinnabar on paper
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)

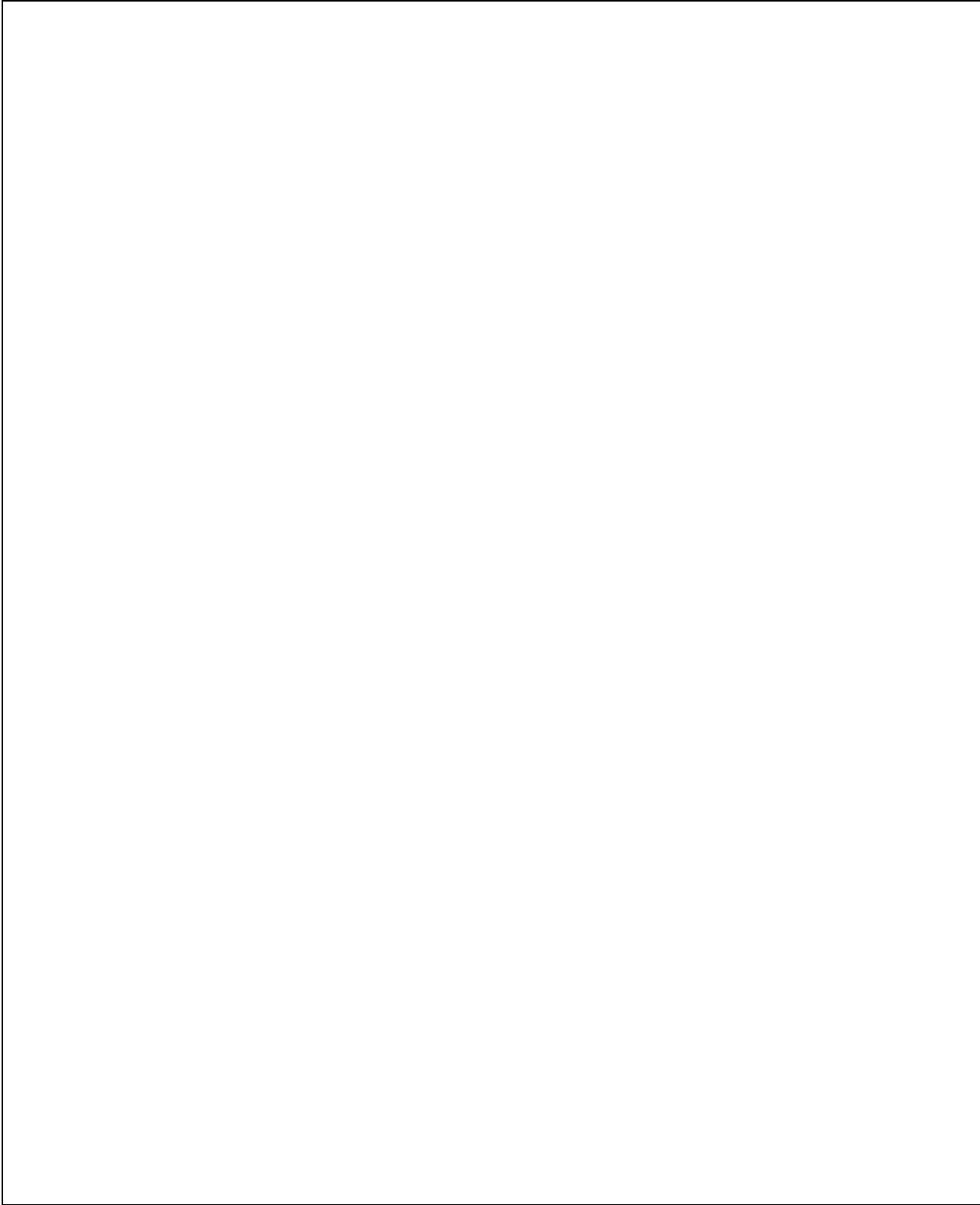


Fig. 3.17
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Shou*, 1902
Ink on paper, 170 x 92.5 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.3.18

The plaque “Treasured Mirror of Great Brightness” on the gate of the Hall of Benevolence in Longevity in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony, Beijing
(Photograph: Ying-chen Peng)

Fig.3.24

The rubbing of Yan Zhenqing’s *Prabhutaratna Pagoda Stele*, detail, 752.
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



(A)



(B)



(C)

Fig. 3.19A, B, C
Empress Dowager Cixi, *Blessing, Fortune and Longevity*, 1888
Cinnabar on paper, 128.3 x 62 cm
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 3.20
Empress Dowager Cixi's inscription on *Fish*, 1904
Colors and ink on paper
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

<p>Fig. 3.21 Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Plum Blossom</i>, 1889 Ink and colors on paper, 179.5 x 80.5 cm Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>	<p>Fig. 3.22A, B Attri. Empress Dowager Cixi, <i>Pine and Fungi</i>, 1897 Ink and colors on paper, 122.5 x 60.9 cm (painting only) Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Image removed for copyright reasons)</p>

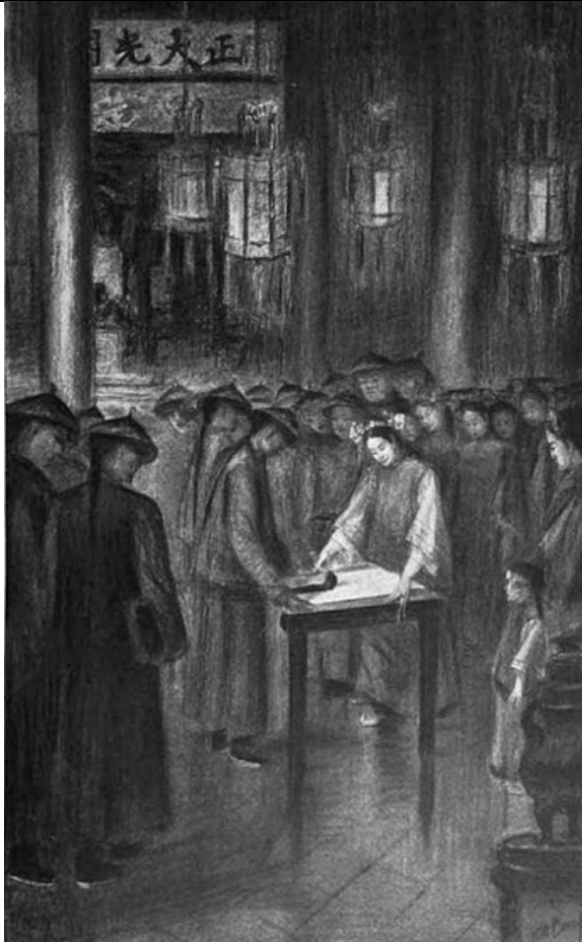


Fig. 3.23

Katharine A. Carl's sketch of Cixi's calligraphy performance.
After *With the Empress Dowager* [1905], 136.

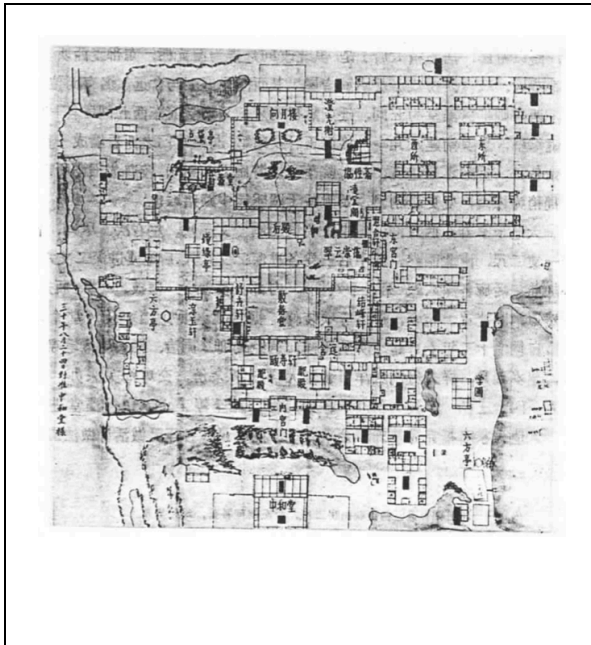


Fig 4.1A
Plan of the Hall of Spreading Spring in the Gardens
of Variegated Spring
National Library, Beijing
(After “Tongzhi chongxiu Yuanming yuan shiliao,”
[1933], fig.35)

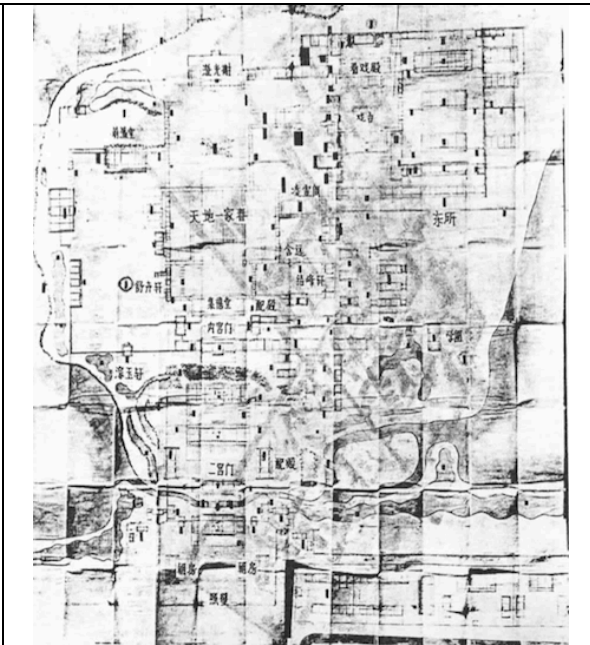


Fig 4.1B
Plan of the Spring Palace in the Gardens of Myriad
Springs
National Library, Beijing
(After “Tongzhi chongxiu Yuanming yuan shiliao,”
[1933], fig.36)

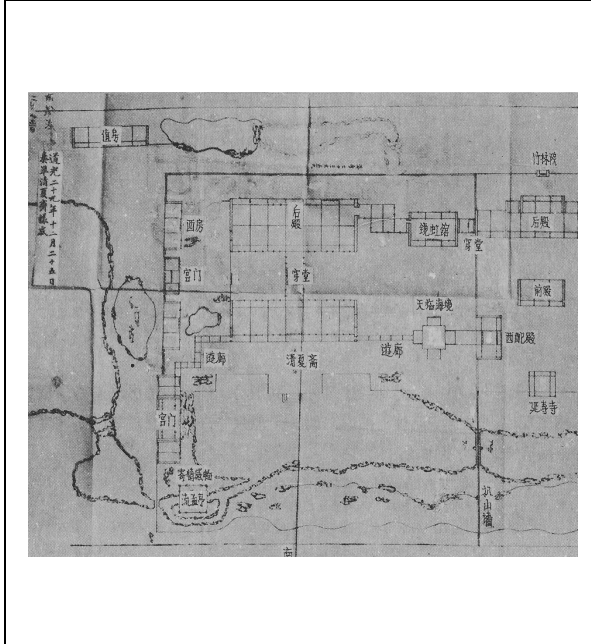


Fig 4.2A
Plan of the Chapel of Cool Summer in the Gardens
of Variegated Spring
National Library, Beijing
(After “Tongzhi chongxiu Yuanming yuan shiliao,”
[1933], fig.44)

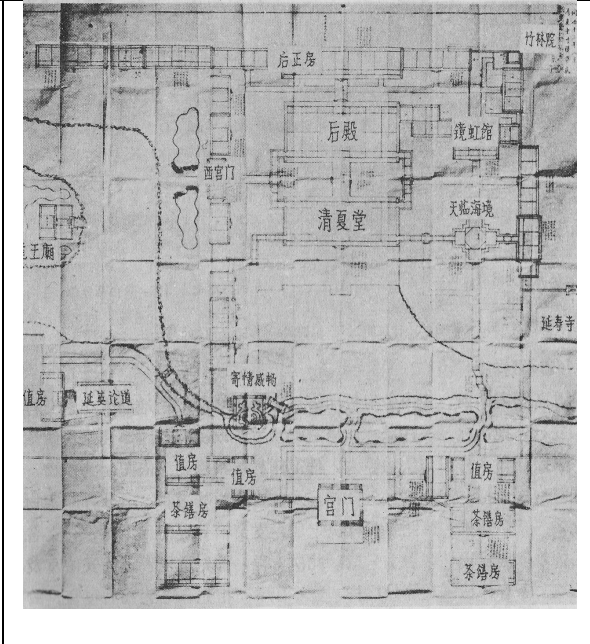


Fig 4.2B
Plan of the Hall of Cool Summer in the Gardens of
Myriad Springs
National Library, Beijing
(After “Tongzhi chongxiu Yuanming yuan shiliao,”
[1933], fig.46)



Fig.4.3A
Furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace (view from the south side)
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.3B
Furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace (view from the south side), detail
(Image removed for copyright reasons)
Palace Museum, Beijing

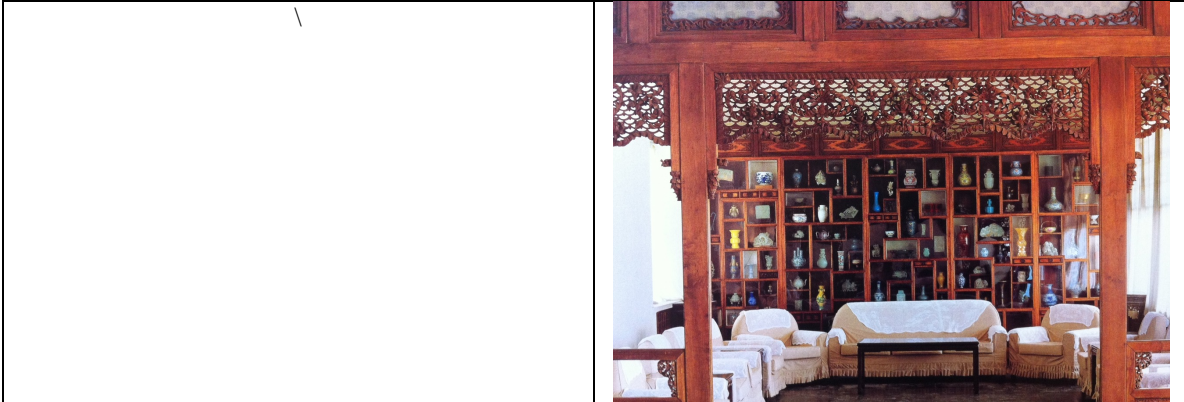


Fig.4.3C
 Unfurnished architectural model of the Spring
 Palace, detail
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig.4.4
 Display case in the Study of Fresh Fragrance, the
 Forbidden City.
 (Artwork in the public domain)

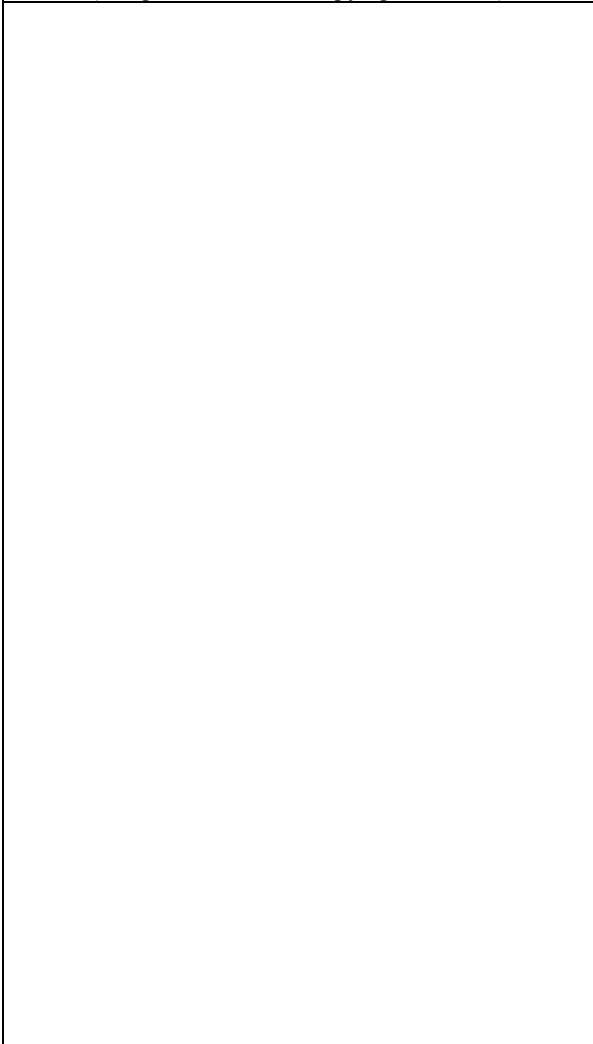


Fig.4.3D
 Furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace
 (view from the north side), detail
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig.4.3E
 Furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace,
 detail
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.5
Plan of the Palace of Mental Cultivation in the Forbidden City
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

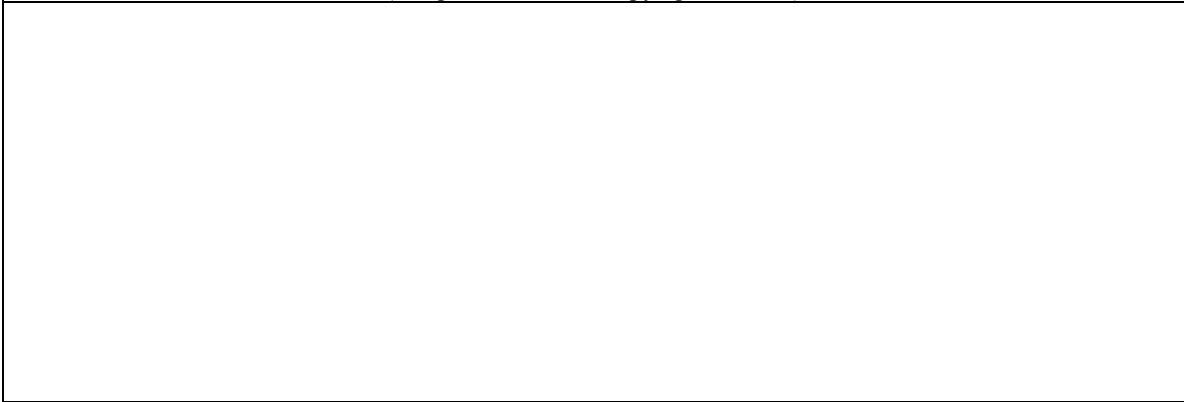


Fig.4.6
Unfurnished architectural model of the Spring Palace (view from the west side), detail
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.7
Interior of the Palace of Eternal Spring, the Forbidden City
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.4.8
Interior of the Hall of Manifest Origin, the Forbidden City
(Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.4.3E
 Furnished architectural model of the Spring Palace
 (view from the south side), detail
 Palace Museum, Beijing
 (Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.9
 Cixi's sleeping chamber in the Palace of
 Concentrated Beauty, the Forbidden City
 (Artwork in the public domain)



Fig.4.10
 T slab stone on the staircase in front of the main hall of Cixi's mausoleum
 Zunhua, Heibei Province
 Photograph: Ying-chen Peng

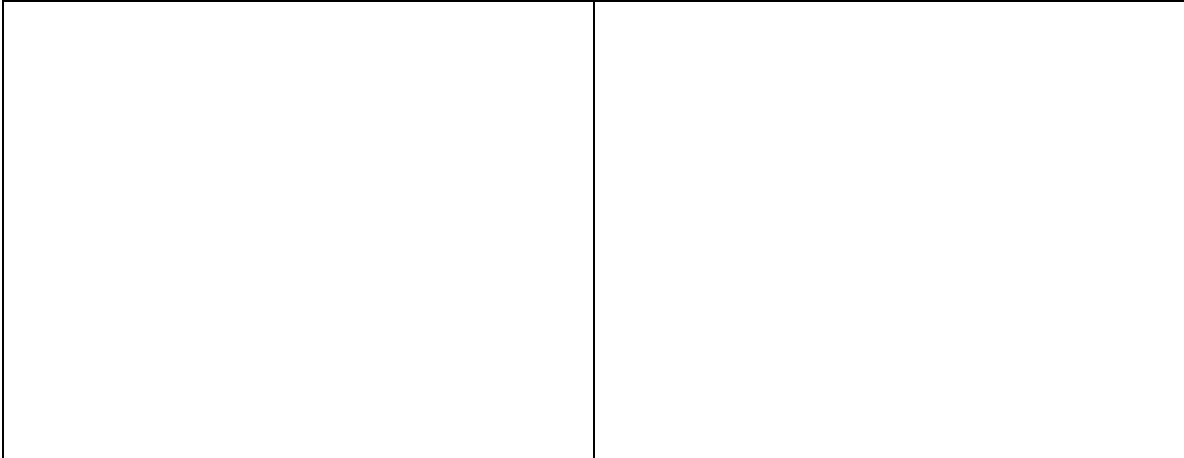


Fig.4.11
Vairocana hat partition in the Palace of Concentrated Beauty, the Forbidden City
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

Fig.4.12
Vairocana hat partition in the Temple of the Buddha Sun, the Forbidden City
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

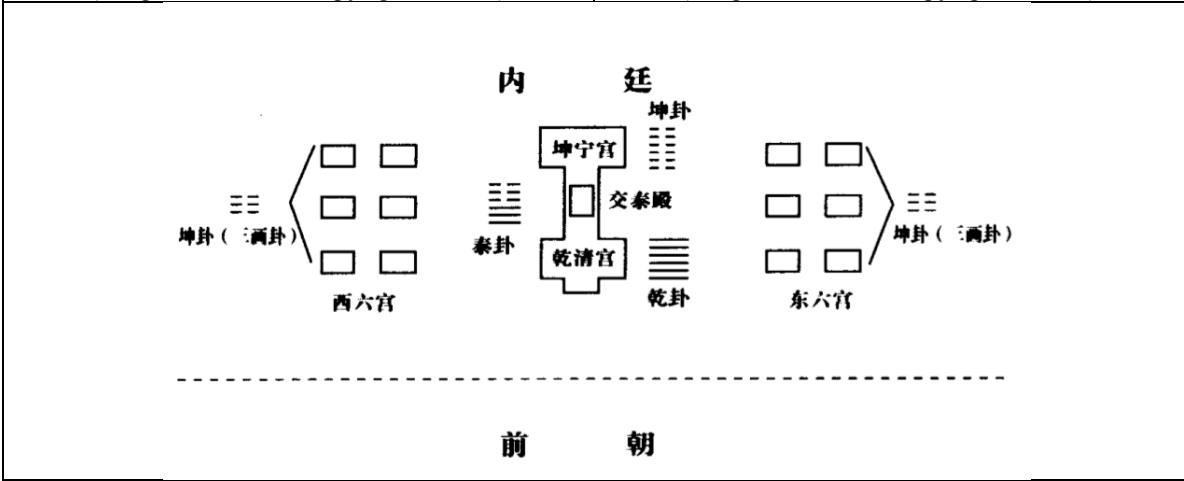


Fig.4.13
Original layout of the inner quarters in the Forbidden City
(After *Zijingcheng fengshui* [2005], 152)



Fig.4.14
The Hall of Dispelling Clouds in the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony
Photograph: Ying-chen Peng

Fig.4.15
Bird's eye view of the Hall of Dispelling Clouds compound, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.16
The courtyard of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Forbidden City
(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.4.17
Anonymous court painter, *Pleasant Banquet in the Palace of Compassion and Tranquility*, detail, 18th
century
Ink and colors on silk
Palace Museum, Beijing
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

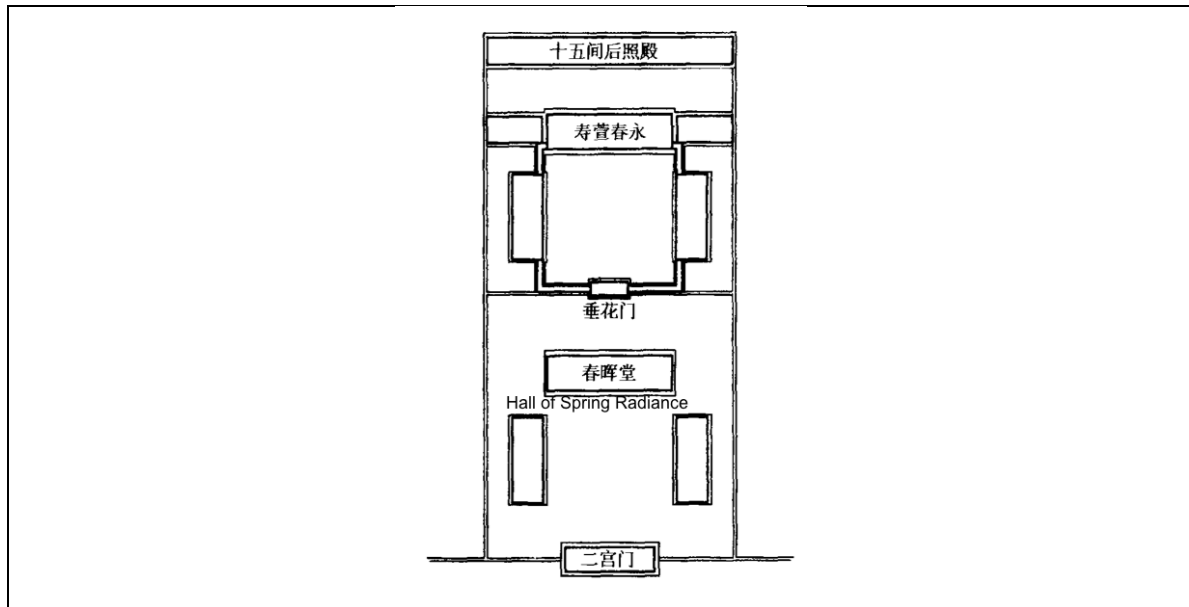


Fig.4.18

Plan of the Hall of Spring Radiance in the Summer Palace, Rehe
 (After “Qingdai ligong yuyuan zhong de taihou qingongqu jianzhu chutan” [2002], fig.1)



Fig.4.19

Interior of the Hall of Dispelling Clouds, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony
 (Artwork in the public domain)

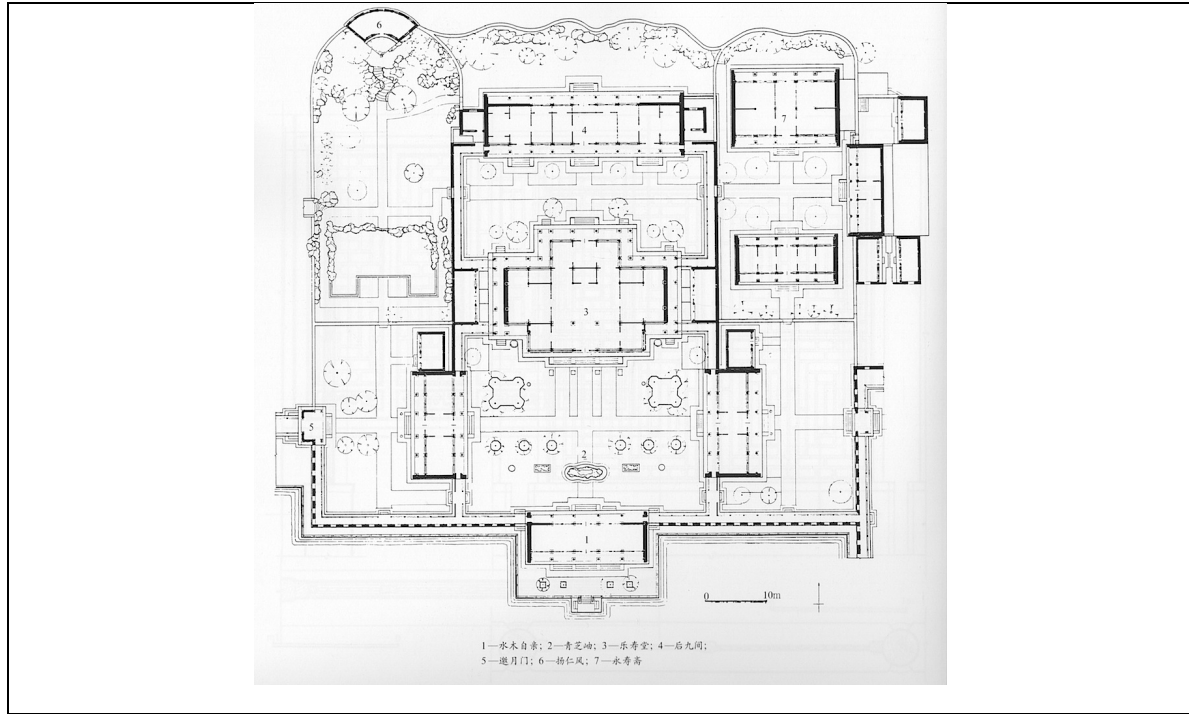


Fig.4.20
Plan of the Hall of Pleasant Longevity in the 19th century
(After *Yihe yuan* [2000], fig.137)



Fig.4.21
Exterior of the Hall of Pleasant Longevity, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony
Photograph: Ying-chen Peng



Fig.4.22
Exterior of the Hall of Jade Billows, the Gardens of Nurtured Harmony
Photograph: Ying-chen Peng



Fig.4.23
Katharine A Carl's illustration of the official audience
After *With the Empress Dowager of China* [1905], 146.

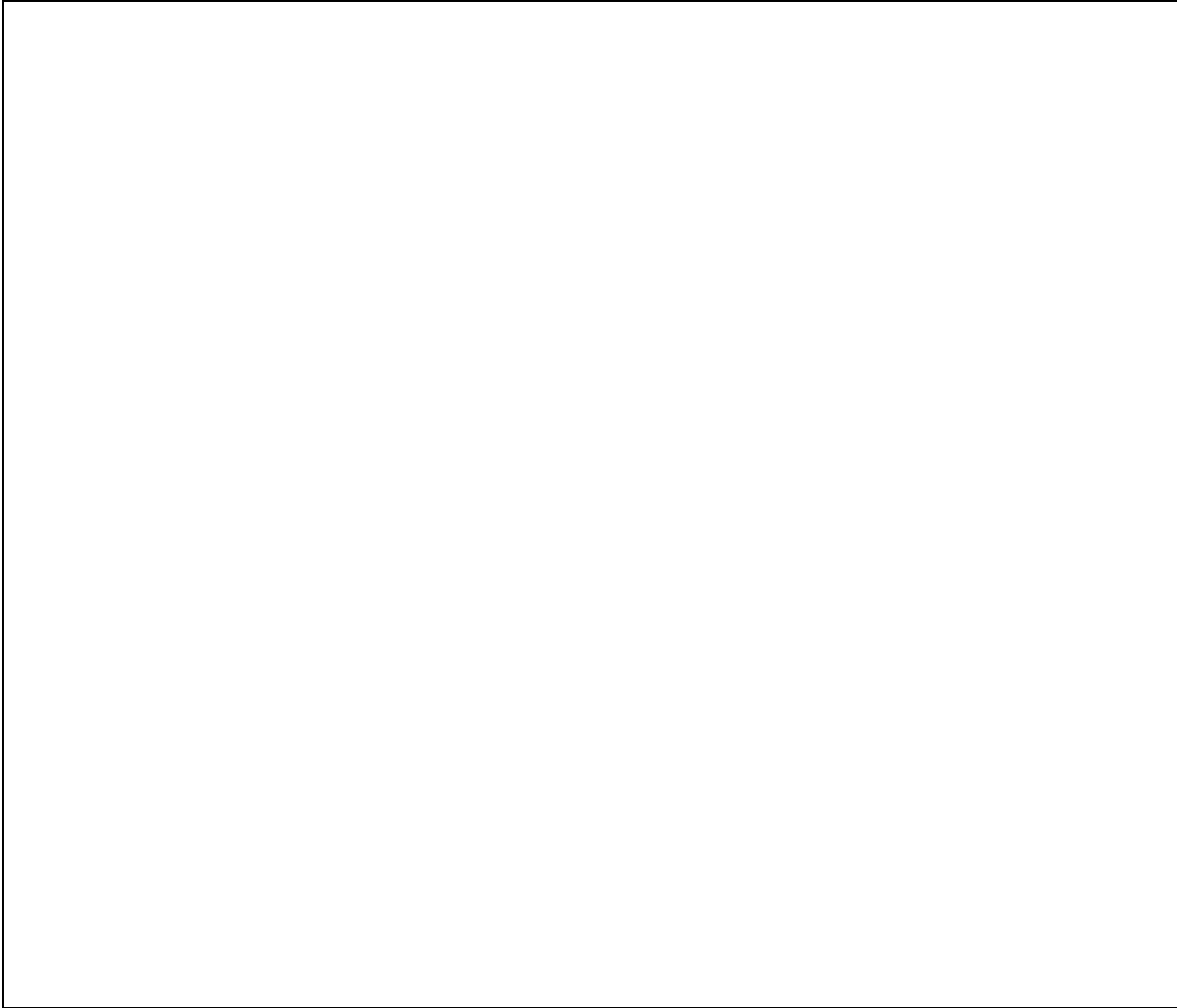


Fig.C.1

John Jabez Edwin Mayall, *Queen Victoria With Her Family*, ca. 1863

Albumen silver carte de visite, 7.2 x 5.9 cm

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

(Image removed for copyright reasons)



Fig.C.2
Portrait of the Empress Shōken, 1889
Silver gelatin print, 27.5 x 20.5 cm
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
Archives, Washington D.C.
(Artwork in the public domain)

Fig.C.3
Harada Naojirō, *Dragon-Riding Gannō*, 1890
Oil on canvas, 27.2 x 181 cm
Gokoku Temple, Tokyo
(Image removed for copyright reasons)

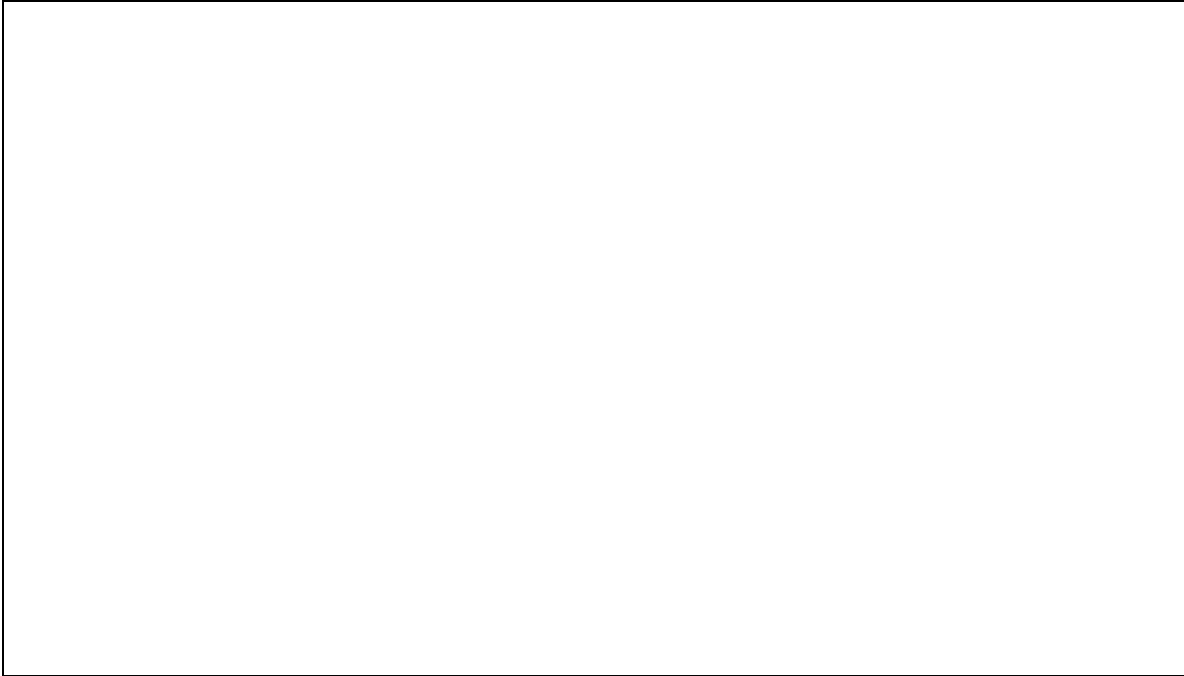


Fig.C.4

Sun Wen, *Madame Jia Hosting the Mid-Autumn Festival*, detail, c. 1862-1908

Lüshun Museum, Shandong

(Image removed for copyright reasons)