

**THE WAY TO BE MODERN: EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI'S PORTRAITS OF THE  
LATE QING DYNASTY**

by

**Lihui Dong**

BA, Tsinghua University, 2006

MA, Tsinghua University, 2008

MA, University of Pittsburgh, 2010

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This dissertation was presented

by

Lihui Dong

It was defended on

May 8, 2017

and approved by

Katheryn Linduff, Professor, Department of History of Art & Architecture

Evelyn Rawski, Professor, Department of History

Josh Ellenbogen, Associate Professor, Department of History of Art & Architecture

Dissertation Advisor: Gao Minglu, Professor, Department of History of Art & Architecture

Co-Advisor: Kirk Savage, Professor, Department of History of Art & Architecture

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# **THE WAY TO BE MODERN: EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI'S PORTRAITS OF THE LATE QING DYNASTY**

Lihui Dong, PhD

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This dissertation discusses portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi, including her early traditional portraits from the 1860s through the 1890s, oil paintings and photographic portraits during the New Policy Reforms (1901-1908), with the approaches of working on the social-political contexts, materials, functions, audiences, transcultural dissemination and circulation of the portraits.

I contend that Cixi's early masculine portraits were produced as a part of her struggles for power within the inner court after her husband's death, when another Empress Dowager not only exceeded Cixi's status, but also somewhat threatened Cixi's motherly identity. When the inner court situation and Cixi's concerns changed, especially after 1900, the masculine features were reduced and much more feminine features were shown in Cixi's portraits. In the early 20th century, during the New Policy Reforms, Cixi changed her image strategies, potential audiences and the functions of her portraits. If the early images of Cixi in Chapter 1 were part of her struggles for imperial power, which were still an inner court issue, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I explored how the production and circulation of Cixi's personal portraits were upgraded to elements of national strategies or even international cooperation, and how and why Cixi would change her mind not to show her portraits fully with masculine features after 1900.

These portraits not only visually manifest the female leader's changing project of her image design, but also help to explore the complicated issue related to how China was to become modern at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was not a passive, isolated, nor one-sided procedure, but was intertwined within interactive international affairs and entangled benefits.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Encountering “changes unprecedented in China’s over 3000 year history,”<sup>1</sup> the late Qing Dynasty was a period of radical transformation: the influence of Western powers and technology, the conflict between conservatives and reformers in the court, the struggle for power between Emperors and Empress Dowagers, the changing relations between the old empire and other modern states, and the decline of the last dynasty. The Empress Dowager Cixi’s portraits of the late Qing Dynasty, therefore, is a topic about the transition of Chinese history and visual art from the traditional to the modern, a transition that still needs further research.

Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) was the *de facto* ruler of the late Qing Dynasty. Her reign extended over 48 years, beginning after her husband's death in 1861 to her own death in 1908. Her portraits were not only traditional Chinese ink paintings, mounted as either hanging scrolls or small albums, but also oil paintings and photographs. In total, 8 traditional ink portraits, 5 oil portraits and 786 photographs printed from 31 negatives were all commissioned by the Empress Dowager. Cixi’s portraits outnumbered all other Imperial portraits of both male and female rulers throughout the Qing dynasty. It is also noticeable that except for two of Cixi’s traditional ink portraits, possibly made during the Tongzhi reign (1862-1874), almost all other portraits, especially, the oil paintings and the hundreds of photographs, were all made during the

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<sup>1</sup> Li Hongzhang 李鴻章, “*chou yi zhi zao lun chuan wei ke cai che zhe* 籌議製造輪船未可裁撤折”(1872), in *Li Wenzhong gong quan shu* 李文忠公全書, vol.19, ed. Wu Rulun 吳汝綸 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ben she, 1995), 45.

New Policy Reforms (1901-1908) following the failed war with the Eight-Power Allied Forces. Furthermore, among all the Emperors and Empresses in Chinese history, the Empress Dowager Cixi was the first imperial member to allow her portrait to be displayed for an overseas public during the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, commonly known as the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

In my dissertation, taking the Empress Dowager Cixi's portraiture as a case study, I will explore how portraiture was made use of by the female monarch as a way to maintain her imperial power, how her portraits functioned as diplomatic strategies to reconstruct a positive national image internationally during the New Policy Reforms, how the powerful woman recognized and displayed her gender identity during different periods of her life, how the Empress Dowager promoted her forward public impression by using both traditional approaches and modern techniques, and how the new opinion of portraiture which was neither Western nor Eastern was formed as a way to be modern in the late Qing Dynasty.

## **1.1 RULERS' PORTRAITS IN CHINA: SIGNIFICANCE, STYLES, PRODUCTION AND DISPLAY**

Even if current scholars have already challenged the argument "portraiture in the Western sense does not really exist in Chinese art"<sup>2</sup> as an outdated stereotype, admittedly, by comparison, an obvious difference between Western and Chinese art history is that, at least since the fourteenth century, portraiture in China was typically ignored as a genre of art. Portraits were always

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<sup>2</sup> Hugo Munsterberg, "Chinese Portraiture by Eli Lancman," review of *Chinese Portraiture*, by Eli Lancman, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26(1967): 699-700.

ascribed as nameless, and portraitists were not regarded as true artists. As Sherman Lee raised the question in the late 1970s: “Why (in China) true portraits as great works of art were so rare?”<sup>3</sup> Let alone the different ways of understanding and creating “true portraits,” Lee’s question triggered one of the key points in my discussion: although both in China and the West portraiture was always linked with the subject’s social status, political authority, cultural and class identities,<sup>4</sup> Chinese portraits, especially imperial portraits, were not viewed as “works of art” at all.

Scholars agree that the “individualism” valued within the Western tradition never dominated Chinese portraiture,<sup>5</sup> which might be the most significant difference between Chinese and Western portraiture. In Chinese portraiture, by contrast, the individual subject is seldom regarded as “a basic human unit,” but a member of a family, clan or nation. As Richard Vinograd points out, “family affiliations” are regarded as “the source of identity” and “the performance of social roles as the fulfillment of the self.”<sup>6</sup> In imperial portraiture, “family affiliations” are always vital in claiming a regime’s legitimacy. Jan Stuart also argues that the significant difference in Chinese genre painting is “its persistent linkage with rituals of death and ancestor worship.”<sup>7</sup> A good example is that almost all deceased Emperors’ and consorts’ portraits, whether formal or informal, were required to be moved out of living spaces and worshipped within specific imperial ancestral halls during the Qing Dynasty.

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<sup>3</sup> Sherman E. Lee, “Varieties of Portraiture in Chinese and Japanese Art,” *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 64 (1977): 118-9. Jan Stuart and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors: Chinese Commemorative Portraits* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Sherman E. Lee, “Varieties of Portraiture in Chinese and Japanese Art”. *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 64( 1977): 118-136.

<sup>6</sup> Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 35.

In general, such features of Chinese portraiture were deeply rooted in the traditional hierarchic system, Confucian philosophy, religion, ritual and custom. These contexts shaped not only the appearance of Chinese portraiture but also the specific traditional Chinese ways of using and understanding portraits. Here, I use the word “tradition” as a changeable context developed throughout different phases of Chinese dynasties rather than a rigid guideline for the entire history.

Coincidentally or not, the earliest documented Chinese portrait was a portrait of the male ruler Chiyou (蚩尤),<sup>8</sup> whose history may be traced back to legendary times.<sup>9</sup> According to legend, the Yellow Emperor (*huangdi* 黃帝), leader of Red and Yellow Clan (*yanhuangzu* 炎黃族 or *huaxiazu* 華夏族), defeated and killed Chiyou, leader of Nine Li Clan (*jiulizu* 九黎族).<sup>10</sup> Chiyou was believed to be extremely brave and fierce. He was respected as the God of War, so that other clans dared not wage war during his lifetime. However, following the death of Chiyou, other clans prepared to attack the Yellow Emperor and several riots erupted. The Yellow Emperor painted (or ordered the painting of) a posthumous portrait of Chiyou to pretend that the God of War was still alive and ready to fight at any time. Finally, the other clans mistakenly assumed the portrait as Chiyou himself and were frightened into surrendering.

According to this first legendary Chinese record about male ruler’s portrait, during the time when people were not familiar with paintings and might be easily confused between painting and reality, the dead clan leader’s lifelike portrait played a vital role in making the land

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<sup>8</sup>According to prehistoric legends recorded during the Han Dynasty (BC. 202- AD.220), *Shiji* (史記・五帝本紀第一・黃帝紀) notes 9 (《正義龍魚河圖》：“蚩尤沒后，天下複擾亂，黃帝遂畫蚩尤形像以威天下，天下咸謂蚩尤不死，八方萬邦皆為弭服。”)

<sup>9</sup> This event is believed to have occurred around the Third Century BCE, the so-called Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors’ period.

<sup>10</sup> The legend of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors became popular and officially recorded in the Second Century BCE, during the Western Han Dynasty.

of pre-dynastic China return to peace. It seems that the first male ruler's portrait functioned as a kind of new-tech battle gear to successfully launch a psychological offensive and effectively avoid greater bloodshed.

Here, based on this legendary record, I sum up four features of the earliest portrait in China: 1) the first documented Chinese portrait was a male ruler's portrait produced under another male ruler's order. 2) The first portrait depicted a deceased figure, coinciding with the traditional Chinese taboo that associates portraiture with ominous death. 3) The portrait represented the subject so realistic that its audience believed that the portrait was Chiyao in the flesh, indicating that in China the pursuit of visual authenticity and the technique of simulating one's likeness may be traced back as early as the origin of portrait. 4) The first portrait was created to maintain social and political peace, and finally satisfactorily fulfilled such a function under the Yellow Emperor's reign. In this sense, this record of the earliest example of Chinese portraiture innately records and fulfills political meaning and function. In other words, rather than understood as an artwork meant for aesthetic appreciation or pleasure, portraiture was inherently part of a regime's political strategies and ruling skills.

In the first famous Chinese painter and art theorist Gu Kaizhi's scroll painting, *Admonitions of the Court Instructress to Palace Ladies* (女史箴圖) dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the painter depicted several bygone male rulers of the previous dynasties,<sup>11</sup> such as the Emperor

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<sup>11</sup> Portraits of the deceased Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, including Yellow Emperor's portrait, were recorded as a common genre of Chinese painting for people to respect in Three Kingdom period in the 3rd century. See Yu Jianhua 俞劍華, ed., *Collection of Theories of Ancient Chinese Painting* 中國古代畫論類編 (Beijing: ren min mei shu chu ban she, 2014), 12. It is also recorded that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century the Emperor Guangwu of the Eastern Han once ordered court portraitist to paint sages and ancient imperial portraits in his court. (『東漢光武中興，於宮中列古代聖賢帝后之像』) In the folk, bygone rulers' portraits were popular as a genre of decoration on painted bricks of family shrines in the Eastern Han dynasty when filial piety and luxurious burials became a trend. However, from the extant painting of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors on the painted bricks of the Wu Family Shrine in the Eastern Han Dynasty in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, we can only identify the figures through their inscriptions, clothes and other symbols rather than individual facial likeness. See Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 156-7. Another extant piece of painted brick about previous ruler, "The Duke of Zhou Assisting the king

Yuan of the Han Dynasty in the scene where Lady Feng is depicted blocking the bear to save the emperor. Another Han Emperor, Emperor Cheng is rendered in Lady Ban's refusal to ride in the imperial litter for the Emperor's virtuous reputation. The male painter's purpose in presenting this scroll to his Emperor was to help to educate court ladies and visually show exemplary behavior for women, as a visual approach in maintaining the patriarchal order.

Even if the thirteen bygone Emperors have individualized features in the extant 7<sup>th</sup> Century silk scroll *Portraits of Successive Emperors* (lidai diwang xiang,), there is no record to corroborate the claim that the scroll represents the actual physical likeness of the deceased Emperors. They are also imaginary portraits painted based on each emperor's historical records and merits. According to Ning Qiang's study, the thirteen Emperors on the scroll were not randomly selected but picked strategically by the Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty, who killed his princely brothers in order to ascend to the throne, while also confirming his political legitimacy as the legal inheritor of the founder of the Dynasty<sup>12</sup>.

The first recorded representation of a living ruler occurred in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, when Buddhism grew in popularity within Northern China. In 454, the Emperor Wencheng of the North Wei sponsored five giant Buddha statues based on five Northern Wei Emperors' physical features. The gigantic Buddha statues, housed in today's Five Tanyao Caves (曇曜五窟)<sup>13</sup> are identified as the recorded five Emperor-Buddha statues. The visual combination of each of the male ruler's physical likenesses with a religious deity was a new approach in claiming the divine

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Cheng" (周公輔成王), is also hard to recognize the figures' identities and even status without the inscriptions. Hence, strictly speaking, the paintings of bygone rulers left today are abstract figure paintings based on imagination rather than the so-called portraiture with realistic facial resemblance of the subject.

<sup>12</sup> Ning Qiang, "Imperial Portraiture as Symbol of Political Legitimacy: A New Study of the 'Portraits of Successive Emperors'," *Ars Orientalis* 35(2008): 96-128.

<sup>13</sup> They are the five earliest caves in the Yungang Grottoes (cave 16-20).

rights of the Emperor. During the later Tang Dynasty, the first and the only Chinese female Emperor Wu Zetian used this approach again.

The first documented portrait of a living ruler which still exists today is a scroll painting of the Tang Dynasty ruler Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty titled *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy* (*bunian tu* 步輦圖), originally painted in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. The scroll depicts the historical moment that the Emperor Taizong received Tibetan envoys for the marriage of the King of Tibet to a Tang Princess. Considering the high rank (titled as prime minister) of the painter Yan Liben, he might have also been a witness of the historical moment. In this scroll, the seated Emperor Taizong is portrayed larger than the female attendants and members of the Tibetan envoys. In congruence with traditional rules of Chinese portraiture, the high rank figures appear seated with their bodies portrayed slightly larger than lower class figures in addition to those of lesser political rank. Emperor Taizong's portrait is an example of "pictures of Emperor's achievements" (帝王功績圖), whose basic function is to visually document the Emperor's merits, virtues and contributions.

Generally speaking, Chinese imperial portraiture was usually separated into two categories: 1) formal portraits, mainly used for worshipping, displayed in imperial ancestral halls, and 2) "merry-making picture" (or "pleasure portraiture", *xingle tu* 行樂圖), in which "pictures of the Emperor's achievements" mentioned above is a sub-genre under the latter. One of the earliest "merry-making portraitures" found today is the scroll *The Double Screens* (重屏會棋圖) from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. The scroll depicts the Emperor Li Jing watching his brothers playing go, in which the Emperor, as the dominant and most powerful figure, is *en face* seated in the center position, while his three brothers show either or three-quarter profiles, seated around the central character. A relatively smaller-sized servant stands to the side, resembling a piece of furniture.

Considering the fact that playing *go* within the traditional Chinese context was usually associated with contending for the domination of the country, the scroll might also denote the cooperation or competition of Emperor Li Jing with his three brothers.<sup>14</sup> Hence, even in the style of the so-called merry-making portrait, hierarchical rank and political denotation are significant.

As to the function of a Ruler portraiture, compared with the subject of a “merry-making portraiture,” besides their function as political symbols and court documents, formal imperial portraits were mainly displayed or worshipped in memorial ceremonies, perhaps originally influenced by Buddhism rites. According to historical literature, before the Song Dynasty, imperial portraits were usually placed in Buddhist or Daoist temples.<sup>15</sup>

Based on historical documents, it was not until the early 11<sup>th</sup> Century of the Song Dynasty that official regulations and institutions for worshipping ancestral imperial portraits was formally founded, which matches the surge in imperial portraits during the Song Dynasty. From then on, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, as ancestor portraits, previous imperial formal portraits were displayed within specific palaces or state temples to be revered by royal members. Such a tradition of worshipping imperial ancestors through the possession of previous dynasties’ imperial portraits was usually a method to claim the political legitimacy of the current regime.

Compared with the seemingly leisurely and informal appearance of “merry-making portraiture,” which was created to fulfill different potential political functions, the subject of formal imperial portraiture throughout Chinese dynastic history has always been strictly obedient to changing traditional styles. Around 152 portraits of Emperors, Empresses and concubines

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<sup>14</sup> Cheng-hua Wang, “Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles 走向公開化：肖像的風格形式、政治運作與形象塑造,” *Taida Journal of Art History* 國立臺灣大學美術史研究集刊, 32 (2012): 250.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Ebrey, “Portraiture Sculptures in Imperial Ancestral Rites in Song China,” *T’oung Pao* 83(1997): 42-92.

from the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties have been preserved in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, also representing formal imperial portraiture. These portraits were originally handed down from the Northern Song Dynasty to the Southern Song, then transferred to the Mongol Yuan Dynasty and kept in the Forbidden City during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. At last, these imperial and other Confucian sage portraits were reorganized, remounted and restored in the Hall of Southern Fragrance (南薰殿) during 18<sup>th</sup> Century Qing Dynasty Emperor Qianlong's reign. This large scale restoration project was argued by some scholars as denoting the Manchu ruler's political strategy in addition to asserting the legitimacy of his rule and representation of all Han Confucian, Mongol and Manchu cultures.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the 152 portraits are full-length, life-size or even double or even triple life-size whose original function was to perhaps function as portraits for reverence. Other portraits are smaller half-length portraits, which were then bound together as albums. The possible function of these albums was to serve as sketches (*fen-ben* 粉本) for larger portraits, although there are records pertaining to the temporal use of the bust portrait in a funerary context among common folk, due to the limited time required to produce a large-size portrait.<sup>17</sup> Due to their original function as ancestor portraits created to be revered by royal posterities, one of the basic requirements was physical likeness. If the portrayal was inaccurate in even the slightest detail, the ancestors' souls might fail to recognize their portraits so as not to bestow blessings of longevity and prosperity upon the living.<sup>18</sup> This was one of the reasons why some Song Neo-

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<sup>16</sup> Lai Yu-chih 賴毓芝, "Heritage Remaking: Emperor Qianlong's Reorganization of the Imperial Portraits from the Previous Dynasties in 1748 文化遺產的再造：乾隆皇帝對於南薰殿圖像的整理," *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 故宮學術季刊 26 (2009): 75-110.

<sup>17</sup> Such an example is recorded in the Ming Dynasty novel *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅).

<sup>18</sup> Jan Stuart, "The Face in Life and Death: Mimesis and Chinese Ancestor Portraits," In *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, ed. Wu, Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 197-228.

Confucians protested the use of portraits instead worshipping the ancestors' written names during ritual.<sup>19</sup> Hence, these imperial portraits must show the facial verisimilitude, except for nine hanging scrolls of the Ming Emperor Taizu's "strange" or "ugly" portraits (*guai-yi-xiang* 怪異相) which, according to Chinese physiognomy was a typical form of "countenance of majesty and reverence" (*fu-gui-xiang* 富貴相).

As to the styles of the formal imperial portraits, they changed gradually throughout the Song, Yuan and Ming periods. All of the Song imperial portraits are three-quarter length portraits, with most of the hanging scrolls depicting the subjects in full-length except for three of the first Song Emperor Taizu's hanging bust portraits. Three-quarter view imperial portraits dominated throughout the Song Dynasty. Wen Fong named imperial portraits in the Song Dynasty as "naturalistic representations" with characteristics of rich details and touches of natural expressions. Fong attributes this trend in Song imperial portraits to the physiognomic knowledge of monumentalizing the human face and body by transforming the features into the natural landscape, which also embodies the Neo-Confucian version of a hierarchically ordered and moral universe.<sup>20</sup>

The extant formal imperial portraits from the Mongol Yuan Dynasty are all bust portraits bound into paper albums. Official reports denote that these small paper bust portraits were

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<sup>19</sup> Mette Siggstedt, "Forms of Fate: An Investigation of the Relationship between Formal Portraiture, Especially Ancestral Portraits, and Physiognomy (xiangshu) in China," in *International Colloquium on Chinese Art History*, ed. National Palace Museum (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1992), 715-43.

<sup>20</sup> Wen Fong, "Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods," *Ars Orientalis*, 25 (1995): 48-51. Some other scholars also associate the three-quarter-face view with traditional physiognomy. For example, Wai-Kam Ho suggests that the preference for the three-quarter pose in early Chinese art is based on the regulated positions in a lecture hall. Mette Siggstedt also argues the connection between the three-quarter view with the traditional physiognomy but his explanation is: "the use of the three-quarter aspect was at least partly conditioned by its being the most satisfactory aspect for rendering the volumetric quality of the human face, when the artist did not fully master the technique of shadowing." See Siggstedt, "Forms of Fate," 715-43. Also see Wai-Kam Ho, "Development of Chinese portrait Painting as Seen from the Face-Orientation of the Subjects," in *Portraiture: International Symposium on Art Historical Studies 6* (Shōzō: Kokusai Kōryū Bijutsushi Kenkyūkai Dairokkai Shinpojiamu 肖像: 国際交流美術史研究会第六回シンポジウム), ed. Department of Aesthetics and Art History (Kyoto University. Kyoto: Taniguchi Foundation, 1987): 133-136.

sketches for larger “woven portraits.” Textile portraiture is exclusively found in the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>21</sup> According to Shang Gang, there were at least three different sizes of formal imperial portraits produced during the Yuan Dynasty. The extant bust portraits are simply a single element.<sup>22</sup> Judging from the extant portraits, the facial orientations are between frontal and three-quarter poses with only one ear depicted. Wen Fong argues that the almost full-face formal portraits from the Yuan Dynasty were created under the influence of Tibetan Lama Buddhism, which is the official religion of the Mongol nation. Regardless, it seems there was also a Han Chinese tradition in promoting the frontal view in imperial portraits.<sup>23</sup> The first written documentation was first recorded during the Song dynasty, and illustrated by portraitist Mou Gu, the only court painter able to produce frontal portraiture. Mou Gu explained to the Song Emperor Zhenzong that the full-face view fit the august nature of the saints.<sup>24</sup>

When it came to the Ming Dynasty, a significant change of formal portraiture first appeared in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. This change was especially noticeably in the facial orientation: the slightly three-quarter view was gradually replaced by the frontal, symmetrical portrait icon. According to Wen Fong and Dora Ching, such a change was influenced by the style of the Tibetan Mandala based on an increased interest in Tibetan Buddhism within the court from the mid-Ming Dynasty onwards.<sup>25</sup> Such a “schematic representation” with rigid frontality became

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<sup>21</sup> Shang Gang 尚剛, “Imperial Portraits of the Mongols and the Yuan Dynasty 蒙元御容,” *Palace Museum Journal 故宫博物院院刊* 3(2004): 31-59.

<sup>22</sup> The different sizes also have different functions and display spaces: The largest sizes are enshrined in the “imperial ancestor hall” (shen-yu-dian 神御殿) or “shadow hall” (ying-tang 影堂) founded in state’s Lama temples. The middle sizes are named as “small shadow” or “small shadow deity”(xiao-ying-shen 小影神) which are mainly displayed in Mongol tents for everyday worshipping. The small sizes might be sketches for larger ones but their main function is still for worshipping in the nomadic Mongols’ routine travels. Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Fong, “Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods”, 48-51.

<sup>24</sup> Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛, “Experiences in Painting(圖畫見聞志),” in *Series of Books of Art History 畫史叢書*, ed. Yu Anlan 于安瀾 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chu ban she, 1963), 47-48.

<sup>25</sup> Fong, “Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods”, 55-57. Dora C. Y. Ching, “Icons of Rulership: Imperial Portraiture during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011).

the predominant paradigm in the production of imperial portraits with few exceptions from the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, and continued during the following Qing Dynasty.<sup>26</sup>

Typically, these formal portraits featured a female paired with male engaged in posthumous worshipping. It is argued that from the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, husband and wife portraits began to be portrayed together.<sup>27</sup> Individual and paired couple portraits were painted in the following Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. Sometimes servants were depicted behind the couples, holding symbolic objects in their hands. It was also typical for a male servant to stand beside the male host and a female servant to stand behind the female host.

Female portraiture always held a relatively minor status. In fact, female figures were even associated with negative connotations. According to Ning Qiang's research, in the famous scroll *Portraits of Successive Emperors* by the Tang court artist Yan Liben, virtuous Emperors' portraits which were flanked by male ministers, while accompanied by female attendants might have been "a symbol of evil and weak rulers."<sup>28</sup>

During the early and high Qing period there were several imperial painting institutions found within in the imperial records.<sup>29</sup> When it came to the late Qing period, when the nation became weak, the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes (*ruyi guan* 如意館) was the only imperial painting institution.<sup>30</sup> As to the historical location of the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes, most scholars agree that

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<sup>26</sup> Fong, "Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods", 58.

<sup>27</sup> Stuart, "The Face in Life and Death," 197-228.

<sup>28</sup> Ning, "Imperial Portraiture as Symbol of Political Legitimacy", 96-128.

<sup>29</sup> Other institutions include: the Painting Workshop (*huazuo* 畫作), Painting Office (*huahua chu* 畫畫處), Painting Academy Department (*huayuan chu* 畫院處) and The Hall of Fulfilled Wishes (*ruyi guan* 如意館).

<sup>30</sup> The so-called painting office, where Giuseppe Castiglione(郎世寧), Ding Guanpeng (丁觀鵬) and other court portraitists worked, was affiliated with the painting workshop, while both belonged to the department of the workshops of the imperial household of the Hall of Mental Cultivation (養心殿造辦處). They may have existed from the Shunzhi to the Yongzheng period. The name of Painting Academy Department and The Hall of Fulfilled Wishes both appeared in 1736, the first year the Emperor Qianlong's reign. In 1762 (Qianlong's 27<sup>th</sup> year), The Painting Academy Department was merged into the Enamel Department. Since then, The Hall of Fulfilled Wishes was left as the only imperial painting institution of the Qing. Yang Boda, "The Development of the Ch'ien-lung Painting Academy," in *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*, ed. Alfreda Murck and Wen Fong, 333-356. Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Qing Court Painting

it was housed within the Forbidden City, where painters of imperial painting institutions worked in or near the Hall of Opening Auspiciousness (*qixiang gong* 啟祥宮).<sup>31</sup> From 1736 to 1860, when Emperors moved to the Summer Palace, court painters then accompanied and worked in their offices in the Summer Palace. In 1860, the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes (*ruyi guan*) located within the Old Summer Palace was burned to ashes by the Anglo-French Allied Forces. Two years later, a new Hall of Fulfilled Wishes was constructed in the Northern Five Halls (北五所), located northeast of the Forbidden City, where court painters worked from 1862 to the end of the Qing in 1911.

Hence, during Empress Dowager Cixi and the last five Emperors' reign of the late Qing, court painters were all registered in the imperial painting institution, namely, The Hall of Fulfilled Wishes. During the Daoguang and Xianfeng period, the office of court painters was housed in the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes within the Summer Palace and the Hall of Opening Auspiciousness in the Forbidden City. During the Tongzhi, Guangxu and Xuantong periods, court painters worked in the newly built Hall of Fulfilled Wishes in the Forbidden City.

In the Imperial Painting Academy, court painters were classified by their official rank, which depended on their painting skills, working attitudes, productivity, attendance rate, ability to satisfy the imperial family, relationship with the others and so on. Court painters were sometimes required to be able to paint every subject, no matter whatever a portrait, landscape, animal, still life or even household decoration. It is therefore hard to determine which painter was a portraitist. What is more, court painters were usually forbidden to write their names on

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Institutions, Systems and Painters 清代宮廷繪畫機構、制度及畫家," *Art Research* 美術研究(3)1984: 51-54. Nie Chongzheng, "Court Paintings and Court Painters of Qing Dynasty", in *Court Painting of the Qing Dynasty*, ed. The Palace Museum (Beijing: Cultural relics publishing house, 1992), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Yang Boda and Nie Chongzheng have different opinions on the location of the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes. Ibid.

imperial portraits. Hence, even if scholars find records of the late Qing court painters who were good at portraiture,<sup>32</sup> it is difficult to know the exact portraitist of each imperial portrait.

As for the display space of imperial portraits during the Qing dynasty, before 1900, they were strictly limited to placement inside the imperial palaces in Beijing, Chengde and Shenyang. Scholars argue that there was a tradition in the Qing court that after the death of the Emperor or Empress, his or her imperial portraits would be moved to, and revered within the Hall of Imperial Longevity.<sup>33</sup> Still, certain imperial portraits were kept in palaces inside the Forbidden City and Summer Palace after the deaths of the portrayed subjects.<sup>34</sup> Besides the Hall of Imperial Longevity, according to the tradition of worshipping ancestors of the Qing imperial family, after the Emperor's death, a select number of his portraits were to be transported, displayed or deposited in Summer Mountain Resort located in Chengde in addition to the original Imperial Palace in Shenyang. At last, in the early 1900s, it was the Empress Dowager Cixi who terminated the nine centuries-old tradition of blocking the portraits of imperial rulers from the public.

In conclusion, imperial portraiture throughout Chinese history, especially ruler portraiture, no matter whether so-called "merry-making portraiture" or designated for formal worship, was never simply a kind of art intended for leisure. Rather, portraiture was politically significant and

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<sup>32</sup> For example, He Shikui (賀世魁) and Shen Zhenlin (沈振麟), who worked in the Hall of Fulfilled Wishes for four late Qing emperors from 1821 to 1882. Li Shi 李滉, "Ruyiguan Painter Shen Zhenlin and his Imperial Portraits 如意館畫士沈振麟及其御容像," *Wenwu* 文物 4(2012):76-77.

<sup>33</sup> Xu Jin 徐瑾, "Research on the *fengan* system of the Qing emperors' imperial portraits 清代皇帝御容奉安制度探析," *Journal of the Palace Museum Studies* 故宮學刊 2(2015): 209.

<sup>34</sup> For example, it is recorded that Emperor Daoguang's portrait of "reading ancient book" (情殷鑑古圖) was moved from the Palace of Heavenly Purity (乾清宮) to the Hall of Imperial Longevity (壽皇殿) in 1861, already eleven years after Emperor Daoguang's death. Also, in the inventory of items in the Forbidden City completed in 1924-1925, there are still one scroll of Emperor Tongzhi's portrait and one Emperor Guangxu's portrait in the east room of the Palace of Heavenly Purity, both portraits were kept in wood box and the latter was wrapped with yellow silk. Also, in the west room of the Palace of Heavenly Purity, there are seven previous Qing emperors' portraits from Emperor Kangxi to Emperor Guangxu and one photocopy of the Empress Xiaozhaoren (孝昭仁皇后 second wife of the Emperor Kangxi)'s portrait. Ibid, 219. Also see "Record of Imperial Portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity 壽皇殿藏聖容皇冊," in *Furnishing Archives of Qing Palace in the Collection of the Palace Museum* 故宮博物院藏清宮陳設檔案, vol. 1, ed. Beijing Palace Museum (Beijing: the Forbidden City Press, 2013), 65-105.

tightly associated with the legitimacy of the imperial reign. What's more, rulers' portraits in China were dominated and controlled at the hands of males. For example, Emperors were always depicted more realistically and appeared larger in size, while female consorts and attendants were rendered rather quickly with generalized faces. Also, the chances of displaying female imperial members' formal portraits depended on their relationships with male rulers. Based on such a context, in the following section of the dissertation, we will see how, to what extent, and why Cixi challenged the gender expression, technique, function, display and dissemination of traditional Chinese imperial portraiture.

## 1.2 LITERATURE AND PAST SCHOLARSHIP

Even if the underlying political meanings of imperial portraits have already been observed, the “political” is commonly regarded as a continued ancestral object still framed in conventional ritual form. Further research on some imperial portraits and certain ongoing history related to the subjects of the portraits as well as the process of the production of the portraits may tell us additional stories about the meaning of searching for a new political “identity” of the subject, no matter who was the Emperor, Empress, or Royal Family. Such political meaning might change from ancestral, or ritual, to individual, from abstract to realistic.

The research on Empress Dowager Cixi's portraits is a growing field. In 1905, during Cixi's lifetime, in America and England, Katharine Carl published her memoir about painting Cixi, *With the Empress Dowager of China*. Carl's text was later translated into Chinese during the Republic of China period (1912-1949) with the book title *On Cixi's Portraits* (Cixi xiezhao ji

慈禧寫照記).<sup>35</sup> After Cixi's death, as early as the late 1900s and the 1910s, memoirs and biographies on the mysterious Chinese female leader always referred to her portraits.<sup>36</sup> These early records, together with the 1920s *Inventory Report of the Palace Museum* (故宮物品點查報告)<sup>37</sup>, and some of the imperial household documents, such as *the Record of Imperial Portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity* (壽皇殿藏聖容皇冊) and *the Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* (清檔・活計檔),<sup>38</sup> are all important works on Cixi's portraits. During the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese scholars working in Beijing's Palace Museum began to publish papers on Cixi's photographic portraits,<sup>39</sup> oil painting portraits<sup>40</sup> and Guanyin portraits.<sup>41</sup> These studies explain useful primary resources which are still kept in storage in the Palace Museum without any other publication, such as the imperial household document in the Palace Museum collection *The Aulic Account Book: The Record of the Imperial Visage* (宮中賬簿・聖容帳).

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<sup>35</sup> Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China* (New York: The Century Co.; London: Eveleigh Nash, 1905).

Katharine Carl, *On Cixi's Portraits* (Cixi xiezhao ji 慈禧寫照記), trans. Chen Tingrui 陳霆銳 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu ju, 1915).

<sup>36</sup> Isaac Taylor Headland, *Court Life in China: the Capital its Officials and People* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909). Sarah Pike Conger, *Letters from China: with Particular Reference to the Empress Dowager and the Women of China* (Chicago: MuClurg, 1910). Philip Walsingham Sergeant, *The Great Empress Dowager of China* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1910). Edmund Trelawny Backhouse and John O. Bland, *China under the Empress Dowager, Being The History Of The Life And Times Of Tzu Hsi: Compiled from State Papers and the Private Diary of the Comptroller of Her Household* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1910). Yu Der Ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911). Also see the memoirs and biographies published later: Yu Rong Ling 裕容齡, *Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court* 清宮瑣記 (Beijing chu ban she, 1957). Marina Warner, *The Dragon Empress: Life and Times of Tz'u-hsi 1835-1908, Empress Dowager of China* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

<sup>37</sup> Qing shi shan hou wei yuan hui (The Commission of Dealing with Qing Imperial Family Affairs 清室善後委員會), ed., *The Inventory Report of the Palace Museum* 故宮物品點查報告 (Beijing: xian zhuang shu ju, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Collected in the First Historical Archive, Beijing.

<sup>39</sup> Such as Lin Jing 林京, "Discussion on Cixi's Photos during Her Later Age 慈禧晚年生活照片譚概," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 5(1987): 7-18. Lin Jing 林京, "Historic Records on Cixi's Photographs 慈禧攝影史話," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 3 (1988): 92-98.

<sup>40</sup> Such as Lin Jing 林京, "Record on Cixi's Small Oil Painting Portrait 慈禧油畫小像復得偶記," *Collector* 收藏家, (2)1995: 16-17. Zhou Xi 周熙, "Carl's Cixi Portraits 卡爾畫的慈禧像," in *The West Empress Dowager* (Hsi tai hou 西太后), Yu, Bingkun 俞炳坤 et al., 224-228 (Beijing: zi jin cheng chu ban she, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Such as Feng Huang 馮荒, "Empress Dowager Cixi Disguised Herself As the Goddess of Mercy 慈禧扮觀音," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 4 (1980): 34-36. Yuan Jie 袁傑, "Acting as Guanyin in Photography 妙相莊嚴入畫圖," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 1 (1995): 38-39.

After the 1990s, more and more biographies of Cixi were published, and some of them referred to, but were not specifically focused on, the topic of Cixi's portraits.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the biographies, Cixi's portraits also appear in research on Chinese modernity.<sup>43</sup> Lydia Liu and Lai-kwan Pang both talk about Cixi's photographic portraits as Guanyin and notice the androgynous context of the iconography of Guanyin in China. The difference is that Lydia Liu suggests the patriarchal desire in Cixi's portraits,<sup>44</sup> while Lai-kwan Pang proposes the feminine nature of Cixi's portraits as an example of the modern "cult of the self."<sup>45</sup> Carlos Rojas also focuses on Cixi's photographic portraits in the beginning of his book on Chinese visual modernity. Specifically, by referring to Lacan's theory of mirror stage, Rojas discusses the complicated gazes intertwined in Cixi's photographic portraits with the pose of looking-at-mirror.<sup>46</sup> These are enlightening notions - but I disagree in certain respects. I will further discuss Cixi's photographic portraits in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

In terms of 21<sup>st</sup> Century research, some of Cixi's portraits were carefully restored and exhibited for the first time in public. The restoration of Hubert Vos's portrait<sup>47</sup> in the Summer Palace was completed in 2008 after a four-year cooperation between Chinese and Dutch specialists. The topics on the restoration, the painter and the portrait again attracted scholars'

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<sup>42</sup> Such as Sterling Seagrave, *Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China*, with the collaboration of Peggy Seagrave (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992). Zuo Shue 左書譚, *the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后* (Jilin: Jilin wen shi chu ban she, 1993). Xu Che 徐徹, *the Grand Biography of Cixi 慈禧大傳* (Shenyang: liaoshen chu ban she, 1994). Liu Beisi 劉北汜 ed., *the True Cixi 實說慈禧* (Beijing: the Forbidden City Press, 2004). Xu Che 徐徹, *Beauty and Sadness: A Real Empress Dowager Cixi 美麗與哀愁: 一個真實的慈禧太后* (Beijing: tuanjie chu ban she, 2007). Yehenala Genzheng 葉赫那拉·根正, *the Empress Dowager Cixi As Far As I know: Cixi's Great-Grandson's Dictating 我所知道的慈禧太后: 慈禧曾孫口述實錄* (Beijing: Zhongguo shu dian, 2007). Jung Chang, *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine Who Launched Modern China* (London: Jonathan Cape. NY: Knopf, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Harvard University Press, 2006). Lai-kwan Pang, *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007). Carlos Rojas, *the Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 162-4.

<sup>45</sup> Pang, *Distorting Mirror*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 1-30.

<sup>47</sup> In 2000, Luke S. K. Kwong published two articles on Hubert Vos's oil paintings of Cixi. Luke S. K. Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager, Cixi 慈禧寫照的續筆: 華士·胡博)," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 1(2000): 71-81. Luke S. K. Kwong, "No Shadows," *History Today* 50 (2000): 42-43.

attention.<sup>48</sup> Later, restoration work on another oil portrait of Cixi, painted by Katharine Carl, was finished, at the request of David Hogge, the head of the Archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.<sup>49</sup> After over a century of travel between China and the United States,<sup>50</sup> the restored portrait was exhibited in the exhibition “Power|Play: China's Empress Dowager,” at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, from September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.<sup>51</sup> Also, to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Beijing's Palace Museum from May 17<sup>th</sup> to July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, hundreds of imperial portraits, including the exquisitely mounted, tinted and enlarged photographic portraits of Cixi, were exhibited in public for the first time in a special exhibition at the Palace Museum located in Beijing.<sup>52</sup>

During recent years, more PhD dissertations and research articles have been published on Cixi's portraits.<sup>53</sup> Yuhang Li provides a case study of Cixi's Guanyin portraits.<sup>54</sup> In contrast with Pang and Rojas, Li's research does not directly pay much attention to the issue of Chinese

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<sup>48</sup> Van Grevenstein- Kruse et al., *Hubert Vos: en het verhaal van een portret* (Amsterdam: Arte et Cetera, 2008). Management Department of the Summer Place, ed., *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi: History and Restoration* 胡博·華士繪慈禧油畫像：歷史與修復 (Beijing: wenwu chu ban she, 2010). Virginia Anderson, “A Semi-Chinese Picture: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China,” in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, Cynthia Mills, Lee Glazer, and Amelia A. Goerlitz, eds, 97-108 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2011). John Seed, “Hubert Vos: Court Painter of Empress Dowager Cixi,” *Arts of Asia* 45 (2015): 108-119.

<sup>49</sup> David Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera: Photographing Cixi, 1903-1904*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology © 2011 Visualizing Cultures, 1-44, [http://vcarchive.com/mitvc/empress\\_dowager/cx\\_essay\\_01.pdf](http://vcarchive.com/mitvc/empress_dowager/cx_essay_01.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Leng Shujie 冷書杰, “The Repairer of Cixi's Oil Painting 慈禧油畫修護人,” *East South West North* 東南西北, 22(2015): 74-76.

<sup>51</sup> The symposium “Imperial Exposure: Early Photography and Royal Portraits across Asia” coincided with the exhibition. See selected revised papers delivered in the symposium in the journal *Ars Orientalis*, 43 (2013).

<sup>52</sup> About the exhibition “100-years of Lighting and Shadows: Old Photographs in Palace Museum 光影百年：故宮老照片特展” and the related papers, see *The Forbidden City* 紫禁城 6 (2015).

<sup>53</sup> Such as Ying-Chen Peng, “Admire Herself: Two Photographic Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi 顧影自憐：從慈禧太后的兩幀照片所見,” *The Forbidden City* 紫禁城 9 (2010): 70-75. Yuhang Li, “*Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women's Artistic and Literary Reproductions of Guanyin in Late Imperial China*” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2011). Cheng-hua Wang, “‘Going Public’: Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi, Circa 1904,” *Nan Nu* 14 (2012): 119-176. Wang, “Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles”, 235-320. You-heng Feng 馮幼衡, “Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art: A New Reading Into the Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi 皇太后、政治、藝術：慈禧太后肖像畫圖解讀,” *the National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 30 (2012): 103-155. Ying-Chen Peng 彭盈真, “Remaining Things in Three Seas: Empress Dowager Cixi's Photographs of ‘Acting as Guanyin in the Middle Sea’ 三海遺事：慈禧太后的“中海扮觀音”拍照始末,” *The Forbidden City* 6(2012): 31-39. Ying-Chen Peng, “Lingering Between Tradition and Innovation: Photographic Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi,” *Ars Orientalis* 43 (2013) 157-174. Ying-Chen Peng, “*Staging Sovereignty: Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1809) and Late Qing Court Art Production*” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> “Chapter 3: Oneself as a female deity: representations of Empress Dowager Cixi as Guanyin,” in Li, “*Gendered*,” 142-212.

modernity. Rather, Li focuses on Cixi's multimedia Guanyin portraits (7 photographs, 3 ink paintings and 2 albums) in the context of religious practices of the cult of Guanyin in late imperial China. Although there is no solid evidence for a religious function in Cixi's Guanyin portraits, Li points out an often-neglected point, that is, the religious context and significance of Cixi's Guanyin portraits.<sup>55</sup> Ying-Chen Peng also uses one chapter to focus on the portraits of Cixi in her dissertation on Cixi's art productions.<sup>56</sup> Peng regards Cixi's portraits as part of her strategy in staging agency, important in China's modern politics and gender studies.<sup>57</sup> Peng points out that Cixi's portraits combine with both masculine and feminine qualities, which are features I will delve into separately, placing them within changing political and diplomatic contexts of Late Qing China. Cheng-hua Wang's articles on Cixi's portraits discuss the political manipulation and publication of Cixi's photographic and oil painting portraits during 1904.<sup>58</sup> In addition, by comparing Cixi and Ci'an's portraits, Wang traces back the intentional political manipulation of Cixi's portraits during the 1860s and 1870s,<sup>59</sup> which, in comparison, is further analyzed in You-heng Feng's article.<sup>60</sup> You-heng Feng's article focuses on how Cixi promotes herself as a "female emperor" through her portraits. In the conclusion, Feng regards Cixi's later portraits presented to foreigners as a political metaphor.<sup>61</sup> This is a point that I will further explore by associating Cixi's later portraits with the New Policy Reforms after 1901.

Based on this past scholarship, in my dissertation, I intend to focus on the portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi as a means of exploring how images respond to both foreign influences and traditional cultures; and in particular, how the images were rendered in response to the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>56</sup> "Chapter 1: Director and actor: portraits of Cixi", in Peng, *"Staging Sovereignty,"* 28-76.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 238.

<sup>58</sup> Wang, "Going Public", 119-176. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 235-320.

<sup>59</sup> Wang, "Going Public," 123. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 246-9.

<sup>60</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 108-113.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 135-6.

changing court power and its ideology during the transitional period of the final Chinese dynasty. By tracing the last Chinese female leader's portraits through their original historical and political contexts, my purpose is to explore how such portraits played important roles in the reforms, in addition to how and why the court portraiture changed under these complicated contexts. In addition, I will examine how "social subjects" deployed particular portraiture conventions according to their own "self-fashioning." I will also consider what influences shaped Chinese modern visual culture, and how the social topography of court culture functioned in social art history. My research also has consequences for the study of traditional ink-painting portraits, oil paintings and photographic portraits produced in the court by both Westerners and Chinese, either under the control of imperial powers or produced secretly by the artists. These new mediums and techniques can always tell us something that is beyond the subject's likeness.

### **1.3 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

My dissertation is made up of this introduction, three main chapters (Ch. 2-4) and coda. In Chapter 2, I focus on Cixi's traditional portraits from the 1860s through the 1890s. In the first section, I argue that there is a visible trend of empowering women and disempowering man in imperial portraiture during the 1850s when Cixi was merely one of Emperor Xianfeng's consorts. Firstly, by taking some other concubines' portraits as examples, I argue that court ladies would be portrayed according to their ranks rather than their real physical appearances during the 1850s. Also, I argue that Cixi had to keep her identity as a "nameless beauty and faceless lady" during her husband's lifetime. Secondly, by comparing the Emperor Xianfeng's portrait with flowers and his concubines' cross-dressing portraits on horses, I argue that during the 1850s, the

Emperor's portraits were relatively feminine while female court portraits were much more masculine. Finally, as a case study of one of the features and contexts of the Manchu imperial portraits, I work on the proceeding Emperor Daoguang's portraits to contend that horse-riding and hunting portraits were Manchu ways to claim authority. However, these functions were lost or replaced during the 1850s.

In the second section of Chapter 2, I argue that Cixi's portraits from the early 1860s to the late 1890s, full of masculine symbols, are indicative of her struggle for imperial power within the inner court. In the first part, by comparing the two Empress Dowagers' portraits, I agree with some past scholarship that Ci'an's portraits look feminine while Cixi's portraits are rather masculine. However, I do not agree that such a difference is simply due to the two Empress Dowagers' political interests. Rather, I argue that the two ladies' either feminine or masculine portraits are tightly related to their different portrayal strategies based on their distinguished situations within the court. Later in the chapter, I work on Cixi's playing go portrait, as an attempt to delve into the possible meanings and identifications of the mysterious man in the portrait. I argue that the portrait may be dated to the late 1890s, possibly involved in the Hundred Days Reform Movement and that the male go mate of Cixi is her closest eunuch Li Lianying.

Chapter 3 is a case study on Cixi's photographic portraits, which I sort into three groups based on, respectively, their diplomatic function, feminine pose and religious context. In the first section, I begin by describing how and why photo portraiture in China was first understood as culturally taboo. Specifically, I describe the context in which photography was understood as an alien, dangerous, and magical technology. During this period Westerners came to be associated with horrible devils in relation to this new media. These taboos of photo portraiture in the late Qing dynasty are indispensable to our understanding as to why the Chinese female leader chose

to take, present, and display her photo portraits. Also, by working on Prince Gong and Prince Chun's photo portraits, I attempt to delve into the early manipulation of photography by the royal family, which established examples for Cixi's later photo portraits.

In the second section of Chapter 3, I work on the first group of Cixi's photos that were strictly under her control with particular diplomatic functions. Through international circulation and transcultural interpretation of the photos, Cixi's images, as well as the Chinese national images represented by Cixi, were recontextualized and thus, out of Cixi's original control.

In the third section of Chapter 3, by focusing on Cixi's feminine-posing photo portraits, which are quite different from her early masculine portraits, I argue that we should not simply pay attention to the intentional gender representation of these unique feminine portraits, but also to the political background of these mirror gazing portraits. It was during her New Policy Reforms that Cixi began taking these feminine posed photos. At the same time, Cixi called for the ban on binding women's feet in 1902, before ordering the Department of Education to promote female education in 1906. In this sense, not only were Cixi's mirror gazing portraits quite unique within the context of traditional Chinese paintings, but also possibly contained somewhat implicit meanings, even indicating a new era of modern female portraits.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Cixi's performance of her gender identity in these portraits may be included within her modernization reforms as well as the specific issue of Chinese modernity.

In the final section of Chapter 3, by focusing on Cixi's widely circulated dress-up portraits as different examples of female deities, I propose that Cixi not only dressed up as Guanyin, as some scholars have already noticed, but she also embodied the Madonna while wearing Qing imperial attire. Such representations of the icon have been handed down until

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<sup>62</sup> Ying-chen Peng even takes these Cixi's photos as the first signs of the modern images of woman. Peng, "Lingering Between Tradition and Innovation," 170. Peng, "Admire Herself," 75.

today. On the one hand, missionaries wanted to use Cixi's august national image to convert Chinese people. On the other hand, after the notorious anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion, during the New Policy Reforms, Cixi changed her strategies towards Christianity and even collaborated with missionaries in creating the Cixi-like Madonna. Hence, through her embodiment as almighty goddesses, Cixi represented herself as the ultimate female ruler in charge of everyone's spiritual life.

In Chapter 4, I work on the four oil paintings of Cixi under the hands of the American Katharine Carl and the Dutch-American painter Hubert Vos. In the first section, I review the tradition of oil painting portraiture in the Chinese court as context for Cixi's oil painting portraits. Even though there are oil paintings of imperial portraits before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of them were painted on traditional Chinese paper/silk and kept in storage as sketches. By comparison, Cixi's oil painting portraits were much more westernized: all of Cixi's oil painting portraits are painted on imported canvas with completely western materials, and some of her oil painting portraits were even customized for worldwide exhibition according to the public display of rulers' portraits within the Western tradition. During the late Qing, Westernization was sometimes identical with modernity.<sup>63</sup> In this sense, Cixi's oil painting portraits during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were much more modernized than the previous Chinese imperial portraits, no matter how East Asian, traditional or conservative Cixi's oil painting portraits looked to Western eyes.

In the second part of Chapter 4, by examining the diplomatic relations between the United States and the late Qing Empire, as well as the identity of the "travelling woman" in the context of the American Woman's Rights Movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, I argue that

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<sup>63</sup> As Zheng Yongnian discusses the complexities of westernization: "Semi-peripheralization triggered off China's modernization. It was in this aspect that China was deeply dependent on the West. For many Chinese political leaders, westernization and modernity were identical; the West was the standard that China should aim for; and only by westernization could China develop a strong nation-state and become an equal member in the nation-state system." Yongnian Yongnian, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15-16.

Cixi's oil painting portraits were not merely based on the Empress Dowager's one-sided thinking to modernize the old empire, but were also promoted by American government and educated American women as approaches to manifest: 1) the friendship and shared-benefits between the United States and China; 2) the achievement of worldwide woman rights. I propose that during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Western travelling women, such as Mrs. Conger and Miss Katharine Carl, played indispensable, but neglected roles in modernizing the Chinese female leader's portraiture.

In the third section of Chapter 4, I point out that Katharine Carl's four portraits of Cixi perhaps have different audiences and functions, which are strictly separated and under the control of Cixi. The public exhibition of Cixi's portrait at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition displayed the Empress Dowager's advanced and modern thought as well as her unbeatable royal power to an international audience.

The fourth section of Chapter 4 is a case study on the Dutch-American male painter Hubert Vos's two portraits of Cixi. I propose that Cixi's approval of her painting by the foreign male painter was not only a part of the New Policy Reforms with the purpose of saving the old empire by way of modernization, but was also a diplomatic success of the United States which was beneficial to China-US relations. Moreover, even though Vos painted the "realistic Cixi" without Cixi's permission, as far as I am concerned, rather than intentionally defame the Empress Dowager by showing her authentic, aged or wicked facial resemblance, Vos represented a powerful and mysterious female ruler, which to some extent agreed with what Cixi wanted to show to Western audiences. In this sense, between Cixi's Chinese aesthetic requirements and Western visual languages, Vos set up a bridge, working as a visual translator to interpret the positive image of Cixi to the western world.

The dissertation ends with the concluding coda. Taking Cixi's first and last unplanned photos as examples, I underline Cixi's different treatments to domestic people and foreigners. I also refer to Cixi's complicated attitudes towards portraits as a part of the issue of Chinese modernity. If Cixi's early portraits during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century were part of her strategies for inner court power, as I discuss in Chapter 1, Cixi's portraits during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as I discuss in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, characterized her strategy to gain international support rather than try to achieve domestic enlightenment, which was finally challenged by the later Revolutionary Party.

## 2.0 FEMININE EMPERORS AND MASCULINE CIXI: HER PORTRAITS AND INNER-COURT STRUGGLES BEFORE 1901

At the beginning of the film *The Burning of the Old Summer Palace* (1983), when the 16-year-old Cixi entered the palace to attend the beauty selection, she noticed that dragon patterns were all around the palace and always carved above the phoenix. A short conversation between the young Cixi and an old craftsman explained the symbolic meaning of the dragon and phoenix pattern motif:<sup>64</sup>

Cixi: Why is the dragon always placed above the phoenix?

Craftsman: Of course! The dragon is the emperor and the phoenix is the empress. Of course, the dragon should be above the phoenix.

Cixi: If I were the empress, I would put the phoenix above and the dragon below.

Craftsman (Laughs): Sure, if you were the empress, you would turn the *qian* (乾 literally heaven or male) and *kun* (坤 literally earth or female) upside down! I'll do this free for you!

Cixi (Earnestly): Are you serious?

Craftsman (laughs): Yes!

Even though such a conversation might have been employed simply to enhance the dramatic plotline of the film, it still reflects the widespread comments on Cixi: a female who tried to change the traditional notion that women should be inferior to men, and ultimately succeeded. In her tomb, there indeed is a unique carved pattern of a phoenix placed above a

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<sup>64</sup> Han Hsiang Li direct, *The Burning of the Old Summer Palace* (火燒圓明園), movie released in 1983.

dragon. In fact, Cixi's tomb is not the only tomb to feature the phoenix pattern above one dragon. Another Empress Dowager Ci'an's tomb also has such a pattern, though not as exquisite as the one in Cixi's tomb. Furthermore, another pattern of a phoenix followed by two dragons is unique to Cixi's tomb. Tour guides will tell tourists that the pattern of two dragons following a phoenix symbolically suggests the historical fact that two emperors, Tongzhi and Guangxu, were suppressed under the control of Cixi.

Yet, in spite of what she promised in the film, Cixi never became an empress during her husband Emperor Xianfeng's lifetime. Still, thanks to her giving birth to the only heir to the throne, she became one of two Empress Dowagers and obtained authority, together with another Empress Dowager Ci'an, within two months after her husband's death in 1861. Together, the two Empress Dowagers attended to state affairs behind a bamboo curtain for approximately twenty years. After Empress Dowager Ci'an's sudden death in 1881, Cixi finally became the sole authority of the country and began the process of preparing her tomb, a process which lasted up until her death, which is one of the reasons why the patterns in Cixi's tomb are much more exquisite and unique.

Symbolically, the unique upside down patterns of the phoenix leading the dragon(s), respectively, one dragon in Ci'an's tomb and even two dragons in Cixi's tombs, are perhaps be associated with the relationship of the feminine Emperors and masculine Empress Dowagers of the late Qing dynasty during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even if the formation of such an upside down gender relationship was historically complicated and did not really start from the images related to Cixi, Cixi's early portraits with masculine features are indeed the most representative. In this chapter, I am going to work on Cixi's early portraits that are produced and in a limited fashion displayed within the court space to explore how and why Cixi would like to

be portrayed before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as how the images joined the inner court struggles so as to help Cixi to survive and ultimately succeed.

## 2.1 EMPOWERING WOMEN AND DISEMPOWERING MAN: CIXI AS ONE OF EMPEROR XIANFENG'S CONSORTS (1850S)

### 2.1.1 Nameless beauties and faceless ladies

The title *Empress Dowager Cixi* is neither her real name nor one adopted during her lifetime.<sup>65</sup> Debates still continue as to what her name given at birth was and where she grew up. She was usually known as as Orchid (*laner* 蘭兒 or *yulan* 玉蘭, which translates to magnolia flower) in some non-official historical documents<sup>66</sup> as well as in most modern popular publications and dramas, including the film mentioned above. But she was also associated with other names, such as Apricot (*xinger* 杏兒 or *xingzhen* 杏貞).<sup>67</sup> The fact is that no official records remain which could reveal her real maiden name. However, this is quite common for late Qing women, no

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<sup>65</sup> She was enthroned as Empress Dowager Cixi approximately one and half months after Emperor Xianfeng's death. It is during the two Empress Dowagers' struggle for power (and even lives) against the eight assisting ministers, on the first day of September in 1861 according to the Lunar calendar, that the two Empress Dowagers were respectively entitled Ci'an and Cixi. In the end of September, with the support of the Prince Gong, the two Empress Dowagers finally killed all of the eight ministers. Some scholars regard the acceptance of their honored titles of Ci'an and Cixi as one of the political strategies of the two Empress Dowagers' step-by-step pursuit for power. Xu, *Beauty and Sadness*, 172.

<sup>66</sup> Tian Gu 天陂, *Unofficial History of Qing* 滿清外史, vol 2., in *Anecdotes and Unofficial History of Qing* 滿清稗史, ed. Lu Baoxuan 陸保璿 (Beijing: Zhongguo shu dian, 1987), 5.

<sup>67</sup> Yehena, *The Empress Dowager Cixi As Far As I know*, 12.

matter Manchu or Han Chinese.<sup>68</sup> In the court, it is the emperor who holds the right to award names to concubines, and the ladies' names were sometimes changed according to the Emperor's requirements.

Not only is her name before she entered the court is unknown, but also her early title in the court, before the second lunar month of 1854 when she was promoted to the fifth rank concubine with the title Yi (懿), is also both unclear and controversial. After the death of Emperor Daoguang, his fourth son was appointed as the new Emperor Xianfeng in 1851. During the initial selection of consorts to Emperor Xianfeng, the young Cixi was selected by the emperor from a group of Manchu teenage girls and became a relatively lower sixth-rank concubine<sup>69</sup> with the awarded title of *lan guiren* (蘭貴人, which literally means Noble Lady Orchid) or *yi guiren* (懿貴人, literally, Noble Lady Virtuous).<sup>70</sup> The young Cixi was almost negligible in her early years in the court. Whereas, another Manchu girl, whose maiden name is also missing from any official records, was awarded a higher title Concubine Zhen (*zhen pin* 貞嬪, literally Concubine Chaste). Although Cixi and Zhen entered the court the same time, the two-year younger Concubine Zhen was quickly promoted from the fifth rank concubine to the Empress within one year. During Cxi's early life in the court during the 1850s, it seems the most outstanding merit of the young Cixi was her appointment firstly as a Noble Lady (1852-1854)

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<sup>68</sup> However, different from the severe Han Chinese patriarchal tradition, just as their male family members, Manchu women's names remained in records during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. But the situation changed after the Manchu court moved to Beijing. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 129-130.

<sup>69</sup> There are nine classes of imperial consorts in Qing dynasty: Empress (皇后), Imperial Noble Consort (皇貴妃), Noble Consorts (貴妃), Consorts (妃), Imperial Concubines (嬪), Noble Ladies (貴人), First Class Female Attendant (常在), Choice Lady (答應), and Female Attendant (官女子).

<sup>70</sup> Cixi's title is recorded as Noble Lady Orchid in the Manchu imperial jade genealogy, but in the later *Draft History of Qing*, her title is written as Yi. According to Yu Bingkun, the writer of *Draft History of Qing* might make a mistake possibly according to her later widely accepted title Imperial Concubine Yi, since normally most of the consorts' titles, once they were conferred upon from the emperor, would not change even they were promoted. But Emperor Xianfeng changed Cixi's original title from Orchid to Yi when she was later promoted to Imperial Concubine Yi. Yu Bingkun 俞炳坤, "The Year of Cixi's Entering the Court, Her Status and Title 慈禧入宮時間、身份和封號," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 4(1979): 22.

and later as Imperial Concubine Yi (懿嬪 1854-1856). After her appointment as Consort Yi (懿妃 1856-1857), she gave birth to the only surviving son of the emperor in the third lunar month of 1856. During the Spring Festival of 1857 in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Xianfeng reign, she was finally elected as the third rank Noble Consort, titled Noble Consort Yi (懿貴妃), whose title was only behind the Empress among the eighteen consorts in the imperial harem.<sup>71</sup> From that point forward, Noble Consort Yi and the Empress had been the two highest ranking imperial consorts of the Emperor Xianfeng.

The official portraits of the Empress and the Noble Consort Yi, the two highest-ranking imperial consorts during Xianfeng reign (1851-1861) have not survived until today.<sup>72</sup> Despite the loss of these portraits, two traditional Chinese ink paintings that have been identified as portraits of Emperor Xianfeng's four concubines remain. One painting is a merry-making scroll(*xingle tu* 行樂圖) with three consorts (fig.1), while the other is a horse-riding painting with two consorts (fig.2). They are confirmed as Xianfeng consorts' portraits because all figures in the paintings, respectively, have a clear title label. However, I find the labels chronologically in conflict with one another because some of the titles were given during Xianfeng's reign and some were created several years after Emperor Xianfeng's death. In the following paragraphs, I will examine the inscriptions, the layout and somewhat invisible order in the two paintings of Xianfeng's four consorts. I believe the four concubines' portraits will provide us more information on consort portraiture during the Xianfeng reign.

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<sup>71</sup> Xianfeng emperor does not have the second rank Imperial Noble Consort.

<sup>72</sup> In the second year of the Xianfeng reign (1852), it is recorded that court painter Shen Zhenlin was ordered to paint a portrait of the Empress. In the same year, Shen Zhenlin and another court painter Shen Zhen were also ordered to paint smaller size portraits for the Imperial Concubines Yun(雲嬪) and the First Class Female Attendant Wan's(婉常在). Later, a half-length portrait of the Empress, together with a half-length portrait of the Emperor Xianfeng, was hung in the emperor's bedchamber. However, none of the portraits left till today. See *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, film No 29, reports of 8.3, 8.7, 11.21, 12.8, 12.9.



**Figure 1.** Merry Making of Noble Consort Mei and Noble Lady Chun(玫貴妃春貴人行樂圖), color on paper, 169 x 90cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

The merry-making portrait of emperor Xianfeng's three consorts (玫貴妃春貴人行樂圖 fig.1) depicted the scene of the court ladies' picking flowers and fishing in a traditional Chinese garden. According to the inscriptions, the front middle lady is the third rank Noble Consort Mei (玫貴妃), the front left is the sixth-ranking Noble Lady Chun (春貴人), and the back right is the seventh-ranking First Class Female Attendant Xin (鑫常在). There are several surviving records that detail the middle Noble Consort Mei who gave birth to the second son of Emperor Xianfeng in 1858. Unfortunately, her son died before his first birthday. Regardless, Noble Consort Mei's status was still higher than the other concubines who never produced an heir. Indeed, by contrast, there are fewer records remaining that provide information about the other two ladies with no descendants in the painting. With the Emperor Xianfeng's seal, (meaning that the emperor Xianfeng once watched the painting) the scroll is presumed to have been painted during

Xianfeng reign, possibly 1853-1859 when the three consorts all entered and lived in the court.<sup>73</sup> But since the title “Noble Consort Mei” was only granted after Xianfeng’s death in 1874 during the Tongzhi reign, I assume that the inscription might have been added approximately two decades after the original painting. Hence, the inscriptions most likely did not refer to the titles of the three consorts during the time in which the paintings were created, but rather the highest rank that each consort achieved during her lifetime was recorded onto the surface of the paintings several years later. Indeed, given the common rule of Chinese portraiture that the middle figure usually holds the highest rank, among the three ladies, the rank of the middle figure depicted in a green robe is higher than those who appear on her left and right wearing dark blue robes. Visually, it is not easy to distinguish their identities due to their identical facial features, fashionable hairstyles known as the two flags bun (*liang ba tou* 兩把頭), and fashionable attire characterized by rolled-up sleeves (*da wan xiu* 大挽袖). In this sense, I contend that the identified inscriptions added later are primarily based on the three ladies’ imperial ranks indicated by their meaningful hierarchical arrangements in the painting rather than their physical representations. In other words, the merry-making painting represents not the court ladies’ authentic portraits but their imperial rank.

The Noble Lady Chun, the front left lady in the merry-making painting, is also depicted in another portrait of Xianfeng’s consorts, *the Horse-riding of the Imperial Concubine Ying and the Noble Lady Chun* (英嬪與春貴人騎馬圖 fig.2), possibly painted between 1852-1856.<sup>74</sup> The two consorts’ identities are also labeled with two inscriptions indicating that the front lady is the

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<sup>73</sup> Noble Consort Mei (玫貴妃) entered the Court in November 1853 according to the Lunar calendar. Noble Lady Chun (春貴人) and the First Class Female Attendant Xin (鑫常在) both died in 1859. See the tablet of the concubines of Emperor Xianfeng in Xu Guangyuan 徐廣源, *Visual History: Private Family Album of the Qing Concubines* 視覺歷史:大清後妃私家相冊(Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2012), 258.

<sup>74</sup> The two concubines were both given the imperial titles in 1852, and Imperial Concubine Ying died in lunar July 1856. See the tablet of the concubines of Emperor Xianfeng in Xu, *Visual History*, 258.

higher ranking Imperial Concubine Ying, and the back lady is the lower ranking Noble Lady Chun. Noticeably, the front lady's face is depicted at a three-quarter angle. This gesture helps to show the two-eye peacock feather on her official cap much more clearly. The lady in the back is painted in a manner that portrays her entire face with the addition of a one-eyed peacock feather that indistinctly appears behind her cap. Among the hierarchy of Machu clothes, the different numbers of peacock eyes, from one eye to three, are symbols of one's official rank: the more eyes on the peacock, the higher status the official is. In the cross-dressing painting of Xianfeng's consorts, we can also see the hierarchy of Machu males' clothes. Therefore, through even the most minimal depiction of the consorts' physical representation,<sup>75</sup> I argue that the two paintings discussed above do not highlight the four consorts' beautiful looks or authentic appearance, rather, they pay much more detailed attention on their imperial rank.



**Figure 2.** Horse-riding of the Imperial Concubine Ying and the Noble Lady Chun (英嬪與春貴人騎馬圖),

color on paper, 169 x 90cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

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<sup>75</sup> For example, in the horse-riding painting, the front Imperial Concubine Ying is depicted with a wide chin. But it is also susceptible that such a facial characteristic is possibly due to the painter's lack of experience of painting a three-quarter face.

The fact that no female painters served the Court might be one of the reasons for the lack of authentic facial details of the young consorts.<sup>76</sup> Traditionally, male portraitists were forbidden to observe female models too long. For example, it was recorded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century that the first King of Western Shu (*xishu* 西蜀) once ordered a portrait of his concubine, but meanwhile he placed limits on the amount of time that the male court painter could look at the concubine.<sup>77</sup> The traditional scene of portraying elite women is also visually recorded in some paintings, such as the 10<sup>th</sup> Century long scroll *In the Palace* (*gongzhong tu* 宮中圖) and the 15<sup>th</sup> century scroll *Spring Morning in the Han Palace* (*hanging chunxiao* 漢宮春曉 fig.3). In both paintings, the only male, besides the eunuchs, is the portrait painter: the male painter sits in front of the consort in order to draw her bust portrait on silk and mounted within a rectangle frame. Since the bust portrait is very unusual within the Han Chinese tradition, the painters in both painting scenes were probably drawing simple sketches to record the facial features of the consorts in a limited amount of time.<sup>78</sup> Considering the general process of making a Chinese portraiture in which the face and body are assembled separately,<sup>79</sup> the full portrait and the rest of the portrayed lady's body might be completed later in the painters' studios.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Although the person who created the first Chinese painting is identified as a woman, as recorded in the first book on analyzing Chinese words *Word and Explanation* (*shuo wen jie zi* 說文解字), throughout Chinese dynastic history, most painters, especially professional portraitists either in the court or in the folk are male.

<sup>77</sup> See the entry "Chang Chongyin 常重胤" in Huang Xiufu 黃休復, *The Record of Renowned Yizhou Painters* 益州名畫錄 vol.1 (Chengdu: Sichuan ren min mei shu chu ban she, 1982), 43.

<sup>78</sup> Small bust portraits are usually used as sketches, known in Chinese as *yang* or *fenben*. See Heping Liu, "Empress Liu's 'Icon of Maitreya': Portraiture and Privacy at the Early Song Court," *Artibus Asiae*, 63 (2003): 134. Also see Anning Jing, "The Portraits of Khubi-lai Khan and Chabi by Anige (1245-1306), A Nepali Artist at the Yuan Court," *Artibus Asiae*, 54 (1994): 71-78.

<sup>79</sup> Especially in making the formal portrait for memorial and worshipping., see ECHO of Things Chinese Journal 漢聲雜誌, ed, *Chinese Folk Portraiture*.

<sup>80</sup> It is also recorded in the archive of the Qing Imperial Household Department that in the fourth year of Tongzhi reign(1865), court portraitists firstly painted several pieces of half-length portrait of Cixi and Ci'an, After they were approved by the empress dowagers, the painters would continue to finish the final full-length portraits. In *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, film No. 35.



**Figure 3.** Qiu Ying (Ch'iu Ying), part of the scroll Spring Morning in the Han Palace (*hangong chunxiao* 漢宮春曉), color on silk, total 30.6 x 574.1cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei

In order to maintain the rigorous separation between males and females, the famous Neo-Confucius scholar Zhu Xi severely protested against female portraits. In the opinion of Zhu, during their lifetimes, women should live deep in their own quarters and never go out except in a closed carriage with a veil over their faces, so as to disallow a outside male painter to watch and draw a lady's true likeness. Furthermore, according to Zhu, it is "a gross violation of ritual" for a male painter to enter women's quarters and portray her true likeness, both living and dead.<sup>81</sup>

When it came to the Manchu Qing dynasty, even if Manchu women were not allowed to follow several Han customs, such as foot binding and wearing Han Chinese clothing, Manchu rulers still promoted several good Confucian conducts to rule not only Han but also Manchu

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<sup>81</sup> According to Zhu Xi (or Chu Hsi 朱熹), "in the current custom everyone draws an image on the back of the soul cloth. This is all right for men who had portraits made while alive. But what about women who during their lifetimes lived deep in the women's quarters and never went out except in a closed carriage with a veil over their faces! How can one have a painter, after their deaths, go right into the secluded room, uncover their faces, take up a brush, and copy their likeness? This is a gross violation of ritual!" Patricia Buckley Ebrey, trans., *Chu Hsi's "Family Rituals": A Twelfth-Century Chinese Manual for the Performance of Capping, Weddings, Funerals, and Ancestral Rites* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 78. Also see Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006), 91. However, even if in some of the Song female formal portraits the ladies do have "a veil over their faces" or similar makeup just as Zhu's suggestion, judging from the Song portraits passed down till today, it seems Zhu's reaction against worshipping female portraits is in vain.

women.<sup>82</sup> In contrast with identified male portraits, female portraits sometimes looked more impersonal. For example, mainly based on eighty-five Chinese figure paintings in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, most of which are portraits from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jan Stuart and Evelyn Rawski noticed that “strongly idealized faces rarely appear in ancestor portraits but under some circumstances are tolerated... exception relates to women who were painted before reaching old age”.<sup>83</sup> The scholars also provided two possible reasons: 1) In the Qing dynasty, young elite women often wore heavy white makeup which might have concealed “not only blemishes but also small idiosyncrasies, resulting in an idealizing uniformity among women”. 2) As a result of “sequestering women from unrelated men”, male painters might have not been able to gaze upon the women’s face, which is a proper rite that no one could accuse the skill of the painter.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, with limited physical representation, even if sometimes females might have had their so-called portraits left, they are still faceless to some extent.

Compared with the four faceless ladies whose faces were at least once painted, when the Emperor Xianfeng was still alive, the young Cixi received no portrait commissions at all. During the 1850s, without her portrait or authentic records revealing her true name, the young Cixi seems to be a mere nobody just as, if not less noticeable than, the other nameless and faceless court ladies. Even worse, as recorded in several unofficial documents, during the late 1850s, the Emperor disliked Cixi and once even thought of killing her due to her interference in politics.<sup>85</sup> In this sense, just as the other females in inner court, the young Cixi was not bestowed the rights

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<sup>82</sup> Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present*, 104 (1984):111-52. About chaste women in Qing dynasty, see Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," *the Journal of Asian Studies*, 46(1987): 37-56.

<sup>83</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 55-6.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>85</sup> The event was recorded in several literary sketches and stories compiled during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, *Qing Petty Matters Anthology* (*Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔), *Gossips of Ten Generations* (*shi ye ye we* 十葉野聞), *Trivial history of Qing* (*man qing bai shi* 滿清稗史) and *Memoirs of Huasuiren Shengan* (*huang sui ren sheng an zhi yi* 花隨人聖庵摭憶). See Xu, *Beauty and Sadness*, 121-3.

to join in government affairs. If she ever exposed political ambition, her life would be threatened. What's more, since she was also the birth mother of the only heir to the throne, she needed to act in a relatively discrete manner, as to protect herself from being killed, the fate of many mothers of heirs to the throne throughout history.<sup>86</sup> Hence, during the 1850s when her husband was still alive, regardless of whether or not she was disliked by the Emperor and therefore had no chance to be painted, it seems to have been wise for the young Cixi to maintain her identity as one of the nameless beauties and faceless ladies to survive in the inner court.

### 2.1.2 Consorts on horses and emperor in flowers

Although during the 1850s the young Cixi left no portrait and seemed to be among the nameless and faceless ladies in the inner court, it is noticeable that, as I mentioned above, there were rumors that the young lady showed her political ambitions as early as the 1850s. Meanwhile, the rumors exposed Emperor Xianfeng as a self-indulgent ruler with little interest in government affairs, especially after the continuing failed battles with foreign armies.

Considering that no horse-riding portrait of the Emperor Xianfeng is left, it is also noticeable that in the above horse-riding painting of Xianfeng's two consorts, *the Horse-riding of the Imperial Concubine Ying and the Noble Lady Chun* (英嬪與春貴人騎馬), both consorts of Emperor Xianfeng look relaxed on horses with smiles, wearing male Manchu attire and boots, caps with peacock feathers, and swords on their waists. The similar genre of consort horse-riding portraiture in male clothing is also depicted in Qianlong reign. In the scroll of *the Spring Hunting*

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<sup>86</sup> For example, after her son was elected as the heir of the throne, in order to keep the power in the young male heir's hand, her husband the Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty executed the lady Gouyi (鉤弋夫人). During the late 1850s, it is also recorded that some officials suggested following the example of the lady Goyi to execute the young Cixi. Ibid.

in *Imperial Garden* (禦園春蒐), the Emperor Qianlong is riding horse and leading the team, while the concubine trailing on horseback follows the emperor's route. Also, in another Emperor Qianlong's shooting deer scroll (威弧獲鹿 fig.4), a concubine is riding a horse following the emperor's step and going to hand over an arrow in her hand to the emperor.<sup>87</sup> The role of the Emperor Qianlong as the superior leader is revealed vividly on these scrolls. Compared to the Qianlong-era paintings, in the Xianfeng consort horse-riding painting, the cross-dressing and healthy young ladies who happily control their horses are in sharp contrast to the invisible and disabled Emperor.



**Figure 4.** Shooting Deer with Powerful Bow (wei hu huo lu 威弧獲鹿) scroll, color on paper, 37.6

x195.5cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Actually, after Daoguang's reign (who is the last Chinese Emperor depicted in a horse-riding and hunting portrait which I will discuss as a case study in the next section), Qing Emperors did not have horse-riding or hunting portraits any more, especially during Xianfeng reign, as the emperor was physically disabled and therefore unable to ride a horse. According to a report of items in the Forbidden City, Emperor Xianfeng (1831-1861, reign 1851-1861) had three surviving portraits as of 1924,<sup>88</sup> while only two were recorded in the Hall of Imperial

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<sup>87</sup> According to Yang Boda, the concubine in non-Manchu costume is the Emperor Qianlong's famous Muslim concubine, Concubine Fragrant (xiangfei 香妃. Yang Boda 楊伯達, "A Qing Concubine's Portraits in *hui* Costume 清代回裝嬪妃像," *The Forbidden City* 紫禁城 1(1984): 9.

<sup>88</sup> In the Archive of the Imperial Household Department, it is recorded that Emperor Xianfeng ordered his portraits in the second, ninth and tenth year of his reign. After he died, his successor again ordered Emperor Xianfeng's portraits in the

Longevity in 1863 (壽皇殿尊藏聖容黃冊, abbr. 1863 record). All three of the portraits were included in the Hall of Imperial Longevity. It is possible that two of Emperor Xianfeng's portraits were made before 1863, while another was painted or moved to the Hall of Imperial Longevity at least two years after his death.<sup>89</sup> There are also three portraits of Emperor Xianfeng currently in storage at the Palace Museum in Beijing.<sup>90</sup> In his only merry-making portrait, with a feather fan in hand, the Emperor is seated in the garden in front of a vivid lotus pond. (fig. 5)



**Figure 5.** Emperor Xianfeng's merry-making picture (咸豐行樂圖), Palace Museum, Beijing

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eleventh year of Xianfeng reign, the first and second year of Tongzhi reign. See *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, Collected in the First Historical Archive, Beijing, film No. 28, 29, 33, 34, 35. Also see Qing shi shan hou wei yuan hui, *The Inventory Report of the Palace Museum*, vol.10, 207, 227.

<sup>89</sup> It is usually recorded that after an old emperor's death, during the early several years of the next reign, the new emperor always ordered to paint several portraits of the past emperor for worshipping. See the Archives of the Imperial Household Department, film No.28-59.

<sup>90</sup> Two are typical formal portraits in court apparels, possibly painted after his death. One is used for ancestor worship, which is the typical formal portrait in court apparel that every Qing emperor has at least one. Another one is the stylized formal reading book portrait seated with legs crossed, which style might be ordered to paint after emperors' death for display and worship in the Suicheng Hall(綏城殿) in Chengde(Rehe) imperial palace. About the halls of displaying the late Qing emperors' portraits in Chengde palace, see Shi Lifeng 石利鋒 annotate, *Current Rules of Rehe Garden* 熱河園庭現行則例 (Beijing: tuan jie chu ban she, 2012), 295-6.

Compared to previous Qing emperors' portraits which were all rendered in a similar style, portrayed within an imperial garden, the surrounding colorful flowers in this Emperor's portrait are very striking: red, yellow, pink and white lotus flowers are booming in the pond; two lotuses are in the vase on his stone table; red rose-like flowers are dotted around him behind the rockeries and even among the bamboos. Flower motif is very common in female portraiture, but seldom shown in Qing Emperor portraiture. Rather, when emperors are alone in the garden, they are usually with books, writing or reading (fig.6-9). Even if in depicting an emperor and a group of peoples in a flower viewing scene, besides the surrounding flowers, a book is always indispensable (fig.10). One exception is the Emperor Yongzheng's *Flower Viewing* portrait (fig.11), which, according to Dr. Hui-Chi Lo, the purpose of the unique *Flower Viewing* portrait is to record an important event in the successful accession of the Emperor Yonzheng.<sup>91</sup> In the Emperor Yongzheng's other group portraits in the garden, flowers disappear and books are again necessities (fig.12). In this sense, Emperor Yongzheng's unusual *Flower Viewing* portrait is possibly in its specific way to claim the emperor's legitimacy. Hence, by comparison with the past emperors' garden portraits and even flower viewing portraits, then, it looks very striking and unusual that the only merry-making portrait of the Emperor Xianfeng is full of feminine flowers, without book or any traditional sign for the masculine authority.

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<sup>91</sup> The portrait was painted before the emperor's accession, when Yongzheng was still entitled prince Yinzen and pretended as a hermit without any ambition to the throne. According to Dr. Hui-Chi Lo, there are two main figures on the painting: one is the center prince Yinzen, and another is the boy seated in front of him. The boy is possibly prince Yinzen's fourth son Hongli, the future emperor Qianlong. The painting is possibly a record of the current emperor Kangxi's visiting to prince Yinzen's retreat in 1722 when the emperor Kangxi expressed his affection towards his grandson Hongli. Hence, "Prince Yinzen used *Flower Viewing* as a reminder to the Kangxi emperor that his favorite grandson could be an emperor if Yinzen first became the emperor." Hui-Chi Lo, "Political Advancement and Religious Transcendence: The Yongzheng Emperor's (1678-1735) Deployment of Portraiture"(PhD disss., Stanford University, 2009), 57-60.



**Figure 6.** Emperor Qianlong's pleasure-making picture (清高宗秋景寫字圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 7.** Emperor Jiaqing's merry-making picture (嘉慶春苑展書圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 8.** Emperor Daoguang's merry-making picture (情殷鑑古圖), color on paper, 172.2 x 83.4cm, 1849,  
Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 9.** Emperor Daoguang's merry-making picture (松涼夏健圖), color on silk, 189 x 97.2cm, 1824,  
Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 10.** Emperor Jiaqing's Flower Viewing portrait (嘉慶觀花圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 11.** Emperor Yongzheng's Flower Viewing portrait (雍正觀花圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 12.** Emperor yongzheng's merry-making picture (雍正行樂圖), Beijing Palace Museum

### **2.1.3 Horse-riding and hunting as a Manchu way to claim authority: Case study of Emperor Daoguang, the last Chinese male ruler on horse**

Before going into Cixi's portraits after her husband's death, I will focus on the horse riding and hunting portraits of the Emperor Daoguang for three purposes. First, historical context for my argument in the above section shows that Emperor Xianfeng's flower portrait is unusually feminine. Second, a visual lineage and example for male rulers' strategic usage of portraits in the late Qing is needed since it is a relatively neglected field in past scholarship. Finally, further comparison with the female leader Cixi's portraits suggests that different gender and international situations will be proposed in the following chapters.

Among the last five emperors of the Qing dynasty, as the longest-living Emperor (1782-1850, reign from 1821-1850)<sup>92</sup>, the quantity of Emperor Daoguang's portraits is the highest, just less than the three high Qing emperors' portraits. According to the record of imperial portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity in 1863, there are twenty-two Emperor Daoguang portraits collected in wood boxes or displayed, while Emperor Xianfeng has two portraits and Emperor Tongzhi has four. Without oil painting or sculpture like the three high Qing emperors, the last three Qing emperors' portraits in this 1863 record are all ink and color paintings on silk. After carefully mounted, these portraits are easy to roll up and be stored separately in small boxes.

Besides the twenty-two portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity, there are also formal portraits for reverencing in Summer Mountain Resort in Chengde and the Imperial Palace in Shenyang. After the Old Summer Palace burned down in 1860, the eight-nation alliance's occupation of the Forbidden City in 1901 and the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, several imperial portraits were removed from the imperial art collection. In 1986, Canton Museum purchased a scroll of half-length portraits of Emperor Daoguang and his concubines (雍宮式範), which is believed to have been stolen from the Forbidden City in 1900. In 2002, Emperor Daoguang's shooting willow portrait from the Old Summer Palace (綺春園射柳圖 fig.13) appeared on the auction market.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Emperor Daoguang's life ends in 69-year-old, which is only shorter than the 89-year-old Emperor Qianlong among all of the twelve Qing emperors.

<sup>93</sup> Li Zefeng 李澤奉, "the Scroll of Shooting Willow in Yichun Garden 綺春園射柳圖卷," *Art Market* 藝術市場 1(2002): 28-29. Zhao Yu 趙瑜, "A Note on Zhong Mao Sheng Jia Autumn Auction in 2002 中貿聖佳 2002 年秋拍記事," *Collectors* 收藏家 1(2003): 65. Liu Yang 劉陽, "Information of the Auction of Cultural Relics in the Old Summer Palace and the Research on Looted Relics 圓明園文物拍賣的資訊收藏與流散文物的研究," *Old Summer Palace* 圓明園學刊 14(2013):91-2.



**Figure 13.** part of Emperor Daoguang’ s scroll of shooting willow in yichun yuan (綺春園射柳圖), color on silk, 621.5 x 70cm, private collection(2008 spring of Guardian Auctions )

It is noticeable that almost half of Emperor Daoguang’s merry-making portraits mentioned above are related to horse riding, hunting or military attire.<sup>94</sup> Horse-riding portraiture is a traditional genre of Emperor’s merry-making portrait in previous Chinese dynasties, such as *Xuanzong's Journey to Shu* (明皇幸蜀圖), *Emperor Shizu of Yuan’s Hunting* (元世祖出獵圖) and *Emperor Xuanzong of Ming’s Hunting* (明宣宗行樂圖軸). These portraits are usually long-scrolls depicting traveling or hunting scenes of the Emperor and a group of attendants with landscapes. Emperor Daoguang’s shooting willow portrait is just in this style. In this painting, Emperor Daoguang, depicted in a casual blue Manchu robe is drawing a bow on a white horse on a straight runway, and two officials in court dress are holding their horses waiting and staring the emperor.

Shooting willow is a traditional sport of the northern pastoral people. As a Manchu tradition, the sport can be traced back to Manchu’s ancestor, Nuzhen (女真) tribes, who set up

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<sup>94</sup> From their names in the 1863 record, at least nine of the portraits (策駿清塵圖，灰甲乘馬圖，穿盔甲乘馬圖，穿盔甲半身掛屏，秋澄攬轡，攬轡怡神，鵠正威申圖，行健思藏圖，耀德崇威圖) depict the emperor riding a horse or in military attire. Another two portraits (健行繹志，閱八駿) might also relate to military attire or horse-riding. See “Record of Imperial Portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity” (壽皇殿尊藏聖容黃冊), 65-105.

the kingdom of Jin (金) in north China in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>95</sup> The Manchu royal family of the Qing dynasty also inherited the tradition of shooting willow. There are three inscriptions on the shooting willow portrait of Emperor Daoguang written by the Emperor himself, separately, in the third year (1823), fifth year (1825) and sixth year (1826) of his reign. According to the inscriptions, Emperor Daoguang practiced shooting willow on horses every March during these years in one of the three gardens of the Summer Palace, the Brilliant Pavilion in the Garden of Beautiful Spring (綺春園含輝樓). In the three inscriptions, Emperor Daoguang mentioned twice that he successfully hit the willows six times, which reminded him of the award granted by his grandfather, the great Emperor Qianlong.

Horse riding and shooting were required skills for the Manchu imperial family. Manchu nobles should participate in several horse riding, shooting and hunting events every year, such as shooting willow in the Summer Palace, hunting in the Southern Park (南苑行圍) and the Mulan autumn hunting (木蘭秋獮). In August 1791, according to the Lunar calendar, when Emperor Daoguang, named Minning (旻寧), was only nine-year-old, he successfully shot a deer in a Mulan autumn hunting expedition. The current emperor Qianlong was overjoyed and praised the little prince Minning as “not losing the tradition of Manchu family” (不墜滿洲家風). Emperor Qianlong even rewarded Minning with a yellow Mandarin jacket (黃馬褂) and a peacock feather on official cap (花翎) to identify his superior status among the other ordinary princes.<sup>96</sup> It is on the horse that Manchu leaders seized the power of all of China from the north. In this sense,

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<sup>95</sup> About the tradition of shooting willow in Jin, see *The History of Jin: Notes on Rituals*(金史禮志). In Song and Yuan dynasty, shooting willow once became one of the military training projects. In Ming dynasty, shooting willow turned to be a performance acting in the Dragon Boat Festival (the 5th day of the 5th lunar month). Wu Changyuan 吳長元 ed., *Chen yuan shi lue* 宸垣識略, vol3(Beijing: guji chu ban she, 1982), 44.

<sup>96</sup> Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽 ed., *Draft History of Qing* 清史稿, vol 4(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 617.

Emperor Qianlong commended not only Mining's professional skill of shooting on horse but also his ability and proficiency in taking over the imperial inheritance.

The award also reminds us of Emperor Qianlong's first yellow Mandarin jacket. When emperor Qianlong was a little prince as well, aged twelve, his grandfather, the great Emperor Kangxi, also granted him a yellow Mandarin jacket to reward his successive successful shots. Hence, to Emperor Daoguang, such an award not merely distinguished his higher rank among the other princesses, but also implied that his talent was valued and even approved by his great grandfather, the great Emperor Kangxi. In 1795, four years after praising Minning, the Emperor Qianlong passed the throne to Mining's father, the Emperor Jiaqing. In sharp contrast with Emperor Daoguang, although Emperor Jiaqing continued the tradition of horse riding, shooting and hunting every year, there is no such kind of portrait left among the Emperor Jiaqing's collection of approximately thirty portraits. The questions may be asked: why did Emperor Daoguang, unlike his father Emperor Jiaqing, commission horse riding and shooting portraits again and again? What's more, in the inscriptions, why did Emperor Daoguang repeatedly mention his successful shooting deer in his childhood?

In Chinese tradition, deer is an icon for rich and official promotion, since the pronunciation of "deer" (*lu* 鹿) in Mandarin is the same as an official's "emolument" (*lu* 祿). The practice of hunting deer is a traditional metaphor of fighting for hegemony. Actually, among the twelve Qing emperors, Emperor Daoguang was the son of a legal Empress, thus the first and the only eldest Prince (called *dizhangzi* 嫡長子 in Chinese) who succeeded to the throne. However, the legitimacy of his succession was still questioned, due to the sudden death of his father Emperor Jiaqing and the missing of the secret imperial edict of adopting an emperor which was usually hidden behind the plaque of "frank and righteous" (正大光明) in the Palace of

Heavenly Purity (乾清宮). By connecting his ability to repeatedly hit a willow in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his reign with his successfully shooting deer in one shot in his childhood, Emperor Daoguang's inscriptions of his shooting willow portrait during his early reign claimed his identity as the only legal heir of his Manchu royal family. The legitimacy might not be succeeded from his father, but was clearly confirmed by his grandfather, the great emperor Qianlong of the high Qing period. Hence, I contend that the successful shooting of the deer is not merely a way for the Emperor Daoguang to show off his expert skill, but rather to symbolically identify himself as the legal inheritor of his royal Manchu family, directly approved by his grandfather Emperor Qianlong.

Furthermore, I note that the Emperor Daoguang not only preferred horse hunting and shooting portraits just like Emperor Qianlong, but also imitating Emperor Qianlong's pose in such kind of portraits. It is noticeable that the style of the portrait of Emperor Daoguang in his shooting willow scroll is very similar to the images of Emperor Qianlong in several of his hunting portraits, such as the shooting deer scroll (擊鹿圖 fig.14), shooting two deer on the Jinyun horse scroll (禦錦雲駿殪雙鹿圖), spring hunting in the Southern Park (春搜圖 fig.15), and the shooting wolf scroll (弘曆射狼圖軸). Indeed, hunting was one of Emperor Qianlong's favorite portrait subjects, especially the scenes in Mulan autumn hunting, were in accordance with the significance of the Mulan autumn hunting in emperor Qianlong's succession of the imperial throne. As a military ritual, the annual Mulan autumn hunting began from the Emperor Kangxi's last year of his reign in 1722, which was also the Emperor Kangxi's last hunting.<sup>97</sup> The 12-year-old prince Hongli, who would become the future Emperor Qianlong, also joined the hunting and later recorded the details of an event in which he pretended to capture a bear under

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<sup>97</sup> Zhao, *Draft History of Qing*, vol 90, 2668.

the order of his grandfather.<sup>98</sup> This record suggests that it was his grandfather Emperor Kangxi who intentionally granted the imperial hegemony to emperor Qianlong.



**Figure 14.** Emperor Qianlong' s shooting deer scroll(清高宗擊鹿圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 15.** Emperor Qianlong' s portrait of spring hunting in the South Park(春搜圖), Palace Museum, Beijing

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<sup>98</sup> Emperor Kangxi shot a bear and thought the bear was dead, then he asked his grandson Hongli to catch the dead bear and pretended his 12-year-old grandson shot the bear. But suddenly the bear stood up and run towards. Emperor Kangxi shot again and finally killed the bear. When emperor Kangxi went back to his tent, he said that the life of Hongli was so precious: Hongli frightened the dead bear but was not hurt at all. Ji Yun 紀昀 et al. ed., *Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature* (*si ku quan shu* 四庫全書) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986), vol. 1301(集部·別集類·清代), 361.



**Figure 16.** Giuseppe Castiglione, Spring's Peaceful Message(平安春信圖), ink and colors on silk, 192 x 71cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

During the Qianlong reign, when some officials asked to stop luxurious imperial hunting, Emperor Qianlong argued that hunting was not leisure but rather a military exercise.<sup>99</sup> In 1741, during his first Mulan autumn hunting which followed his succession to the throne, Emperor Qianlong declared three reasons for hunting:<sup>100</sup> Firstly, as one of the ancestor's rules, the tradition of hunting should be seriously handed down by Manchu descendants. Secondly, hunting was a way to practice military operations and train troops. Thirdly, Mulan autumn hunting provided a chance to meet with Mongol nobles so as to conciliate Mongol tribes. During the Qing dynasty, Mulan autumn hunting was regarded as the grandest ceremony to control the Mongols through a peaceful approach.<sup>101</sup> Among the three reasons, if the last two refer to military and diplomatic functions of hunting, I would say the first reason listed by Emperor

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, vol 643(史部·政書類·通制之屬), 222.

<sup>100</sup> Zhao, *Draft History of Qing*, vol 90, 2668-9.

<sup>101</sup> Wei Yuan recorded it in his military notes in the 1840s. Wei Yuan 魏源, *Imperial Military Records* 聖武記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 100.

Qianlong implied his identity as a legal and qualified heir taking over his imperial power from his grandfather and the other previous ancestors. That might be one of the reasons why Emperor Qianlong repeatedly ordered the paintings of his Mulan autumn hunting scenes. Scholars also noticed the similar artistic approach to claim the emperor's legal succession of hegemony in Emperor Qianlong's other portraits, such as *the Spring's Peaceful Message* (平安春信圖 fig.16), which portrayed the Emperor Yongzheng transmitting a blossoming plum as representing "the authority to rule China," to emperor Qianlong.<sup>102</sup> Even if Emperor Daoguang did not leave as many portraits as his grandfather Qianlong, he still learned similar strategies on producing portraits and made use of them well in his own portraits.

Visually, we can also find similarities between another one of Emperor Daoguang's horse-riding portraits, named *Honoring Virtues and Respecting Dignity* (耀德崇威圖 fig.17), and emperor Qianlong's similarly posed portrait in ceremonial armor on horseback (*Reviewing Troops* 乾隆大閱圖 fig.18). Each are life-size portraits, with both emperors in the same pose with a horsewhip in their right hand and a bridle in their left. In addition, both horses appear with one of their front legs bent. This portrait of Qianlong was painted in 1739 during the fourth year of his Imperial reign by the Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione. The portrait features the Emperor during his first grand military parade in the imperial Southern Park(南苑). From 1739 to the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, this portrait was hung on the wall of the back hall of the New Palace located within the Southern Park (南苑新衙門行宮後殿).<sup>103</sup> Based on the records

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<sup>102</sup> Wu Hung, "Emperor's Masquerade: Costume Portraits of Yongzheng and Qianlong," *Orientalism* 26(1995): 28. Chen Baozhen 陳葆真, "Meanings of Emperor Yongzheng and Emperor Qianlong's Merry-making portraits in Han Chinese Costumes 雍正與乾隆二帝漢裝行樂圖的虛實與意涵," *the National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 故宮學術季刊 27(2010): 49-58.

<sup>103</sup> Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, "Emperor Qianlong's Picture of Reviewing Troops 乾隆皇帝大閱圖," *The Forbidden City* 紫禁城 2 (1980): 28. Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "Two Portraits of Emperor Qianlong in Military Attires 兩幅乾隆戎裝像," *The*

within *Draft History of Qing* (清史稿), Emperor Daoguang visited the Southern Park thirteen times during his thirty year reign.<sup>104</sup> Since it is clearly recorded that he stayed in the New Palace at least once, it is plausible that the Emperor Daoguang saw Emperor Qianlong's life-size portrait hanging on the wall. It is also recorded that one of Emperor Daoguang's horse-riding portraits was possibly a copy in the style of Qianlong and painted around the dates that the Emperor Daoguang visited the Southern Park.<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 17.** Emperor Daoguang's portrait of honoring virtues and respecting dignity (耀德崇威圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 18.** Giuseppe Castiglione, Emperor Qianlong's portrait of reviewing troops(乾隆大閱圖), ink and color on silk, 322.5 x 232cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

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*Forbidden City* 紫禁城 12 (2010): 74-77. Zhang Hongxing, *The Qianlong Emperor: Treasures from the Forbidden City*(Edinburgh: NMS Publishing Ltd, 2002),51.

<sup>104</sup> Among the 13 visits, 10 of them happened during his early reign from 1820s to 1830s.

<sup>105</sup> Zhao, *Draft History of Qing*, vol 17, 646. Also see *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, film No.15.

It needs to be mentioned that Emperor Qianlong's portrait is quite different with previous Chinese emperors' horse-riding portraits. Taking examples of previous Chinese Emperors' portraits, as mentioned in the beginning of the section, horse-riding portraits in China usually depicted hunting or traveling scenes with a group of attendants and detailed landscapes in long scrolls, just as in emperor Daoguang's shooting willow portrait. However, Emperor Qianlong began the new style of life-size imperial portraiture, posing to display his riding on a horse. Such a style was very popular in king's portraiture during the Italian Renaissance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This tradition may be traced back to ancient Roman period. It might be Giuseppe Castiglione who first brought the European style into Qing court.<sup>106</sup> When it came to the reign of Daoguang, there was already no European painter in the court. Regardless, Emperor Daoguang still followed Qianlong's European portrait style. After the reign of Qianlong, Emperor Daoguang was the only Emperor whose portraits reflected such a style.

It is recorded that on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the Lunar 7<sup>th</sup> month of 1840, Daoguang required a portrait of horse riding by the court painter Shen Zhenlin.<sup>107</sup> Based on the features and size, Li Shi argues this record is just about the Emperor Daoguang's portrait of honoring virtues and respecting dignity (耀德崇威).<sup>108</sup> In this portrait, the aged Emperor Daoguang (59-year-old) is in a suit of golden armor, riding on a black horse, just like the supreme commander of the Qing army. He stares ahead without any smile as is usual in some of his other extant portraits. In addition, the emperor wrote an inscription on the scroll: honoring virtue and respecting dignity

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<sup>106</sup> Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens 畢梅雪, "Giuseppe Castiglione and the Renovation of the Emperor's Portraits in the 18<sup>th</sup> century China 郎世寧與中國十八世紀帝王肖像畫的復興," *Palace Museum Journal 故宮博物院院刊* 3 (2004): 101.

<sup>107</sup> *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department*, film No. 22.

<sup>108</sup> Li Shi 李滢, "Ruyiguan Painter Shen Zhenlin and his Imperial Portraits 如意館畫士沈振麟及其禦容像," *Wenwu 文物* 4 (2012): 76-77.

(耀德崇威). The painted date of the portrait is also noticeable, that is, only half a month after the arrival of the British Navy in the China Sea and outbreak of the Opium war.

In the Imperial Household record, on the 22<sup>ed</sup> day of the Lunar 7<sup>th</sup> month of 1840, fourteen days after the above portrait, the Emperor Daoguang again required the same court painter Shen Zhenlin to paint another portrait in half-length, depicting the Emperor wearing golden armor.<sup>109</sup> Coincidentally, in the 1863 record, I also found an entry about a half-length hanging screen depicting Emperor Daoguang in a suit of armor.<sup>110</sup> Even if there is no Emperor Daoguang portrait of that type left today, I assume the two records refer to the same half-length portrait of the Emperor Daoguang in golden armor. The portrait was to be mounted as a hanging screen and was ordered to be painted just one day after British warship approached to Tianjin Harbor and threatened the safety of the Emperor living in nearby Beijing<sup>111</sup>.

Li Shi argues that the purpose of Emperor Xuan's request to paint the two portraits in golden armor is to symbolize the strong Qing army's dignity, while also encouraging soldiers to keep up high morale.<sup>112</sup> However, considering their sizes and mounted methods,<sup>113</sup> the portraits might have been both hanging displays as wall decorations in some Imperial Hall,<sup>114</sup> where ordinary soldiers had no way to enter. So I would rather to say that the audiences of the portraits were not the Qing Army nor soldiers, but the emperor himself. I contend both portraits are painted and displayed for the emperor himself, as a reminder of his grandfather's once honored

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<sup>109</sup> *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department*, film No. 22.

<sup>110</sup> "Record of Imperial Portraits in the Hall of Imperial Longevity" (壽皇殿尊藏聖容黃冊), 96.

<sup>111</sup> Zhao, *Draft History of Qing*, 678.

<sup>112</sup> Li, "Ruyiguan Painter Shen Zhenlin and his Imperial Portraits 如意館畫士沈振麟及其禦容像," 77.

<sup>113</sup> To mount as a scroll, a painting is able to hang on the wall and easy to keep in storage without folding. As to hanging screen, it is a popular style of furniture functioned as wall decoration in the Qing dynasty. The first made full-length horse-riding portrait is 347cm in height and 282cm in width, mounted as a scroll, while the half-length portrait is around 140cm in height and 70cm in width, mounted as hanging screen. *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* (清檔·活計檔), film No. 22.

<sup>114</sup> Although the 19 Emperor Daoguang's merry-making portraits, including 18 scrolls (軸) and one half-length portrait mounted as hanging screen (掛屏), were all kept in storage in separate boxes in the same hall in the 1863 record, they might have other functions and displaying spaces when they were originally painted, for example, the Old Summer Palace.

military achievements, thus indicating the Emperor's aspirations of maintaining his nation's dignity during the first stage of the Opium War, just as declared in his inscription. It needs to be mentioned that during the reign of Emperor Daoguang, the most successful military achievement is the suppression of the Islamic Jahanghir Khoja rebellion (1820-1827). Taking Emperor Qianlong's same name scroll (*Offering Captives at the Meridian Gate* 午門獻俘圖) as the direct example, Emperor Daoguang also ordered the painting of a small scroll which depicted the scene of capturing and handing over of the leader Jahanghir at the Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City.

To sum up, from their childhood as little princes, Emperor Daoguang and Qianlong shared similar experiences: on one hand, they were both selected and promoted by their grandfathers. There was always a rumor among the common folk that Emperor Qianlong was not born in Beijing and that his imperial blood was not pure. But if Emperor Qianlong were not the legal heir, the legitimacy of Emperor Daoguang's power, which was confirmed by Qianlong, would also be in question. From this aspect, it is not surprising that Emperor Daoguang dismissed two grand ministers only two months after his enthronement just because the ministers made a mistake in writing Emperor Qianlong's birth place.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, their talents of hunting and shooting play indispensable roles in their inheriting the throne. Therefore, as a way to claim the legal transmission of his power, Emperor Daoguang preferred not only horse hunting and shooting portraits to highlight his talents confirmed by his grandfather, but also imitating emperor Qianlong's portraits as a means to show the similarities with his grandfather. Such similarities would demonstrate his direct succession to his grandfather's throne, granted by his great-grandfather, the Great Emperor Kangxi. We can even notice one of Daoguang's portraits with a bow and arrow in a frontal pose (namely "straitening the bulls-eye and

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<sup>115</sup> Zhao, *Draft History of Qing*, vol 4, 619.

demonstrating dignity” 鵠正威申圖 fig.19) is similar with emperor Kangxi’s portrait in military attire (康熙戎裝圖 fig. 20). In another emperor Daoguang’s portrait of “riding horse cleaning dust” (策駿清塵圖 fig.21) painted around eight months before his death, the 67-year-old Emperor’s yellow jack seems to intentionally or unintentionally remind me of the award for shooting deer in childhood by his grandfather Emperor Qianlong.



**Figure 19.** Emperor Daoguang’s portrait of “straitening the bulls-eye and demonstrating dignity”(鵠正威申圖), 1826, Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 20.** Emperor Kangxi in military attire(康熙戎裝圖), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 21.** Emperor Daoguang's portrait of "riding horse cleaning dust"(策駿清塵圖), 1849, Palace Museum, Beijing

The horse was once an important military vehicle and horse riding was an indispensable military skill. Due to the loss of areas which produced good breeds of horses to nomadic hands after the Tang Dynasty, Han Chinese power continued to be weak in the following Northern Song dynasty, Southern Song and Ming dynasty. In the Qing Dynasty, Manchu leaders were fully aware of the importance of horse riding and shooting in their acquisition of authority from the Han Chinese, as the latter were usually educated, and thus valued literary talent above martial ability. So, keeping the Manchu advantage of horse riding and shooting was one of the reasons that the early Qing leaders set up the tradition of annual hunting. During the over two millennia of Dynastic rule in China, major enemies of the central plains come primarily from the northern groups. The situation continued in the Qing dynasty. Therefore, the Mulan autumn hunting took on an important effect in uniting and pacifying the northern Mongolian tribes. In addition, during the military parade in the Southern Park, Qing emperors also invited representatives from

Kazakh, Mongol and the Hui Muslim group as a means of showing off the Qing army's military power as all of these groups were supposed as potential major enemies to the Qing army.

However, during the late years of Emperor Daoguang, the situation totally changed: the most dangerous threats were not from the northern grasslands, but from the sea; the major enemies were no longer the northern peoples on horseback with bows and arrows, but the alien navies sailing halfway across the globe with warships and guns. Emperor Daoguang was confused about the changes and once wondered whether there was still a land route to England. During Daoguang's reign, the annual Mulan autumn hunting ceased, the major enemy changed from the northern grassland to the south ocean, and emperor's horse riding and shooting portraits were finally terminated.

After the emperor Daoguang, no Emperor left the portrait of horse riding and hunting. Coincidentally or not, during the 1850s, the termination of emperors' horse riding and hunting portraits, the emperor Xianfeng's feminine portrait with flowers and his cross-dressing concubines' horse-riding portraits, as well as the rumors of the young Cixi's political ambition, all visually manifests a new era of empowering women and disempowering man. Such a feature of the late Qing's imperial portraits also coincides with the historical fact that the male ruler gradually lost his power during the 1850s, thus indicating the future female regent Cixi's control of power for almost the next half century.

## 2.2 MASCULINE CIXI: HER EARLY PORTRAITS DURING TONGZHI REIGN AND EARLY GUANGXU REIGN (1860S-1890S)

After the burning of the Summer Palace by the Anglo-French Army and the imperial family's fleeing Beijing, in Lunar July 1861, Emperor Xianfeng died in the Summer Mountain Resort in Chengde. The Noble Consort Yi's five-year-old son acceded to the throne as the new Emperor. The 24-year-old Empress and the 26-year-old Noble Consort Yi both became Empress Dowagers, with the honorific title of, respectively, Ci'an (meaning "motherly and calming") and Cixi (meaning "motherly and auspicious"). Also, Ci'an is known as East Empress Dowager and Cixi is West Empress Dowager. Ci'an's status is higher than Cixi. In traditional imperial hierarchy, the east is the senior and superior, while the west is the auxiliary and relatively inferior.<sup>116</sup>

With the support of prince Gong and prince Chun, within two months after the emperor Xianfeng's death, the two empress dowagers successfully defeated eight assisting regents appointed by their dying husband, and started to charge state affairs behind a yellow curtain in the Hall of Mental Cultivation (養心殿), where Qing emperors lived and worked since the Qianlong reign. The two Empress Dowagers also changed the title of the new reign from Qixiang (auspicious 祺祥) to Tongzhi (同治), in which Tongzhi is abbreviated from the classical phrase "restoring order together" (同歸於治) but also literally implicates "cooperating control", or "mother and son co-emperors". During the following 1860s-1870s, the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) subsided and the Westernized Movement (1861-1895) began to achieve, the reign of

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<sup>116</sup> With regards to the title "East" and "West", another possibility is that Cixi lived in the Western palace, the Forever Spring Palace (長春宮), while Ci'an's palace was relatively positioned in the East (鐘粹宮).

Emperor Tongzhi, actually under the control of two Empress Dowagers, was also named the Tongzhi Restoration.

### 2.2.1 Struggles between two women: Cixi and Ci'an's two pairs of portraits

Throughout the entire Tongzhi reign (1862-1874), Cixi's imperial rank in the court was lower than Ci'an for at least a dozen years, even though the more educated Cixi actually read over and gave remarks on most of the official documents.<sup>117</sup> Until the Emperor Dowager Ci'an's sudden and somewhat mysterious death in the seventh year of the following Guangxu reign (1881), Cixi finally seized the superior power and became the only *de facto* ruler of the state.

The struggles between Cixi and Ci'an were often the subject of rumors and Cixi is even believed to have been the primary suspect in the murder of Ci'an in several unofficial records and modern dramas. Indeed, as mentioned in the first section in this chapter, Cixi and Ci'an entered the court during the same beauty selection, when the younger Ci'an was quickly promoted to be the only Empress within one year's time. Cixi, on the other hand, remained unknown for quite a few years and later got promoted only partly because she gave birth to the heir of the throne. Even after her husband's death, Cixi's entitlement as the Empress Dowager was also one day after Ci'an's.

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<sup>117</sup> As to the two Empress Dowagers' ranks in the court, Zou Ailian delves the changing reference of the honorable title "Old Buddha" in imperial household archives. The honorable title "Old Buddha" was firstly used in an imperial archive in the second year of the Tongzhi reign (1863) by eunuchs to specifically refer to Ci'an. Two years later, Cixi started to be referred to as "West Old Buddha," while Ci'an as "East Old Buddha." Still, in the name sequence of the "East Old Buddha" Cixi was written ahead of the "West Old Buddha" Ci'an, implying the higher status of Ci'an in the court. Within the imperial archives, such a name order lasted for fourteen years, throughout the entire Tongzhi reign. It is until the third year of Guangxu reign (1877) that the name order finally changed, implying that the status of Cixi was finally higher than Ci'an in the court only after the early Guangxu reign. Zou Ailian 鄒愛蓮, "Cixi in Archives 以檔證史說慈禧," *Beijing Archives* 北京檔案 1 (2015): 18.

Even the dating of Cixi's early portraits had to depend on the similar styles of Ci'an's portraits. Due to the Emperor Tongzhi's handwriting and seals on two portraits of Ci'an, scholars agree that the portraits date to Tongzhi reign. In the portrait with the inscription, "motherly bamboo extends her purity" (慈竹延清 abbr. Ci'an's bamboo portrait, fig.22), Ci'an sits in the garden, while in another portrait with the words "longevity in beautiful palace chamber" (璿闈日永 abbr. Ci'an's courtyard portrait, fig.23), she sits in the imperial courtyard, both surrounded by bamboo and peony flowers. Ci'an's "two flags bun" hairstyle and blue robe with fully rolled-up sleeves are very similar to the concubines featured in the merry-making paintings commissioned by Emperor Xianfeng. But as a widow, Ci'an does not put on makeup, which might be the reason why her facial features look far more realistic to the previous three young concubines.



**Figure 22.** Ci'an's portrait with inscription of "motherly bamboo extends her purity"(慈竹延清), color on paper, 130.5 x 67.5cm, Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 23.** Ci'an's portrait with inscription of "longevity in beautiful palace chamber"(璿闈閨日永), color on paper, 169.5 x 90.3cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Also in the Palace Museum in Beijing, there are two portraits of Cixi: one in a yellow court robe sitting in the garden (fig.24); another one in a casual dark red robe, sitting in a courtyard (fig.25). Neither of the two portraits includes an inscription or seal. The casual robed portrait of Cixi looks very similar to Ci'an's bamboo portrait, and their dimensions are also the same (130.5cm in length and 67.5cm in width). According to the size of the portraits, despite the rank of the West Empress Dowager Cixi was lower than the East Empress Dowager Ci'an's, the standards of making their portraits were on the same level.

In the imperial household records of the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Tongzhi reign (1865), from the Lunar 4<sup>th</sup> month to the Lunar 6<sup>th</sup> month, the two Empress Dowagers ordered their portraits at the same time from court painters Shen Zhenlin and Shen Zhen,<sup>118</sup> and both portraits were mounted in

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<sup>118</sup> Shen Zhenlin 沈振麟 and Shen Zhen 沈貞 also painted a portrait of Emperor Tongzhi in March 29<sup>th</sup>, two days before they

same size and style.<sup>119</sup> Based on the similarities found between the records and extant Empress Dowagers' portraits, You-heng Feng presumes that the two portraits recorded in 1865 might be just the casual dark red robe portrait of Cixi and Ci'an's bamboo portrait.<sup>120</sup> Feng also points out the possible political context of the two Empress Dowagers' portraits: in March 4<sup>th</sup> 1865, one month before the paintings, the two empress dowagers successfully removed the powerful Prince Gong from his post of Prince Regent.<sup>121</sup> In this sense, the two Empresses' order of painting portraits was a special way to celebrate or demonstrate their corporate political success.



**Figure 24.** Cixi in court robe (慈禧吉服像), color on paper, 130.5 x 67.5cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

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started to paint the two Empress Dowagers' portraits. Then from April 1<sup>st</sup>, he was ordered to paint 16 pieces of imperial women's portraits, including the Emperor Daoguang's Imperial Noble Consort Lin (林皇貴太妃) and some princesses. *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, film No. 22.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 108-110.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 109.



**Figure 25.** Cixi in casual dress (慈禧常服像), color on paper, 130.5 x 67.5cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

We do not know which empress dowager first proposed to order their portraits under such a political context, but scholars have already noticed Cixi's skillful manipulation of politically meaningful symbols in her portraits, especially when compared with Ci'an's apparently feminine and motherly portraits.<sup>122</sup> In Cixi's casual robe portrait (fig.25) and Ci'an's bamboo portrait (fig.22), both Empress Dowagers wear the same style casual robe with fully rolled-up sleeves and longevity pattern, while Cixi in dark red and Ci'an in blue robe. They both sit in a garden with rockery behind and bamboo on their right side. The composition of the two portraits is also the same traditional style. By contrast, there are still some differences in details: 1) Cixi sits on a couch with a table above, but Ci'an directly sits on the rockery; 2) Cixi holds a folding fan in hand, but nothing appears in Ci'an's hands; 3) there is an open book and a cup of tea on the left side of Cixi, but on the left of Ci'an are merely bunches of garden flowers.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 108-110. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 247-9. Wang, "Going Public," 123.

The similar scene of sitting on rockery in a garden between bamboo and flowers is also depicted in the *Watching Bamboo Portrait of Empress Xiaoshengcheng* (孝慎成皇后觀竹圖 fig.26), possibly painted during 1820s-1830s.<sup>123</sup> But in Cixi's casual robe portrait, the book and teacup on the table take the place of the flowers in Ci'an's and the previous Empress Xiaoshengcheng's portraits. Cheng-hua Wang argues that the book in Cixi's portraits reveals her political ambition.<sup>124</sup> You-heng Feng also notices this point and regards the book in Cixi's portraits as a symbol of her failure to maintain her role as a female consort in the imperial harem.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, as I mentioned in the preceding section, a book is a common symbol within Emperor portraiture. Books are not only symbols of a literary heritage but also represent cultural continuity, and even the transmission of power. As I mentioned, most of the previous Qing Emperors' portraits in the garden depict the male ruler holding a book or sitting besides books (fig.6-9). In this sense, with an open book on the table, Cixi's casual robe portrait contains unusual masculine meanings and indicates her attention out of the traditional female harem, while Ci'an still limits herself in the traditional garden features with feminine flowers. Hence, by comparison with Ci'an's two portraits surrounded by feminine flowers and empty hands, the masculine features of Cixi's official robe portrait are much more obvious.

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<sup>123</sup> Empress Xiaoshengcheng is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Empress of Emperor Daoguang. She became the empress in 1822, and died in 1833. If Ci'an's bamboo portrait is just the one in record made by Shen Zhenlin, the *Watching Bamboo Portrait of Empress Xiaoshengcheng* might also attribute to Shen Zhenlin, whose serve time is the court is from 1821 to 1883. About study on Shen Zhenlin, see Li Shi 李澍, "Group of Painters in Late Qing Court 晚清宮中畫家群," *Art Observation 美術觀察* 9(2006): 100-102. Also see Li, "Ruyiguan Painter Shen Zhenlin and His Imperial Portraits," 75-82.

<sup>124</sup> Wang also argues the possibly political meaning of the folding fan in Cixi's hand. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 248-9.

<sup>125</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 110.



**Figure 26.** Watching Bamboo Portrait of Empress Xiaoshengcheng (孝慎成皇后觀竹圖), Palace Museum, Beijing

Besides the casual dark red robe portrait, Cixi has another portrait of the same size in which she appears in a yellow court robe (fig.24). The composition is similar with Ci'an's courtyard portrait and also very similar with Emperor Tongzhi's portrait of "Writing in a Courtyard" (遊藝怡情圖 fig.27). The pine trees in the front left in Cixi and Tongzhi's portraits are depicted in the same way. According to imperial household record, in the Lunar third month of the fourth year of Tongzhi reign (1865), court painters Shen Zhenling and Shen Zhen were ordered to paint the Emperor Tongzhi's "Imperial Face Portrait" (禦容臉像).<sup>126</sup> Around one year later, in the Lunar fifth month of the fifth year of the Tongzhi reign (1866), Shen Zhenlin again painted a portrait of Cixi in her living palace (Palace of Eternal Spring 長春宮).<sup>127</sup> As Cheng-hua

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<sup>126</sup> And other princesses' portraits, totally sixteen portraits, see *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔·活計檔, film No. 35, vol. 3106.

<sup>127</sup> Based on the similar composition of the portraits and age of the emperor, Emperor Tongzhi's writing in courtyard portrait (遊藝怡情) is possibly the one painted by Shen Zhenlin and Shen Zhen, on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of the Lunar 3<sup>rd</sup> month of

Wang noticed, the jade *ruyi* (如意) and the snuff bottle on the short-legged table also refer to specific political meanings.<sup>128</sup> On one hand, *Ruyi*, literally “as one wishes”, was a traditional Chinese decoration widely used by literati, Buddhists, Daoists and royal families. During the Qing dynasty, *ruyi* became an auspicious gift between imperial families and officials. Usually, *ruyi* and a “persimmon-shaped” (*shishi* 柿式 in Chinese, whose pronunciation is the same as “everything”, *shishi* 事事) spittoon are put on Qing emperor’s imperial throne, to imply “everything as emperor’s wishes” (*shishi ruyi* 事事如意), and appears often in Qing Emperor portraiture. (fig.11, fig.28)



**Figure 27.** Empress Tongzhi’s merry-making picture (遊藝怡情圖), color on paper, 147.5 x 84cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

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the fourth year of Tongzhi reign(1865), when the emperor was nine-years old. And, the yellow official robe portrait of Cixi was possibly the recorded portrait painted by Shen Zhenlin in 1866.

<sup>128</sup> Wang, “Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles,” 248.



**Figure 28.** Emperor Tongzhi in monk robe (清穆宗僧裝像軸), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 29.** Emperor Daoguang's merry-making picture (静缘圖), Beijing Palace Museum



**Figure 30.** Emperor Tongzhi in casual robe (同治便裝像), Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 31.** Emperor Daoguang's taking snuff portrait, Palace Museum, Beijing

On the other hand, the snuff bottle in Cixi's portrait was also an allegorical masculine item. It may have been Manchu banner troops who started to take snuff to refresh and recover from fatigue, as a replacement for the forbidden tobacco smoking. During the mid-Qing period, within common culture, the snuff bottle was regarded as a symbol of a male's social status.<sup>129</sup> In the court, Qing emperors took snuff frequently and produced a large amount of snuff bottles.

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<sup>129</sup> Fu Bingquan 傅秉全, "Snuff and Snuff Bottle 鼻煙與鼻煙壺," *Forbidden City 紫禁城* 6(1983): 26-28.

Snuff bottles also appeared frequently in Emperors' portraits (fig.29, fig.30). Emperor Daoguang even had a bust portrait specifically depicting him taking snuff (fig.31). The similar scene of taking a pinch of snuff is shown apparently in Cixi's court robe portrait, despite the fact that taking snuff was still a masculine habit no matter in court or among folk, Cixi used to take water pipes rather than snuff. In one of Emperor Tongzhi's five existent merry-making portraits (fig.30), the emperor's right hand's taking snuff gesture is very similar to the pose of Cixi's left hand. Based on the Emperor Tongzhi's age, his taking snuff portrait might have been painted after he grew up, during his later reign.<sup>130</sup> Using the snuff gesture as a mature masculine symbol, Emperor Tongzhi's taking snuff portrait might be painted after he was eighteen-year-old, when he namely took over the reins of the Qing government from the hands of two Empress Dowagers. Cixi's taking snuff portrait might have also been used as the model for Emperor Tongzhi's similar pose portrait to promote the mature male emperor's masculine quality.

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<sup>130</sup> As the only son of the Emperor Xianfeng, the Emperor Tongzhi succeeded his father's throne and became a puppet under the control of two empress dowagers when he was five-year-old. He died in his nineteen-year-old.

### 2.2.2 Identity of a lower rank man: Cixi's playing *go* portrait with a mysterious man



**Figure 32.** the Empress Dowager Xiaozhen(Cixi) playing *go*(孝欽后弈棋圖), color on paper, 231.8 x 142cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Besides the two single portraits I discussed in the above section, Cixi also has a huge size (235 x 144.3 cm) portrait of playing *go* (*weiqi* 圍棋) with a man in the garden (fig.32). No inscription, seal, or any imperial record is left about the portrait. There is even no record that Cixi's played *go*. Playing *go* is a common scene depicted over and over again in traditional Chinese paintings. However, usually the game players are the same sex. (fig.33, fig.34) Considering the visual traditions within the scene of ladies playing chess, in this portrait, Cixi is represented playing *go* under a pine tree with a male companion who looks quite incompatible. You-heng Feng also notices this point and presumes the reason that Cixi does not choose to play *go* with a female in her portrait is her refusal to be feminized as a traditional lonely court lady.<sup>131</sup> Admittedly,

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<sup>131</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 113.

although the date, the mysterious identity of the man and the possible meaning of portrait are still in debate, scholars have come to the agreement that Cixi looks quite masculine in the unique playing *go* portrait.<sup>132</sup>



**Figure 33.** Qiu Ying, part of Spring Morning in the Han Palace (漢宮春曉), color on silk, 30.6 x 574.1cm,  
National Palace Museum, Taipei



**Figure 34.** Chen Mei, concubines playing chess in a pavilion(月曼清游圖冊之閑亭對弈), 37 x 31.8cm,  
ink and color on silk, album leaf, Palace Museum, Beijing

Cheng-hua Wang underlines the political symbolism of the game *go* in traditional Chinese context, and argues the man is Cixi's son, the Emperor Tongzhi.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 250-1

traditional game of playing *go* is sometimes associated with male players' plot of political scheme or fighting for power. For example, in order to take over his imperial power and kill the regent minister Aobai, the young Emperor Kangxi once pretended to indulge in playing *go*, and by chance of playing *go* with his officials, the Emperor actually schemed and finally succeeded to seize back the Emperor's power. According to Wang, Cixi's playing *go* portrait should be dated during the Tongzhi reign when the two Empress Dowagers were both alive. The purpose of Cixi's ordering of the portrait may have been to declare her natural mother-son relationship with the emperor. In addition, by portraying herself to be playing *go* with her son, Cixi might have intentionally established the impression that both she and her son together were in charge of the nation.<sup>134</sup> In this way, Cixi visually excluded Ci'an out of the center of imperial power.

Nevertheless, since Tongzhi died when he was just eighteen years old, presuming that the man with a mature face is the young Emperor Tongzhi is quite suspicious. Scholars in the Palace Museum in Beijing used to identify the man as Cixi's husband, the Emperor Xianfeng, and name the portrait after *The Emperor and Empress Playing Go* (帝后弈棋圖). But later they changed the name of the portrait to *the Empress Dowager Xiaozhen (Cixi) Playing Go* (孝欽後弈棋圖) and left the identity of the man unknown. In fact, there were at least two reasons that the man in the portrait cannot be Cixi's husband, the Emperor Xianfeng. Firstly, the man humbly stands and bends his body while Cixi takes seat tranquilly. These positions would be impossible for an Emperor and his concubine. Taking the scroll of *Emperor Minghuang Playing Go* (明皇會棋圖) as an example, the emperor is seated, while the playmates and servants stand and bend their bodies. Secondly, young Manchu women always wore thick white foundation on their faces with

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 251.

rouged lips, but widows were not allowed to do so. In this sense, this portrait of Cixi should be painted after the Emperor Xianfeng's death, when she had already been a widow without any makeup at all. Cheng-hua Wang also refers to three more reasons why the man could not be Emperor Xianfeng, as Cixi's position in the portrait implicates her actual status as an Emperor.<sup>135</sup> Cixi could not do these when the emperor Xianfeng was alive. All in all, it is probable that in this portrait, Cixi's status is higher than the man.

Ying-Chen Peng's research pays attention to Cixi's attire and suggests the date of the portrait should be in the early Guangxu reign: the light purple riding jacket that Cixi wears in the portrait is against the rigid widow's dark colored dress code during the Qing dynasty, so the portrait could only be commissioned after the Empress Dowager Ci'an's death in the seventh year of Guangxu reign (1881), when Cixi finally seized the power in her own hand and might have been able to openly challenge the traditional dress code in her back garden.<sup>136</sup> Peng also presumes the mysterious man in the portrait as Prince Gong, who was once the most powerful political figure but expelled out of the Council of State in 1884.<sup>137</sup> Hence, according to Peng, the allegorical portrait possibly reflects after Ci'an's death, Cixi's struggle for power with Prince Gong during 1881 and 1884.

However, if we pay attention to the man's belt color in the portrait, the above assumptions of his identity, either as Emperor Xianfeng, Emperor Tongzhi, or Prince Gong, are indefensible. According to Manchu male dress code, current royal family members were to wear

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<sup>135</sup> The three reasons are: firstly, usually, in a *go* game, it is a rule that the much elder and more distinguished player holds white chess and takes the first step. Secondly, with 20 white chesses and 19 black chesses, the chessboard in the portrait manifests that the white chess player, Cixi, is the current winner. Thirdly, in emperors' portraits, the flower vase in the south of the center axil always refers to the emperor's position in the north of the central axil. Ibid, 249.

<sup>136</sup> Ying-Chen Peng, *Staging Sovereignty: Empress Dowager Cixi(1835-1809) and Late Qing Court Art Production*, PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2014, p. 37.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, pp.37-38.

a yellow or red belt (fig.7, fig.8).<sup>138</sup> But in this portrait, Cixi's *go* mate wears a black belt. Hence, the man could not be any imperial family member.

Some scholars also suspect that the man might be some eunuch in the court.<sup>139</sup> Chenghua Wang disagrees since a eunuch's status could not be as high as Cixi's well-matched playmate in the portrait.<sup>140</sup> I agree with Wang on the point that the man in the portrait holds high status within the court. The waist watch and thumb ring of the man again represent his high rank. In the Qing dynasty, a watch was a high priced exotic treasure. Wearing a watch was usually a fashionable way for male to show his wealth and a social status. Thumb rings in precious materials were also a traditional male decoration to denote the owner's noble status, especially favored by Qing Emperors. Yet, I do not agree with Wang that no eunuch could be depicted as in the portrait. Actually, there is one eunuch in Cixi's court with an exceptional high status, that is, Cixi's chief eunuch Li Lianying. In some of Li's photos, we can see he always wears a similar watch at his waist (fig.41, fig.42). A green jade thumb ring similar with the one that the man wears in this portrait is also identified as Li's belongings, which might be awarded by Cixi.<sup>141</sup> Li Lianying and Cixi's portraits are also found side-by-side on two pages of a folding album (fig.69). Therefore, I contend Cixi's *go* mate in the portrait is possibly the eunuch Li Lianying.<sup>142</sup>

As to the date of Cixi's playing *go* portrait, another similarly composed portrait of emperor Guangxu and his Concubine Zhen might provide us some additional clues. You-heng

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<sup>138</sup> According to *Collected Statutes of the Great Qing* (大清會典), "members of the royal clan should wear gold belt. Members of Gioro clan should wear red belt. Members of removing from the royal clan should wear red belt. Members of removing from the Gioro clan should wear purple belt." (宗室系金黃帶，覺羅系紅帶，革退宗室者系紅帶，革退覺羅者系紫帶).

<sup>139</sup> Lin Jing 林京, "On Cixi's Playing chess picture 慈禧對弈圖賞析," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 5(1988):18. Xu Che 徐徹, *Cixi's Pictorial Biography* 慈禧畫傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai kexu jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2006), 222.

<sup>140</sup> Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 250.

<sup>141</sup> The jade ring (2.5 x 3 cm) is in the storage of the Capital Museum, Beijing.

<sup>142</sup> Some scholars also guess the man might be Li Lianying, but with little evidence. See Mao Xianmin 毛憲民, "the Playing Chess Game in Ming and Qing Court 明清宮廷的圍棋活動," *Chinese Literature and History* 文史知識 8(1995): 39.

Feng presumes that the two similar portraits may have been commissioned during the same time range, possibly after the fifteenth year of the Guangxu reign (1889) when the Concubine Zhen entered the court.<sup>143</sup> In February 1889 (Lunar first month of the fifteenth year of Guangxu reign), after Emperor Guangxu's marriage, Cixi officially returned the authority to his nephew Emperor Guangxu and physically moved from the Forbidden City to the Summer Palace. Actually Cixi never relinquished her power. On September 21, 1898, Cixi stopped the Hundred Day's Reform and placed Emperor Guangxu and the reformer's supporter Concubine Zhen under house arrest, separately. In Guangxu and Concubine Zhen's playing *go* portrait, the Emperor Guangxu sits in the center, accompanied by his favorite Concubine Zhen in his left side. It seems that the Emperor holds the central power and Concubine Zhen assists him. Based on the cooperative relationship shown in the Emperor Guangxu's playing *go* portrait, I speculate that the portrait might have been commissioned during 1889 and 1898, showing the Emperor Guangxu nominally as the most powerful man by his favorite Concubine Zhen's assist. If the two playing *go* portraits were painted between 1889 and 1898, then, Cixi's playing *go* portrait might be an allegorical narrative of Cixi's surreptitious layout of her authority, with the help of her servant Li Lianying.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 112 note 31.

<sup>144</sup> Cixi also has other photo and ink painting portraits together with Li Lianying, which I will discuss in the next Chapter.

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

To sum up, in this chapter, when Cixi's status was relatively lower and unstable in the court, I argue her early portraits were part of her struggle to survive in the court as well as her fight for imperial power. Before Cixi became one of the Empress Dowagers, her husband Emperor Xianfeng held the ultimate power to decide whether to order a portrait or which concubine should be painted. Even if several records and portraits left of Xianfeng's Empress and the other different ranks of concubines, there is no record of Cixi's portrait at all during her husband's lifetime. In imperial record, it is only during the spring of the fourth year of the Tongzhi reign (1865) that Cixi received her portrait, together with Empress Dowager Ci'an and another Empress Dowager Lin.<sup>145</sup> Even if we cannot exactly confirm the portraits in the records, the timing of these portraits is quite noticeable: it is during the spring of the fourth year of the Tongzhi reign that the two Empress Dowagers first politically defeated and gained power from Prince Gong. Also, it is meaningful that the Empress Dowager Lin was Cixi's new political ally Prince Chun's mother. In this sense, during the Tongzhi reign, within the inner court, when and whom should be painted was somewhat tightly associated with the Empress Dowager's political strategies.

I agree with past scholars' argument about the masculine features of Cixi's these portraits. However, on one hand, we should recognize that the masculine features are only prominent in her early portraits, rather than those portraits painted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which I will discuss in the next two chapters. On the other hand, I do not agree that Cixi's masculine portraits are representative of her political ambitions while Ci'an's seemingly feminine portraits are produced

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<sup>145</sup> See *Official Qing Records of the Activities of the Bureaus and Workshops in the Imperial Household Department* 清檔活計檔, film No. 35, vol. 3106.

in a manner which reflect the Empress Dowager Ci'an's lack of political interest. In fact, whether Ci'an or Cixi really controlled the late Qing Empire and achieved the short-term restoration from the 1860s to the early 1880s is still up for debate.

Here, I am not going to argue which Empress Dowager's power is more superior, rather, I argue that, when we compare the two Empress Dowager's portraits (from the 1860s to the 1880s), besides the possible political ambitions of Cixi, we should also consider the two ladies' different living conditions within the inner court. As I mentioned, Ci'an became the Empress during the first year in which she was selected into the court. Whether her husband was alive or not, or if she gave birth to an heir or not, Ci'an's so-called first-lady status would never change. In this sense, it is Ci'an's female identity as the Emperor's highest-ranking spouse that provided her lifelong superior honor and power. By comparison, Cixi never became an empress and was bestowed the title of Empress Dowager only because she gave birth to her husband's only son. At one time, she still faced the prospect of being killed just because she was the natural mother to the imperial successor, meaning that her identity as a mother contained dual natures and was always dangerous, even to the extent that her life was threatened. During Emperor Xianfeng's lifetime, as I mentioned in the previous section, it may have been wise for Cixi, as well as Ci'an, to maintain her identity as a normal court lady among the faceless and nameless beauties. Once her husband died and her toddler son became the emperor, Cixi at last would not need to worry about being killed because of her maternal identity. However, when her identity as a mother, or a female, was finally safe, Cixi had to share her identity as a mother with another higher status mother Ci'an, even though Cixi was the real birth mother of the emperor. Even worse, the relationship between Emperor Tongzhi and his birth mother Cixi was not as close as his intimate relationship with Ci'an. The emperor refused Cixi but accepted Ci'an's suggestions on selecting

his Empress. He also wrote inscriptions on two of Ci'an's portraits to praise Ci'an's motherly nature, wishing her longevity, while the emperor left no words on Cixi's portraits. Hence, it seems that Cixi could never have exceeded Ci'an if they shared the same female identity as female, or as mother.

Through the consideration of these factors, I argue that Cixi's portraits before 1900 were produced based on her concerns and struggles for power within the inner court. Admittedly, just as some scholars already pointed out and I also discussed in the above paragraphs, compared with Ci'an's portraits, Cixi's early portraits are full of masculine symbols and political meanings. However, compared with Cixi's later portraits produced after 1900, which I will discuss in the next chapters, and also considering the displaying spaces and audiences of the portraits, I contend that Cixi's early masculine portraits were produced in the context of inner court struggles between two court ladies rather than some other governmental or internationally diplomatic issues. In other words, the production of these early portraits before 1900 remained as reflective of imperial family issues rather than related to national affairs. Still, it is interesting that even if in the ladies' struggles remained within the harem, showing masculine features seems to be an effective way to promote a female's status.

As to the function of these Cixi's early portraits, just as the other imperial consorts' portraits, they were strictly confined within an inner chamber with no outside audience who might have chance to see them. Especially after her husband's death, Cixi herself, and possibly the other Empress Dowagers, court servants and high ranking members of the royal clan who were allowed to enter the inner court were quite possibly the only viewers of these portraits. Compared to other imperial consorts' portraits, especially in contrast with the Empress Dowager Ci'an's portraits, Cixi's early portraits strategically indicated her distinctive literacy within the

harem, reduce her feminine appearances and promote her masculine qualities. Without outside viewers, I contend that these early masculine portraits were produced for herself and her imperial family. Not only was the audience of these early portraits different after Cixi's portraits were made for a wider international viewership during the New Policy Reforms after 1901, but also the images that Cixi would have liked to construct to her inner court family and the later outside world were quite distinct.

### 3.0 THROUGH MODERN MEDIA: EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI'S PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS

After Emperor Tongzhi's premature death in 1875, 40-year-old Empress Dowager Cixi, together with Empress Dowager Ci'an, continued to control the state behind the curtain by choosing her 3-year-old nephew as the new emperor Guangxu. After Emperor Dowager Ci'an's death in 1881, Cixi finally became the only *de facto* ruler of the state. During the 1880s and the 1890s, under her control, the state lost battles one after another, including the Sino-French War of 1884, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. In the modernization movement (or Reform Movement, 1895-1898), Cixi was a supporter at the beginning, but in the end she killed six chief reformers, arrested the Emperor Guangxu before finally bringing an end to the reform. In the following anti-foreigner movement, the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1900), again she was a supporter of the folk Boxers at first, but ultimately changed her mind due to the occupation of the Forbidden City by the Eight-Nation Alliance.<sup>146</sup> She escaped Beijing in 1900.

On January 29<sup>th</sup> 1901, in Xi'an, Cixi issued the famous "Reform Edict" (*gaige shangyu* 改革上諭) to implement the so-called New Policy (*Xinzheng* 新政) Reforms, including political, economic, military, cultural and educational reforms, as a means to modernize the old state-

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<sup>146</sup> In response to the attack of the international legations in Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion, eight nations set up military collations, dispatched armies to and occupied Beijing. The eight nations included Empire of Japan, the Russian Empire, the British Empire, the French Third Republic, the United States, the German Empire, the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

system. It was declared in the official edict that China should not only study Western skills but also learn from Western fundamental principles and essentials to change China's old administrative methods and regulations. Ironically, the New Policy reforms were very similar to the proposals in the modernization movement that was suppressed by Cixi only three years prior.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, having learned a lesson from the 1900 revolt, Cixi was forced to adjust her ruling methods and political strategies. According to the official edict:

“Since the removal of the court (to Xi'an in August 1900), the Empress Dowager (Cixi) has been consumed with anxiety night and day... the Empress Dowager (Cixi) has enjoined upon us the need to appropriate the strong points of foreign nations in order to eliminate the weak points of China, to rectify errors of the past, and to serve as lessons for the future.”<sup>148</sup>

The reforms accelerated during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Admittedly, due to complicated entanglements both domestically and internationally, the reforms did not succeed in saving the crumbling old state-system. The Qing dynasty came to an end only three years after Cixi's death. However, some scholars have already confirmed the important influences of the New Policy Reforms in 20<sup>th</sup> Century China, and even regard the New Policy reforms as a revolution.<sup>149</sup> After all, no matter how ineffective the reforms actually launched, at least three acknowledged improvements helped to lay the foundation for modern China: the abolition of the more than 1000-year-old civil-service examination system, the official support and establishment

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<sup>147</sup> For more on the 1898 and the 1901 Reforms, see Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese States, 1885-1924* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 72. Luke S. K. Kwong, *A Mosaic of The Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 237.

<sup>148</sup> “自播遷以來,皇太后宵旰焦勞...懿訓以為:取外國之長,乃可去中國之短;懲前事之失,乃可作後事之師”, For the translation see Douglas Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xincheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 201-202.

<sup>149</sup> According to Douglas Reynolds, the New Policies “achieved far more, far faster than its sponsors had envisioned or intended... its results nonetheless provide the necessary and indispensable baseline for understanding China in the new century.” Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912*, 14.

of modern education including female schools, and the sending of students abroad.<sup>150</sup> In this sense, under Cixi's instruction, the New Policy Reforms modernized the old bureaucratic system, enlightened the country and influenced later reforms in Republican China.

On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1902, two years after her escape from Beijing, Cixi returned to the Forbidden City. Cixi's first photo was just taken by an unknown Western journalist on her way back. The following year, Cixi began to produce a large number of her photographic portraits and disseminated them internationally. These events were regarded as remarkable symbols of China's stepping in the direction of modernity.<sup>151</sup>

When photography was first introduced to China during the Daoguang reign (1820-1850), horror stories about this new technique, such as the threat of "soul draining," quickly penetrated the Court.<sup>152</sup> Consequently, the Daoguang Emperor, Xianfeng Emperor (1850-1861), and even the Tongzhi Emperor (1861-1875)--Empress Dowager Cixi's son, never took pictures. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Cixi was a serious opponent to taking photos. Stories surrounding the Guangxu Emperor and his Concubine Pearl (*zhenfei* 珍妃) reinforced this attitude. The Guangxu Emperor, believed to be a puppet to the Empress Dowager Cixi, supported Reform. He was also fascinated by photography during the 1880s and the 1890s. He preferred the half-length portrait with sharp darks and lights rather than what he considered the banal, full-length portrait showing both eyes clearly. The Empress Dowager Cixi, however, destroyed all these photos. After his house arrest in 1898, Guangxu was forbidden to take photos.<sup>153</sup> It is even recorded that Cixi demoted

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<sup>150</sup> Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 412.

<sup>151</sup> Carlos Rojas argues that the photographic events of Cixi "were taken precisely as China was changing from a 'traditional' dynastic system to a 'modern' republican one." Rojas, *The Naked Gaze*, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Wu, *the Development History of Chinese Photography*, 106.

<sup>153</sup> Wang Rui 王瑞, "Historical Evidence and Political Narratives of Photography in Palace of the Qing Dynasty Qing 清宮攝影的史跡論證與政治敘事," in *Collection of Papers for the Third Guangzhou International Photography Biennial* (2009, unpublished), 88.

Guangxu's favorite Concubine Pearl because of photographs she posed for in Western-style attire.<sup>154</sup>

However, it seems that Cixi's opinion of photography changed during the New Policy Reforms after 1901. During 1903, one year after her returning to Beijing and just before the grand celebration of her 70-year-old birthday,<sup>155</sup> the Empress Dowager Cixi made two decisions: 1) to invite American artist Katharine Carl to the Court to paint her portrait in oils at the recommendation of U.S. minister Edwin Conger's wife Mrs. Sarah Conger, 2) and to take her photo portraits. Almost simultaneously, the oil painting portraits and photo portraits began to be made under Cixi's order.<sup>156</sup>

In this chapter, by focusing on Cixi's photographic portraits, I am going to address questions such as why did Cixi change her mind and decide to take a large amount of photographic portraits during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? What kind of taboos on photography did Cixi challenge? What kinds of images did Cixi want to construct through her photo portraits? What are the functions of the photos? Who is their audience, and how do they disseminate as reproductive copies in the mechanical age? What are the influences of the photo portraits through mass media and international exhibitions? How could the influences spread under or out of the control of Qing central power? And, what are the differences between the strategies of Cixi in producing her early ink painting portraits before 1901 and her later photo portraits after 1901?

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>155</sup> Through Lacan's mirror stage theory, Carlos Rojas analyzes the symbolic importance of Cixi's 70-year-old birthday as the "dialectics of anticipatory nostalgia and retrospective anticipation". Rojas, *The Naked Gaze*, 24-25.

<sup>156</sup> According to Rong Ling and Der Ling, Cixi took photo portraits before Katharine Carl started to paint oil painting portraits of Cixi. But in Carl's memoir, Cixi decided to take photographic portraits after Cixi watched the photos of her two oil portraits painted by Carl: "when she(Cixi) saw how quickly the photograph was made of the portrait, and how satisfactory it was, she decided she would have the photographer try one of herself, and she was not one to stop at a single trial." Yu, "Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court," 16. Yu, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 218, 226. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 305.

### 3.1 CONTEXTS AND SOURCES OF CIXI'S PHOTO PORTRAITS

The technical process of photography was publicly announced in France on August 19, 1839. Four days later, the British army seized Hong Kong as a military base. After several months, the First Opium War (1839-1843) broke out in Mainland China. Subsequently, the gates of the Qing Dynasty's closed monarchical society (1636-1912) were forced to open. As a result of the war, which is often cited as "the end of China's isolation and the beginning of modern Chinese history," photography had been introduced to China through Western missionaries, merchants and photographers in the mid-Nineteenth Century. Later, in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, the Chinese began to incorporate photography into their lives as a demonstration of their response to "Western culture" as well as to domestic political change.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in China, the appearance and diffusion of photography coincided with the decline of the old dynastic state structure as well as the development of a new worldview. Although we cannot know the "authentic" attitude towards photography of Chinese people at that time, through the study of period photographs, Chinese and Western writers' articles, and historical records of the royal family, the attitudes of certain persons are knowable to some extent. By comparing and analyzing these documents, I contend that photographic portraits of this period were not only an indispensable part, but also a sign, of modern thought, renewal and the promotion of the establishment of Chinese modernity, which is an important context for Cixi's changing image strategies during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In other words, due to common taboos, which I will discuss below, photography was initially forbidden in the court during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, it was Cixi who broke out the taboos, accepted them, and even more significantly, skillfully made use of photographic portraits as a

means of rebuilding not only her international reputation but also China's national image after the Revolt of 1900.

### 3.1.1 Taboos of Photographic Portraiture in the Late Qing Dynasty

When photography was introduced into China, the word was translated into Chinese as “reflected image (*zhao xiang* 照相),” a contraction of the words meaning “small reflection (*xiao zhao* 小照)” and “picture image (*ying xiang* 影像).” The first term refers to pictures of the living while the second refers to pictures of the deceased. To record the faces of dying or dead persons in funeral worship was one of the main functions of photography when photographic portraits first came to China,<sup>157</sup> similar to its original use in the West. The idea of “reflection” suggested that photography was regarded as a sort of “mirror” when first introduced in China. In the Nineteenth Century, Oliver Wendell Holmes also compared the daguerreotype to the mirror: “by making a sheet of paper reflect images like a mirror and hold them as a picture.”<sup>158</sup> However, at least at that time in China, a mirror was not merely a tool that objectively reflected the physical likeness of one's physical presence, but was also associated with magical events. There are numerous Chinese stories regarding the mirror as a “soul drain.”<sup>159</sup> According to traditional Chinese *fengshui* (風水) principles, a mirror has the power to create insomnia and even bad dreams.<sup>160</sup> Such a belief from *fengshui* has deep roots in traditional Chinese thinking, and up until today, in

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<sup>157</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 168. Also see Clark Worswick and Jonathan Spence, *Imperial China: Photographs 1850-1912* (New York: Penwick Publishing, Inc., 1978), 142.

<sup>158</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1859; reprinted in *Soundings from the Atlantic* (Boston: Ticknor and Field, 1864), 142.

<sup>159</sup> I will discuss in the third section of the chapter, “Cixi's photos of Looking into Mirrors.”

<sup>160</sup> David Daniel Kennedy, *Feng Shui Tips for a Better Life* (East Peoria, IL.: Versa Press, 1998), 68.

some counties and small cities in China, the custom of hanging a mirror outside a window to deflect demons is still practiced.<sup>161</sup>

We may also find a connection between portraiture and a subject's "soul" in traditional Chinese portrait painting, in which capturing the spirit of the subject has always been much more important than depicting physical features. "Showing the soul of the sitter" or "transmitting the spirit" (*chuan shen* 傳神)<sup>162</sup> is the most essential standard of evaluation for Chinese painting, first established by Gu Kaizhi (顧愷之 344-406 or 348-409), the first named Chinese painter. This has dominated the field of painting for thousands of years. To fulfill the standard, "literal representation" is secondary to "psychological clairvoyance,"<sup>163</sup> and is often sacrificed. Eli Lancman offered the following remarks on the features of Chinese Portraiture:

The Chinese held that literal reproduction of the features never fully revealed the character of the subject, but that the painter must use what today would be called 'psychological clairvoyance' in order to reveal his subject's soul... The most important fact that a student of Chinese portraiture must remember is that the actual subject and the features shown in his portrait will seldom be physically alike.<sup>164</sup>

Chinese portrait painting is not, therefore, a representation of the physical likeness, but a competent portrait painting would have to capture successfully the "soul" of the subject. Such a notion also pertains to the early acceptance of photo portraits: rather than a physical record of the subject, photo portraiture was regarded as the "catcher of the soul," or a "reflection of the spirit." However, the attitudes towards these two media are different: while people did not mind being

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<sup>161</sup> While the house on the other side of the road would hang a pair of scissors to cut off the "reflected demon".

<sup>162</sup> Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 ed. *Chinese Painting Theory by Categories* 中國畫論類編(Beijing: zhong guo gu dian yi shu chu ban she, 1957), 347. Also see Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, ed., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 14.

<sup>163</sup> Eli Lancman, *Chinese Portraiture* (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Tuttle Co., 1966), 34-35.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35, 38.

painted, they did associate photography with capturing the subject's "soul." To some extent, native Chinese portrait painting was associated with "showing the soul," which is safe and acceptable,<sup>165</sup> while the "exotic" photo portraiture was recorded as a threatening tool to "drain the soul,"<sup>166</sup> thought of as horrible and even forbidden.

If the camera caught the unique soul, the sitter might face death. That was also believed to be one of the main reasons why several native Chinese people showed hostility to both Chinese and foreign photographers. We cannot use such beliefs however, to establish essentialist differences between China and the West. In fact, when photography was first introduced in France, some were hostile to the new media, while others refused to be shot. The famous writer Balzac's belief was that one's "spectral skin" might be "peeled off."<sup>167</sup> However, in China this attitude was described as "a strange belief," as recorded by some foreign travelers and photographers like D.K. Griffith, in 1875:

This unfortunate hostility to photographic manipulations is due to a strange belief... that the photographic image is the soul of the original, the withdrawal of which from the body very naturally produces death. This tragic end may not take place for a month or more, but I have heard two years given as the longest time the photographed victim can exist.<sup>168</sup>

In Lu Xun's opinion, the hostility to photography was because of his countrymen's conviction that, especially when they were blessed with good fortune, photography was a means

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<sup>165</sup> It is interesting that the earliest excavated Chinese portrait paintings are always believed to have relations to funeral rituals which were intended to call back the soul of the dead, e.g. the silk painting of a man riding the dragon, the silk painting of woman, dragon and phoenix in Warring States period (475BCE- 221BCE) and the silk painting of Mawangdui Tomb in the western Han Dynasty (202BCE-9AD).

<sup>166</sup> Wu Qun 吳群, *The Development History of Chinese Photography* 中國攝影發展歷程(Beijing: Xinhua Press, 1986), 106.

<sup>167</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Tracing Nadar," in *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from 1850 to the Present*, Liz Heron and Val Williams ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duck University Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>168</sup> *The Photographic News*, May 28, 1875, 260. About D.K. Griffith, see Worswick and Spence, *Imperial China: Photographs 1850-1912*, 142-3.

through which “the spirit might be taken.”<sup>169</sup> In addition, it was believed throughout Lu Xun’s hometown that foreigners had a hobby of seeking human eyes and salting them. Countrymen explained that foreigners were able to capture and collect the eyes of Chinese people by taking their photos.<sup>170</sup> In a paper about China in *The Times*, September 28, 1864, it is also recorded that “anti-foreign propaganda described how the foreigners needed to use the eyes of Chinese children to make photographs.”<sup>171</sup> Here, the foreigner, magician and devil were allegedly connected by way of photography.

In addition to enchantment, magic and the devil, this “alien, dangerous-looking and seemingly magical technology”<sup>172</sup> was also the source of horror stories.<sup>173</sup> It is recorded that people believed photographic images were “either the water in ones’ eyes or the blood in ones’ heart,”<sup>174</sup> which are both essences of one’s life and hazardous to touch. In 1885, John Thomson, one of the earliest and most influential Western photographers who travelled in China during the second half of the Nineteenth Century, recounted popular superstitions about photography in his photo book. Elliot Parker described Thomson’s reaction to news of Tseng Kuo-fen’s death (曾國藩 1811-1872):

Thinking of it later, Thomson decided it was just as well he had not arrived earlier, as he might have been thought responsible for Tseng's death by taking “a certain portion of the vital principle”. He was frequently looked upon as a forerunner of death and people fell on their knees, beseeching him not to take their likeness before the “fatal lens”.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Lu Xun 魯迅, “On Photography and Related Matters 論照相之類,” in *Tomb 墳*, Lu Xun 魯迅(Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1973),152.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>171</sup> Elliott S. Parker, “John Thomson, 1837-1921 RGS Instructor in Photography”, *the Geographical Journal* 144 (1978): 468.

<sup>172</sup> Regine Thiriez, “Photography and Portraiture in Nineteenth-century China,” *East Asian History* 17/18 (Jun/Dec. 1999): 87.

<sup>173</sup> Even the Chinese living in trading cities always described photography as miracle or magic during the appearance of photography in these areas in 1840s and 1850s. Ma Yunzeng 馬運增, et al., *History of Chinese Photography: 1840-1937 中國攝影史：1840-1937*(Beijing: China Photography Press, 1987),16.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>175</sup> Parker, “John Thomson, 1837-1921 RGS Instructor in Photography”, 468.

What is more, in some records at that time, new Western techniques were not only regarded as magical, enchanting or horrible, but also as an evil method employed by foreigners to control Chinese people. In Lu Xun's article described above, another explanation for the salted eyes is associated with electric wires. Lu Xun mentions that the amount of electric wires, which are made of salted eyes, will increase every year in case of the arrival of foreign military that would cause the Chinese to escape.<sup>176</sup> Lu Xun also writes about the foreigners' desire to "take away human hearts" for the use as lights to aid in their search of treasure. In the eyes of countrymen, this was the principal reason why foreigners were so rich. Considering these beliefs, Lu Xun wanted to show that modern technologies introduced from the West, such as photography, electrical wiring and the electric lightbulb, were all fearsome and antagonistic to Chinese countrymen. In the opinion of Chinese intellectuals of the period, the rejection of these modern western technologies showed ignorance and China's backwardness. To them, photography was not a fancy tool that could quickly document human lives, but a sign of Western, advanced, cultivated and modern thought.

Notions of foreigners as devils whose technologies were magical, dangerous and harmful to the Chinese people reached its peak at the turn of the century and broke out with the peasant revolt known as the Boxer Uprising (1898-1900). One of the rebels' slogans was, "Support the Qing, and destroy the foreign (*fu qing mie yang* 扶清滅洋)." In this violent anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement, supported by Cixi, the rebels regarded photography as a practice of foreign beliefs. Several Chinese photographers and amateurs were persecuted because of their photographic skills.

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<sup>176</sup> Lu, "On Photography and Related Matters," 152.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the suppression of the Boxer Uprising and the occupation of Beijing by the Eight-Power Allied Forces, Cixi finally broke the taboos about photo portraits. She reversed her obstinacy towards the modern Western technique and removed the prohibition of taking photos within the Court. This announcement corresponded with a series of new policies attempting to modernize the country, within only a few years, hundreds of Cixi's photo portraits were taken, printed, enlarged, mounted, handed down, displayed or even sold.

### 3.1.2 Sources and Collections of Cixi's Photos Under Her Orders

Today, a total of 786 photographs are recorded within 31 entries of the Imperial household account, *The Aulic Account Book: The Record of the Imperial Visage* (宮中帳簿·聖容賬).<sup>177</sup>

This account was established in the seventh lunar month of 1903. According to the 31 entry titles, Cixi's 786 photographs can be divided into four groups: 754 individual portraits included in 27 entries; ten costume play photographs under the entry of "10 pieces of imperial visage with five-Buddha crown"; three group photographs taking on a barge; and 19 group photographs with court ladies or foreign ambassadress included in two entries. The titles of the entries simply describe 31 different styles of Cixi's hairstyles, patterns of clothes and decorations, such as six types of photographs with pearl shawl (*yingluo* 瓔珞), four types with folding fans, three types with round fans and six types with different crowns. Sometimes the titles also detailed the pose (e.g. standing or sitting in a sedan), the displaying places of the portraits or the length. Among the 786 photographs of Cixi, only one photo is described as "one piece of big imperial portrait in

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<sup>177</sup> Besides the 766 photographs in *The Record of the Imperial Visage* which were possibly made in 1903-1904, 20 of Cixi's single photos included under 2 entries were submitted twice by the last Prince Qing Zaizhen (慶親王載振) on August 20<sup>th</sup> and September 5<sup>th</sup> of the lunar year in 1906. Lin Jing 林京, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum* 故宮藏慈禧照片 (Beijing: Zi jin cheng chu ban she, 2001), 16-23.

half-length with combing hair in flower-pattern clothes” (梳頭穿花卉半身大聖容一件), however, no half-length photo of Cixi remains today.

During the first inventory of items within the Palace Museum (1924-1930), 709 of Cixi's photos (under 11 item numbers), 14 boxes of “Cixi's enlarged photos” (item No. Zhen-186) and one box of glass negatives (item No. Zhen-196) were found in the Palace of Scenery and Happiness (*jing-fu gong* 景福宮).<sup>178</sup> Located in the northeast corner of the Forbidden City, the palace *jing-fu gong* belongs to the architectural complex of the Palace of Tranquility and Longevity (*ning-shou gong* 甯壽宮), where Cixi spent her 60th birthday. It is also recorded in *The Record of the Imperial Visage* that an “imperial portrait with combing hair in flower-pattern clothes” (梳頭穿花卉聖容) was hung just in the Palace of *ning-shou gong*.<sup>179</sup> Among the 709 recorded photos, 444 were printed as 8-inch photos (20.3\*15.2cm, item No. Zhen-195, 197), 12 individual photographs in addition to 14 boxes of Cixi's photos were recorded as “enlarged photos” (items No. Zhen-184, 185, 191, 208). Some of the photos were put inside or placed together with a silk box (items No. Zhen-203, 205, 206, 208). Some were also decorated with silver gilding hooks (item No. Zhen-186). Currently most of the negatives and photo prints are in the storage of the Palace Museum in Beijing. There is also an archive with 36 glass negatives of Cixi's photos in the Freer Gallery of Art, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, and Smithsonian, all acquired from a Los Angeles dealer in 1964.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Based on the inventory report, they are under 13 entries: “Zhen(珍)” title item no. 182, 184, 185, 186, 195, 196, 197, 203-208. Recorded on Jan. 8th –Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> 1926. the Commission of Dealing with Qing Imperial Family Affairs 清室善後委員會, ed., *The Inventory Report of the Palace Museum* 故宮物品點查報告, vol.8, 12-13. Also in Beijing Palace Museum, ed., *Furnishing Archives of Qing Palace in the Collection of the Palace Museum* 故宮博物院藏清宮陳設檔案, vol.8, 14-15.

<sup>179</sup> The photo was hung in the western living room of the Hall of Pleasure and Longevity (萬壽堂) in the architectural complex of the Palace of Tranquility and Longevity (甯壽宮). Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 23.

<sup>180</sup> According to David Hogge, these glass negatives were from Yu Der-ling's estate. Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 3.

Besides the official accounts and the above two collections, there are also two primary sources that directly recorded the procedure of taking Cixi's photos: Yu Der-ling's *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (1911) and Yu Rong-ling's *Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court* (1957).<sup>181</sup> The two sisters grew up in Japan and France during their father Yu Geng's tenure as a Chinese envoy. They were proficient in English, French, Japanese and Mandarin. During their early life abroad, they also developed versatile talents that traditional Chinese children had no chance to learn.<sup>182</sup> Their mother Mrs. Yu, with the maiden name Louisa Pearson, a hybrid American-Chinese lady, was also fluent in both Chinese and English. Rong-ling, Der-ling and Mrs. Yu were the only three court ladies who could communicate directly with foreigners during Cixi's reign. In March 1903, when they came back from France, the 14-year-old Rong-ling and 17-year-old Der-ling served as Cixi's attendants.<sup>183</sup> In summer 1903, when Cixi ordered photographs to be taken, it was recommended by Mrs. Yu that Yu Xun-ling, one of Rong-ling and Der-ling's elder brothers, a Manchu nobleman who also studied abroad as a child with his diplomat father, became the exclusive photographer of Cixi.<sup>184</sup> Xun-ling was granted several exemptions when taking photos in the court.<sup>185</sup> Almost all of Cixi's photos in the Palace Museum and the Arthur M. Sackler Collection are attributed to Xun-ling.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Both books are with some of Cixi's photos as illustrations. *Two Years in the Forbidden City* was originally written in English and firstly published in 1911 in New York (Moffat, Yard and Company) and London. In 1915, it was translated in Chinese and published in Shanghai (商務印書館, 東方雜誌社譯述). *Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court* was firstly published on the Chinese journal *New Observe* (新觀察) in 1957 as a serial, and later was published as a book in Beijing. Even if the two memoirs have some errors due to the authors' somewhat misunderstandings of the court lives, they are relatively reliable compared with Derling's other two fictions about Cixi. See Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, "Historical Mistakes in Der Ling and Rong Ling's Books 德齡容齡所著書中的史實錯誤," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 4(1982) 25.

<sup>182</sup> Yu Rong-ling was once a student of the famous modern dancer Isadora Duncan.

<sup>183</sup> They left the court two years later when their father became seriously sick.

<sup>184</sup> Cixi also appointed Xun-ling to serve in the Imperial Lightning Department due to his knowledge of the modern technique.

<sup>185</sup> Cixi allowed Xun-ling to stand on one knee when he took photos. It was also prohibited to wear eyeglasses in the empress's presence, but Cixi allowed Xun-ling to wear eyeglasses when he took photos. Yu Rong-ling, "Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court" 16.

<sup>186</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 218. Qin Shouou 秦瘦鷗, "The Earliest Photographer in the Qing Court: Xun Ling 清宮最早的攝影家:勳齡," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 8(1982): 5-6.

### 3.1.3 Possible Triggers for Cixi's Photos

According to Der-ling, during summer 1903, one day when Cixi visited Der-ling's room just after she decided to invite Carl to paint her oil portrait, Cixi was surprised to find some of Der-ling's photo portraits and highly praised these photos as more beautiful than Der-ling's oil painting portraits. Cixi at once decided to take some photographic portraits in addition to her scheduled oil portrait. According to Der-ling, she hid these photographic portraits before Cixi made the decision to accept Mrs. Conger's oil portrait suggestion because she was afraid that Cixi might not choose to sit for an oil painting which was far more time consuming than a photographic portrait which captured her actual likeness.<sup>187</sup>

However, Der-ling's portrait was certainly not the first photo that Cixi saw. As previously mentioned, at least, Cixi might see the destruction of the photographs that Guangxu took during the 1880s. Moreover, as early as the 1860s, Cixi's two relatives Prince Gong Yixin and Prince Chun Yixuan began to take photos.

The first imperial member who took photo portrait is Prince Gong Yixin (恭親王奕訢 1833-1898), with the nickname "Devil Number Six" (鬼子六) in reference to his frequent contact with westerners (the "foreign devils").<sup>188</sup> Felice Beato first photographed Prince Gong in 1860, just after Prince Gong's signing of the Beijing Treaty when his brother Emperor Xianfeng and concubines, including Cixi, fled Beijing. (fig.35) Although the half-length pose had become commonplace during the later 1920s and 1930s, it was still something new in the late Qing Dynasty and sometimes could reflect the sitter's progressive ideas or even political stance.

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<sup>187</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 215-6.

<sup>188</sup> For Prince Gong's bibliography, see Zhao Erxun, *History of the Qing Dynasty*, 9105-9157. Also see Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period, 1644-1912*, vol.1. 380-4.

In his article “On Photography and Related Matters” (1924), Lu Xun talked about the severe taboo of the half-length portrait:

A small number of customers went to a photo studio at that time (1890s). I don’t know who they are, maybe they are unlucky men, or they might be members of the New Party... The half-length portrait is a taboo, because it looks like yaozhan. Although yaozhan was abolished in the Qing Dynasty, we can still see it in operas... Therefore, the photos are almost full-length...<sup>189</sup>

*Yaozhan* (腰斬) was a cruel punishment in ancient China in which criminals were cut in two at the waist. In Lu Xun’s version of events, traditional Chinese people enjoyed believing that those countrymen who went to have their photos taken in that manner either had bad fortune or were members of the New Party. Here, members of the New Party referred specifically to reformers of the late Qing Dynasty.

In a 1784 letter, Father Bourgeois also explained the taboo on the portrait that did not show the whole body:

In China, a head separated from the body causes such horror that when someone’s head is cut off, his parents or his friends rush to sew it back on the body. And the lockets depicted a severed head; one might even say that you could see the place where the blow of the sword had been applied.<sup>190</sup>

In this sense, as one of the leaders of the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895) and a member of the Westernization Group, Prince Gong’s half-length photo portrait served as one of the principal sites for imagining his pro-Western attitudes. After all, reformation would come to equal the acceptance of Western thought. In the late Qing Dynasty, when the country was facing

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<sup>189</sup> Lu, “On Photography and Related Matters,” 152.

<sup>190</sup> Larissa N. Heinrich, *the Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body Between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 114.

civil chaos and foreign aggression, assimilation of and resistance to Western culture occurred at the same time.



**Figure 35.** Felice Beato, Prince Gong, 2 Nov 1860(from China National Library and British Library, ed., *Western Eyes: Historical Photographs of China in British Collections, 1860-1930*, 40)



**Figure 36.** Felice Beato, Prince Gong, 2 Nov 1860(from Thomson, *China and Its People in Early Photographs*, vol. I , plate I )

By comparison with Prince Gong's another full-length portrait taken by John Thomson in the 1870s,<sup>191</sup> (fig.36) the sitter's eyes in both photographs attracted attention. In 19<sup>th</sup> Century China, many formal photos taken by either native or foreign photographers show both eyes of the subject. As photographer D.K. Griffith noticed,

A direct front face must be taken, so as to show both his ears, and each side of his face of the same proportions; both feet must be arranged so that they are of equal length, perspective being no reasoning power with a China-man. The hands are next arranged so as, if possible, to show each finger distinctly. If they are blessed with a fancy long nail or two, great is their delight to see them well brought out in the portrait.<sup>192</sup>

Since "formal photos" must get approved by the sitters themselves, the sitters' worldview could play a noticeable role in the making of the photo, especially in the case of the nobility. In Thomson's photo of Prince Gong, Prince Gong's "fancy long nail" is shown clearly, a feature also shared with Cixi's photos and noted by Griffith in the quote above. In Chinese tradition, long fingernails were a sign of nobility, demarcating one who did not need to do physical work. Even in the field of painting, clients were known to request that these symbols be included in order to display an honorable identity.<sup>193</sup> When it came to photo portraits, it seems that even by the same photographer, the Chinese would preferred to be shown frontally in full-length portraits, featuring their fully-lit "white faces," while the Western client would prefer to be shown half-length and in a three-quarter pose unevenly lit. Milton Miller's portraits of Western and Chinese clients provide us comparative examples of this phenomenon (fig. 37, fig. 38).

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<sup>191</sup> Prince Gong's this full-length portrait opens Thomson's best-selling photo book, *Illustrations of China and its people* (1873-74).

<sup>192</sup> Worswick and Spence, *Imperial China*, 144.

<sup>193</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 114.



**Figure 37.** Milton Miller, Douglas Lapraik, Merchant, Hong Kong, 1861-64 (from Worswick and Spence, *Imperial China: Photographs 1850-1912*, 92)



**Figure 38.** Milton Miller, Wife of a Mandarin, 1861-64 (from Worswick and Spence, *Imperial China: Photographs 1850-1912*, 90)

In addition to Prince Gong, another photography-lover as well as an important royal politician in the late Qing Court was Prince Chun Yihuan (淳親王奕譞 1840-1891). Prince Chun was Prince Gong's young brother. Both princes were interested in photography and the number of their photos remaining today is much greater than any other princes. While Prince Gong's photos were primarily taken by foreign photographers, those of Prince Chun were taken by a native photo studio called Liang Shi-tai (or See-Tay 梁時泰).

Compared with Prince Gong's photo portraits, Prince Chun's photo portrait are evidently much more traditional. A good example is one of his birthday photo portraits (fig.39), in which Prince Chun holds a pine branch accompanied by a deer, while wearing an informal Chinese-style gown. Pine branches and deer are typical Chinese symbols for longevity. Prince Chun is also flanked by two Chinese seals, which are a necessary aesthetic component of traditional Chinese literati painting. Indeed, most of Prince Chun's photos are designed in order to imitate traditional Chinese painting. Thus, in comparison to Prince Gong, it appears that Prince Chun deliberately preferred to be regarded as a member of the traditional literati. This argument may be verified in the political views of these two Princes.<sup>194</sup>



**Figure 39.** Liang Shi-tai, Prince Chun (from Liu and Xu, ed., *Selected Photo Portraits Collected in Forbidden City*, 61)

Even if there is no record about whether Cixi saw either of the princes' photos during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it is recorded that in 1886, Prince Chun submitted to the court a group of photos taken during his inspection tour in Tianjin Navy.<sup>195</sup> Reportedly, John Thomson, the photographer of Prince Gong, once took Cixi's photo in 1861.<sup>196</sup> It is also rumored that in 1885, upon the recommendation of Prince Chun, the native photographer Liang Shi-tai and a German

<sup>194</sup> For a case study on Prince Chun's "traditional" photo portraits, see Yi Gu, "Prince Chun through the Lens: Negotiating the Photographic Medium in Royal Images," *ARS Orientalis* 43(2003): 125-139.

<sup>195</sup> Lin Jing 林京, "History of Cixi's photography 慈禧攝影史話," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 (3)1988: 82.

<sup>196</sup> Sun Yanjing 孫燕京 ed., *Photos of the Late Qing* 晚清遺影 (Jinan: Shandong huabao chu ban she, 2000), 73.

photographer together took pictures of Cixi at Court.<sup>197</sup> Hence, the two princes' choices of taking photography, their photographic styles and their manipulation of the new media in both diplomatic issues (such as Prince Gong's half-length portrait taken during the negotiation with foreign representatives) and relatively private events (such as Prince Chun's birthday-photo) possibly influenced Cixi's later photographs.

Here, it is also pertinent to mention that rather than totally imitating Western culture, the nobility and high ranking classes, including the princes as well as Cixi, preferred to choose , and perhaps even control their "likenesses" through the new media. Such a "refusal of the realist chronotope" is referred to by Christopher Pinney as "vernacular modernism,"<sup>198</sup> reflecting one aspect of the paradox of Chinese modernity, characterized as both a refusal to and an acceptance of Western culture. In this sense, through photography, a western way of seeing was introduced to China. At the same time, the new way was not merely an aesthetic choice. Rather, especially in the case of Empress Dowager Cixi, I argue that her acceptance of photography in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was an important political vehicle in visualizing her New Policy Reforms. It is through photography that the royal family's closed and feudal attitudes were transformed into a modern expression of presence and power.

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<sup>197</sup> Jiang Shun Yuan 姜舜源, "Analysis of Old Photos in Qing Court 清宮舊照賞析" , *Old Photos 老照片* 3 (1997): 58.

<sup>198</sup> Christopher Pinney, "Notes from the Surface of the Image: Photography, Post-Colonialism, and Vernacular Modernism," in *Photography's Other Histories*, Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 202.

### 3.2 POTENTIAL AUDIENCES OF CIXI'S PHOTO PORTRAITS

After the 1900 revolt, Cixi finally changed her attitude towards the West illustrated through the implementation of Westernized New Policies.<sup>199</sup> After Cixi's return to Beijing, in 1902, Cixi received the Czar of Russia Nicholas II's family delicate colored photo portrait as a gift (fig.40).<sup>200</sup> The experience of receiving photo portraiture as a diplomatic gift may have also influenced Cixi's decision to take photos.

According to Rong-ling's memoirs, during summer 1903, after Cixi decided to invite Katharine Carl to paint her portrait, she asked Rong-ling and her sister Der-ling if they knew how to take photos, because Cixi would take some photo portraits and give them to the painter Katharine Carl as models.<sup>201</sup> But in *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, Der-ling did not mention Cixi's decision to take photos to serve as models for her oil painting portraits. In fact, there is no record of using any of these photos as a painting model. According to Rong-ling, anytime Cixi felt too bored to sit as a model, Cixi would order her young attendant, Rong-ling or Der-ling, to wear her clothes and seat on her throne in place of herself. However, she never asked the painter to paint according to her photos. By frequently taking the young attendants as model, the face of Cixi in the oil painting looked very young, with which Cixi was very happy and satisfied.<sup>202</sup> Hence, it is possible that Cixi would like to use her photos as model for the painter at first as mentioned by Rong-ling, but later after she took photos and looked upon her actual aged face,<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> It is possible that before 1900, Cixi's attitudes towards photography had already gradually changed: in the late 1890s, the imperial household once tried to use photography in place of traditional painting to routinely portray the old courtiers, but the attempt was interrupted by the 1900 revolt. Wu, *The Development History of Chinese Photography*, 127.

<sup>200</sup> Lin Jing 林京, "Photography in the Forbidden City 走進紫禁城的攝影術," *Forbidden City 紫禁城* 6 (2015): 32. According to Der-ling, Cixi received the portrait of the Czar's family as a present from a Russian envoy's wife in March 1903. Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 45-6.

<sup>201</sup> Yu Rong-ling, "Miscellaneous Records of the Qing Court", 16.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>203</sup> According to Der-ling, Cixi compared her face in the mirror with her photo portraits carefully for a long time after the

she then changed her mind and never used her photos as a painting model. However, if Cixi's purpose of taking photos was not to employ them as a painting model, why did she have over 700 photographs printed and enlarged within the same year? Or, in other words, what were the functions of these several hundred photographs? Who might be the potential audience of Cixi's photographic portraits?



**Figure 40.** the Czar of Russia Nicholas II's family, present to Empress Dowager Cixi in 1900s, Palace Museum, Beijing

### 3.2.1 Dress for Diplomacy: Cixi's First Day Under Xunling's Camera

Among Cixi's 786 photographs included in the records, the photo of Cixi in a sedan chair with a group of eunuchs in front of the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity (*renshou dian* 仁壽殿, fig.41), where Cixi attended daily morning audience during her stay in the Summer Palace, might be the first of Cixi's photos taken by Xun-ling.<sup>204</sup> According to Der-ling, Cixi asked Xun-

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first day of taking photos. Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 223. Carlos Rojas regards "Cixi's comparison of her photographs to her own mirror reflection" as "a transposition and inversion of the moment of alienated recognition that Lacan famously outlined in his mirror-stage essay", that is, the "second-order mirror scene". Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 16-17.

<sup>204</sup> Cixi said: "I want to have one taken first of all in my chair, when going to the audience, and you (Xunling) can take some others afterwards." Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 218.

ling to take her first photo in her sedan to document her procession to the morning court meeting. The time was 8 o'clock in the morning, on the fifth day of the sixth lunar month of 1903. Before taking the photo, Cixi was curious about the new technique and went directly to the focusing lens to see the processing image. Driven by curiosity, during the day, Cixi went several times and spent more than two hours in Xun-ling's dark room to inquire about the printing process.<sup>205</sup> In the afternoon, Xunling presented the photo to Cixi and then printed 10 more copies under Cixi's order.<sup>206</sup> In *The Record of the Imperial Visage*, 59 of Cixi's photos were recorded under the entry of "imperial portraits with small double-side bun in flower clothes holding round fan in a sedan chair" (梳小頭穿花卉拿團扇乘轎聖容), which possibly refer to the first photo of Cixi taken by Xun-ling. With 59 copies, it is possible that Cixi was very satisfied with the photo and later ordered more prints of this particular photograph. In the photo, raised by a group of eunuchs, Cixi is the only female seated in the center. Her two favorite eunuchs, Li Lianying and Cui Yugui, stand in each front side as bodyguards. The composition is used again in another photo with court ladies, her dog and eunuchs in front of Hall of Happiness and Longevity, her living hall in the Summer Palace (*leshou tang* 樂壽堂 fig.42). In both photos, with the privilege of either seating in a sedan chair or standing under an imperial canopy with dragon and phoenix pattern, Cixi always holds the central position, apparently showing her superior rank within the Court.

In the same day, after her morning audience, Cixi ordered to take another four single photo portraits in the courtyard of the Audience Hall (*renshou dian*). One was taken just after her morning meeting, while another captured her in casual clothes. In another two photographs, she

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 219-221.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 223.

commanded to sit in her throne with a screen and footstool, while dressed in two sets of gowns and jewels that looked “exactly as though she were holding an audience.”<sup>207</sup> The two attires Cixi ordered were just the ones she carefully selected to wear when she received the American Admiral Mr. Evans and his wife a month and a half prior.<sup>208</sup> It seems that Cixi wanted to represent herself either as charging the routine official audience or as receiving foreign diplomats: represented by her first photo with eunuchs, she shows her central role with the superior rank in the court; while by wearing the same attire as when she received American Admiral, the scene of the diplomatic meeting recurs in her single portraits, in which she shows again how she wants to be seen in front of the foreigners.



**Figure 41.** Cixi in a sedan chair with a group of eunuchs in front of the Hall of Benevolence and Longevity (renshou dian 仁壽殿), photo, Palace Museum, Beijing

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>208</sup> Cixi received the American Admiral Mr. Evans and his wife on June 23<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 1906 (lunar May 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>). Derling recorded Cixi's clothes during the audiences: on June 23<sup>th</sup>, “her Majesty ...selected one embroidered (gown) all over with the character ‘Shou’ (long life), covered with precious stones and pearls, on pale green satin...she ordered me to go to the jewel-room and get flowers to match for her hair. On one side of the headdress was the character (shou) and on the other side was a bat (the bat in China is considered to be lucky). Of course her shoes, handkerchiefs and everything else were embroidered in the same way.” On June 24<sup>th</sup> “finally she chose a blue gown embroidered with one hundred butterflies, and wore a purple sleeveless jacket, which was also embroidered with butterflies. At the bottom of this gown were pearl tassels. She wore her largest pearls, one of which was almost as large as an egg, and was her favorite jewel. She only wore this on special occasions. She wore two jade butterflies on each side of her headdress. Her bracelets and rings were also all designed in butterflies, in fact everything matched. Among her beautiful jewels, she always wore some kind of fresh flowers. White Jessamine was her favorite flower.” Ibid, 189-193.



**Figure 42.** Cixi with court ladies, her dog and eunuchs in front of Hall of Happiness and Longevity  
(leshou tang 樂壽堂) in Summer Palace, photo, Palace Museum, Beijing

During her first shot, the short shooting time surprised Cixi. She did not even notice Xun-ling's first quick shot. But in order to take a "pleasant" rather than a "too serious" portrait, Cixi asked Xun-ling that next time he should allow her to fully prepare.<sup>209</sup> After her first shot, Cixi's photos were all carefully arranged and posed. Everything was meticulously planned in advance. Each time Cixi commissioned her portrait, her eunuchs and maids would attend to many preparations, such as arranging the scene, putting up the screen, and bringing several gowns and jewels for her to select. No matter which props or backdrops were employed, everything was strictly chosen and arranged. After all, any unsatisfactory mistake might prove fatal for her servants and even the photographer. According to the record of the Office of the Imperial Household, all preparations had to be approved by Cixi herself eight days prior to the final shoot.<sup>210</sup> Also, shoot dates were carefully selected and confirmed by Cixi herself as auspicious days ahead of time. Hence, we can see how Cixi's photographs were a serious undertaking. These photos were, like her painted portraits, in fact, "made" by Cixi herself rather than by the

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>210</sup> Lin Jing, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 34.

photographer. Just as scholars always suggest, there is no “candor” in these imperial portraits.<sup>211</sup> Cixi’s serious control of photography constructed her mystique and powerful image for her anticipatory audiences. However, as I will discuss in the next sections, even if Cixi tried everything to control the production of her portraits, in the new age of mechanical reproduction, as a modern visual medium, photography has its specific way of reproduction, circulation, transcultural dissemination and misreading, which Cixi was neither familiar with nor able to control.

### 3.2.2 Transcultural Dissemination of Cixi’s Diplomatic Photos

Cixi’s photo portraits are in different sizes. According to the 1926 inventory report, around two thirds of Cixi’s photos<sup>212</sup> were sized to eight inches (20.3x15.2cm).<sup>213</sup> There are also more than 100 copies of certain photographs. There are 103 copies of “Imperial Portrait with Combing Hair in Clear Clothes with Round Fan” (梳頭穿淨面衣服拿團扇聖容), 75 centimeters in length and 60 centimeters in width.<sup>214</sup> Some of the enlarged copies were colored by court painters in the imperial painting institute *ruyiguan* (如意館), mounted carefully on hard boards and placed in gold lacquered frames carved with flowers (framed with the dimensions of 107 centimeters by 85.5 centimeters). Moreover, each of them has a precious rosewood box (128 centimeters long by 100 centimeters wide and 20 centimeters in height) wrapped with yellow embroidery silk.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshiping the Ancestors*, 167.

<sup>212</sup> Among the 709 pieces of recorded photos, 444 pieces were 8 inches. Item No. Zhen-195, 197.

<sup>213</sup> the Commission of Dealing with Qing Imperial Family Affairs 清室善後委員會, *The Inventory Report of the Palace Museum* 故宮物品點查報告, vol.8, 12-13.

<sup>214</sup> Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 19. Liu and Xu, *Selected Photo Portraits Collected in Forbidden City*, 28.

<sup>215</sup> Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 25. Liu and Xu, *Selected Photo Portraits Collected in Forbidden City*, 28.

The American Minister to Beijing Edwin Conger described a similar box with a photo inside as a gift to the American President, Theodore Roosevelt, in his letter to Secretary of State, John Hay, in 1904.<sup>216</sup>

Two of Cixi's small sized photos hung in her newly built Baroque-style reception hall (海晏堂 *haiyan tang*, Hall of National Peace), according to *The Record of the Imperial Visage*. One of the photos was much more formal, depicting Cixi wearing a crown. Another photo is much more casual with Cixi sporting a double-sided bun hairstyle with a fan in hand.<sup>217</sup> Taking the destroyed Western-style Hall of National Peace in the old summer palace<sup>218</sup> as the model, in 1904, Cixi rebuilt the new hall with the same name in the West Garden, along to the west of the Forbidden City, as a diplomatic space to meet with foreign ladies. It seems that the potential audiences for the two Cixi's photographic portraits hanging in the reception hall were intended for foreign female visitors. Chosen and displayed under Cixi's order as usual, the two photographs may have been intended to exhibit Cixi's dual faces: on the one hand, her supreme and sacred formal visage; on the other, her benign and charming casual outlook. However, to what extent her foreign female visitors could understand the visual messages that Cixi intended to convey through the photographs is still a question. After all, few foreigners could notice the subtle details and the hierarchy in Cixi's photos. Hence, the cross-cultural reading and misreading of her photos started just when the foreign ladies entered Cixi's carefully decorated reception hall.

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<sup>216</sup> "The portrait was received at the Legation in a black wood box, lined with yellow silk, with a yellow silk curtain hanging over the front of the picture inside the box, The box was encased in a well-fitted, yellow quilted silk case; and over all was spread an exquisitely embroidered cloth of imperial yellow." Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 26.

<sup>217</sup> Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 23.

<sup>218</sup> French-Anglo Army burned this hall in 1860.

Some of Cixi's photos were also directly given to foreign rulers, ambassadors and their wives as gifts based on international diplomatic decorum as a part of her New Policies. For example, from April 1904 to August 1906, Cixi sent her photos as return gifts to courtiers from Germany, Austria, Japan, Britain, America, France, Mexico, Italy, and the Netherlands.<sup>219</sup> According to Cheng-hua Wang, the different size, costume, coiffure and even the object Cixi holds might indicate a hierarchy within the photos:

Those photographs depicting Cixi wearing a crown are of the highest prestige. Larger pictures are superior to smaller ones. Those with her holding silken handkerchiefs are in higher hierarchical order than those in which she holds a round or folding fan. As such, a group photograph with her hair in a small double-side bun, holding a round fan, and seated upon a sedan chair could only be given to diplomats. Large individual photographs of her wearing a crown were reserved for emperors, empresses, and presidents.<sup>220</sup>

The photo presented to the American president Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 is a good example (fig.43): carefully colored and enlarged to a big size, the photo depicting Cixi seated on her throne, with a Manchu style crown (*dianzi* 鈿子) on her head and handkerchief in hand. By comparison, the photo sent to the president's daughter in 1905 is much smaller (fig.44),<sup>221</sup> in which Cixi neither wore crown nor held a handkerchief as in the photo presented to the President Roosevelt. Rather, Cixi held a casual folding fan in hand to lower the rank of the photo. Still, Alice Roosevelt described how the photo was carefully wrapped, seriously carried and escorted by higher rank officials to her residence in Beijing after her audience with Cixi.<sup>222</sup> David Hogge

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<sup>219</sup> "Gift to the President," *Washington Post*, Feb. 26, 1905, 6. "Congratulate China's Ruler: Mr. Roosevelt and Other Heads of States Send Autograph Letters," *New York Times*, Nov.13, 1904, 3.

<sup>220</sup> Wang, "Going Public," 139. Wang, "Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles," 264.

<sup>221</sup> For more information about the rediscovery and the details of the two photos, see Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 26.

<sup>222</sup> "The next morning two court officials came to the Legation and presented me with a little black dog sent by Empress, and in the afternoon her photograph arrived. It is an excellent photograph, really like the 'old Buddha.' I thought so at the time when her face was fresh in my mind, and to look at it now, recalls vividly that day at the summer palace. A troop of

comments on the event: “the photograph has become an extension of the imperial presence, due the ceremony and deference given the Empress Dowager herself.”<sup>223</sup> Indeed, the photos were not merely pictures but the Empress Dowager Cixi herself, whether absent or present, must be treated the same as a painted portrait.<sup>224</sup>



**Figure 43.** Empress Dowager Cixi, photo presented to Theodore Roosevelt in 1904



**Figure 44.** Empress Dowager Cixi, photo, Palace Museum, Beijing

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cavalry clattered down the street to the Legations, surrounding an imperial yellow chair in which, by itself, was the photograph. It was in an ordinary occidental gilt frame, but the box that held it was lined and wrapped in imperial yellow brocade and the two officials were of much higher rank than those who brought the Pekinese.” Longworth, *Crowded Hours*, 101.

<sup>223</sup> Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 29.

<sup>224</sup> Isaac Taylor Headland, *Court life in China, the Capital, its Officials and People* (New York, Chicago, Toronto, London and Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909), 90.

Both photos, sent to president Roosevelt and his daughter, have similar copies in today's Palace Museum collection. The tinted photographic portrait sent to President Roosevelt in 1904 (fig.43), as the Minister Edwin Conger described in his letter,<sup>225</sup> is selected and enlarged based on a black and white portrait taken in 1903.<sup>226</sup> Enlarged to quite a big size with a Manchu style crown and handkerchief in hand, as mentioned above, the photo holds the highest rank among the hierarchy of Cixi's photos. In the photo, Cixi wears her favorite Manchu style "da wanxiu" (fully rolled-up sleeves 大挽袖) attire embroidered with the Chinese character "shou" (long life 壽). She also wears a Manchu style vest with a *ruyi*-shaped collar. Two big vases depicting lotus flowers are placed on each side of her throne. A big screen is placed within the background with a peacock pattern (represented phoenix, the king of birds) and peony (the king of flowers), which traditionally symbolizes the wishes for riches and honor. By comparison to the black and white photo, the 70-year-old Cixi looks quite a bit younger in the photo given to the President Roosevelt: the original shadings, under-eye puffiness and the nasolabial folds on Cixi's face are all removed. By retouching the photo, Cixi's aged face is skillfully transformed into a white and glowing representation. Her eyes and eyeliner in the portrait are even enhanced and painted with brushes by imperial painters in *ruyiguan*.<sup>227</sup> Cixi resembles a 40-year-old in the photo sent to the American President.

The photo gifted to Alice Roosevelt is a rather smaller black and white one. The big double-sided bun hairstyle (大兩板頭 or 大拉翅頭), the embroidery of wisteria on the gown, the folding fan in hand and the plates stacked with fruit are different attributes from those in the one

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<sup>225</sup> Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera: Photographing Cixi*, 26.

<sup>226</sup> The year is in the inscription on the photo. Longworth, *Crowded Hours*, 101.

<sup>227</sup> Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 27.

given to President Roosevelt. However, similarities between the two photographs still exist. For example, they were both shot in 1903 in the same frontal pose, seated on the same throne with Baroque style curled feet; the background is also the same peacock and peony pattern screen. The gift given to Alice Roosevelt might be one of the “Imperial Portraits with Combing Hair in Flower Pattern Clothes with Folding Fan”(梳頭穿花卉拿摺扇聖容六十件) in the 1903-1906 imperial household record.<sup>228</sup> It is possible that some of the 60 copies printed, besides the one given to Alice Roosevelt, were also sent as gifts to Cixi’s other foreign friends, including the American painter Katharine Carl.<sup>229</sup> It seems the photo had a wide circulation: besides a Chinese painter’s naïve copy of the photo (fig.45),<sup>230</sup> a colored portrait of Cixi in *L’Illustration*, June 20, 1908, was based on one of the 60 copies. The tinted portrait printed in the French journal provides us with a good example of the cross-cultural visual translation of Cixi’s photograph in a foreign context (fig.46).



**Figure 45.** the Empress Dowager Cixi, painted by a naïve Chinese artist from a photograph taken in 1903  
(from Warner, *Dragon Empress*, 216.)

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<sup>228</sup> See *The Aulic Account Book: the Record of the Imperial Visage* 宮中賬簿・聖容帳, in Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 19.

<sup>229</sup> Peng, “Lingering between Tradition and Innovation: Photographic Portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi,” 161.

<sup>230</sup> Warner, *The Dragon Empress*, 216.



**Figure 46.** Cixi in *L'Illustration*, June 20, 1908 (from les Grands Dossiers de L'illustration, *La Chine*, 86)

Upon further examination of the original black and white photograph and the illustration in the French journal, it is evident that Cixi was in control of every aspect of the original photograph, while an anonymous foreign painter tinted the latter mainly according to how he imagined the Chinese ruler. Ultimately, three differences attract my attention:

Firstly, in the tinted illustration, Cixi's face is pale while she wears dark red lipstick and pink blush on her cheeks. The heavy make-up was possibly influenced by popular commercial photos of Chinese ladies and prostitutes during this time.<sup>231</sup> However, in the original black and white photograph, even if Cixi would like to have looked much younger, as a widow, she was forbidden to wear make-up. Secondly, in the tinted illustration, Cixi's Manchu style flat shoes were enlarged and even had added a flower pattern. In China, traditionally, women's feet were regarded as a private and sexual part of the body.<sup>232</sup> Shoes were also a common erotic symbol in traditional paintings. However, it seems to the Western painter that the small bit of shoes exposed unintentionally in the original black and white photo are specifically attractive, thus he

<sup>231</sup> About portraits' of prostitutes, see Pang, *Distorting Mirror*, 74-81.

<sup>232</sup> This is especially related to the bound feet that were popular in the Ming and Qing dynasty. Dorothy Ko, "The Body as Attire: The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Women's History* 8.4 (1997): 8-27.

intentionally exaggerated the alien shoes. Thirdly, after the retouching, the original wisteria flower with the character “*shou*” (long life) pattern is changed to a kind of seemingly grape pattern, and the characters “*shou*” are erased by dark red colors. During the cross-cultural visual translation, the auspicious meaning of the pattern is finally lost. Therefore, through transcultural dissemination, the multiple possibilities of interpretations and misinterpretations of Cixi’s photos are at last out of the ruler’s control.

In this way, through the modern media of journals and photography, the dissemination of photos in the western public participates actively in the construction of the image of the Chinese female ruler, as well as the imagination of China, in the Western world. Moreover, sometimes, such images might also spread back to China and join in the process of the domestic visual modernity. For example, probably influenced by photographic-portraits with shoes unintentionally exposed outside gowns, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the taboo of concealing feet and shoes in formal female portraits started to change and some Chinese women’s painted portraits began directly to depict their shoes.<sup>233</sup>

### 3.3 POSING AS A WOMAN: CIXI’S PHOTOS OF LOOKING INTO MIRRORS

Besides the photographs that functioned as diplomatic presents, Cixi hung some of her portraits on the walls of her personal living quarters in the Summer Palace and Forbidden City.<sup>234</sup> According to Lin Jing, most of Cixi’s enlarged photos with luxurious gold lacquered frames

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<sup>233</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 172.

<sup>234</sup> Three portraits were hung in the Hall of Happiness and Longevity (*leshoutang* 樂壽堂) in the Summer Palace, and one was in the same name hall in the Palace of Peace and Longevity (甯壽宮) in the Forbidden City. See *The Aulic Account Book: The Record of the Imperial Visage* 宮中賬簿・圣容帳, Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 19, 23.

carved with flowers (sized to 107 centimeters in length and 85.5 centimeters in width) were hung in her bedrooms.<sup>235</sup> It seems that these photos were not produced for others but rather to be displayed in her own private spaces. Although we cannot exactly know which photos she hung in her bedrooms, two photos of Cixi gazing into a hand mirror attract many scholars' attentions. One is her group portrait with eight female attendances and a eunuch, among whom only Cixi is seated (fig.47). Gazing carefully into a small mirror in her left hand, Cixi is adjusting a hair ornament with her right hand. The photo is taken in front of the Hall of Dispelling Clouds (*paiyun dian* 排雲殿), where Cixi received officials' respects during her birthday. Another is Cixi's single portrait holding a hand mirror as well as placing a flower in her hair (fig.48). Standing in front of her imperial throne, Cixi is holding a mirror in her left hand while raising her right hand inserting a flower in her hair.<sup>236</sup>

The pose of looking into mirror or adjusting hair ornaments is seldom depicted in a typical Chinese female portrait, but usually appears in traditional female figure painting, especially the "beautiful woman painting" (仕女圖/美人圖).<sup>237</sup> This genre of "beautiful woman painting" did not record the exact facial likeness of the female subject nor authentic portrait; rather, such a genre was created by male painters for the male's voyeuristic desire and pleasure, so that is usually featured implicit erotic symbols, for example, bound feet, crossed leg, holding flowers, in addition to sharp and alluring eye contact. These erotic symbols were also taboos in normative female portraits. However, in Cixi's single portrait which depicts her looking into a

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>236</sup> It is also recorded that Japanese photographer Sanshichiro Yamamoto was once invited by Prince Qing Yikuang to take a "wearing flower" photo of Cixi in the Summer Palace. In return, Cixi awarded Yamamoto thousands of pieces of gold. Xu Ke 徐珂, *Categorized Anthology of Petty Matters from the Qing Period* 清稗類鈔, vol.7 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1984), 3294.

<sup>237</sup> Ellen Johnson Laing, "Chinese Palace Style Poetry and the Depiction of A Palace Beauty," *The Art Bulletin*, 72 (1990): 286. On the differences between ancestor portraits and *meirentu*, see Jan Stuart, "The Face in Life and Death: Mimesis and Chinese Ancestor Portraits," *Harvard East Asian Monographs* 239 (2005): 218-9.

mirror, the almost 70-year-old Empress Dowager, inserts a flower in her hair, and even exposes half of her naked arm. As David Hogge notices, the “coquettish poses” are quite astonishing for a Chinese ruler.<sup>238</sup> According to Hogge, Cixi’s poses might have particular meanings since Cixi, who is “so bound by convention and propriety”, even repeats the similar “coquettish” postures several times.<sup>239</sup>



**Figure 47.** Cixi and others in front of Pai Yun Men Gate of the Summer Palace. photo, Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 48.** Cixi holding a hand mirror, photo, Palace Museum, Beijing

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<sup>238</sup> Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 18.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

Within a traditional Chinese context, looking into a mirror also sometimes refers directly to death. The notion of the fatal mirror further helps to develop people's hostility towards the mirror-like photo portrait when photography was first introduced into China. Ancient Chinese bronze mirrors are always related to ritual and rites. Stories that associate mirrors with the "soul" could be traced back as early as the western Han Dynasty (205 BCE- 9CE). It is recorded that Emperor Xuan of the western Han Dynasty had a precious mirror that could reflect demons. A demon that hides in the form of a human, especially with a face of a beauty, could be recognized and unveiled as its true horrible form in the special mirror. One of the most widespread stories is recorded in the famous novel, *A Dream of Red Mansions* (紅樓夢), in which a man, named Jia Rui, died when his soul left his body after being attracted by a magic mirror of his dream lover, Wang Xifeng, a married and powerful woman. There is also a special mirror recorded as a tool of a "demon-detector" in several other famous ancient stories, such as *Journey to the West* (西遊記) and *Love Story in the Fantasy Land* (鏡花緣). Carlos Rojas also mentions the popular Buddhist aphorism of "flower in a mirror and moon in water" (鏡花水月),<sup>240</sup> which denotes the ephemeral nature and the fatal death of beautiful reflections in mirror-like images. Hence, as mentioned in the first part of the chapter, by regarding the photograph as a mirror, the relationship between photography and black magic/demons is established.

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<sup>240</sup> Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 6.



**Figure 49.** Qiu Ying, detail of Concubine Yang's Morning Making-up Painting(貴妃曉妝圖), color on silk,  
41.4 x 33.8cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Particularly, female portraiture is much more tightly concerned with fatal death. In traditional literature and paintings, females were always compared to flowers. The ephemeral spring and spring flowers also frequently appeared in female images to imply the fleeting quality of female beauty. For example, in the *Concubine Yang's Morning Making-up Painting* (貴妃曉妝圖 fig.49), the 16<sup>th</sup> century painter Qiu Ying depicted the morning making-up scene of the Concubine Yang of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, who was forced to commit suicide in her 30s. The young concubine is looking at a mirror and wearing a flower in her hair. Two kinds of late spring flowers around (peony and crabapple) symbolically imply the nearly end of the lady's spring-like life.



**Figure 50.** ‘Oriole reads Scholar Zhang’s love-letter’; illustration for Act 10 of *The Romance of the West Chamber*, Min Oiji edition. Museum fur Ostasiatische Kunst, Cologne. (from Wu, *Double Screen*, 253)

Judith Zeitlin further argues the association between female self-portraits and the fatal death of female painters, especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century literature.<sup>241</sup> A famous example is the connection between the heroine Cui Yingying’s self-portrait and her early death in the drama *Peony Pavilion*. Her self-portraits, named “spring appearance” (春容), is regarded as the ephemeral nature of spring with the fatal end of an early death. The scene of looking at a mirror in the drama also implies her fate, in which the young heroine Cui Yingying sings that her mirror “steals” half of herself.<sup>242</sup> The mirror and the heroine’s face in the mirror are frequently depicted in 17<sup>th</sup> Century illustrations.<sup>243</sup> (fig.50) The drama *Peony Pavilion* is also very popular in China after the 17<sup>th</sup> century and performed again and again in different kinds of Chinese native operas, including Beijing Opera. As a big fan of Beijing Opera, sometimes Cixi even performed as a certain heroine in person. Some scholars have already noticed the performativity of Cixi’s photo

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<sup>241</sup> Judith T. Zeitlin, “The Life and Death of the Image: Ghosts and Female Portraits in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Literature,” in *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, Wu, Hung and Katherine R. Tsang, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 229-256.

<sup>242</sup> As the script of *The Peony Pavilion* goes: “... the mirror steals half of my face.” (沒揣菱花, 偷人半面)

<sup>243</sup> Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 253.

portraits.<sup>244</sup> In this sense, with the pose in which she gazes into the mirror, Cixi challenged the traditional ominous parallel between the feminine pose and fatal death.



**Figure 51.** Scene 7 (The toilette scene) of the British Museum copy of *the Admonitions Scroll*, attributed to Gu Kaizhi

Besides the alluring and sometimes erotic “beautiful woman painting,” the pose of looking into a mirror also appears in the type of “admonition painting”—another genre of female figure painting that is also not a form of authentic portraiture, but with a decent fame, filial and benevolent women and nymphs are depicted for educational purposes.<sup>245</sup> However, even in the much more respectable genre, the pose of looking into a mirror is always associated with negative meanings. The first and most famous example of this genre is *the Admonitions Scroll*, which was painted especially for court women.<sup>246</sup> In the seventh part of the scroll, two ladies are looking at mirrors (fig.51): one is in a three-quarter pose facing viewers and looking carefully into a bronze mirror, while a maidservant behind is combing her hair. Seemingly in a reverse

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<sup>244</sup> For example, Cheng-hua Wang argues Cixi’s photos of looking into mirrors reflect Cixi’s narcissism and histrionic personality. Wang, “Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles,” 268.

<sup>245</sup> However, during the late imperial period, the genre of “admonition painting” is not painted with the same sincerity as in earlier times, and sometimes uses similar erotic symbols as in the genre of “beautiful woman painting”. Based on Ellen Johnston Laing’s study, as a part of suppressing “immorality,” the early Manchu rulers simply ordered to change the catalogue of “beautiful woman paintings” in imperial collections to the genre of “aloof nymph.” Ellen Johnston Laing, “Erotic Themes and Romantic Heroines Depicted by Ch’iu Ying,” *Archives of Asian Art* 49 (1996): 68-91.

<sup>246</sup> See Shane McCausland, *First Masterpiece of Chinese Painting: the Admonitions Scroll* (New York: G. Braziller, 2003).

pose, another lady also sits in front of a mirror but shows her back to viewers, so that we only see her facial reflection through the mirror. As the inscription alongside the seventh part of *the Admonitions Scroll* goes, “People only know how to modify their appearance, but do not take care of decorating their moral character.” In this sense, the painter’s purpose of painting the mirror motif is to teach court ladies not to dedicate themselves to their physical beauty. Yingchen Peng also notices the critical attitude towards this female’s making-up and mirror gazing motif.<sup>247</sup> Hence, even in the “admonition painting”, the lady depicted looking into the mirror is always represented as a negative target at the hand of male painters.



**Figure 52.** one of Empress Yongzheng’s *Twelve Beauties* screen, Palace Museum, Beijing

The two poses in *the Admonitions Scroll* also set up examples for two types of looking-at-mirror beauties in the following traditional beautiful woman paintings. One type is to depict the beauty’s face directly when the lady is carefully staring at the mirror. The 16<sup>th</sup> century *Concubine Yang’s Morning Making-up Painting* (fig.49) and the 18<sup>th</sup> century looking-at-mirror

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<sup>247</sup> Peng, “Admire Herself,” 73.

lady in the Empress Yongzheng's *Twelve Beauties Screen* (fig.52) are of this type. Even if we cannot see her reflection in the mirror, we understand the ladies are examining themselves and absorbed in their own private worlds. Another type implicitly shows the lady's facial reflection in her mirror, while her face in the painting is partly or fully invisible to viewers, such as the two *Making-up Paintings* mounted as round fans during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. In both paintings, in the corners of the gardens, the lonely ladies carefully gaze at their own reflections in the mirrors (fig.53, fig.54).



**Figure 53.** Su Hanchen, A Lady at her Dressing Table on a Garden Terrace, 12<sup>th</sup> century, round fan mounted as album leaf, ink, color and gold on silk. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (from Wu, *Double Screen*, 23)



**Figure 54.** Traditionally attributed to Wang Shen (1036-89), Ladies Before an Embroidered Dresser, (?)13<sup>th</sup> century, fan painting, ink and color on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan.

Overall, no matter in which types, the traditional motif of ladies looking into a mirror shares several common characteristics: firstly, the ladies' gaze are fastened to their reflections in the mirrors. Secondly, the females are always alone and hopelessly prepared at every moment for their absent male masters. For example, in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century *Concubine Yang's Morning Making-up Painting* (fig.49), the Concubine Yang is dressing up in a side room that only occupies the left part of the whole composition, while the right part is the main room with footsteps seemingly looking forward to the absent emperor. Also, even if the Emperor Yongzheng is absent in the painting, (fig.52) the male ruler's striking handwriting behind the lady highlights his ubiquitous presence, in addition to his overarching power. According to Wu Hung, the water wave screen in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century *Making-up Painting* is a metaphor for the lady's depressed lust (fig.53), and the literati's mountain and water screen on the bed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century *Making-up Painting* suggests the absent emperor (fig.54).<sup>248</sup> Hence, the looking-at-mirror ladies are always in passive positions. They are powerless and incomplete human beings. In other words, they are playthings for their invisible male rulers. The only thing they ought to do is to dress-up and be prepared to serve their masters at a moment's notice.

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<sup>248</sup> Wu, *Double Screen*, 23, 163.



**Figure 55.** The Catherine De' Medici of China, *Illustrated London News* (London, England), issue 3631, November 21, 1908, 705.

However, Cixi's mirror gazing portrait is quite different with both traditional types of "admonition painting", at least in two aspects:

On one hand, although Cixi is holding a mirror, her actual gaze is not into the mirror but far beyond. She is not actually looking at herself, even if she intentionally chose such a feminine position. A newspaper illustration as well as a postcard based on the mirror gazing portrait of Cixi<sup>249</sup> (fig.55, fig.56) were both retouched with strong lines. Such modifications sharpen Cixi's "errant gaze." Among scholars, only Rojas notices the "errant gaze" within Cixi's portrait. Rojas argues that rather than carefully seeing her own reflection, Cixi looks away from the small mirror in her hand, seemingly losing herself in deep thought. The "errant gaze" is meaningful to Rojas

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<sup>249</sup> The postcard is possibly based on Cixi's mirror gazing portrait published in the *Illustrated London News*, November 21, 1908.

as “a fracturing of the specular gaze that is the ostensible subject of the portrait.”<sup>250</sup> Rojas further lists three external gazes in this “boudoir mirror photograph”<sup>251</sup> and contends that it is the complexity of gazes that finally shape the gender identity and the imaginary “self-image” of Cixi’s “own.”<sup>252</sup>



**Figure 56.** The Late Empress Dowager Ise His of China, postcard, mailed from Etaples, France, to Hankou, China, on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1912

On the other hand, standing in front of the screen and throne, Cixi holds the center of the composition. She is self-sufficient and does not need to flatteringly dress up for some much more powerful absent male. She, herself, is both a feminine performer and the ubiquitous patriarchal ruler. As a ritual implement, Chinese screens originally had specific political meanings. Wu Hung argues screen is the extension of the Chinese Emperor’s body and perhaps even represents

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<sup>250</sup> Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 4.

<sup>251</sup> The three external gazes Rojas lists are: One, Cixi, who had to view the resulting photo, or, “Cixi’s specular gaze originates from the virtual center of the image but then wanders out of the frame of the photograph”; Two, the photographer, or the “photographic gaze”, as a direct outside observer, “positioned outside the frame of the picture even as it simultaneously frames the picture;” Three, the target audience, represented by the western-educated lady Der-ling’s invisible gaze, which “was located quite precisely at the very intersection of China/tradition and foreign/modernity that Cixi is in the process of negotiating with the mirror photograph itself.” Ibid, 28.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 7, 15.

the Emperor's face, appearing frequently in imperial portraits to idolize the male subjects.<sup>253</sup> Most of Cixi's photographic portraits employed curtains or wooden screens as backgrounds, just like the stage settings in traditional Chinese opera. Sometimes the margins of the curtains/screens were not included in the photos. In this way, the backgrounds seem to be the real bamboo and flower gardens. However, in Cixi's mirror gazing portrait, rather than disappearing or being reduced to the background, the freestanding wooden screen stands entirely in front of the background bamboo patterned curtain. The screen and throne are visually emphasized, reconstructing a stage for Cixi to perform her supreme status as a ruler, whose stage is traditionally prepared to wait for some absent powerful male. In this way, the feminine gesture is infused with patriarchal desire. Cixi refreshes the passive mirror gazing posture in traditional painting to represent her identity as a female ruler. Hence, during the 1900s, just as Ying-chen Peng suggests, Cixi not only recognizes and admits her female gender, but also is proud of and even makes use of the specific gender identity to display her supreme power.<sup>254</sup>

Hence, even if the mirror gazing portraits produced before 1901 may have been primarily for display in the inner court, as discussed in Chapter 2, Cixi's early portraits were filled with masculinity, while Cixi's portraits during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century began to show off her femininity. Ying-chen Peng regards the mirror-gazing photos as Cixi's self-portraits, which were not produced for men's voyeuristic gaze, but intentionally taken to represent her proud gender identity.<sup>255</sup> Carlos Rojas also associates Cixi's photos with her gender identity, and further positions Cixi's photos on the historical watershed between the pre-modern (her so-called "a specular visual economy") and the modern periods (the so-called "a spectated, or photographic,

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<sup>253</sup> Wu, *Double Screen*, 9-11.

<sup>254</sup> Peng, "Admire Herself," 70.

<sup>255</sup> Peng, "Lingering Between Tradition and Innovation," 75.

visual economy”).<sup>256</sup> After all, it seems to be an ominous taboo to paint self-portraits in traditional China. Only in the modern world, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, did educated female artists begin to create more and more female self-portraits. This phenomenon represented the modern current of female liberation and the rise of feminist art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, illustrated by practicing artists such as Pan Yuliang (潘玉良), Cai Weilian (蔡威廉), Guan Zilan (關紫蘭).<sup>257</sup>



**Figure 57.** Chinese actress, postcard, mailed from Hankou, China, to Charleroy, Belgium, on Aug. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1903

As for the dissemination of the mirror gazing portraits, besides possibly displaying these feminine portraits in her personal living quarters in the inner court, Cixi's mirror gazing portraits seem to have been welcomed and circulated widely within the Western world. The well-known English newspaper, *Illustrated London News*, published the mirror gazing portrait to memorialize Cixi's death in 1908 (fig.55).<sup>258</sup> Since then, this photographic portrait had been

<sup>256</sup> According to Rojas, "Cixi was performing not only femininity but more generally the very possibility of gender performativity itself." Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 9-10.

<sup>257</sup> About female painters' self-portraits as an important sign of Chinese modernity, see Xu Hong, "The Awakening of Women's Consciousness," in *Asian Women Artists*, Dinah Dysart and Hannah Fink eds (Roseville East, NSW: Craftsman House, 1996), 16-23. Also see Wang Huangsheng and Zhu Qingsheng, *Self-image: Woman Art in China (1920-2010)* (自我畫像：女性藝術在中國 Guangzhou: Lingnan Fine Arts Press, 2010).

<sup>258</sup> "The Catherine De' Medici of China," *Illustrated London News* (London, England), issue 3631, November 21, 1908, 705.

reproduced many times as postcards and circulated all around the world. With the title “the Late Empress Dowager Ise Hsi of China”, one of the postcards was mailed from Hankou, China, to Etaples, France, in June 1912, half a year after the last Emperor’s abdication (fig.56).<sup>259</sup> But the question is to what extent western viewers could understand the strictly constructed feminine power through Cixi’s visual performance.<sup>260</sup> In fact, before the falling of the Qing Empire, Cixi’s portrait had already been reproduced as postcards and even sold abroad when she was still alive.<sup>261</sup> Postcards depicting the Empress were juxtaposed with popular postcards of prostitutes, actresses, beheadings and executions, which were also on the market during this time. In this sense, the traditional Chinese visual context was lost in Western eyes: the postcard of an actress with a mirror in her hand (fig.57) and the postcard of Cixi in a similar pose shared the same feminine and Orientalized imaginations. The popular “romanticized portrait” of Cixi circulated in Western publications throughout the 1890s.<sup>262</sup> This portrait style substantiates the feminine imagination of the delicate Oriental China and her female ruler.

### 3.4 EMBODIMENT AS ALMIGHTY GODDESSES: CIXI’S IMAGES AS GUANYIN AND HOLY MOTHER OF CHINA

On Oct. 13, 1904, the Youzheng Bookstore in Shanghai posted an advertisement titled “Five New Photographs of the Empress Dowager and Others” (皇太后以次新照相五種), in *Shibao*

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<sup>259</sup> Chen Shouxiang, ed., *Surprise at Old Dreams: Selected Post Cards of Qing* 舊夢重驚：清代明信片選集 (Guilin: Guangxi meishu chu ban she, 2000), 2.

<sup>260</sup> Cheng-hua Wang also noticed that “this most feminine of Cixi’s photographs still fed into the fanciful imaginings of Westerns”. Wang, “Going Public”, 149.

<sup>261</sup> A group portrait of Cixi and her female court attendances was also printed as postcard, in which Cixi avoided direct eye contact with the viewers. The postcard was firstly purchased in China and carried to Vietnam, the current French colony, and then was mailed from Dapcau, Vietnam, to Nante, France, in October, 1907. Chen, *Surprise at Old Dreams*, 7.

<sup>262</sup> Arthur Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 1894, 1<sup>st</sup> edition. See Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 6.

(Times 時報) to publicly sell two styles of photographs depicting Cixi dressed up as Guanyin. One style is the so-called “eight *cun* large photographs,” sold for one *yuan* each, in which Cixi dressed up as Guanyin and sat in the middle of a bamboo grove in the Summer Palace, while Li Lianying and two consorts,<sup>263</sup> respectively dressed up as Weito and dragon girls, standing on both sides of Cixi. Another style is the smaller “two six *cun* photographs”, which together cost one *yuan*. In this photograph, Cixi is seen dressed up as Guanyin riding on a boat in “the South Sea” while other imperial ladies, all in theatrical costume, are dressed up as dragon girls or as the individual who rows the boat.<sup>264</sup> In the Imperial Household Archive from the ninth lunar month of 1903, there are also similar records of the two kinds of Cixi portraits: one entry is a triptych titled “Cixi’s Boat Riding Portrait,” while another entry is ten of “Cixi’s Wearing Five Buddha Crown Portraits”.<sup>265</sup> All of the above documents correspond to the extant two styles in which Cixi dressed up as Guanyin, including fourteen photos and glass negatives, now a part of both the Beijing Palace Museum and the Freer Gallery’s collections (fig.58, fig.59).

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<sup>263</sup> There is an error in this publication of the *Shibao*. The two ladies are not consorts. They are possibly Prince Qing Yikuang’s (慶親王奕劻) two daughters. See Xiao heng xiang shi zhu ren 小橫香室主人, *Completed Works of the Unofficial History of Qing* 清朝野史大觀 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu ju, 1932), vol.2, “Qing court poem 清宮詞” notes.

<sup>264</sup> “Five New Photographs of Empress Dowager and Others”(皇太后以次新照相五種), *Shibao*, NO.124, Oct.13, 1904.

<sup>265</sup> Lin, *The Photographs of Cixi in the Collection of the Palace Museum*, 19.



**Figure 58.** The Empress Dowager Cixi in the guise of Avalokitesvara 1903-1905, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. No.: FSA A.13 SC-GR-245



**Figure 59.** The Empress Dowager Cixi and attendants on the imperial barge on Zhonghai, Beijing 1903-1905, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. No.: FSA A.13 SC-GR-244

Five-Buddha-Crown is a typical Esoteric Buddhist (Vajrayana) headwear, representing the supreme five wisdoms and is restricted for the Buddha, abbot and an enlightened eminent monk. In Cixi's five-Buddha-Crown portraits, no matter how her attendants change, the role of Cixi is playing is clearly demonstrated through the Chinese characters on the scroll placed above

her head: *Putuoshan Guanyin Dashi* (普陀山觀音大士), or Great Master Guanyin of Mount Putalaka. Also, even if without dressing up as Guanyin, the same scroll with the title of Guanyin clearly appears on the screen beside the seated Cixi in the group portraits of Cixi on the imperial barge (fig.2.4.2). It seems as though in all of these portraits, Cixi always plays the part of Guanyin (or Kuan-yin), the Goddess of Mercy, or the Bodhisattva of Compassion.



**Figure 60.** Cixi in Buddha Costume (慈禧佛裝像), color on silk, 191.2 x100cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Besides taking photos as Guanyin, Cixi also ordered court painters to portray herself as Guanyin.<sup>266</sup> There are two hanging scrolls that depict Cixi in the Five-Buddha-Crown and other Buddhist icons in Beijing's Palace Museum. One of the paintings, officially entitled *Cixi in Buddha Costume* (慈禧佛裝像 fig.60), depicts Cixi sitting in an indoor space surrounded by a bamboo-pattern folding screen. The Five-Buddha Crown on her head, the lotus pedals decorated on her collar and shoes, in addition to the Chinese character that means “Buddha” (*fo* 佛)

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<sup>266</sup> Headland, *Court Life in China*, 90.

decorated on the red glaze vase, the golden Vajra bell, the incense burner and the four-volume *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingangjing* 金剛經) on the table all refer to Cixi's role as a Buddha of Vajrayana.<sup>267</sup> But the willow twig in the red glaze willow-leaf-shaped vase and the bamboo pattern on the back screen, both visual symbols of Guanyin, also denote Cixi's role as Guanyin. Another painting which portrays Cixi in the Five-Buddha Crown is clearly named after *Cixi's Guanyin Portrait Scroll* (慈禧觀音像軸 fig.61), since the painting depicts a boy presenting an elixir to the seated Cixi in a garden, a typical iconography of *Virgin Boy Shancai Making an Offering to Guanyin*.<sup>268</sup> Even if no written record is left to provide information about these two paintings, their rich symbolic visual signs related to the wish of longevity (for example, the peach tree, the elixir *lingzhi* on the rocks and in the boy Shancai's hand, and the butterflies, pronounced similarly to the Chinese character *die* (耄), or literally, advanced in years, especially referring to a 70 and 80-year-olds), the date of *Cixi's Guanyin Portrait Scroll* might be in 1904, the year in which she celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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<sup>267</sup> For more information on Tibetan Buddhist iconography, see Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003).

<sup>268</sup> For more information on this iconography, see Li, "Gendered Materialization," 190.



**Figure 61.** Cixi' s Guanyin Portrait Scroll(慈禧扮觀音像軸), color on silk, 217.5 x 116cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Cheng-hua Wang argues that from the hanging scroll *Cixi in Buddha Costume* (fig.60) to the *Cixi's Guanyin Portrait Scroll* (fig.61), Cixi changes from “acting as” (扮演) Guanyin to “becoming” (成為) Guanyin, and finally completes her role of the trinity: the nation's ruler, the patriarchal clan's leader and a Buddhist deity.<sup>269</sup> Here, in the case of the two ink paintings, Wang might be right to use the word “Buddhist.” After all, there is no clear clue that associates the paintings with the cult of Guanyin and other non-Buddhist religions. However, in the following parts of this chapter, I will show how Cixi incarnated herself not merely as a Buddhist deity, but an almighty deity beyond the limitation of a single religion.

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<sup>269</sup> Wang, “Portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi and Their Public Roles,” 256.

### 3.4.1 Cixi as Guanyin

Within the Qing court, although the Imperial family members' religious beliefs and visual representations seem very ambiguous, there is a tradition of producing Emperors' portraits with multiple religious symbols. For example, Emperor Yongzheng ordered to portray himself as a Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist monk in addition to a Daoist priest (fig.62, fig.63). Emperor Qianlong not only left seven Tangka portraits in which depicted himself as Cakravartin (轉輪王), but also had portraits acting as Manjusri (文殊菩薩), sometimes in Tibetan Buddhist costume and other times in Han Chinese Buddhist costume. (fig.64, fig.65) Besides, some of the Qing Imperial concubines also left their portraits full of religious symbols, for example, the Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang's (孝莊) casual portrait in Tibetan Buddhist's yellow costume (fig.66), and the Empress Xiaozhuang's (孝全) casual portrait acting as a Daoist female immortal (fig.67). However, before Cixi, no one in the court ever portrayed him or herself as Guanyin.<sup>270</sup>



**Figure 62.** the Emperor Yongzheng in Lama dress, 41.2 x 36.2, Palace Museum, Beijing

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<sup>270</sup> In the previous Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Emperor Wanli claimed his birth mother, the Empress Dowager Cisheng (慈聖), as Nine-lotus Bodhisattva (九蓮菩薩) incarnate, to raise the emperor as well as his birth mother's divine rights. Based on popular forms of Guanyin, the iconography of Nine-lotus Bodhisattva was then created and painted by court painters during the Wanli period again and again. However, these Nine-lotus Bodhisattva scrolls are still religious paintings rather than identified as portraits of the Empress Dowager Cisheng. Marsha Weidner, "Images of the Nine-lotus Bodhisattva and the Wanli Empress Dowager," *Chungguksa Yongu* (The Journal of Chinese Historical Researches) 35 (2005): 245-278.



**Figure 63.** the Emperor Yongzheng as a Daoist priest of fighting dragon, Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 64.** the Qianlong Emperor as Manjusri-Cakravartin, Tangka, ink and colors on cotton, 117 x 71cm,  
Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 65.** the Qianlong Emperor as Manjusri, Palace Museum, Beijing



**Figure 66.** portrait of the Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang



**Figure 67.** portrait of the Empress Xiaozhuang, Palace Museum, Beijing

Then, why did Cixi choose to act as Guanyin, rather than other male or female deities in the tradition of previous Emperors, Empresses and Dowagers? To respond to this question, I think it is necessary to focus on the sinicization of Avalokitesvara, in which I extract two main features based on Chun-fang Yu's research.<sup>271</sup> I will first examine gender transformation of Avalokitesvara that only happens in China, followed by noting that the worship of Guanyin is not limited to Buddhists but was pervasive among mixed folk cults and religions.

### 1) Performing Guanyin: the Deity with Gender Transformation

Guanyin was originally the Buddhist male deity Avalokitesvara, worshipped in India no later than the fifth Century CE. Since the Six Dynasty period (222-589), as a byproduct of the introduction of Buddhism, the cult of Guanyin began to be popularized in China. However, the early images that depicted Guanyin as a male deity resembled the original Indian form of the Bodhisattva (fig.68). It is only after the Song dynasty that the gender of Guanyin was

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<sup>271</sup> Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 1-21.

transformed into a Chinese female deity. At last, during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, possibly incorporated with some native Chinese Goddess, the Buddhist male deity Avalokitesvara was completely sinicized as the Chinese Goddess of Mercy.<sup>272</sup> It is in China alone that the male Avalokitesvara underwent such gender transformation.<sup>273</sup>



**Figure 68.** Eleven-Headed Guanyin, dated to 985, Dunhuang, Gansu province, China, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop

Lydia Liu notices this trans-gender context of Guanyin in China and uses one of Cixi's Five-Buddha Crown portraits to prove that Cixi wanted to be treated as a powerful man rather than a woman during diplomatic gift exchanges.<sup>274</sup> Admittedly, although the original male deity Avalokitesvara was completely transformed into a female deity Guanyin in the late Qing, the title of Guanyin still contains the honored *Dashi* (大士), or literally, Great (male) Literatus. Using a masculine title to address respect to a female is not rare in China. For example, the title

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid. Also see Chün-fang Yü, "A Sutra Promoting the White-robed Guanyin as Giver of Sons," in *Religions of China in Practice*, Donald Lopez ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 83-5. Chün-fang Yü, "Guanyin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteshvara," in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850*, Marsha Weider ed. (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, U of Kansas, 1984), 176.

<sup>273</sup> Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 15.

<sup>274</sup> Liu, *The Clash of Empires*, 162-4.

*Xiansheng* (先生), or Mister, is a highly honored title for an erudite female scholar. The honored title *Dashi* deliberately highlighted within Cixi's Guanyin photos somewhat implies the masculine nature of the subject. However, there is no record about any diplomatic function related to Cixi's wearing of the Five-Buddha crown. Rather, it is recorded that Cixi once enlarged one of her Guanyin portraits and hung the photo in her imperial living chamber.<sup>275</sup> In this sense, Cixi's dressing up as Guanyin photos may not have been produced for the outside diplomatic purposes, but for her own viewing pleasure within in her private space.

In contrast with Lydia Liu, Lai-kwan Pang argues that Cixi intentionally emphasized her feminine side in her photographs. As Pang argues, the photo portraits may have been created as a means for the Empress' personal viewing pleasure.<sup>276</sup> In Pang's opinion, Cixi's dressing-up as the feminine Guanyin is analogous to upper-class males cross-dressing as females. From this perspective, Cixi's Guanyin photographs may be regarded as cross-dressing photos.<sup>277</sup> In this sense, in comparison, if Cixi's early images dedicatedly highlight Cixi's masculine side and construct Cixi as a powerful man, then, Cixi's Guanyin photos turn towards the matriarch's inner self and her female identity.

In fact, before photographing herself as Guanyin, Cixi dressed up as Guanyin for leisure. One of Cixi's court attendances Der Ling recalled that Cixi once said:

“Whenever I have been angry, or worried over anything, by dressing up as the Goddess of Mercy it helps me to calm myself, and so play the part I represent. I can assure you that it does help me a great deal, as it makes me remember that I am looked upon as being

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<sup>275</sup> Xiao heng xiang shi zhu ren 小橫香室主人, *Completed Works of the Unofficial History of Qing* 清朝野史大觀, vol.2, “Remaining stories from Qing court 清宮遺聞”. Wu, *The Development History of Chinese Photography*, 123.

<sup>276</sup> Pang, *Distorting Mirror*, 82.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

all-merciful. By having a photograph taken of myself dressed in this costume, I shall be able to see myself as I ought to be at all times.”<sup>278</sup>

Hence, I conclude that dressing up as Guanyin had at least three meanings to Cixi. First, as a kind of positive psychological implication, it was an effective way to calm her inner self. Second, it reminded Cixi that she was always seen by others. Third, she wanted to be seen as all-merciful. Carlos Rojas also agrees that Cixi’s Guanyin photos were produced for herself to help to perform her “own.” To Rojas, it seems unimportant as to whether Cixi’s portraits were masculine or feminine. Rather, the essential point is that Cixi preformed “the very possibility of gender performativity itself.”<sup>279</sup> In this way, from different perspectives, both Rojas and Pang point out the potentially visual modernity, or the so-called new awareness of the modern world,<sup>280</sup> in Cixi’s Guanyin photos, as well as in her mirror gazing photos.

## 2) Guanyin as the Goddess of Mixed Religions

Different from Pang and Rojas, Yuhang Li’s research does not directly pay much attention to the issue of photographic modernity, but rather focuses on the context of religious practices of the cult of Guanyin within late Imperial China. According to Li, “dressing up as Guanyin was a religious practice in late-Qing China”.<sup>281</sup> Here, Li refers to an often-neglected point, that is, the “religious,” rather than “Buddhist” context of Cixi’s Guanyin portraits.

The Sinicized goddess of Guanyin is not only worshipped by Buddhists in China, but also seen as sacred to Daoists as well as worshippers of specific folk cults.<sup>282</sup> Especially during the Ming and Qing dynasty, Guanyin became a chief deity among the newly developing Chinese

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<sup>278</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 225.

<sup>279</sup> Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 7-9.

<sup>280</sup> Pang, *Distorting Mirror*, 84. Rojas, *Naked Gaze*, 15.

<sup>281</sup> Li, “Gendered Materialization,” 211.

<sup>282</sup> In Daoism, Guanyin is also regarded as “merciful ferry Daoist deity”(慈航道人). About Cixi’s Daoist worshiping, see Xun Liu, “Visualizing Perfection: Daoist Paintings of Our Lady, Court Patronage, and Elite Female Piety in the Late Qing,” *HJAS*, 64.1 (2004): 57-115.

native cults, including the White Lotus Cult and other secret folk cults.<sup>283</sup> Just as David Hogge noticed, the Chinese characters of Cixi's Daoist title *Guangrenzi* (廣仁子), or "Broad Benevolence", were also embedded in Cixi's portrait photographs.<sup>284</sup> It is also worth noting that the rapid growth of the specific cult of Guanyin in late Imperial China, was synchronized with the upspring of civil social stratum and folk literatures. More and more folk literature within late Imperial China described the goddess Guanyin as a deity shared by multiple religions. In this sense, Cixi's Guanyin portraits should not be simply associated with the "Buddhist" religion, but with her hybrid religious ideology influenced by civil and folk cultures.

It is well known that Cixi was a big fan of traditional Chinese operas. She not only hired a group of court actors, but also frequently recruited folk actors in the court. Shortly after Empress Dowager Ci'an's death, which was followed by national mourning for Ci'an, all the entertainments were forbidden. However, Cixi could not wait to recruit Chinese folk opera actors.<sup>285</sup>

In folk operas, Guanyin was depicted as a beautiful and merciful goddess as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> Century during the Yuan Dynasty ruled by the Mongols. After the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, during the Qing dynasty, Guanyin appeared much more frequently in folk operas, usually found supporting the endangered virtuous and helpless people in vital moments.<sup>286</sup> In one of the earliest and most famous traditional operas *Mulian Saving His Mother* (目連救母), the role of Guanyin was depicted as an omnipotent goddess, showing her transformed ability as crane, tiger, lady with a

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<sup>283</sup> Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 449.

<sup>284</sup> Daoist title(*hao* 號) often indicates the title owner's affiliation to Daoism, especially in imperial clan. Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2013), 55. Yuhang li and Yingchen Peng also talked about Cixi's this Daoist title. Li, "Gendered Materialization," 191. Peng, "Remaining Things in Three Seas," 38. Hogge, *The Empress Dowager and the Camera*, 29.

<sup>285</sup> Ding Ruqin 丁汝芹, "Cixi Watching Operas Arbitrarily 肆意看戲的慈禧," *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 11 (2013): 121.

<sup>286</sup> Zhou Qiuliang 周秋良, *Research on Guanyin Stories and Guanyin Beliefs* 觀音故事與觀音信仰研究 (Canton: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chu ban she, 2009), 438-440.

fishing basket, goddess with a thousand hands, warrior, literatus, and even a Daoist priest in the most influential version of the opera script of the late Ming dynasty (the 16<sup>th</sup> Century).<sup>287</sup> During the Qing dynasty, the folk opera *Mulian Saving His Mother* was then adapted as one of the seven court operas, *Exhorting the Authority to be Kind* (勸善金科), in which the role of the changeable and powerful Guanyin kept as in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century folk script.<sup>288</sup> Hence, as a link between folk visual cultures and court arts, folk operas played an indispensable role in bringing the theatrical images and performance costumes of the civil Guanyin into the Qing court, and also played a vital role in shaping the so-called preexisting Guanyin iconography of Cixi's Guanyin portraits.

Cixi's famous title "Old Buddha" (老佛爺) also indicates Cixi's fondness for operas. Scholars usually believe that the title was only to address Cixi after the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and the title of "Old Buddha" was possibly used to describe one of Cixi's large Guanyin photographic portraits.<sup>289</sup> However, archives from the Imperial Opera Management Bureau (*shengpingshu* 昇平署) clearly demonstrate that the title of "Old Buddha" was first used in the second year of Tongzhi reign (1863) by eunuchs to specifically refer to Ci'an. Only after the death of Ci'an in 1881, the title of "Old Buddha" starts to exclusively belong to Cixi.<sup>290</sup> In this sense, the title of "Buddha," or later "Old Buddha," which firstly used by eunuchs of the opera bureau, did not come from Cixi's Guanyin photo, but has close relationship with the Imperial Opera Bureau.

Cixi's interest in opera is usually cited to support her relatively low educational level as well as her immortal luxurious lifestyle even during the national calamity. Chun-fang Yu

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<sup>287</sup> Chen Fangying 陳芳英, *the Development of the Story of Mu-lien Saves His Mother and its Position in Literature* 目連救母故事之演進及其有關文學之研究 (Taipei: National Taiwan University press, 1983), 139.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>289</sup> Xiao heng xiang shi zhu ren 小橫香室主人, *Completed Works of the Unofficial History of Qing* 清朝野史大觀, vol.2, "Poem of Qing court: Xiaoqin acting as Guanyin 清宮詞·孝欽觀音妝".

<sup>290</sup> Zou, "Cixi in Archives," 18.

explains Cixi's performances in which she dressed as Guanyin was merely for entertainment and theatrical effect.<sup>291</sup> In comparison with the high Qing Emperor Qianlong's religious portraits, You-heng Feng also argues that Cixi's Guanyin portraits indicate nothing about political ambition, but rather her low aesthetic taste.<sup>292</sup> In fact, just like her omnipresent control over her portraits,<sup>293</sup> Cixi not only liked to watch operas but also sometimes adapted screenplays by herself.<sup>294</sup> Cixi's adaptation of the folk opera about the Generals of the Yang Family (*zhao dai xiao shao* 昭代簫韶) is a good example for Cixi's political intentions in manipulating her entertainment.<sup>295</sup> Both in historical records and in the opera, the nomadic regent Empress Dowager Xiao (蕭太后) was usually depicted as a good female ruler. One day, when the famous actor Chen Delin (陳德霖) played the role of the Empress Dowager Xiao, he creatively imitated the steps of the Empress Dowager Cixi. Cixi highly praised the actor and then ordered the old opera to be adapted onto a much larger scale.<sup>296</sup> Here, on the stage, by wearing costumes and heavy make-up, the male actor completely effaced himself and apparently played the good deed and role of the female ruler Empress Dowager Xiao, while simultaneously imitating the steps of Empress Dowager Cixi. In this way, the actor finally incarnated Empress Dowager Cixi as Empress Dowager Xiao. Cixi happily accepted the actor's ingenious way of equaling herself to a well-known regent. Furthermore, the adaptation and enhancement of the role of Empress

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<sup>291</sup> Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 5.

<sup>292</sup> Feng, "Empress Dowager, Politics, and Art," 114-116.

<sup>293</sup> The enormous amount of preparation for her portraits was recorded in the Imperial Household Archive. See Feng, "Empress Dowager Cixi Disguised Herself As the Goddess of Mercy," 35.

<sup>294</sup> Ding, "Cixi Watching Operas Arbitrarily," 121.

<sup>295</sup> The opera tells the merits of the generals of the Yang family, who bravely fought the enemy, Liao country, and assisted the emperor of the Song dynasty loyally even if they were trapped again and again by traitor ministers and finally almost the male members of the Yang family fought to death. The story happens between the nomadic regime Liao country and the Han Chinese, the north Song court, and the Yang family is loyal to the Han Chinese court. During the Qing Dynasty, the similar nomadic regime Qing Empire began to reduce the ethnic factors in the story, and to promote the loyalty to the emperor.

<sup>296</sup> Cross-gender Cross-dressing? Performances are very common in Chinese operas. Traditionally, no female was allowed to act in opera, so males acted in all the female roles. The story is based on a conversation between the famous Beijing opera actor Chen Delin and the opera theorist Qi Rushan. Ding, "Cixi Watching Operas Arbitrarily," 126-7.

Dowager Xiao was only evident during the Hundred Days Reform,<sup>297</sup> when Cixi namely returned power to the Emperor Guangxu but was still secretly aware of political movements. Hence, through the example of Cixi's adaptation of the opera during the Hundred Days Reform, we can see how Cixi made use of folk operas in the court to promote her image as a benevolent female ruler.



**Figure 69.** An album of Cixi and Li Lianying (from *Forbidden City* 紫禁城 1(1995): 39)



**Figure 70.** Cixi- Guanyin portrait, ink painting (from Headland, *Court Life in China*, 1909, frontispiece)

Just as the function of “theatricality” in Cixi’s Guanyin photos, as pointed out by Yuhang Li, through both the theatrical stage in operas and in photos, Cixi transformed her role from a real actor to a fictional character, and finally intentionally created herself as an object of

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

worship.<sup>298</sup> In this sense, for Cixi, opera was not just entertainment without any form of political consideration. Also, we cannot ignore the influence of folk operas and popular cultures to court arts. Specifically, when talking about the preexisting Guanyin iconography of Cixi's Guanyin portraits, popular visual cultures might influence much more than the other high level art forms to the so-called relatively lower educated Cixi.<sup>299</sup>

The Guanyin portraits circulated widely not only within the court but also throughout the country and even abroad. It is said that Cixi once printed several of her group photos acting as Guanyin on punt (fig.59) and hung them "everywhere" in the court.<sup>300</sup> She also periodically transcribed the Buddhist scripture *Heart Sutra* (心經), a traditional habit of Chinese literati and emperors, including the Qianlong Emperor. Different from the male transcribers, Cixi ordered court painters to draw her Guanyin portrait in the transcription albums (fig.69). These sutra albums with Cixi's handwritings and her Guanyin portraits were handed out as presents to officials.<sup>301</sup> Also, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, in 1904, Cixi's Guanyin photos were publicly sold on the domestic market. Moreover, in 1909, Cixi's Guanyin photos in addition to an ink painting where Cixi is depicted dressed as Guanyin (fig.70) were selected as illustrations in a book published in New York. According to the author Isaac Taylor Headland, the ink painting was a secret gift from one of Cixi's court painters.<sup>302</sup> It seems to people with different education levels and cultural backgrounds, that no matter whether in court or in folk

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<sup>298</sup> Li, "Gendered Materialization," 194.

<sup>299</sup> It is also necessary to mention that some scholars have already paid attention to the functions of female deities as a means of promoting the status and liberation of Chinese women. Barbara E. Reed, "The Gender Symbolism of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva," in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, Jose Ignacio Cabezon, Albany ed (New York: State University of New York, 1991), 159.

<sup>300</sup> Wu, *The Development History of Chinese Photography*, 122.

<sup>301</sup> "One day another of the court painters came to call on me and during the conversation told me that he was painting a picture of the Empress Dowager as the goddess of mercy. Up to that time I had not been accustomed to think of her as a goddess of mercy, but he told me that she not infrequently copied the gospel of that goddess 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." Headland, *Court Life in China*, 90.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

culture, Cixi's Guanyin portraits are always attractive, meaningful and somewhat mysterious visual representations.

### **3.4.2 Cixi as Our Lady of China**

Besides Cixi's Guanyin portraits, there is other religious iconography that implicitly renders Empress Dowager Cixi as a Christian female deity: Our Lady of China. Such iconography has been worshipped for more than 100 years in certain Chinese churches, even though Cixi's attitude towards Christianity was equivocal and sometimes self-contradictory. It is well known that Cixi once gave support to the notorious anti-Christian and anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion (1898-1900). However, it is also known that only four years before the Boxer Rebellion, Cixi received and exchanged gifts with Protestant missionaries and Chinese converts. Such an event fostered the notion that "the work of the missionaries in China had finally gained sovereign recognition."<sup>303</sup>

After almost one century of prohibition against Catholicism, through unequal treatment, Western missions obtained permission again in Mainland China in the late Qing dynasty. Along with the western colonial expansion, conflict between missions and native people never ceased. The frequent mission incidents were not always religious issues, but were intertwined with social, cultural, political, economic and diplomatic struggles. In such a context, Cixi's ambiguous attitude towards Christianity was not an isolated religious issue at all. Especially, after the Boxer Rebellion and the later Eight-Power Allied Forces' occupation of Beijing in 1900, possibly in an effort to achieve international fame and gain external support, Cixi exhibited favor towards

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<sup>303</sup> By Rev. John R. Hykes in his letter to Rev. Edward W. Gilman in Shanghai, December 21, 1894. Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 152 note 32.

foreigners, western techniques and customers. This change in attitude included the public exhibition of her portrait at the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition.

In spring 1904, Father Joseph de Lapparent (Chinese name Kong Daoming 孔道明), the head of the French Jesuit orphanage of Tushanwan (or Tou-Se-we 土山灣) in Shanghai, received an order for the World Exposition in St. Louis. The mysterious rich client ordered gilt wooded furniture and a table screen. In addition, the client had four principal requirements. First, the subject of the table screen should be the “Holy Mother Empress Dowager” (聖母皇太后), which clearly referred to Cixi.<sup>304</sup> Second, the subject should also incorporate the western “Holy Mother and Child.” Third, the background in the screen should match the interior design of the Chinese Village rendered at the St. Louis World Exposition. Fourth, the table screen should be made on behalf of “Shanghai Nanyang Public School” (上海南洋公學) when exhibited in St. Louis.<sup>305</sup> One of Cixi’s photo portraits and a photocopy of Cixi’s oil painting portrait<sup>306</sup> were both attached to the order as primary models. After several detailed modifications on request of the secret client,<sup>307</sup> the painting workshop (the St. Luke Studio), the woodworking and metalwork studio of the Tushanwan Orphanage collaborated to finish the table screen, depicting Cixi as Virgin Mary with her son depicted on her lap. The exquisite furniture was then sent to St. Louis and received a lot of compliments. The “Shanghai Nanyang Public School” was hence granted a gold medal in the World Exposition.

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<sup>304</sup> By comparison, Ci’an’s honored title was “Benevolent Mother Empress Dowager” (慈母皇太后).

<sup>305</sup> Zhang Xiaoyi 張曉依, “From ‘Empress Dowager’ to ‘Our Lady of China’: the History of the EXPO Exhibit ‘Our Lady of China’ 從《聖母皇太后》到《中華聖母像》:土山灣《中華聖母像》參展太平洋世博會背後的故事,” *Journal of Catholic Studies* 天主教研究論輯 12 (2016): 186.

<sup>306</sup> The oil painting was painted by Katharine Carl, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>307</sup> According to Zhang Xiaoyi, the secret client might be Prince Pu Lun 溥倫, the official representative who accompanied with Cixi’s oil painting portrait to the St. Louis Expo. Zhang, “From ‘Empress Dowager’ to ‘Our Lady of China,’” 189.

The painting script of the table screen<sup>308</sup> in the Shanghai Tushanwan workshop was set up as a religious icon and influenced several versions of “Our Lady of Donglu” (東閩聖母), or later “Our Lady of China” (中華聖母). Paradoxically, on one hand, Cixi was once a supporter of the anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion and blamed it on an evil heretic leader; on the other hand, when the Church of Donglu was built to memorialize Madonna’s miracle of protecting Chinese and foreign Christians during the Boxer Rebellion, the church chose to use Cixi’s portrait as the model for Madonna. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Father René Flament of Donglu Church knew well of Cixi’s notorious anti-Christian attitudes in addition to the anti-Christian slaughter during the Boxer Rebellion. Regardless, in order to manifest Madonna’s respectable and noble temperament, Father René Flament still ordered the depiction “Our Lady of Donglu” to be based on Cixi’s portrait.<sup>309</sup> By painting Madonna as a beautiful and august lady, Father René Flament’s purpose was to convert more Chinese people.<sup>310</sup> This missiological strategy of employing images of Madonna to attract Chinese people started as early as the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, when the first generation Jesuits Matteo Ricci entered China and began to disseminate charming images of Madonna. One of the results is that during the late Ming dynasty, many Chinese people took Madonna for the Christian God, and sometimes the image of “Madonna with Child” was even mistaken for “Child-giving Guanyin.”<sup>311</sup> As Jonathan Spence noticed, the Jesuits might have

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<sup>308</sup> Different from the official documents and news reports on Carl’s oil painting of Cixi, which was also displayed at the St. Louis World Expo, there are few remaining documents which detail the table screen. The oil painting portrait was later officially presented to the government of the United States, while the table screen’s whereabouts had been unknown until it appeared back in Mainland China a century later.

<sup>309</sup> Song Zhiqing 宋稚清, *History of Worshipping Our Lady of China* 中華聖母敬禮史話 (Tainan: wendao chu ban she, 2005), 82-3.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>311</sup> Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 91. John E. McCall, “Early Jesuit Art in the Far East IV: in China and Macao before 1635,” *Artibus Asiae* 11 (1948): 47.

known this mistake, but they never gave up using the images of Madonna in their missionary works because of the great influence of the images in China.<sup>312</sup>

We do not know if Cixi also took the icon of “Madonna with Child” for “Child-giving Guanyin.” After all, as scholars point out, it is possible that the Guanyin cult in China may have been influenced by Christianity,<sup>313</sup> since the image of Guanyin holding a son was first depicted as early as the Ming Dynasty. Furthermore, the majority of legends concerning Guanyin’s power as a fertility goddess were recorded in indigenous scriptures during the late Ming Dynasty,<sup>314</sup> when the icon of “Madonna with Child”, promoted by Matteo Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries, was widely circulated around China. Still, it is possible that both Cixi and missionaries reached an agreement in the creation of the image of the Chinese Madonna based on Cixi’s portraits. As Jeremy Clark points out:

Cixi’s enthusiastic adoption of portraiture and photography thus occurred at a time when Catholic missionaries were also engaged in producing edifying imagery. The success of the imperial photographs and portraits provided further impetus to the Catholic Church’s own efforts. The desire of the Donglu Catholics and their resident missionary to possess a painted image of Mary was one consequence of these stimuli. They wanted a portrait as beautiful and as impressive as any other image; they now had the means to procure one, and a model to use as a guide.<sup>315</sup>

Jeremy Clark insightfully notices the influence of Cixi’s photographic portraits on missionaries, but has offered few words about Cixi’s intentional cooperation with Christian churches. Admittedly, Father Jean-Paul Wiesel assumes that the “Holy Mother and Child” table screen may have been commissioned due to the decision of some Chinese Christian artisans in

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<sup>312</sup> Jonathan Spence, *the Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books, Penguin Books, 1986), 245.

<sup>313</sup> Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity* (New York: Ballantine Wellspring, 2001), 244. Williams Watson, ed., *Chinese Ivories from the Shang to the Qing*, London: The Oriental Ceramic Society, 1984, p. 40, note 28.

<sup>314</sup> Chün-fang Yü, “A Sutra Promoting the White-robed Guanyin as Giver of Sons,” in *Religions of China in Practice*, Donald Lopez ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 81. Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 259.

<sup>315</sup> Jeremy Clark, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities in Chinese History* (Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 99-100.

Tushanwan, rather than the decision of Cixi herself, since the Christian artisans “knew about Carl’s paintings of Cixi and came up with the idea to portrait Mary in a similar fashion”.<sup>316</sup> Regardless, no matter who commissioned the table screen, the fact is that the model of the Holy Mother depicted in the table screen is the Empress Dowager Cixi. Considering the strict censorship of the late Qing, as an export to the St. Louis World Exposition, even if the patronage might have not been Cixi directly, it is clear that she still offered either direct or indirect support. It seems Cixi was indeed very satisfied with the “Holy Mother and Child” table screen, since all the Chinese people in charge of the table screen were rewarded handsomely.<sup>317</sup> This fact is of particular interest if the production of the screen may be indeed traced back to the 1890s, during a time when Chinese Christians were persecuted as traitors.



**Figure 71.** Madonna and Child in Beitang Church, Beijing

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<sup>316</sup> Jean-Paul Wiesel, “Marian Devotion and the Development of Chinese Christian Art During the Last 150 Years,” in *Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China* 基督宗教與近代中國, Institute of Modern History, CASS 中國社會科學院近代史研究所 and Verbiest Institute KULeuven 比利時魯汶大學南懷仁研究中心 eds. (Beijing: shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2001), 204.

<sup>317</sup> Zhang, “From ‘Empress Dowager’ to ‘Our Lady of China’,” 192. Since then, Tushanwan Orphanage set up a close relationship with the government and received more orders of imperial portraits, for example, the last Emperor Xuantong and the Regent Prince Chun’s portraits.

It seems as though the iconographical collaboration of the portrait of Cixi and Madonna lasted for over a century. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, different versions of “Our Lady of China” with Qing imperial attires were printed, published, and distributed. Original paintings of these versions of “Our Lady of China” have also been displayed or stored all over the world, including Mainland China, Taiwan, San Francisco and the Vatican.<sup>318</sup> In all these versions, Mary and Child always wear regal imperial robes, just as Father Rene Flament’s earliest suggestion.<sup>319</sup> A recent version of Mary and Child displayed at the North Church (*beitang* 北堂), one of the biggest and earliest Catholic churches in Beijing, still depicts Mary and Child in Qing Imperial dragon-patterned court robes (fig.71).

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I was interested in questions related to how and why Cixi accepted photography as a new media, and how Cixi’s photo portraits were associated with her approaches to not only the inner court’s power but also international power. I contend that Cixi changed her image strategy during the New Policy Reforms after 1901.

I classify Cixi’s photo portraits in three groups based on their functions, poses and specific subjects. The first group consists of Cixi’s photo portraits produced for Western viewers, including her carefully prepared photos as diplomatic presents and her first unplanned photo taken by a Western journalist. The second group is composed Cixi’s photos with the feminine

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<sup>318</sup> About the different versions of “Our Lady of China”, see Zhang, “From ‘Empress Dowager’ to ‘Our Lady of China’,” 84-204. Also see Wiest, “Marian Devotion and the Development of Chinese Christian Art During the Last 150 Years,” 207.

<sup>319</sup> Wiest, “Marian Devotion and the Development of Chinese Christian Art During the Last 150 Years,” 201. Also see Su Changshan 蘇長山, *the True Story of Our Lady of Donglu* 敬禮東閣聖母史話 (Baoding: Baoding Donglu Catholic Church, 1994).

mirror gazing pose. These are good examples of her changing image strategy during the New Policy Reforms. These images are also associated with the rising female identity as well as important symbol of Chinese modernity in 20<sup>th</sup> Century China. The third group is surmounted by Cixi's photos with religious signs, in which Cixi embodied herself as almighty goddesses of both traditional Chinese cults and newly imported Christianity.

By focusing on the production, features, functions, circulations and influences of Cixi's photographic portraits, I propose that these portraits not only visually manifest the female leader's changing project of her image design which is a part of her political strategies during the New Policy Reforms, but also help to explore the complicated issue related to how China was to become modern at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was not a passive, isolated, nor one-sided procedure, but was intertwined within interactive international affairs and entangled benefits.

#### **4.0 UNDER TWO AMERICANS' BRUSHES: CIXI'S OIL PAINTING PORTRAITS**

Between the years 1904 and 1905, the seventy-year-old Cixi ordered her portrait to be painted in oils twice. Cixi not only allowed a foreign woman to step foot within the Summer Palace to paint for almost a year, but also allowed her painted portrait to be exhibited abroad. Approximately one year later, Cixi again permitted a foreign male painter to paint her portrait in the Forbidden City. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from Cixi's reign on, Chinese rulers began actively to allow their portraits to be shown to the public. Imported oil paintings on canvas finally took the place of traditional ink painting on paper/silk, becoming one of the main methods to present the rulers' open-minded and cultivated appearances to the public.<sup>320</sup>

American Katharine Carl and Dutch-American painter Hubert Vos were the two painters who came to Beijing to paint Cixi face-to-face. In total, Mrs. Carl painted four portraits of Cixi between 1903 and 1904. Today, three of the portraits have been preserved. One is a three-quarter-length portrait, kept in Beijing's Palace Museum (fig.75). The second is a full-length portrait, which was sent to the 1904 St. Louis World Expo before presented to the American Government as a gift in 1905 and currently in Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (fig.77). The third is a draft oil portrait of Cixi now housed in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, which

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<sup>320</sup> Today we can still see Mao Zedong's large oil painting portrait hung on Tian'anmen Gate. While these portraits have been changed several times during the past half century, each portrait is oil on canvas.

corresponds to the recorded draft of Cixi's St. Louis portrait (fig.76). Compared to Carl's almost yearlong tenure in Beijing, Hubert Vos was only allowed to meet with Cixi four times. Vos completed a full-length portrait of Cixi in Beijing in two months during 1905, which satisfied Cixi. Today the portrait is still kept in Beijing, within the Summer Palace's collection (fig.79). All the paintings discussed above were approved and verified under Cixi's direction.

Vos returned with a sketch portrait of Cixi and developed it to a half-length painting upon his return to the United States. Today the "realistic Cixi" portrait is housed within the Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum (fig.80). According to Vos, Cixi allowed him to paint and keep the portrait as "a special mark of favor." Cixi even went as far as to frame the portrait for Vos.<sup>321</sup> However, Cixi never had chance to see the completed portrait herself and never knew that Vos painted an aged "realistic" portrait of the Empress Dowager.<sup>322</sup> What's more, Cixi never knew that in 1906, Vos exhibited the portrait at the Paris Salon in France without her permission.<sup>323</sup>

However, in 1899, while Vos was still a Dutch citizen, he once sought permission to paint Cixi, but was rejected.<sup>324</sup> The question may be posed as to how American Katharine Carl was first granted permission to paint Cixi? Why did Vos at last get the permission in 1905? Furthermore, how could the foreign male painter enter the Chinese Imperial Chamber to portray

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<sup>321</sup> *American Art News*, Vol. 4, No. 11 (Dec. 23, 1905), 3

<sup>322</sup> Kwong uses "young Cixi" and "realistic Cixi" to clarify Vos' two portraits of Cixi. Kwong, Luke SK, "No Shadows", *History Today* 50 (2000): 42-43.

<sup>323</sup> "Hubert Vos is at present in Paris executing some portrait orders. His portrait of the Empress Dowager of China now in the Salon, has received much favorable comment from the French press." *American Art News*, Vol. IV. No 32, June 16, 1906, 3. "Hubert Vos his portrait of her Majesty the Dowager Empress of China, which, by the way, was not placed on the line, although such honor is usually accorded to portraits of sovereigns..." in Special Correspondent, "Exhibits Paris Salons: The American Artists' Display", *Fine Arts Journal*, Vol.17, no.9, Sep. 1906, 581. It was also reported that in January 1910, Vos showed "an interesting original sketch from his noted portrait of the Empress Dowager of China painted from life in Peking in 1905" at the exhibition galleries of Edward Brandus, No. 712 Fifth Ave., in New York City. "Vos at Brandus's", *American Art News*, Vol. VIII, No. 15., January 22, 1910, 6.

<sup>324</sup> Hubert Vos, "Autobiographical Letter," in Lstvan L. Szenassy, *Hubert Vos, Dutch-American Painter* (Stamford, CT: Stamford Museum and Maastricht, Netherlands: Bonnefantenmuseum, 1979), 11. See Virginia Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, Cynthia Mills, Lee Glazer and Amelia A. Goerlitz, eds (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2011), 100.

the Chinese female ruler? What are the differences between Cixi's portraits painted at the hand of the female painters versus the male foreign painter? And how could the oil painting portraits influence and construct the image of Cixi, in addition to Chinese national images abroad? In this chapter, focusing on Cixi's oil painting portraits during the New Policy Reform era (1901-1908), I will confront these questions.

#### 4.1 OIL PAINTING PORTRAIT IN THE CHINESE COURT

Possibly imported by Matteo Ricci or other missionaries, the first oil painting appeared in China in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>325</sup> The authentic appearance of a Madonna attracted Chinese people and once played an important role in converting the first generation of Chinese Christians.<sup>326</sup> But it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that Court painters<sup>327</sup> started to use oil colors to paint imperial portraits. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, only two Emperors' and nine imperial concubines' oil painting portraits remain today.<sup>328</sup> However, I suggest that these imperial oil painting portraits are different from Cixi's, especially if we are to consider the following two aspects:

1). Most of the two Emperors' and all of the concubines' oil painting portraits are painted either on paper or silk, rather than on canvas.

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<sup>325</sup> Gu Qiyuan 顧啟元, "Ke zuo zhui yu 客座贅語," vol. 6, in *the Continuation to the Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* 續修四庫全書, vol. 1260, Xuxiu Si Ku Quan Shu bianzuan weiyuanhui ed (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chu ban she, 1995), 192. Similar comments see Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書, "Wu sheng shishi 無聲史詩," vol. 7, in *the Continuation to the Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature* 續修四庫全書, vol.1065, 578.

<sup>326</sup> Spence, *Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, 244.

<sup>327</sup> Including missionaries served in court, such as Giuseppe Castiglione (郎世寧 1688-1766), Jean-Denis Attiret (王致誠 1702-1768), Ignatius Sickeltart (艾啟蒙 1708-1780) and their Chinese students.

<sup>328</sup> Including Emperor Kangxi, Emperor Qianlong, Emperor Qianlong's mother, seven of Qianlong's concubines, and the second Empress of Jiaqing. Kangxi has 3 pieces of oil painting portraits in the Palace Museum in Beijing; Qianlong has 2 pieces in the Palace Museum in Beijing and 1 in the French National Museum of Asian Arts collection. See Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "A Discussion of Qing Dynasty Half-length Oil Portraits of Emperors, Empresses and Concubines 談清宮皇帝後妃油畫半身像," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 1 (2008): 50-59.

2). All the concubines' oil painting portraits are painted in a half-length style. Compared with ink painting portraits, the number of oil painting portraits is far fewer and seemingly less significant. According to Nie Chongzheng, these half-length portraits are merely drafts for formal full-length portraits.<sup>329</sup>

After the turn of the 20th Century, during the last five years of Cixi's reign, however, these two features of imperial oil painting portraits began to change.

#### **4.2 AMERICAN FRIENDSHIPS, MRS. CONGER AND TRAVELLING WOMEN**

After the Boxer Uprising and the Siege of the International Legations in 1900, the international image of the Empress Dowager Cixi was portrayed as atrocious and tyrannical. She was even depicted as an evil-visaged slaughterer with a bloody dagger in her hand and surrounded by a pile of beheaded bodies as a means of further exemplifying her cruelty (fig.72). After Cixi's return to Beijing in January 1902, she frequently hosted visits by ladies from foreign legations as an attempt to establish friendships with foreigners. In June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903, during the sixth visit of her old friend Cixi, Sarah Pike Conger, the American Ambassador Edwin Hurd Conger's wife, suggested that the Empress Dowager to sit for portrait for worldwide exhibition, in order to change Cixi's negative international image.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Nie, "A Discussion of Qing Dynasty Half-length Oil Portraits of Emperors, Empresses and Concubines," 57. About the imperial drafts, or sketches, see Nie Chongzheng 聶崇正, "A Description of Studies of the 'Manuscript Versions' of Qing Dynasty Palace Paintings 清代宮廷繪畫稿本述考," *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 3(2004): 75-91.

<sup>330</sup> As recorded by Der-ling: so that "... the American people may form some idea of what a beautiful lady the Empress Dowager of China is." Grant Hayter Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade: The Legend of Princess Der-ling* (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 196.



**Figure 72.** Charles Lucien Leandre, Empress Dowager of China, colored engraving, front cover of *Le Rire*,  
July 14<sup>th</sup> 1900

According to Mrs. Conger's letter, all the unhappy memories, the violent anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement of the Boxer Rebellion, and the occupation of the Forbidden City by the Allied Forces of Eight Powers should give way to a newly established diplomatic friendship.<sup>331</sup> The old evil face of the Empress Dowager Cixi was to be updated and replaced by the new understanding of the real "Her Majesty", the nice, kind and generous woman, who signed the Boxer Indemnity (1901) and began to implement new policies (1901). In this sense, Cixi's oil portrait is not only an artistic and cross-cultural achievement of Cixi's partial acceptance of the Western culture, but also a political signal of the feudal Qing Empire's compromise with the outside modern Western world.

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<sup>331</sup> Mrs. Conger wrote to her daughter on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1903: "Only think of it! That this portrait may present to the outside world even a little of the true expression and character of this misrepresented woman, is my most earnest wish. I do not, my dear girl, forget the dark days of the siege, the sufferings, the bloodshed, the sorrows; but I would not have this darkness bury in oblivion all the bright rays of sunshine. I have most earnestly wished that our home people could see Her Majesty as I have many times seen her." Sarah Pike Conger, *Letters from China* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1909), 249.



**Figure 73.** The Empress Dowager Cixi with Mrs. Sarah Conger and other three foreign envoys' wives, 1903-1905, the Palace Museum, Beijing

Between 1898 and 1905, Mrs. Conger accompanied her American Minister husband to Beijing, where they lived for seven years.<sup>332</sup> According to Mrs. Conger's letters, she set up a firm friendship with the Empress Dowager Cixi, especially after the Boxer Rebellion. The close friendship is also proved by Mrs. Conger's intimate photo with Cixi. Depicted with a group of foreign ladies, Mrs. Conger stands closely beside Cixi, holding her left hand. The photo is carefully tinted and housed in the Forbidden City to this day (fig.73).<sup>333</sup> It is worth mentioning that Mrs. Conger was the first and the only foreigner who was captured in such a close and intimate pose with the Empress Dowager. Mrs. Conger is also the only foreign legation whose name is honorably recoded in the imperial household's *The Aulic Account Book: The Record of the Imperial Visage* (宮中賬簿·聖容帳). In the letters to her daughter in 1902, she introduced her status as representative and First Lady of all the foreign legations to China.<sup>334</sup> Hence, the status

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<sup>332</sup> She recorded her Beijing experiences in letters to her friends and family, publishing them in English in 1909.

<sup>333</sup> The negative glass is now in the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, No. FSA. A. 13 SC-GR-249.

<sup>334</sup> Conger, *Letters from China*, 218, 223.

of the First Lady of the American legation to China seemed much more important and higher than other foreign ladies.

Cixi accepted Mrs. Conger's suggestions not only to allow a female American painter to paint her oil portrait but also to send the portrait to the St. Louis World Exposition. To some extent, the American lady Mrs. Conger not only plays an important role in making Cixi's oil paintings and photo portraits,<sup>335</sup> but also has a visible influence on Cixi's New Policy as well as the feudal Qing Empire's way to a modern world. However, when discussing Cixi's portraits, few scholars pay attention to Mrs. Conger's contributions and her potential impetus in encouraging Cixi's non-traditional media portraits. Furthermore, there is no mention of her identity as an educated white American woman who grew up and lived during the historical period of the Women's Rights Movement between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

In fact, Mrs. Conger did not hold a high-ranking status as a member of the foreign envoys' wives before 1902.<sup>336</sup> The first time Mrs. Conger met with Cixi was on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1898, at the first party of Westerners in the Forbidden City held by Cixi. The party was held less than three months after the end of the Hundred Days' Reform (June 11- September 21, 1898). The failure of the Reform directly led to an anti-foreign movement in Beijing. In the three months after the failed Reform attempt, foreign legations in Beijing were frequently attacked. Hence, the party, suggested by the British Minister Claude Maxwell MacDonald's wife to celebrate Cixi's 64-year-old birthday, was regarded as inappropriate by the other legations.<sup>337</sup> Among the seven

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<sup>335</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 218, 226.

<sup>336</sup> Based on Mrs. Conger and Mrs. Heyking's memoirs, Marina Warner might have been mistaken in her assertion that Mrs. Conger led the 1898 party. Marina Warner, *the Dragon Empress: Life and Times of Tz'u-hsi 1835-1908, Empress Dowager of China* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 220.

<sup>337</sup> Elisabeth von Heyking, *Diary of the Wife of German Ambassador* 德國公使夫人日記 (Fuzhou: Fujian jiao yu chu ban she, 2012), 181-2.

Ministers' wives, the British lady Mrs. Ethel MacDonald held the leading status.<sup>338</sup> Clearly, during the 1890s, the American lady Mrs. Conger was neither an organizer nor played a key role among the foreign legations' ladies. It was only after the 1900 calamity, on February 1<sup>st</sup> 1902, no more than one month after Cixi's return to Beijing, during Mrs. Conger's second group visiting with Cixi, that Mrs. Conger directly led the visit. Her speech, made on behalf of all the women of the foreign legation finally attracted Cixi's attention.<sup>339</sup>

Here, the following questions may be posed: why did the American become the First Lady of foreign legations in China after the Siege of 1900? Why did the friendship between Cixi and Mrs. Conger grow closer soon after Cixi's return to Beijing in 1902? And, why did Mrs. Conger suggest painting a portrait of Cixi by an American lady in addition to exhibiting the portrait in America? And finally, why did Cixi approve to do so?

To answer these questions, we should take into account at least two issues which may provide additional context. The first was the diplomatic relationship between China and America during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The second was the influence of the American Women's Rights Movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Firstly, American policy on China was different from other Imperialist Powers who participated in the burning and looting of Chinese land and inflicting harm to its people, all while expanding claims to Chinese territory. During the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the wars between Anglo-French Army and Manchu Qing Dynasty of China broke out, the young independent United States was still engulfed in a Civil War. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, after the success of the Spanish–American War and the occupation of the Philippines as its far eastern colonial base, the United States announced the so-called Open Door Policy in order to share equal profits and trade

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Conger, *Letters from China*, 218.

assess in China with all the imperial powers. During the partition of China by major European powers and Japan, for the purpose of keeping equal privilege with other powers in China, the American government did not want any other country to monopolize the Qing Empire. Therefore, the Open Door Policy pledged to protect China's territorial integrity from partition. Hence, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, some Chinese scholars believed that allying with the United States was a better way to save the country from being partitioned off by Imperialist powers.<sup>340</sup> What's more, during the Eight-Nation Alliance's occupation of Beijing in 1900, American troops were not only the first to retreat out of Mainland China, but they were also the most disciplined Army. They neither looted nor killed Chinese civilians at will, so as to be officially praised by the Qing government.<sup>341</sup> Hence, when Mrs. Conger visited Cixi for the second time in 1902, the diplomatic relations between the Qing government and the United States became closer than any other Imperialist power. On the one hand, the Qing Government needed the support of the relatively disciplined United States to maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, as a part of its global expansion strategy, the young and rising United States also needed the support of the Qing Government to share commercial profits and privileges in China with the other old and powerful imperialist countries. In this sense, Mrs. Conger's friendship with Cixi was not a personal choice made by either Cixi or Mrs. Conger, but the requirement of a mutually beneficial diplomatic relationship. Or, simply put, for their national benefits, the ladies who represented their home countries needed one another.

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<sup>340</sup> Chen Jiyan 陳繼儼, "Discussing on China's current union with the America rather than the nations in Europe and Asia 論中國今日聯歐亞各國不如聯美國之善," *The Reformer China* 知新報 41(1897): 1-3.

<sup>341</sup> Michael Hunt, *the Making of A Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914* (Columbia University Press, 1983), 197.



**Figure 74.** The Empress Dowager Cixi with entourage, 1903-1905, the Palace Museum, Beijing

In addition, even if the gender issue has already been applied to research on Cixi, when discussing the friendship between Cixi and Mrs. Conger, few scholars further analyze Mrs. Conger's identity as a 20<sup>th</sup> century American woman.<sup>342</sup> The rising self-recognition as an educated modern woman and the influence of the Women's Rights Movement in the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was frequently reflected in the lines of Mrs. Conger's letters from China. She sympathized with the unfortunate experiences of Chinese women and appreciated their open-minds.<sup>343</sup> She was also proud to mention that the topics in her parties with well-educated high-class Chinese ladies were not about jewelry or clothes, but about current political issues.<sup>344</sup> Mrs. Conger not only recognized her female identity but also made use of the shared identity to set up a friendship with Cixi. The same thing also happened to Cixi, and this can be illustrated in two group photos. In the photo with the American women, Cixi and Mrs.

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<sup>342</sup> About the study on Mrs. Conger, see Grant Hayter-Menzies, *The Empress and Mrs. Conger: The Uncommon Friendship of Two Women and Two Worlds* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 2. Also see Elisabeth Croll, *Wise Daughters From Foreign Lands: European Women Writers in China* (London: Pandora, 1989).

<sup>343</sup> Conger, *Letters from China*, 266-8, 279, 317.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid*, 294.

Conger's hands are interlocked (fig.73). In accordance with Chinese tradition, touching hands or any other part of the body can only happen between a couple or friends of the same sex. This intimate gesture not only displays their friendship but also implies their shared identity as women. By contrast, in a photograph with her entourage, as Ying-chen Peng points out, Cixi, who has been captured with her legs crossed, is an expression of her matriarchal power to show her masculine authority (fig.74).<sup>345</sup>

The exhibition of Cixi's oil portrait was also commented on by foreigners as a signal of feminine liberation: "...from the time she came from behind the screen, and allowed her portrait to be painted, the freedom of woman was assured."<sup>346</sup> Here, beyond the limitation of nations, corresponding to the women rights movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public portrait of Cixi demonstrated the success of women's rights worldwide.

Hence, the female identity provided a natural common ground and convenience for both Mrs. Conger and Cixi in their diplomatic meetings and transcultural communications. Admittedly, it is true that Cixi herself played the key role in making and unveiling her oil portrait, which is also regarded as a signal of the matriarch's attempt to drive the old empire into modern world. Whereas, it is also true that the decision was not made by Cixi alone. It was the American Mrs. Conger who first raised the suggestion, perhaps influenced by the popular Women's Rights Movement in the United States. In this sense, cultural communication between the women played an effective but sometimes neglected role in shaping Cixi's international image as well as the modern face of China.

Furthermore, considering Mrs. Conger's identity as an educated American women travelling to China, if leaving Mrs. Conger's generous kindness alone in helping to promote

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<sup>345</sup> Peng, "Staging Sovereignty," 43.

<sup>346</sup> Headland, *Court life in China*, 73.

Cixi's international impression, is there any other potential cause for Mrs. Conger's suggestion to paint and exhibit Cixi's oil portrait? Lydia Liu noticed the special identity of the "travelling women" during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century: "The traveling women took on different identities in colonial and foreign settings, able to do things that had been off-limits to them at home, where the ideal of female passivity and domesticity prevailed."<sup>347</sup> According to Lydia Liu, one of the potential reasons for the travelling women eager to set up friendship with Cixi is to fulfill the ladies' "self-sovereignty."<sup>348</sup> The notion of "self-sovereignty" among educated white women was just raised in the Women's Rights Movement in the United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as they struggled to achieve in the country dominated by white men.

As a consequence, white women travelled to colonial countries and some of them successfully developed their domestically suppressed "self-sovereignty," such as Mrs. Conger, accompanying her Minister husband, and Miss Katharine Carl, following her brother Francis A. Carl, an officer of Chinese Customs and the Chinese Vice Commissioner of the St. Louis World Exposition. Katharine Carl recorded the process of producing portraits of Cixi in her memoir *With the Empress Dowager of China* (1905). This book has been regarded as "the earliest favorable account of the dowager to reach print, drowned though it was in the sea of anti-Cixi propaganda."<sup>349</sup> Mrs. Conger, together with Miss Carl also enthusiastically praised Cixi as a "perfect woman."<sup>350</sup> Carl declared that at first she did not want to say anything about Cixi due to the traditional Chinese courtesy of not commenting on a ruler, but in order to refute the rampant rumors about the so-called evil Cixi, Carl finally decided to publish her authentic recording of

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<sup>347</sup> Liu, *Clash of Empires*, 140.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>349</sup> Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 197.

<sup>350</sup> Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 72.

the Empress Dowager.<sup>351</sup> In this sense, the purpose of Carl's publication was to help to set up a worldwide positive image of Cixi, which continued the purpose of Mrs. Conger's suggestion of exhibiting Carl's portraits of Cixi. Although these women did not have official jobs, they played significant roles in changing the international image of the Chinese *de facto* ruler, as well as modernizing Chinese portraiture.

#### **4.3 KATHARINE CARL'S PAINTINGS AND THE 1904 LOUISIANA PURCHASE EXPOSITION: THE OFFICIAL INTERNATIONAL DEBUT OF CIXI'S PORTRAIT**

As an educated American woman like Mrs. Conger, Miss Katharine Augusta Carl (1865-1938), accompanied by her brother, arrived in China in 1903. Recommended by Mrs. Conger, Carl arrived in Beijing via Shanghai on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1903. During the painting process, the Empress Dowager supervised the uncompleted works. Cixi seriously controlled everything, including her positions, accessories, settings, Chinese titles and seals, and even the beginning and finishing moments for the portraits. Apparently, due to Carl's careful obedience to all these requirements, Cixi was quite satisfied with the portraits. The artist's stay within the Court was ultimately extended to eleven months. During this time, she even moved with the Empress Dowager from the Summer Place to the Forbidden City. During these eleven months, according to Carl's memoir, Carl painted a total of four oil portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi.

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<sup>351</sup> As Miss Carl mentioned in the preface, there were rumors in foreign public media that the Empress Dowager forced Carl to paint the portrait unrealistic young and beautiful. Ibid.

#### 4.3.1 Four Portraits of Cixi by Katharine Carl for Different Uses

The first portrait is now housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing (fig.75). Carl began the portrait when she first visited Cixi on August 5, 1903,<sup>352</sup> and completed in May of 1904. In this portrait, seated on her Double Dragon Throne, Cixi wears a yellow silk court dress with wisteria pattern.<sup>353</sup> Cixi carefully dressed up and requested Carl, even “in an almost pleading way”, show every detail in the painting. It seems to Carl that Cixi “did not believe in leaving anything to the imagination, and wished every detail fully worked out.”<sup>354</sup> Cixi was very satisfied with this portrait. When the painting was finished, Cixi designed the teakwood frame by herself and invited the ladies of the Legation to Carl’s studio in the Summer Palace to watch the painting process together.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> The time when Carl put down her first stroke was seriously selected as an auspicious moment, at 11 o’clock. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 10.

<sup>353</sup> The details of the portrait are as same as Carl recorded in her book: Cixi “had been clothed in a gown of Imperial yellow, brocaded in the wisteria vine in realistic colors and richly embroidered in pearls. It was made, in the graceful Manchu fashion, in one piece, reaching from the neck to the floor; fastened from the right shoulder to the hem with jade buttons. The stuff of the gown was of a stiff, transparent silk, and was worn over a softer under-gown of the same color and length. At the top button, from the right shoulder, hung a string of eighteen enormous pearls separated by flat pieces of brilliant, transparent green jade. From the same button was suspended a large, carved pale ruby, which had yellow silk tassels terminating in two immense pear-shaped pearls of rare beauty! At each side, just under the arms, hung a pale-blue, embroidered silk handkerchief and a scent-bag with long, black silk tassels. Around her throat was a pale-blue, two-inch-wide cravat, embroidered in gold with large pearls. This cravat had one end tucked into the opening on the shoulder of her gown, and the other hanging. Her jet-black hair was parted in the middle, carried smoothly over the temples, and brought to the top of the head in a large, flat coil... She wore bracelets and rings, and on each hand had two nail-protectors, for she wore her nails so long the protectors were necessary adjuncts. These nail-protectors were worn on the third and fourth fingers of either hand; those on the left being of brilliant green jade, while those on the right hand were of gold, set with rubies and pearls.” Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, 220.



**Figure 75.** Katharine Carl, Empress Dowager Cixi, oil on canvas, 163.5 x 97cm, 1903, Palace Museum, Beijing

The second portrait has been lost. Carl started to paint it in October 1903 in the Summer Palace.<sup>356</sup> According to Carl's record, different from the first portrait in formal court dress, Cixi's second oil portrait was a non-official one in ordinary dress and without the Manchu coiffure. Rather than displayed before a large audience, the second portrait was "only to be seen by her intimates."<sup>357</sup> Although no picture or photo about the portrait remains, according to records, we know that as she sat for the portrait Cixi wore an embroidered casual robe in her favorite blue color,<sup>358</sup> and, according to Carl, "her hair, in a coil at the top of her head, was beautifully dressed, with the jasmine flowers so quaintly arranged, a realistic butterfly poised above them; her jewels so discreet and picturesque."<sup>359</sup> Cixi also consented to Carl's suggestion of painting Cixi's two favorite dogs beside her footstool. Hence, Carl believed that she had "a

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 172. Headland, *Court life in China*, 198. Li Gongfa 李功發, "Trace to Cixi's Oil Painting Portraits 慈禧油畫像溯源," *Inherit 傳承* 19 (2010): 61.

<sup>359</sup> Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 172.

little more liberty in painting it” and “had more choice as to the surroundings and accessories, which were not obliged to be ‘according to tradition.’”<sup>360</sup> But as an informal portrait, this painting was only permitted to be placed in Cixi’s private bedroom.



**Figure 76.** Katharine Carl, Empress Dowager Cixi, oil on canvas, 57 x 35cm, 1904, Palace Museum, Beijing

In early 1904, in the Forbidden City, Carl started to paint the third and fourth portraits for the 1904 St. Louis World Exposition. The third portrait is a small sketch for the St. Louis portrait. After the St. Louis portrait was sent abroad, Cixi wished to keep the sketch in the palace.<sup>361</sup> In the 1990s, an oil portrait sketch of Cixi, without the sixteen Chinese characters of Cixi’s appellation, was discovered in storage of the Palace Museum in Beijing. The sketch is possibly the third portrait, the one that Carl left in the palace (fig.76).<sup>362</sup>

Carl’s fourth portrait has been kept in Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (fig.77). The portrait was painted between January and April 1904, when it was required to be completed at four o’clock on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1904, carefully selected as the most auspicious time to finish the

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>362</sup> Lin Jing 林京, “Record on Cixi’s Small Oil Painting Portrait 慈禧油畫小像複得偶記,” *Collector* 收藏家 2(1995): 17.

painting.<sup>363</sup> On the same auspicious day, Mrs. Conger and other ladies of the foreign legation were invited to visit the portrait. Later, the portrait was displayed for Chinese Princes, nobles, high officials, functionaries and foreign ministers in the Foreign Office.<sup>364</sup> Then, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1904, the portrait started its journey to the United States. In the past 100 years, the portrait travelled several times between China and the United States. It was first shipped to St. Louis in 1904, sent to the American Government as a national gift in 1905. It was borrowed by the Historical Museum in Taipei in 1966, and was flown back to the Smithsonian Institute in 2010.<sup>365</sup>



**Figure 77.** Katharine Carl, Empress Dowager Cixi, oil on canvas, 1904, 297.2 x 173.4 cm, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

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<sup>363</sup> According to Carl, “her Majesty seemed very anxious until she received my reply as to whether it would be possible to finish at this happy date, for I could not say at first, as I had never thought of finishing at any particular moment!” Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 287.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 294-7.

<sup>365</sup> The portrait was in the storage of the Historical Museum in Taipei for about half a century and was badly damaged. David Hogge, the head of the Archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, noticed the record of the portrait and requested the portrait from Taipei. The portrait was then exhibited in the exhibition of Cixi’s photo portraits in Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, “Power|Play: China’s Empress Dowager,” September 24, 2011- January 29, 2012. About the portrait’s 100-year travel from Beijing-St. Louis- Washington D.C.-Taipei- Washington D.C., see Leng Shujie 冷書杰, “The Repairer of Cixi’s Oil Painting 慈禧油畫修護人,” *East South West North* 東南西北 22(2015): 74-76. Luke S. K. Kwong, “Hubert Vos’s Portraits of China’s Empress Dowager, Cixi 慈禧寫照的續筆：華士·胡博,” *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 1(2000): 71.

In the St. Louis portrait, the almost seventy-year-old woman's face is light, smooth and slightly smiling with no shadows or wrinkles. According to Der-ling, when Cixi once watched Der-ling's oil portrait, she was confused about the white and black shading on the face. Cixi believed that the shading was not "natural" since the real face was not with one side white and another side black. Even if Der-ling explained how the shading worked in an oil painting, Cixi seemed still not to understand. She insisted that no shadows should appear on her face, adding: "Do you think that this Artist lady (Miss Carl) will paint my picture to look black also? It is going to America, and I don't want the people over there to imagine that half of my face is white and half black."<sup>366</sup>

Here, we can see that when the portrait was ordered Cixi clearly knew that her potential audience was the people in America. The refusal to shade her face was just one way to show her satisfied representation to the American people. Also, carefully selected and arranged by Cixi, everything on the painting held a specific meaning. For example, the traditional emblem of the queen, the phoenix, decorated on the background screen, implies the gender, rank, and status of the sitter. According to Carl, Cixi "came very often to the studio and watched over the painting- in of all the accessories, which she seemed to consider quite as important as the likeness itself." Cixi even changed her mind several times on the decorations that were to appear in the painting, despite of Carl's disagreement with the changes. Carl reflected that, "these changes took away the freshness of the painting and did not add to the artistic effect of the picture."<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 211.

<sup>367</sup> According to Carl, "after a jewel was painted in, she (Cixi) would decide she didn't like it and that something else would be better." Carl, With *the Empress Dowager*, 287-8.



**Figure 78.** Xun-ling, photograph of the portrait of the Empress Dowager painted by Katharine Carl, 1904, exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives

As to the fourth St. Louis portrait, Cixi again controlled almost everything, including the design of the frame (fig.78). With a traditional imperial pattern of the double dragon struggling to reach a flaming pearl at the top, in addition to the Chinese character of longevity at two sides, the frame was made from rare camphor-wood. Set in a “superbly carved stand,” Carl noticed that the shape of the entire framed portrait looked very similar to a Chinese dressing mirror.<sup>368</sup> When eunuchs and court ladies were allowed to see the full-length portrait, they admired the likeness, commenting that the portrait “inspired the same awe Her Majesty’s own presence did.”<sup>369</sup>

To sum up, among the four oil portraits, the first was a portrait with official court dress once shown to foreign ladies, the second is a non-official portrait only permitted to be seen by her private intimates, the third was a small sketch and somewhat personal souvenir left by Carl

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid, 288.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, 295.

for Cixi in recognition of her St. Louis portrait, and the fourth was the final official portrait publically displayed at the St. Louis World Exposition to an international audience.

Cixi strictly separated and limited whether a portrait was for personal use and which was for public consumption. Based on the portraits' respective potential audiences and functions, Cixi designed the different poses, chose official or ordinary clothes, accessories, thrones and meaningful backgrounds. As Carl mentioned, when she drew the third portrait intended to be hung in Cixi's private bedroom, she had "a little more liberty in painting it" than the other formal portraits where Cixi controlled everything, including the design of the picture frames in addition to the colors, seals and characters which appeared on the portraits.<sup>370</sup>

Both the first and fourth portraits depict Cixi as a beautiful, young woman, appearing seated in a detailed official court dress. Whereas, with her favorite precious cape made of over 3,000 pearls and depicting nine meaningful phoenixes, the fourth portrait was designated as the official portrait to change the negative Qing national image and show the *de facto* ruler's positive impression to the worldwide public after 1900, just as Mrs. Conger suggested. Under the hand of the American Katharine Carl, who employed a strictly frontal and full-length pose requested by Cixi, the St. Louis portrait continued the Chinese tradition of painting official imperial portraiture. Although in Western eyes, these oil paintings of Cixi might look very Chinese with little Western or modern feeling, in China, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the paintings were very striking since they finally broke the almost 1000-year prohibition on publicly displaying the ruler's portrait.

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid, 172.

#### 4.3.2 Cixi's Portrait on the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition

In June 1904, a huge container wrapped carefully in a large piece of Chinese embroidery with the pattern of imperial dragons and accompanied by fully dressed-up Chinese officials arrived at the St Louis Exposition after a two-month journey from China. It was the first time that the Chinese Government officially sent handpicked official exhibits and a royal representative to an international exhibition.<sup>371</sup> Among these Chinese objects, the most precious and sacred was Katharine Carl's oil portrait of the Empress Dowager Cixi placed on the invaluable wooden throne in the center of the Fine Art Hall. Noticeably, it was also the first time that the portrait of the Chinese Empress was authorized to be displayed to an international public. An approximate 20 million visitors saw the portrait during the seven-month exhibition.

The public exhibition of current Emperor and Empress portraits in Europe has a long history. In China, however, the public display of the rulers' portraits during their lifetimes was strictly forbidden.

In China, formal portraits were "images of the dead that functioned for the living."<sup>372</sup> These sacred images were always revered before an altar. The audience was limited to family members, old and new. The reverence was not merely a means of memorializing the deceased, but also a significant way to authorize the family lineage and property when a new member joined the family.<sup>373</sup> What's more, when it came to the Royal Family, to possess the imperial portraits of prior dynasties was always a claim for the legitimate lineage of the authorized

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<sup>371</sup> For more on the Chinese pavilion and exhibits, see Mark Bennitt and Frank Parker Stockbridge, *History of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Universal exposition publishing Company, 1905), 287-300.

<sup>372</sup> Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self*, 2.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, 5-9.

power.<sup>374</sup> In this sense, the ownership of imperial portraiture was seriously sacred and significant to authorized leadership.

Besides ownership of the imperial portraits, two other features of formal Chinese portraits are noticeable. On one hand, the audiences of the imperial portraits in China were limited to those within the inside of the palace. The formal portraits of the Emperors were usually of a large size suitable to hang on the walls of the Palace.<sup>375</sup> These large portraits are named “sacred likeness portraits” (*sheng-rong, yu-rong, shen-yu* 聖容/禦容/神禦) which are mainly used in the act of reverence. In fact, a prohibition against the publication of royal portraits is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, imperial portraits, no matter formal or informal, had been forbidden to be publicly displayed or privately collected. Although there are some records from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, which document the worshipping of the current or bygone Emperors by patriotic officials in private space, and until the early twelfth century, there were still debates on sacrificial proprieties on imperial portraits worshipped outside the capital city. It was as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> Century that an imperial decree was issued by the Song Emperor Zhenzong which banned the public display of imperial portraits outside the imperial palace.<sup>376</sup>

When it came to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the collecting of previous successive imperial portraits by common folk was strictly forbidden. An attempt to collect imperial portraits privately was even regarded as a crime to conspire against the state. During the 1780s, the Jesuits,

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<sup>374</sup> Jing Anning, “The Portraits of Khubilai Khan and Chabi by Anige(1245-1306), A Nepali Artist at the Yuan Court.” *Artibus Asiae* 54 (1994): 53.

<sup>375</sup> Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self*, 9.

<sup>376</sup> On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1006, the Emperor Zhenzong of Song issued the imperial decree to ban public displays of imperial portraits of successive dynasties. See *History of Song*(宋史·禮志十二·景靈宮,神禦殿), vol.109, 2621-8. Also see Shang Gang 尚剛, “Imperial Portraits of the Mongols and the Yuan Dynasty 蒙元禦容,” *Palace Museum Journal* 故宮博物院院刊 3(2004): 34, note 7. Liu Heping. “Empress Liu’s ‘Icon of Maitreya’: Portraiture and Privacy at the Early Song Court”. *Artibus Asiae*. 63 (2003): 178, note 154.

who were in Beijing at the time, rejected a white porcelain bust of the present Emperor Qianlong, which was gifted by King Louis XVI of France to the Chinese court. The Jesuit called on Father Bourgeois to give an explanation:

“The white porcelain bust of the Emperor was not given to him... because it is forbidden here to do the likeness of the Emperor... They would have quite a laugh here if they knew that in France, as in the rest of Europe, we suspend the portraits of kings before liquor stores, exposing them to the dust, the rain, and the wind that makes them dance prettily, as well as to the praise and possibly ridicule of the people.”<sup>377</sup>

On the other hand, the “sacred likenesses” were hung and worshiped by royal descendants only after the death of the Emperors. Sometimes, they were displayed during Imperial funerals.<sup>378</sup> To show the formal portrait of the person during their lifetime was usually associated with the unpropitious death of the subject. When the U.S. Minister’s wife Mrs. Sarah Conger suggested that Cixi sit for a portrait to be displayed at the St. Louis Exposition, the Empress Dowager drew back in astonishment.<sup>379</sup> Der-ling, the girl who grew up in China, Japan and France, who later served as Empress Dowager’s female official and translator, understood well the reason behind the old lady’s astonishment. She wrote: “...in China a portrait is only painted after one’s death, in memorium of the deceased, in order that the following generations may worship the deceased.”<sup>380</sup> Based on Der-ling’s description, Grant Hayter-Menzies explains the event further in *The Legend of Princess Der-ling*:

“Asking Cixi to sit for her portrait was like voicing the strange desire to see what an elderly person, though still very much alive, might look like as memorialized after death.

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<sup>377</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 114.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>379</sup> Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 195.

<sup>380</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 200.

There was also the touchy issue of such a picture being displayed before unknown thousands in that mysterious city of St. Louis –Confucian regulations on feminine modesty dictated that no woman should present herself in this manner, least of all a semi-divine one like an empress dowager.”<sup>381</sup>

It is necessary to mention that the notion of associating a spirit or soul to portraiture has a long history in China. “Showing the soul of the sitter” or “transmitting the spirit” (*chuan-shen*)<sup>382</sup> was the most essential standard of evaluation for Chinese painting,<sup>383</sup> as established by Gu Kaizhi (344-406 or 348-409), the first named Chinese painter. This has dominated the field of painting for thousands of years. The earliest excavated Chinese portrait paintings were believed to have had relations to funeral rituals, which represented and intend to call back the spirit of the dead.<sup>384</sup>

Although in the field of Imperial portraits, especially after the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, to show the inner personal characteristics of the portrayed gradually took place with the “ultimate embodiment of the absolutist state.”<sup>385</sup> This connection between the spirit and portraiture has more or less been preserved in Chinese culture. In *The Peony Pavilion*, a famous fiction and play published in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the heroine Du Liniang painted her self-portrait before her death, and was at last resurrected after her lover picked up this portrait several years later. Firstly titled *Bring Back to the Spirit* (*huan-hun-ji* 還魂記), the story is regarded as setting up “the symbolic affinity between her ghost and the painting”<sup>386</sup>. Vinograd points out, “the portrait is a

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<sup>381</sup> Menzies, *Imperial Masquerade*, 196.

<sup>382</sup> Yu, *Chinese Painting Theory by Categories*, 347. Also see Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, 14.

<sup>383</sup> Eli Lancman, *Chinese Portraiture* (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Tuttle Co., 1966), 34-35.

<sup>384</sup> For example, the silk painting of man driving the dragon, the silk painting of woman, dragon and phoenix in Warring States period (475-221BCE) and the silk painting of Mawangdui Tomb in the western Han Dynasty (202BCE-9AD).

<sup>385</sup> Wen C. Fong, “Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods”, *Ars Orientalis* 1995(25): 58.

<sup>386</sup> Judith T. Zeitlin, “The Life and Death of the Image: Ghosts and Female Portraits in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Literature,” in *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, Wu Hung and Katharine R. Tsiang, ed (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 245.

stand-in or vehicle for harboring the spirit of the subject.”<sup>387</sup> It seems that to a living person, especially a woman in the story, to produce a portrait is a deadly way to remove the spirit from one’s life.

Considering the traditional taboos of portraiture in China, the Empress Dowager Cixi’s decision to exhibit her portrait publicly is no doubt a challenge to the so-called “ignorant” custom, as recorded by Princess Der-ling.<sup>388</sup> Still, in order to deliver the powerful Emperor Dowager’s portrait in a respectful way, the journey to the St Louis Exposition was not only time-consuming and physically tiring, but also dangerous from a political perspective. The portrait had to be always kept upright, otherwise, the accompanying officials might be judged as exhibiting “great disrespect to the superior” (*da-bu-jing* 大不敬) and face the punishment of death. It seems that the portrait was not only the representation of the most powerful ruler, but also the absent presence of her ubiquitous power. Just as Miss Carl recorded, to Chinese people, the portrait “inspired the same awe Her Majesty’s own presence did.”<sup>389</sup> The portrait of the Empress Dowager in the worldwide Exposition again confirmed her role and ubiquitous power (instead of the Emperor) as the unquestionable representative of Imperial China.

Again, if according to Der-ling, when Mrs. Conger suggested making an oil portrait of Cixi, the first reaction of the Empress Dowager was astonishment,<sup>390</sup> then, why did she finally accept the suggestion? According to the document, Der-ling explained the difference between the Western and Chinese portraits and introduced the background of the painter Katharine Carl to Cixi.<sup>391</sup> At the request of the Empress Dowager, Der-ling also showed the portrait of herself

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<sup>387</sup> Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self*, 11.

<sup>388</sup> “I did not want Her Majesty to appear ignorant before these foreign ladies, so I pulled her sleeve and told her that I would explain everything to her later.” In Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 200.

<sup>389</sup> Katharine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China*, 295.

<sup>390</sup> See also Headland, *Court Life in China*, 104

<sup>391</sup> Yu Der-ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City*, 204-204.

painted by Katharine Carl when she was in Paris. But the Empress Dowager was very unsatisfied with Der-ling's Western style portrait: the oil looked strange, the Western attire looked ugly, and the shading on her face looked unnatural. Finally, the Empress Dowager commented on Der-ling's portrait and the "barbarous customs" as "...getting worse and worse... everything seems to go backwards in foreign countries."<sup>392</sup>

Hence, it seems that Princess Der-ling's explanation did not play an effective role to changing Cixi's understanding of Western customs and portraiture. In this sense, the Empress Dowager's final decision to be painted by the American female artist and public exhibiting the portrait abroad should not be proof of her acceptance of Western culture. Rather, this was a strategic way to promote her political power and the progressive image of China, just as Der-ling implied that the refusal of the foreign woman's suggestion might appear "ignorant."<sup>393</sup> The 1904 oil portraits of the Empress Dowager Cixi are one of the results of her modernization reforms as well as one of her new international strategies.

#### **4.4 "YOUNGER CIXI" AND "REALISTIC CIXI": TWO PORTRAITS OF CIXI BY HUBERT VOS**

Approximately a year after the worldwide exhibition of Katharine Carl's oil painting of Cixi, during the summer of 1905, another Western artist Hubert Vos (1855-1935) was granted permission to portray the Empress Dowager. The Dutch-American painter Vos was the first male

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 200.

painter to sketch and observe the Chinese female ruler from a close distance.<sup>394</sup> Between 1905 and 1906, Vos painted two portraits of Cixi: one is a privately commissioned full-length portrait which depicted her with a younger face and is kept in the Hall of Dispelling Clouds in the Summer Palace; another one is a half-length portrait with Cixi's "realistic" face, completed and displayed in Vos's New York studio,<sup>395</sup> and also exhibited in a French salon.



**Figure 79.** Hubert Vos, the Empress Dowager Cixi, oil on canvas, 1905, 234.5 x 144cm, the Summer Palace, Beijing

In this section, I am going to explore the following questions: If the "younger Cixi" portrait (fig.79) was strictly under Cixi's requirement, why was the Dutch-American painter selected to paint the portrait? What factors might have effected Cixi's final approval of the portrait? How did the Western painter approach the Non-Western tradition in order to satisfy the

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<sup>394</sup> Even Chinese court portraitists can only see Cixi from afar, as Carl mentioned, "Her Majesty has a corps of painters... one even paints portraits, but they have never seen the Empress Dowager except from afar! Though Mandarins of the Third rank, the painters were obliged to withdraw from the court where they worked when Her Majesty and suite passed by." Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China*, 173.

<sup>395</sup> Located at West 67<sup>th</sup> Street, the studio was open to the public every Sunday afternoon from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. John Seed, "Hubert Vos Court Painter of Empress Dowager Cixi," *Arts of Asia* 45.1 (2015): 118.

powerful Chinese lady? If the “realistic Cixi” portrait (fig.80) was Vos’s faithful representation of Cixi, what did Vos want his Western audiences see through the authentic portrait? What was the realistic impression of Cixi that the white male painter wanted to show to the public? Furthermore, how did Vos understand and translate Chinese traditional visual language to the Western world? And, what roles did the two portraits play in the process of modernizing the national image of China?



**Figure 80.** Hubert Vos, the Empress Dowager Cixi, oil on canvas, 1905, 169.6 x 123.6 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum

#### **4.4.1 America Beat the Dutch: the First Foreign Male Painter of Cixi**

Four years earlier than Mrs. Conger, in 1899, Vos arrived in China and attempted to suggest painting an oil painting portrait of the Empress Dowager.<sup>396</sup> But the timing was not right and several months later the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion broke out. Although Vos’s first attempt to paint the Empress Dowager failed, still, in 1899, he painted oil portraits for some Chinese

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<sup>396</sup> Hubert Vos, “Autobiographical Letter,” in Istvan L. Szenassy, *Hubert Vos*, 11. Virginia Anderson, “A Semi-Chinese Picture: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China,” 100.

royalties and high officials, such as the diplomatic official the Prince Qing (fig.81), the first Chinese modern army's commander Yuan Shikai and the famous Chinese minister Li Hongzhang.<sup>397</sup> Four years later, in 1903, as mentioned before, to improve negative international impressions of the Empress Dowager Cixi during the Boxer Rebellion, under the suggestion of Mrs. Conger, the American Katharine Carl entered into Cixi's palace and painted her Majesty's portraits. At last, the public exhibition of Miss Carl's St. Louis portrait of Cixi in 1904 was regarded as a success of the U.S Embassy and was even envied by other countries.<sup>398</sup> As the homeland of great Dutch painters such as Rubens and Rembrandt, the Dutch legation tried to find some Dutch artist to portray the Empress Dowager again, as a means of demonstrating the long history of portraiture in Holland. In 1905, the Dutch legation recommended Hubert Vos as their representative painter. According to Vos, after reviewing Vos's quick studies, depicting a symmetrically frontal portrait of Prince Qing (fig.81), Cixi felt satisfied with both the short painting time and the fine artistic quality, thus finally approved Vos as her portraitist.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> The three portraits were kept in the storage at the homes of Vos and his descendants in the United States and France for about one century. The first public exhibition of the three portraits was in 2011 in the Capital Museum in Beijing, when Hubert Vos's grandson and his wife donated six of Hubert Vos's oil paintings to the Capital Museum. Vos took along these portraits from China back to the United States in 1905. After Vos's death in 1935, these portraits travelled with Vos's son from the New York City to Paris. In 1974, Vos's grandson rediscovered the portraits in his father's studio in Paris. Then, the portraits were moved to the United States and stored in a garage. Due to their small sizes (especially the portrait of Li Hongzhang), these portraits might be only sketches of Vos's original paintings. However, the original paintings gave to the high officials in China might have already been destroyed. Bo Haikun 薄海昆, "The Exhibition 'the Late Qing Big Shots under Hubert Vos's Brushes: on loan from Hubert D Vos and his wife Susan' opened in the Capital Museum '胡博·華士畫筆下的晚清權貴——休伯特與蘇珊伉儷捐贈展'在首都博物館拉開序幕," *Art in China* 中國美術, 6(2011): 42-45.

<sup>398</sup> "Painting and Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.DD., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1905, X8.

<sup>399</sup> Management Department of the Summer Place 頤和園管理處 ed., *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi: History and Restoration* 胡博·華士繪慈禧油畫像：歷史與修復 (Beijing: wenwu chu ban she, 2010), 10-11, 23.



**Figure 81.** Hubert Vos, portrait of Prince Ching (Yikuang 慶親王奕劻), oil on canvas, 61 x 52.7 cm,  
Capital Museum, Beijing

An interesting fact is that Vos changed his nationality at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Born in Holland and trained as portraitist in Brussels, Vos was a Dutch citizen during his first trip to China when he drew Prince Qing's portrait in 1899. After the 1893 Chicago World Exposition, Vos moved to the United States.<sup>400</sup> He joined the 1900 world exposition in Paris and exhibited his works as an American artist in the American Hall. It is recorded in October 1901 that Vos formally became naturalized United States citizens.<sup>401</sup> Hence, when Vos arrived in Beijing to paint the Empress Dowager's portrait in 1905, he had already become an American citizen. As commented in *New York Times*, "his ancestors the Dutch took Holland. With true Dutch courage Hubert Vos beat the Dutch."<sup>402</sup> Ridiculously, American media might have already forgotten their attack on Vos's American identity and their efforts to remove his paintings from the American Pavilion several years ago.<sup>403</sup> It was through painting the portrait of Cixi that Vos's identity as an American citizen was publicly accepted. In this way, it was recognized that the

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<sup>400</sup> Vos married a Hawaiian Princess in 1897.

<sup>401</sup> Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi," 76. Management Department of the Summer Place, *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi*, 10-11, 22-23.

<sup>402</sup> "Painting and Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.D.D., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1905, X8.

<sup>403</sup> *The Collector and Art Critic*, Vol.2, No. 14, Oct. 1900, 220.

first portrait of the Chinese female ruler under the hand of a white male was at last attributed to an American, rather than a Dutch citizen.

#### 4.4.2 “Younger Cixi”: Cooperation Between Cixi and Vos

Cixi modeled for Vos a total four times, every morning from June 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 1905. During her second forty-five-minute sitting, after watching Vos’s first sketch, Cixi asked Vos to paint with no bold outlines of her face, no shadows and no wrinkles: “the eyes wide open, the mouth full and up, not drooping, the brows straight, the nose no shadows.”<sup>404</sup> Indeed, as Baron Stillfried, an Austrian photographer travelled in China during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pointed out, in Chinese photo portraiture, “the face must be as white as possible... All shading in the face must be removed by retouching.”<sup>405</sup> Casting no shadows of the subject’s face seems to be one of the most obvious characteristics in traditional Chinese painted portraits, as Eli Lancman concludes,<sup>406</sup>

“There has been no attempt to introduce the effects of high-relief or the round-boss of sculpture, nor is there any trace of light and shade –of chiaroscuro. The figures stand, as it were, in a natural light which suffuses them and casts no shadows.”

Under Cixi’s “anti-realistic” requirements, Vos brought in another new sketch in the following morning. This time, Cixi preferred the second sketch and again made requests such as moving the eyes further up while also appearing more slanted.<sup>407</sup> In this sense, in front of the

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<sup>404</sup> “Painting and Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.D.D., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China,” *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1905, X8. Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, “Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article,” Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum Curatorial File, 1943, 162, in Anderson, “A Semi-Chinese Picture,” 108, note21. Kwong, “Hubert Vos’s Portraits of China’s Empress Dowager Cixi,” 79.

<sup>405</sup> “Photography in Eastern Asia,” *the Photographic News*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1330, Feb 29<sup>th</sup>, 1884, 129.

<sup>406</sup> Lancman, *Chinese Portraiture*, 34.

<sup>407</sup> Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, “Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article,” Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 1943, 162, in Anderson, “A Semi-Chinese Picture,” 108, note21. Kwong, “No Shadows,” 43.

most powerful woman in China, Vos had to follow her every requirement to complete the painting, in his words, the “unrealistic” and “semi-Chinese” portrait (fig. 79).<sup>408</sup>

During Cixi’s four short-time sittings, Vos could only focus on her facial likeness and expression, which is in fact, a rule of painting a Chinese-style portrait. Especially, when producing female and ancestor portraits, male portraitists were usually allowed to observe the subjects in a very limited time, or even see from afar.<sup>409</sup> The rest of the paintings, including the motions, bodies, clothes and backdrops, were all added later in the painters’ studios.<sup>410</sup> Rather than literally depicting the real clothing and surrounding subjects, the details were always symbolic and stylized according to the different functions of the portraits.<sup>411</sup> And, sometimes, the portraitists were only responsible for painting the facial likeness, while other painters, assistant artisans or apprentices complement the rest.<sup>412</sup> Hence, when Vos asked questions about the details of her rings and accessories, Cixi just told Vos all the clothing and decorations would be send to Vos’s residence quarters by eunuchs later.<sup>413</sup> In this sense, no matter whether he realized it or not, under the Chinese ruler’s direction, the Western artist somewhat obeyed the traditional Chinese process of producing the portrait.

Still, Vos had some freedom in the arrangement of the trivial settings: he had to add details partly based on his memory in his residence quarters, since the eunuchs lent nothing to

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<sup>408</sup> Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, “Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article,” Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 1943, 162. 10, in Anderson, “A Semi-Chinese Picture,” 105. Kwong, “Hubert Vos’s Portraits of China’s Empress Dowager Cixi,” 78.

<sup>409</sup> See the entry “Chang Chongyin 常重胤” in Huang Xiufu 黃休復, *The Record of Renowned Yizhou Painters* 益州名畫錄 vol.1, 43.

<sup>410</sup> See ECHO of Things Chinese Journal 漢聲雜誌 ed. *Chinese Folk Portraiture* 中國民間肖像畫.

<sup>411</sup> Stuart and Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors*, 114.

<sup>412</sup> It is recorded that once the Southern Tang Emperor Li Jing asked court artists to paint his “watching-snow” portrait, then, the court painter Gao Chonggu painted the emperor’s face (*zhenrong* 真容), Zhou Wenju drew the other figures, Zhu Cheng added the architecture, Dong Yuan painted the trees, and Xu Chongsi was responsible for the fish and birds in the garden. Guo Ruoxu, *Overview of Painting* (圖畫見聞志), Vol 6, “Painting of Snow-watching”(賞雪圖). See Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 and Deng Chun 鄧椿, *tuhua jianwenzhi huaji* 圖畫見聞志 畫繼 (Changsha: hunan meishu chu ban she, 2000), 249.

<sup>413</sup> Kwong, “Hubert Vos’s Portraits of China’s Empress Dowager Cixi,” 80.

him, except for the folding screen and the plaque with the Chinese characters of Cixi's titles and seals. Possibly cherishing the precious freedom of artistic creation, Vos paid a lot of attention to every detail. However, Vos did not use the freedom to represent the real settings of Cixi's palace. Rather, in order to make the portrait look much more Chinese, Vos deleted all the Western stylistic decorations in the palace. For example, Vos replaced the magnificent Brussels carpet with the Chinese pattern of two dragons playing with a pearl.<sup>414</sup> In his letter to friends, Vos wrote: the Chinese fan, Cixi's favorite pattern peony, the Manchu hairdressing, her long nails and the golden nail covers, her ivory shoes, the background ink painting folding screen with bamboo pattern, all the details are absolutely in Chinese styles.<sup>415</sup> Not only were the details that Vos chose to paint Chinese, but he also employed traditional Chinese methodology. For example, Vos believed that he strictly followed the Chinese rule of absolute symmetry.<sup>416</sup> Vos was very confident in his full comprehension of the Empress Dowager's exotic taste, as he wrote to his friends, "the whole get-up is a symbolical and allegorical composition, more like a monument than a portrait."<sup>417</sup>

As we can see, in Vos's "younger Cixi" portrait, strictly symmetrical, the face is flat and smooth, the background is Chinese rural scenery, and all the details and backdrops are in Chinese style, even if Western decorations were in the actual Qing Palace. Cixi highly praised the Chinese style portrait. She rewarded him the title of the Knight Commander of the Double Dragon<sup>418</sup> and also gave him a Chinese name, emphasizing that the family name should be

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid. Vos also proudly mentioned that in an interview. "Painting and Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.DD., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1905, X8.

<sup>415</sup> Vos's letter to friends, Aug 18<sup>th</sup> 1905, 2, in Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture," 109, note27. Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi," 80.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid. The symmetric composition also helps a lot to repair the broken painting. Management Department of the Summer Place, *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi*, 71.

<sup>417</sup> Vos's letter to friends, Aug 18<sup>th</sup> 1905, 2, in Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture," 109, note27. Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi," 80.

<sup>418</sup> "Painting and Empress: Hubert Vos, K.C.DD., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China," *New York Times*,

placed ahead of the given name. Cixi even allowed Vos write down his name on the portrait, which in a Chinese context was a great honor for a portraitist.

Here, the western painter Vos and his client Cixi reached an agreement: On one hand, Cixi was satisfied that the western painter who followed her every requirement and painted the oil painting image by adopting her prescribed traditional Chinese visual language. On the other hand, Vos was also fascinated with the Chinese decorative details, and in order to create an entirely Chinese-style portrait for his Chinese client, Vos thoroughly gave up his principles of realism and even deleted all the non-Chinese details based on his own initiative.<sup>419</sup> Cixi's traditional aesthetic tastes corresponded with not only Vos's Oriental pursuits, but also popular exotic trends in the Western art world, which were accompanied by the expansion of oversea colonies.

#### **4.4.3 “Realistic Cixi”: Vos as a Translator**

Another portrait of the Empress Dowager by Vos completed two months after he left China is quite different (fig.80). In fact, the Empress Dowager Cixi never knew the portrait. The painter produced the portrait after he left China, when he was free from the control of the most powerful woman in China. Even if Vos's “younger Cixi” portrait is similar with the portrait by Katharine Carl for the 1904 World's Fair in that there is no trace of aging which appears on the seventy-one year-old lady's face, Vos quickly abandoned the unrealistic methods in the next “realistic Cixi” portrait.

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Dec. 17, 1905, X8.

<sup>419</sup> During Vos's later life, he especially liked to paint Chinese style still-life paintings. Management Department of the Summer Place, *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi: History and Restoration*, 33.

As a professional portraitist and an amateur ethnologist, Vos's original idea of painting Cixi's portrait was quite different from the American ladies Mrs. Conger and Katharine Carl. In fact, as a member of the competition jury of the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, Vos must have seen Carl's portrait of Cixi, yet held a low opinion of the quality of Carl's portrait.<sup>420</sup> At the 1893 Chicago World Exposition, the exhibition of various races and different types of people attracted Vos's attention. Vos felt curious about diverse races and wanted to draw different types of beauties for the "original aboriginal races" just as "what had been done for centuries for the Caucasian races by so many gifted portrait painters."<sup>421</sup> With interest in anthropological study, Vos wanted to count the Chinese female ruler as a part of his ethnographic project, which already included some Hawaii locals, two Tibetan Lamas, the young Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and the Emperor Gojong of Korea.<sup>422</sup>

In the "realistic Cixi" portrait, Vos painted wrinkles and shadows on her face. The corner of her mouth was turned down and appeared much more serious. The three-quarter length portrait replaced the full-length one, and the light contrast was more dramatic, so as to draw attention to Cixi's upper body and brighter facial expression. The background was mysteriously dark, and asymmetrical, just as Vos attempted but ultimately failed to render in the first "younger Cixi" portrait.<sup>423</sup> As the traditional symbol of a male supreme, a lifelike single giant dragon in the "realistic Cixi" portrait replaced the decorative symmetric double-dragon pattern of the "younger Cixi." With bossy eyes seemingly peeping at the audiences in the dark, the background

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<sup>420</sup> Management Department of the Summer Place, ed., *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi*, 29.

<sup>421</sup> Hubert Vos, "Autobiographical Letter, 9-10, in Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture," 107, note 5.

<sup>422</sup> Management Department of the Summer Place, *Hubert Vos's Oil Painting of Cixi*, 10-11, 19-22.

<sup>423</sup> Before he started to paint, Vos once suggested to Wu Tingfang, a Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as Vos's translator: "I would have preferred a darker, more mysterious, less symmetrical background." But Wu refused Vos's suggestion. Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi," 78. Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, "Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article," 5, in Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture," 109, note 26.

dragon raised head above Cixi's right shoulder, which made the painting look much more dramatic and mysterious. The exaggerated head of the dragon looked like another representation of the face of Cixi, and also helped to express the powerful woman's strong-minded inner spirit.

Although the realistic aged face and the odd juxtaposition with the heads of a lady and a dragon looked much like a smear of the female ruler according to Chinese tradition, Vos might not have meant to defame the Empress Dowager. When Vos met Cixi for the first time, he was deeply attracted by Cixi's fine appearance, her strong willpower and motherly benevolence.<sup>424</sup> Vos even "felt straight in love with her," the "Goddess of four hundred million people."<sup>425</sup> During her third sitting, according to Vos, Cixi even rose up from her throne, went over to Vos, took Vos's pencil and drew a line on the notebook that Vos was holding. Vos was proud to write to his friend that this encounter was "nearest ever a white man has been to her".<sup>426</sup> All these experiences left Vos with a good impression of Cixi. In his letter, Vos also praised Cixi's good taste and fine appearance several times. When he complained of the difficulties he met in China, he always blamed the eunuchs and bureaucratic officials, and believed that Cixi did not mean that. Hence, the "realistic Cixi" Vos tried to express to his western audiences was also the same positive and supreme image that Cixi would like to see in her portrait. In the second portrait, by replacing the Chinese traditional visual language with accepted Western methods, Vos represented an aged, serious, majestic, charming and masculine woman. In this sense, Vos worked as a visual translator to introduce his so-called authentic image of Cixi to the Western world.

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<sup>424</sup> Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 415. Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture," 78. Kwong, "No Shadows," 42.

<sup>425</sup> Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 415. Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, "Adaptation of His Letters From Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article," Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 1943, 162, in Anderson, "A Semi-Chinese Picture: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China," 106. Kwong, "Hubert Vos's Portraits of China's Empress Dowager Cixi," 78.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

By focusing on the six oil portraits of Cixi during the New Policy Reforms (1901-1908), in this chapter, I contend that Cixi's portraits are not only part of her modernizing strategies, but also reflect the intertwined process of the construction of China's modern image. Here, I use the word "intertwined" to mean that Chinese modernization is neither merely a one-sided response to Western shock, nor an isolated natural result of the development of Chinese society itself. Rather, the Chinese approach to modernization is closely connected with both sides. Considering the production, circulation and acceptance of Cixi's oil painting portraits as a case study, in addition to Cixi's intention to promote her nation's modern images represented by herself, this chapter show how American interests and global trends, such as international women's rights movements, cooperate with Cixi's concerns in creating her unprecedented internationally exhibited images.

I argue rather than a mere coincidence, the fact that both of the foreign portraitists of Cixi were Americans is associated with the China-US relations at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Also, within the context of the Woman's Rights Movement, the shared identity of women created an effective communication channel between American diplomatic women and the Empress Dowager Cixi. The American travelling women played important, yet neglected roles in promoting Cixi's international image, or in other words, the modernization of the Chinese ruler's portraiture. No matter whether under Miss Carl's or Mr. Vos's brush, these portraits were collaborative works between the artist and Cixi, shaped by unique and diverse purposes, demands and interests. In this sense, the Chinese way to be modern was never one-sided, but was entangled within complicated international movements and reciprocal benefits.

## 5.0 CODA

Although more than ninety-nine percent of Cixi's portraits were produced between 1903 and 1905, with all poses, props, clothing, fashion styles and even painting/shooting dates under her strict control, it is interesting that the first and last photo of Cixi was suddenly taken by photojournalists, without her permission or any careful preparation: the first was the photograph taken on her way back to the Forbidden City in January 7<sup>th</sup> 1902; the last was possibly taken at her funeral.

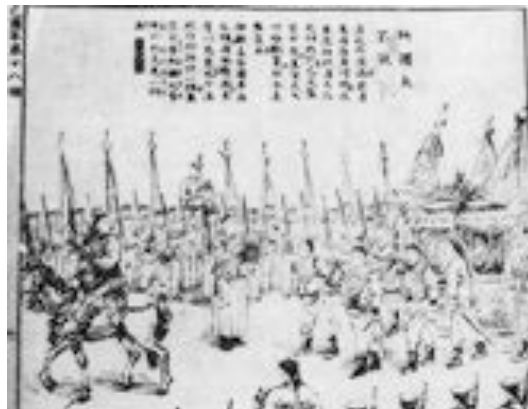


**Figure 82.** Cixi back to Beijing in 1902, *L'Illustration*, Nov.20<sup>th</sup> 1908

At the beginning of the year 1902, after the approximate two-year occupation of the Palace under foreign forces, the return of the imperial family attracted much international attention and became hot news. Several curious Westerners, including photographers, waited on

their diplomatic missions' high walls in anticipation for the imperial group's journey back to the Palace. The Qing government cleared the road to block Chinese people from the imperial procession as usual. Even if there was no Chinese audience alongside the street, Westerners had the special right to gaze and photograph the Chinese imperial troops.<sup>427</sup> Moreover, at the Front Gate (前門/正陽門), when Cixi realized she was photographed, she even waved her handkerchief to the Western watchers on the city wall. With smiles on their faces, Cixi and her fifteen attendant eunuchs all raised their heads to the Western observers (fig.82).

It is noticeable that the first audience of the previously forbidden Imperial procession were not local Chinese people, but foreigners, who climbed on the city wall without permission, thus intruding on the returning ceremony of the imperial family without punishment. What would happen if local Chinese people dared to intrude on the ceremony to take photographs of the Imperial rulers? A similar event of taking photos of Imperial troops seven years later might help answer such a question, as the fate of the photographers was quite different.



**Figure 83.** Illustrated news about the incident of “photographs in the East tomb” in *Current News*

*Illustration* 時事畫報, 1909 (from Ma, *History of Chinese Photography: 1840-1937*, 89-90.)

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<sup>427</sup> *The Times*, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1902.

In 1909, when four Chinese photographers from the local Fusheng Photo Studio in Tianjin attempted to photograph Cixi's lavish funeral troop, they were immediately arrested by the government and sentenced to ten years in prison. Such an event was reported in the *Current News Illustration* (*Shishi Huabao* 時事畫報) as a caricature with the comments: "...European and American leaders', Emperors' and Empresses' portraits are posted everywhere, but they are never regarded to be blasphemed. While, taking a photo for the Qing government, the photographers are put in jail for ten years. We can see how autocratic the autocratic country is."<sup>428</sup> Operated by the revolutionary party, the *Current News Illustration* was the first political journal in China and played an important propagandistic role in the later revolution (fig.83).

In the two photographic events, it seems that the acceptance of taking photographs and exhibiting Imperial portraits were always regarded as a signal of new ideas of the ruler in addition to being symbolic of the modern era. For example, the Italian diplomat Daniele Vare wrote in his 1936 book that the moment of taking Cixi's first photo in 1902 represented a major change in China.<sup>429</sup> Scholars also argue that as the first Chinese ruler showing her face before the public, Cixi's unscheduled photo marked a new era in Chinese history.<sup>430</sup> On the contrary, as reported in the *Current News Illustration*, the refusal of taking a photo was always blamed as backward thought of the so-called autocratic country that ought to be changed by force, either by foreign alliance armies or by the Chinese revolutionary party.

The first photo of Cixi was published in the French weekly newspaper *L'Illustration* on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1908, five days after Cixi's death, never appearing in front of a domestic Chinese audience. In this sense, Cixi's first photo represented the changing of her new policies on

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<sup>428</sup> Ma, *History of Chinese Photography*, 89-90.

<sup>429</sup> Daniele Vare, *The Last Empress* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1936), 258-61. Wang, "Going Public," 128.

<sup>430</sup> Wang, "Going Public," 128. Frances Wood, "Essay and Photo of Cixi," in *Empress Dowager Cixi: Elegance of the Late Qing*, Christie's Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Christie's, 2008), 10-21.

international relationships, and within this context, it represented an important diplomatic change as well as a major turn to modern visual history as scholars have argued above. However, since the dissemination of the photo was limited to a foreign audience, the first photo of Cixi did not change domestic people's attitudes towards the traditional taboos of imperial portraits, which was challenged by the later Revolutionary Party.

In 1902, when Cixi looked happily in front of the foreign camera, her conservative international image began to change in the West, as a part of her New Policies. The New Policies signified that she learned from the lesson of the Eight-Power Allied Forces' occupation of Beijing during the anti-Western rebellion around 1900. By comparison, domestically, in 1909, a local Chinese audience was still forbidden to take photos of the ruler, which became a proof of the out-of-date political system and just cause for the revolutionary party's public attack on the Qing government. After all, the comparison between the Qing and Western rulers' portraits in the domestic *Current News Illustration* was not an aesthetic or artistic representational issue at all, but rather political propaganda to agitate people into resisting the current autocratic government and pursue a modern country.

The 1904 display of the Empress Dowager's portrait at the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition also makes Cixi's attitudes towards Western culture rather confusing. On the one hand, she broke out of the Millennium-old traditional taboo and accepted the Western way of showing a living portrait publicly. On the other hand, she still observed several superstitions. For example, the painting of the portrait was to begin on an auspicious day; the face was not to have black and white shading; the dressing, jewelry and backdrop was not to be seriously selected; the frontal pose was required; a railroad was even built to deliver the portrait "rather than have the portrait

carried out on men's shoulders, as though she were dead."<sup>431</sup> These rigid rules reflected the Empress Dowager's inner cultural identity. In such a context, the issue of Chinese modernity is complicated. After all, the true anti-modern attitude toward Western costumes feared and refused new approaches of producing and displaying portraiture, just as "officials of all ranks felt astonished" by the unjust charges brought against those involved in the incident of "Photographs in the East Tomb" in 1909.

Cixi's seemingly complicated attitudes towards portraiture reflected the tough choices and struggles between the deep-rooted traditional taboos and the modern changes. No matter how superstitious Cixi was, given the long existing taboo of formal portraiture, to exhibit the Empress Dowager Cixi's portrait is not simply a personal art choice or matter of taste; rather, the event was culturally and politically meaningful, which represented the female ruler's claim to imperial power by using portraiture in a seemingly modern way, as well as a microcosm of the changing thoughts in the late Qing dynasty during the era when the East was beaten by the West. Portraiture transformed the royal family's closed and feudal attitudes into a modern expression of presence and power. Hence, in the processes that resulted in the establishment of modern Chinese culture, oil portraiture painting, as well as photographic portraiture, was not only related to new techniques which provided Chinese people with a new "way of seeing," but also allowed specific parties to associate themselves with renewal and modern thought as a means to pursue their political claims to power in a period when such aspirations were threatened.

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<sup>431</sup> Headland, *Court Life in China*, 104.

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