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MILITARY RITUAL AND THE QING EMPIRE¹

Joanna Waley-Cohen

In 1993, Christies' auction galleries in New York City sold two eighteenth-century Chinese scrolls out of an original set of four. The scrolls depict certain awe-inspiring ceremonies held in Chang'an (modern Xi'an) to mark the departure of imperial troops on campaign. The collaborative work of several artists of the imperial painting academy, each scroll included an imperial poem, eleven collectors' seals of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1795), and a jade catch engraved with the title of the scroll and the words "*Qianlong Nianzhi*" (made in the Qianlong period).

If Qianlong could have known of the presence of scrolls such as these on the international art market almost two hundred years after his death, he would have been enormously gratified. The emperor, an ethnic Manchu who generally thought and functioned in military fashion, devoted a good deal of attention both to directing a series of wars and to the orchestration of a parallel campaign that aimed to bring about profound cultural change. Specifically, this campaign was intended to create a distinctively Qing culture that would be founded on the bedrock of Manchu martial (*wu*) ideals, to which such more "civilized" (*wen*) virtues as literary and artistic accomplishment, traditionally dominant in Chinese culture, would yield at least some of their extraordinary prestige. Commemorative art, such as the Christies scrolls, was produced to achieve these ends. Not only did it serve to document and publicize the news of Qing military (*wu*) successes, but, as we will see, the rituals themselves that the paintings portrayed also marked an important intersection of *wen* and *wu*. Finally the scrolls, the rituals they depicted, and (although Qianlong could scarcely have imagined the specific context) their appearance in late-twentieth-century New York, fulfilled two of the emperor's

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because of their theatricality and because one of their principal purposes was to impress the centrality of military preparedness in the Qing polity upon an audience that was both domestic and foreign. They were, in short, another form of ritual in which the Qing sought to draw together the different traditions from which they derived legitimacy and to make each meaningful to the other, in the process creating a new, specifically Qing, cultural context.

The Kangxi Emperor instituted the annual hunts at Mulan in 1681 and hunted there annually, except when on campaign, until his death in 1722. After a hiatus during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor—who expressed his regret at his failure to maintain this important ancestral practice—Qianlong re-instituted the tradition a few years after his accession, and held more than forty hunts at Mulan over the course of his long reign. Many imperial princes took part in the hunts, and troops from the capital were chosen to participate on the basis of such military skills as archery, that were tested earlier in the year. The emperor invited—one might say required—Inner Asian lords to participate in rotation, making it possible both to cultivate important personal relationships and to assemble the desired audience for this implicitly intimidatory parade of military power.

Beyond the display of power, a major function of the hunts was to provide an opportunity to practice making war. Among the diversions offered during the month or so spent annually at Mulan were mock battles, archery displays, and wrestling contests. The most famous of the various forms of hunt involved the formation of a huge circle by mounted troops who surrounded the quarry—sometimes deer, sometimes tigers, sometimes other animals or birds—and drove it towards the waiting marksman, often the emperor himself.³²

Given the massive scale of the arrangements for the provisioning, accommodation, and choreography required for the smooth functioning of the entire operation, these displays of military prowess, like the rituals described above, involved logistics as much as they did skills. The hunts involved tens of thousands of people, most of whom would have travelled the seventy-five miles from the summer capital at Chengde to Mulan each year. The mobilisation of the emperor and his primarily military entourage, and the temporary

palaces erected along the way, created an extraordinary spectacle that must have caused a tremendous stir among all who beheld it.

As in the case of the other military rituals discussed above, the annual hunts were commemorated in numerous paintings produced by artists of the court painting academy. The hunts thus further expanded the imperially-sponsored artistic production whose main purpose was to focus attention on the high degree of military sophistication in Qing culture and the imperial power that rested upon it.³³

Documenting and Disseminating Military Ritual

As we have seen, by the mid-eighteenth century a number of military rituals, like the wars from which they derived their *raison d'être*, were the subject of paintings executed on imperial commission by court painters, with the intention of glorifying Qing power and martiality and proclaiming its accomplishments to generations yet to come. Examples include the two *dayue* paintings done by Castiglione and Jin Kun, discussed above, the collaborative scrolls depicting the send-off of troops, Xu Yang's *xianfu* painting, and numerous others, such as much of Castiglione's oeuvre—his many paintings of horses spring immediately to mind—and Yao Wenhan's "An Imperial Banquet at the Zi Guang Ge," now in the Palace Museum.³⁴ Yet such paintings generally remained within the palace, which limited the scope of their usefulness as propaganda.

The dissemination of some texts and pictures with military content or at least referents was far less restricted. The foreign missionary artists Castiglione, Attiret, Sichelbart and Salusti produced a set of sixteen illustrations of the Xinjiang wars for the emperor. The originals were hung in the Pavilion of Purple Radiance (*Zi Guang Ge*), a pavilion reconstructed by Qianlong in 1760 in the centre of Beijing specifically to display military art and trophies and to receive foreign tributaries. Copies of these paintings travelled to Paris to be engraved in copper by the best engravers that could be found, while artists trained by one of the court missionaries later made further copies in China. These copper-engravings eventually bedecked

³² See Hou and Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *Mulan Tu yu Qianlong Qiuji Dalie de Yanjiu*, (Taipei, 1982), especially pp. 33–37; see Rawski, *Last Emperors*, pp. 20–21.

³³ For a detailed account of some of these paintings, now located in the Musée Guimet in Paris, see Hou Ching-lang and Michele Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, *Mulan Tu*.

³⁴ Gugong Bowuyuan, *Qingdai Gongting Huihua*, no. 82.

public buildings all round the empire and were distributed to deserving officials as a mark of imperial favor. They thus enjoyed a wide circulation and were likely seen by a geographically far-flung and socially diverse audience.

Some of these war illustrations (*zhantu*) depicted battle scenes while others, specifically the first and the last three in the series of sixteen, showed episodes connected to the victory that technically came into the category of military ritual. These included scenes of enemies surrendering, a tableau of a celebratory banquet held at the Zi Guang Ge, the *jiolao* home-welcoming ceremony, and the *xianfu* and *shoufu* ceremonies.

The Xinjiang series of war paintings set a precedent. Most of the subsequent campaigns that qualified as one of the "ten great victories" were recorded in sets of paintings produced collaboratively by court artists, though apparently never again by any of the Jesuits. Several of these later series included military ritual among the subjects depicted. For instance, the last three of a set of sixteen paintings that marked the suppression of the Jinchuan rebellion in 1776 depicted the *jiolao* involving Agui, the *shoufu* held at the Meridian Gate, and the celebratory feast, part of the *kaizu* ritual, given for the victors at the Zi Guang Ge (all described above). Almost all the others showed scenes of specific battles said to have played a pivotal role in the long-drawn-out war to overcome Jinchuan resistance to Qing rule. Another series, only twelve paintings in all, produced to celebrate victory in Taiwan in the 1780s, included a celebratory banquet as the last of its series. The several series of war paintings were significant tools of propaganda because, following the precedent of the Xinjiang series, they were engraved in copper for mass distribution. All later engraving work, however, was done in China rather than in Europe.⁵⁵

The wide-ranging dissemination of these images, and the message of Qing military might that they bore, was augmented by the repro-

⁵⁵ Zhang and Liang, *Shiqu Baoji Xubian*, volume 2, pp. 806–16 lists the sixteen war paintings relating to the Xinjiang wars, and reproduces their inscriptions and other related material, much of it eulogizing the war effort. For a list of the Jinchuan battle pictures of the late 1770s, see *ibid.*, p. 817. I am grateful to Nie Chongzheng for letting me see these in the Palace Museum, many years ago. For a list of the Taiwan battle pictures, see *ibid.*, p. 823; those for the Annan and Gurkha wars are listed at *ibid.*, pp. 827 and 837.

duction of their inscriptions, which appeared, for instance, in the catalog of imperial paintings and in collections of imperial writings. These latter appeared in a variety of forms. A collection of stelae engraved with hundreds of examples of imperial commentaries on military affairs was erected near the Wu Cheng Dian (Hall of Military Achievements), behind the Zi Guang Ge. Like the imperial commemorative inscription engraved on a monument installed at Liangxiang to mark the celebration of the *jiolao*, the accounts these inscriptions presented were completely authoritative. They were widely reprinted. All the stone-engravings also could be mass reproduced in the form of rubbings, liable to be circulated as much as an example of imperial calligraphy as for their content, from which they were, of course, inseparable. Many, in addition, referred to the divine assistance that had brought about Qing victory, thus giving imperial power a cosmic inevitability.

Mass production, for commercial or ideological purposes, or simply for the sake of manufacturing efficiency, was far from new in China. Lothar Ledderose has recently argued that much Chinese art can be broken down into a series of modules that could be and were endlessly re-assembled in multiple combinations. The large-scale production of copperplates of documentary paintings or rubbings of imperial inscriptions, while not precisely modular, developed from these kinds of precedents.⁵⁶ Nor was Qianlong by any means the first to use the mass production and reproduction of words and images for ideological purposes. Illustrated Buddhist and Confucian texts had enjoyed a wide circulation for centuries, while by the late sixteenth century illustrated explanations of a Ming sacred edict on proper behavior circulated through "a number of reproductive processes, with painted pictures . . . being subsequently transferred to stone, from which rubbings were made, which in turn were repainted and transferred onto woodblocks for printing." At about the same time, pictorial biographies of Confucius were made in multiple media: paintings on silk, woodblock prints, and engraved stone tablets.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*, (Princeton, 2000).

⁵⁷ For the quotation, see Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, (Princeton, 1997, originally published London, 1997), p. 50; Julia K. Murray, "The Temple of Confucius and Pictorial Biographies of the Sage," *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 55.2 (May, 1996), pp. 269–300.

Qing China had recourse to most of these techniques as the dissemination of cultural products and motifs was relentlessly reiterated: a commemorative monument was mentioned in a local history, its inscription was reproduced in a variety of printed texts, an imperial stele inscription was reproduced as a rubbing, and a rubbing was converted into a woodblock print. Similarly, paintings of military rituals were reproduced en masse as copper-engravings, their inscriptions reproduced in catalogs, and so on.

Thus when Qianlong arranged to circulate propaganda on military power in a wide variety of media, he was able to draw and build on an existing precedent, so that although the shift in cultural orientation he was seeking to bring about was in many ways revolutionary, the methods and forms employed to achieve it did not seem altogether unfamiliar. In this way, they stood a better chance of acceptance. This technique recalls that noted by Corrigan and Sayer in their discussion of the central role of cultural change in English state formation: "As so often . . . revolutionary transformations were accomplished (and concealed) through new uses of old forms and the tracing of a thousand lineages from the past."³⁸

By such mass production and reproduction, Qianlong availed himself of a twofold opportunity. First, by sending his war illustrations to Paris for engraving he managed to convey to the French, of whose power he was well aware through the accounts of resident Jesuit missionaries such as Father Amiot, the clear impression that the Qing were militarily formidable. Second, he was able to exert a strong influence over the direction of "mass culture," in both senses of a culture that reached most of the people and of a culture mass-produced by "industrial" techniques.³⁹ In this way, the Qing could push a much broader spectrum of people to pay more attention and respect to martiality and to hold military power in far higher esteem than previously, even though most direct participants in and audience of military ritual were members of the elite. The broadly simultaneous and empire-wide dissemination of pictorial images and written documents all promoting the same range of views created a new

³⁸ Corrigan and Sayer, *The Great Arch*, p. 92.

³⁹ This working definition of mass culture is adopted from James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, eds, *Modernity and Mass Culture*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991) p. 2. Despite the wholly different context, this definition seems applicable to eighteenth-century China.

common cultural ground whose driving force was the deployment of military power, and whose ultimate objective was empire.

Conclusion

By the end of the eighteenth century, military rituals in many ways epitomized the special hybridity of Qing culture. They also bore the unmistakable imprint of the Qianlong emperor's desire to achieve multiple goals with a single means and to leave a lasting historical record of the imperial achievements of his reign. First, military rituals brought together the ritual traditions of China and Inner Asia, blurring ethnic or national cultural differences beyond meaningful distinction. Second, through their highly theatrical celebrations of Qing military power, they staged the consequence of that power, the great Qing empire, for a twofold audience. Its international component consisted chiefly of Inner Asian vassals but also included Europeans and other peoples of whose more long-range menace the Qianlong emperor was certainly aware. Its domestic component consisted of the diverse subjects of the empire, both those who took part in the rituals as participant or spectator and the much broader audience of the textual and pictorial record. Ritual texts and monuments, documentary paintings and copper-engravings, stele inscriptions and their rubbings all combined with performed rituals to effectively disseminate a single, tripartite message: Qing, military success, and empire.

Finally, Qing military rituals embodied the relationship of *wen* and *wu* as this was cultivated under the Qing, a period in which warfare thoroughly permeated the world of cultural production. It appeared in ritual texts, it was reproduced in paintings and copper-engravings, it expanded the musical repertory, and it occupied great numbers of officers and soldiers in the imperial armies as well as those responsible for provisioning and transporting them. It also began to assume a pervasive significance in the work of the vast numbers of scholars and civil officials involved in the organization of military rituals. More broadly, scholarship—in the most expansive sense of the literary and artistic tradition—more often than ever before concerned itself with matters of war and empire. Even those who wished to criticize or ridicule the Qing imperial project, however obliquely, could not help but operate within the same general

idiomatic parameters.⁶⁰ In the long run, the shift of emphasis in the Chinese cultural world, promoted by the concerted campaign of their Inner Asian rulers, endured beyond the fall of the Qing empire to affect profoundly the nature of the twentieth-century nation-state.

GLOSSARY

Agui	阿桂
Ajige	阿濟格
bingbu	兵部
binli	賓禮
Chang'an	長安
changhuangwei	皇威
chuishhi jiu yuan	垂示久遠
<i>Chunqiu</i>	春秋
<i>Da Qing Tongli</i>	大清通禮
dajia lubo	大駕鹵簿
daiyue	大閱
Duoduo	多鐸
fajia lubo	法駕鹵簿
fanglüe	方略
fanzhi yue	番子樂
Fuheng	傅恆
Fukang'an	福康安
Galdan	噶爾丹
gongbu	工部
Guandi	關帝
guojia	國家
guozijian	國子監
Heshen	和珅
honglusi	鴻臚寺
<i>Huangchao Liqi Tushi</i>	皇朝禮器圖式
Huangxin Zhuang	黃新莊
hujunying	護軍營
Hung Taiji	皇太極
huoqiying	火器營
jiali	嘉禮
jiolao	郊勞
jili	吉禮
Jin Kun	金昆
Jinchuan	金川
junli	軍禮
kaizu	凱族
Kangxi	康熙
Lang Shining	郎世寧
Liangxiang	良鄉
libu	禮部
liuyi	六藝
Longping	隆平
luanyiwei	鑾儀衛
mangpao	蟒袍

⁶⁰ See Hay, "Culture, ethnicity, and empire in the work of two eighteenth-century 'eccentric artists,'" *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 35 (Spring, 1999): pp. 201–223.

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