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## Illustrating Emperors: Yongzheng and Qianlong's Representation of Individual Identity Within Mid-Qing Art

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# Illustrating Emperors: Yongzheng and Qianlong's Representation of Individual Identity within Mid-Qing Art

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

On the edge of Manchuria in the summer of 1754, strokes of ink and color came to life on precious silk as Jesuit artist Jean-Denis Attiret illustrated a Son of Heaven.<sup>1</sup> Hand-selected by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-96), one of the most powerful emperors in Chinese history who presided over the final years of the Qing dynasty's (1644-1911) golden age, Attiret was given the rare honor of immortalizing in paint Qianlong's reception of an important foreign envoy from the Qing's newly acquired western territories. As recalled by his fellow Jesuit Jean-Joseph-Marie Amoit in a 1754 letter, over a span of only around fifty days, the emperor commissioned Attiret to create "twenty-two portraits in oils, four large sketches... and a quantity of other things, each of which itself would have demanded, even in more favorable circumstances, one or two days of work<sup>1</sup>." It was a nearly overwhelming workload that allegedly gave Attiret "a kind of sciatica that obliged him to stay in his room more than fifteen days after his [return to Beijing]<sup>1</sup>." Throughout the entirety of this artistic process, the Qianlong emperor himself supervised Attiret, observing him work, critiquing details in his paintings as minute as the posture of a Manchu cavalryman riding a horse, and giving his final approval for each and every piece of art<sup>1</sup>.

Amoit's letter is an exceptional account that captures the vast scale of the Qing court's artistic enterprise and its significance to the emperor. For both Qianlong and his predecessor, the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723-35), art was not just a possession, but an expression. Every single detail had meaning. While many works of art in the collections of eighteenth-century Qing emperors commemorated important political moments, ceremonial gatherings, or causes for public celebration, others spoke to more intimate themes, including a number of

portraits of Yongzheng and Qianlong that have captivated many of today's most prominent Chinese art historians. Illustrating the emperors as anything from poor beggars to foreign princes, scholars to bodhisattvas, Han Chinese to Manchus, these portraits contrast with traditional depictions of Chinese imperial monarchs, defying any sense of ritual or convention. Due to their private audience and individualized content, they are some of the most mysterious pieces in the Qing imperial art collection. As numerous accounts from the Qing such as Amoit's recall, artists within the Qing court had little to no freedom away from the Qing emperors' oversight, meaning that to accept unusual paintings in imperial collections as unsanctioned is simply not an option for modern historians. One must then wonder, what did these peculiar portraits represent, and why did mid-Qing emperors such as Qianlong and Yongzheng actively commission them?

These portraits are as unique as the dynasty and rulers under which they were created. Alongside their great achievements in combat, art, and governing, early Qing rulers are almost always remembered for their distinct status as a minority in their empire; they were Manchus, not Chinese. The Manchus originated as northern nomads from Manchuria, descendants of the Jurchen people of central Asia. The term "Manchu" did not even come into existence until the early seventeenth century, when the second Manchu khan, Hong Taiji, first used the word to describe the collection of Jurchen tribes coalesced by his powerful predecessor, Nurhaci<sup>2</sup>. Fulfilling these founding khans' desires within a few decades, successive Manchu rulers came to conquer the once mighty Ming Empire in China under the banner of the Qing dynasty. In the following years, the Qing would greatly expand and consolidate its power along its southern and western borders, amassing the largest territorial empire in Chinese history<sup>2</sup>. By the time of Yongzheng and Qianlong, the Qing was undoubtedly one of the most powerful empires in the world, with a

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<sup>1</sup>Attiret's experience painting in the Qing imperial retreat at Chengde is described within Jean-Joseph-Marie Amoit to P[ere] de la Tour, Beijing<sup>1</sup>

flourishing economy, organized bureaucracy, and dominant military<sup>2</sup>.

While numerous foreign invaders had controlled China in the past, the Qing dynasty was different in two major ways. First, the Qing enacted minority rule on a scale incomparable to previous minority-ruled dynasties; the Manchus led a multi-ethnic empire in which they not only dealt with a large Chinese population, but also newly incorporated Tibetan, Mongol, Uygur, and Miao, among many other, populations. While prior non-Han (feihan 非漢) dynasties such as the Yuan, Liao, and Jin were large, they never had to deal with as many different religious, cultural, or ethnic constituencies as the Qing, as they were mostly concerned with ruling China proper. Second, since the scale of the Qing multiethnic project was unlike that of any previous Han or non-Han dynasty, identity (ethnicity in particular) became a primary concern of the ruling class in a way it had never been before<sup>2</sup>. In order to switch from a mindset of conquering to one of governing, mid-Qing emperors such as Yongzheng and Qianlong had to express their identities in a way that allowed them to relate to each of their various constituencies; they had to become universal emperors, not just Manchu or Chinese emperors<sup>4</sup>. This was not purely out of respect for diversity; constructing multifaceted identities also gave the mid-Qing emperors more authority. They used a variety of methods to construct complex imperial identities, including the production of art. With Yongzheng and Qianlong serving as the sole subjects within the strange eighteenth-century portraits previously mentioned, the emperors' identities come into focus, leading one to wonder how the paintings represented these identities. More specifically, what did alluding to ambiguous imperial identities achieve in these paintings?

Due to the complexity of identity during the Qing, the history of the Manchus and their representation of identity has not always been told using a constant narrative. Histories of the Qing from the early to mid-twentieth century tended to describe Manchu emperors using a dominant narrative of "Sinification" (the process of "becoming Chinese"). The Sinification narrative emphasized the assimilation of the Manchus into traditional Chinese culture, as older historians believed that "the Manchus maintained their position thanks to their sponsorship of neo-Confucian...norms of government, which won them the support of wealthy, lettered Chinese elite that was essential to their political survival<sup>5</sup>." Thus, it was reckoned that by the end of the Qing, the Manchus had ceased to be a distinct ethnic group and

had fully adopted the cultural norms of the vast Han Chinese population in their empire<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, older Qing historians tended to apply twentieth-century ethnic classifications to the Qing due to their assumption that the nature of identity was "monolithic," meaning they believed ethnicity was understood by those living under the Qing in the same way that modern Chinese understand ethnicity<sup>4</sup>.

Entering the field of Manchu studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Chinese/Central Asian historians Mark Elliott and Pamela Crossley were two colossal figures who challenged the old Sinification narrative and helped found the school of "New Qing History" (also known as the Qing Altaic school). These scholars provided evidence that the rulers of the Qing not only maintained their unique Manchu heritage over the course of their dynasty, but that their ability to distinguish themselves as a minority ruling class was just as important of a factor behind their political success as their acceptance of Chinese ways of governance. As described by Elliott, in the absence of Manchu "ethnic sovereignty," the "integrity" of the Qing rulers as a "conquest people" would have disappeared, leaving them incapable of "instilling fear in the Han" and maintaining their dominance within their empire<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the New Qing History recognized that identity, especially ethnic identity, was understood in a drastically different way prior to the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Crossley describes this difference when she states in *A Translucent Mirror* that pre-Qianlong, ethnicity was often understood as the result of one's behaviors, whereas post-Qianlong, modern ethnic classifications tended to reversely determine the ways in which one should behave<sup>4</sup>. In examining the ways in which Qing emperors understood and distinguished their identity, the first major works of the Altaic school of Qing history relied heavily on textual sources produced by the Qing imperial court, which were mostly political in nature. In *The Manchu Way*, Elliott utilizes a variety of imperial edicts and palace memorials to analyze Manchu representations of identity, whereas Crossley does so in *A Translucent Mirror* by looking at a number of retrospective histories written during the Qing about the origins of the Manchus. These sources targeted audiences of Qing officials and bolstered concrete, preconceived notions of an emperor's identity as a ruler, meaning emperors used them to present calculated representations of themselves to others within the context of governing<sup>3</sup>.

Building on the first major works of the New Qing History, later Qing historians, including Patricia Berger

<sup>2</sup>In describing a strange trend of people cutting the legally required Manchu-styled queues (braids of hair) off of Han Chinese men during the eighteenth century and Qianlong's many responses to it, Kuhn evinces just how obsessed Qing rulers were with maintaining a balance of sorts between their Manchu minority class and the Han majority<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>For a concrete example of this, see chapter seven in Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 275-304. This chapter incorporates palace memorials and edicts written by Yongzheng and Qianlong in a way that shows how the two emperors made sure to present themselves as firmly Manchu rulers to their Manchu officials and bannermen, who they believed were straying from the "Manchu Way."<sup>5</sup>

and Hui-Chi Lo, positioned their arguments regarding Qing history within the more general framework of Manchu ethnic sovereignty and universalism set out by Elliott and Crossley. However, these scholars were different in the way that they drew upon more artistic sources, especially visual sources, rather than textual sources. Through her examination of artistic sources, Berger argues in her monograph *Empire of Emptiness* that “artistic representation...occupied a significant place in the Manchu project of empire building,” and that Qing imperial art evinces that there was “no contradiction between...the two apparently disparate goals of transcendence and political benefit” among eighteenth-century emperors<sup>6</sup>. Yongzheng and Qianlong’s “transcendence” of any singular identity, a notion that fits into the broader concept of what Berger describes as “nonduality,” is a common theme expanded upon by other art historians such as Lo as well, and is nearly always described as being driven by imperial, political ambitions<sup>4</sup>. As the title of Lo’s dissertation, “Political Advancement and Religious Transcendence,” suggests, Lo similarly argues that emperors such as Yongzheng used art to escape the confines of fixed religious identities and establish themselves as universal rulers of their diverse constituencies<sup>7</sup>. These works challenge older understandings of Qing artistic sources, such as Chinese art historian Wu Hung’s once prominent theory that private works of art produced by the Qing court depicted Yongzheng and Qianlong in masquerade-styled “costumes,” by suggesting that the various markers of identity the emperors associated themselves with in their imperial portraits actually expressed their identity and were not simply costumes. However, Berger, Lo, and Wu do all agree that Qing artistic representations of identity should be viewed as political expressions that highlight the emperors’ ability to dominate their empire’s various cultural traditions<sup>8</sup>.

While I will use some of the major concepts introduced by the historians discussed above, including ethnic sovereignty, universalism, nonduality, and the transcendence of identity, to analyze representations of Yongzheng and Qianlong’s identities, I will not characterize eighteenth-century imperial identity as inherently political. Instead, I will argue that the Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors were able to craft identities as individuals by commissioning personal, intimate artistic depictions of themselves outside of their role as rulers. Most previous studies of Qing history fail to recognize that Yongzheng and Qianlong possessed individual identities alongside their official, political identities. On the one hand, I will challenge the notion established by Crossley and Elliott that eighteenth-century Manchu emperors only interacted with identity by endorsing

various rigid, calculated identities (i.e. Manchu, Han, Mongol, etc.) in official settings. On the other hand, I will also argue that while the private, imperial artistic sources at hand do indeed capture the emperors’ transcendence of any singular concept of identity, as also argued by Berger and Lo, they do so on an individual rather than a political level. This transcendence encompasses more than just religion, which recent historical accounts, such as Berger and Lo’s, tend to focus on almost exclusively. Finally, rather than focusing on how Qing emperors molded their empire, this discussion will instead show how the Qing Empire was capable of shaping its emperors. Almost ironically, the personal identities of Yongzheng and Qianlong became increasingly reflective of the peoples, religions, and cultural traditions they sought to command. History tends to portray political rulers, including the mid-Qing emperors, primarily as influencers, ignoring the ways in which they are influenced by the empires they govern. Ultimately, it is important for historians to recognize that identity is a negotiation between those who rule and those who are ruled, in which the identity of each is subject to influence.

## 2 BEYOND THE THRONE: CAPTURING THE INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES OF MID-QING EMPERORS

Sometime during his reign, the Yongzheng emperor commissioned a unique artistic source, later kept deep within the walls of the Forbidden City, that suggests how the emperor may not have always seen his own identity as rigid and monolithic, but instead viewed himself as a more fluid individual in certain circumstances. This source is a unique album of portraits of the Yongzheng emperor that depicts him wearing a variety of ethnic “costumes” and performing a wide array of cultural activities [fig 1a-1l]. For an emperor who has often been remembered as stern, calculating, obsessed with governing, and even borderline tyrannical, these portraits illustrate a very different man. In one, he appears as a lone Han fisherman resting along a riverbank (Figure 1a). In another, he recites prayers in a snowy cave draped in the robes of a Tibetan monk (Figure 1b). Most comically, he is seen fighting a tiger while dressed as a European nobleman (Figure 1c). In each, he dons a different hairstyle, his hair flowing down past his shoulders in some, wrapped up in a bun in others, and in one peculiar portrait messy and dangling over his forehead (Figure 1d)<sup>5</sup>. All of this considered, the most intriguing aspect of these paintings is that Yongzheng, a

<sup>5</sup>This is especially important to note considering the history of the Manchu queue hairstyle. Knowing that Qing laws dating from the seventeenth century prescribed death for male Qing subjects who refused to adopt the Manchu queue, the absence of the queue in these portraits is rather surprising.

<sup>4</sup>An introduction to nonduality in Qing artistic can be found on page 8 in Berger’s work<sup>6</sup>

supposedly firm, Manchu tyrant, is not once painted as a Manchu, nor as performing any serious tasks related to governing.

The facts surrounding this portrait album are rather mysterious. There is no known artist nor specific date of creation, outside of them being dated to sometime during Yongzheng's reign. Even more puzzling is that unlike in many other Qing imperial portraits (especially those commissioned under Qianlong), there are no inscriptions that explain anything about the paintings; in fact, the album is not even titled. This is especially strange considering the fact that historically, the number of Chinese paintings with inscriptions noticeably increased over time, meaning that by the Qing dynasty paintings were largely expected to have accompanying text<sup>9</sup>. While the absence of any inscriptions has led some to believe that the album was most likely left unfinished, it surely does not help unveil Yongzheng's intentions behind commissioning such an unexpected work of art<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, this album seems oddly out of place due to the way in which it diverges from what had been a standard way of portraying Chinese emperors since the Ming dynasty. In particular, the portrait style of Ming Emperor Hongzhi (r. 1488-1506), which "appears to downplay his individuality and emphasizes his role as ruler of [China]," represents this standard<sup>10</sup>. This practice was not abandoned during the Qing, as each Qing emperor had similar official portraits painted of them (Figure 2), making an album of portraits depicting an emperor in strange environments wearing unofficial clothing stand out as unique.

Additionally, the audience of this album of portraits adds to its mystery. Unlike imperial edicts, which were accessible not only to a wide number of Qing officials both inside and outside the capital, but also many Qing commoners, works of art within Qing imperial collections were stored and displayed almost exclusively within private imperial quarters such as the Forbidden City, which were off-limits to most ordinary Qing officials, let alone commoners. While portraits of former Chinese emperors were kept in the western Forbidden City in a hall called the Nanxundian, portraits of contemporary Qing emperors were placed within more important, central halls of the Forbidden City, such as the Hall of Cultivating the Mind and the Room of Three Rarities<sup>10;7</sup>. Looking just at Qianlong's art collection, "paintings alone occupied eighteen locations within the Forbidden City and the Yuanming Yuan Summer Palace<sup>11</sup>." Oftentimes, the function of a specific hall within an imperial space was directly reflected by the themes of the art displayed within the hall, meaning imperial artworks "must be considered relative to their original place and special context." In particular, it was common for paintings to occupy space within places of ritual significance that only the emperor himself and highly selected groups of officials were allowed to visit,

meaning that the audience of imperial paintings was nearly always restricted to small, intimate groups rather than large groups of officials from around the country<sup>10</sup>. The album's size further designates it as a work of art intended for limited viewing. With each leaflet only being a little over a foot tall and a foot wide, alongside their being kept within a singular album, these portraits were not designed for grand display, but rather more intimate, hand-held interaction<sup>12</sup>.

Overall, the location and size of the album suggest that its target audience was the emperor himself and a limited number of trusted officials rather than a public audience. This is significant due to the way in which it impacts the primary function of the source at hand. Unlike in edicts or palace memorials, Emperor Yongzheng was able to use personal artwork, such as this portrait album, to interact with a far more intimate, personal identity. Some scholars, including Chuimei Ho and Benet Bronson, suggest that Qing emperors may have intended for their personal art to deliver political messages to select audiences of officials, who would in turn spread those messages throughout the empire<sup>11</sup>. However, if this was truly their intention, there were far more effective ways of spreading such messages than through the commissioning of highly restricted imperial artwork. In other words, Yongzheng had nothing to prove to others when commissioning these portraits of himself, no message to convey to those beneath him. Instead, he was able to set aside the image of himself as emperor and look at himself as an individual possessing a far more complex and ambiguous identity.

The content of the paintings also supports the assertion that they present a more individualistic identity of Yongzheng's. Setting is important in these portraits, as they place Yongzheng in sites far removed from places of political significance, such as Beijing or Chengde. In paintings that were intended for public, ceremonial display, such as the famous *Ceremonial Banquet in the Garden of Ten Thousand Trees* (Figure 3), setting delivers a highly political message<sup>13</sup>. In *Ceremonial Banquet*, the vast, arid plains and Manchurian architecture of Chengde speak to the grandeur of the Manchu homeland, which is appropriate considering that the ceremony taking place is the reception of a foreign envoy meant to place foreigners from newly acquired lands under Manchu rule (symbolized by Chengde)<sup>14</sup>. However, in Yongzheng's portrait album, the emperor is painted in a variety of remote landscapes with no political significance, including caves, forests, cliffs, and riverfronts. Yongzheng is alone in all of these places, further suggesting that he intended for the paintings to speak to an identity that existed independent of political duties requiring him to communicate with his officials, whom he instead addressed through his edicts, memorials, and political paintings. In terms of his characterization, the Qing emperor's vastly important role as Manchu leader

is absent as well. If Qing historians are correct in claiming that maintaining a form of “ethnic sovereignty” as a separate, minority ruling class was crucial to the political success of the Manchus in China, the absence of said ethnic sovereignty in more private sources such as this album can only suggest that bolstering the political legitimacy of Qing emperors was not their purpose<sup>5</sup>.

Quite the opposite, the portraits present the Yongzheng emperor as possessing a multitude of different cultural, ethnic, and/or religious traits that existed throughout the vast Qing Empire. The reasoning behind choosing to portray Yongzheng in such a way is an issue still debated by historians. According to some Chinese art historians, including Wu Hung, the scenes in Yongzheng’s portrait album are not necessarily representative of identities, but rather costumes worn by the emperor, leading them to be labeled as “costume portraits.” This suggests that unique Qing paintings, such as the album of portraits at hand, were simultaneously playful and egocentric. They appear to be a way in which Manchu emperors such as Yongzheng “stag[ed] a ‘personal masquerade’, in which he, as the only participant, constantly changes dress, assuming different nationalities and roles,” thus “demonstrat[ing] the emperor’s uncontrollable desire to dominate any existing tradition” throughout the Qing Empire<sup>8</sup>. The word “masquerade” is important in this theory, as Wu Hung compares Yongzheng’s “costume portraits” to the tradition of European masquerade painting. One reason for this comparison is the similar timing and royal origins of European masquerades, seeing that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, European monarchs had begun popularizing masquerades within art, leading to the production of what would become known as “Western ‘fancy’ dress portraits<sup>8</sup>.”

Especially convincing is the fact that many of the eighteenth-century Qing artists responsible for imperial portraits such as Yongzheng’s were Jesuits from Europe, who would have surely been familiar with trends in masquerade art. The Jesuits exerted tremendous influence within the Qing court, particularly inside departments tasked with producing imperial portraiture. Upon their introduction to China, European Jesuits both recognized the need for “accommodation or adaption to Chinese culture” while also using “European science and technology...to attract the attention of the educated Chinese and convince them of the high level of European civilization<sup>14</sup>.” The Jesuits’ artistic enterprise in China was a way in which they achieved both goals simultaneously. According to Qing art historian Kristina Kleutghen, Jesuit paintings of the Ming and Qing courts “represented a ‘Sino-European’ or ‘intercultural’ space of inquiry that exists somewhere between Chinese and Western art history,” meaning that they used European painting techniques, particularly perspective, to capture Chinese scenes. The Jesuits’ influence in the Qing court

has led Wu Hung to believe that replicating “Western ‘fancy’ dress portraits” in China may have been another way they contextualized Chinese society within European artistic traditions, possibly explaining why Yongzheng is painted as a European nobleman not only in this album, but also in another Qing portrait<sup>8</sup>.

However, this view is problematic for a few reasons. While it is reasonable to acknowledge that the Jesuit artists and perhaps even Yongzheng himself had seen examples of “Western ‘fancy’ dress” portraits, there is no actual textual or visual evidence proving that Qing “costume portraits” either directly copied this trend or were designed to include costumes that were merely playful and for show, nor is there any record that masquerade-style events with public art displays were ever held in the Qing court<sup>8</sup>. Considering the underlying motives of the Jesuit artists, replicating Western fancy dress portraits seems out of place, as they sought to use European techniques to paint Chinese scenes and not the other way around<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, this outlook downplays the individuality of sources like Yongzheng’s portrait album. If these guises were merely designed for a masquerade-style show, to whom were they shown? Since the audience was restricted to imperial halls and ritual sites, this means that there was no large, public audience for the emperor to put on a show for by characterizing himself in the ways that he did. With the very nature of European masquerade culture relying heavily on flashy, public displays of costume, the private, secluded nature of Yongzheng’s portrait album does not quite match up with the same intended audience<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, considering the private nature of these portraits in particular, it may be better to think of them as depicting “real” identities of Yongzheng rather than costumes; these portraits show Yongzheng “becoming” the various characters he is painted as rather than dressing up as them, evincing multiple facets that make up a singular Yongzheng<sup>7</sup>. While each painting is separate, their completion within a singular album in similar styles shows a sense of continuity. As an individual and not a public figure, Yongzheng transcended the confines of rigid identifications, free to build his own personal identity as a conglomerate of the traditions that influenced his life rather than simply having to live up to the expectations surrounding his political role as a Manchu emperor of China.

Yongzheng achieved this on multiple levels. As Chinese art historian Hui-Chi Lo suggests, many of these portraits of Yongzheng have a strong religious element to them, as they possibly allude to legendary or historical Daoist or Buddhist figures by including particular iconography and settings that make specific identifications possible for some portraits<sup>7</sup>. However, while religious transcendence is a major theme within the portraits, it is not the only force at work. Lo states that “it can be assumed that the selection of [the Euro-

pean, Mongolian, Zungharian, Persian, or Turkish] characters” was based on “[t]he possible religious overtone of each character,” but this assumption is not as convincing as her assertion that Buddhist and Daoist figures were being alluded to in the other portraits, as these characters have no connection to any identifiable religious figures, nor are they performing any religious actions<sup>7</sup>. The European (Figure 1d), Mongol (Figure 1e), and Persian (Figure 1f) characters in particular are very hard to identify as religious in nature, seeming to more closely reflect depictions of ethnic or cultural groups rather than religious traditions. Thus, while the paintings do indeed reflect Yongzheng’s ability as an individual to source his religious identity from multiple traditions, they speak to the emperor’s ethnic and cultural fluidity as well. Overall, they are a unique reflection of Yongzheng’s own circumstances and the makeup of his empire. Their private audience and individualistic content (setting and characterization) limit their political implications, as they solely focus on the emperor outside of governing roles. It is this individualistic fluidity and lack of concrete concepts of identity in the album of portraits that sets it apart as representing a different side of an eighteenth-century Qing emperor.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The Yongzheng and Qianlong emperors may have been two of the most powerful emperors in Chinese history, yet they were just as human as the constituents they ruled. Masters at crafting their identity for public audiences, in private, these two emperors were complex individuals who resisted the confines of categorized identity. As the Sons of Heaven, mid-Qing emperors were expected to be the embodiment of everything beneath them; they did not just command every tradition within their empire, but actively engaged with each in their daily life. The artistic productions of Yongzheng and Qianlong serve as reminders of the emperors’ personal engagement with their identities, and that identity was not just a tool to be manipulated for maximum political gain. Yongzheng and Qianlong produced art with themselves as the sole subjects to be viewed in private settings as a way of interacting with their identity on an individualized level. For once, they had no audience to woo or control; Yongzheng and Qianlong resisted duality and explored the fluidity of their identity in the Qing imperial portraits discussed.

While the major takeaway from this study of private artistic productions of the Qing is how mid-Qing emperors viewed themselves as individuals in addition to political leaders, it is also important to note that this study conforms to the standards of the New Qing History by suggesting that Manchu elites did not simply become Chinese during the eighteenth century. In no painting included above were Yongzheng or Qianlong

represented as just being Chinese. The whole point of the imperial portraits discussed was to embody the emperors’ ability to possess more than one identity. If traditional narratives of Sinification were accurate in their description of the Manchus fully assimilating into Chinese culture, then Yongzheng and Qianlong would have appeared unquestionably Han Chinese in both public and private. This is simply not the case. Mid-Qing emperors represented themselves as belonging to multiple categories of ethnicity, religion, and philosophy, as shown in their artistic productions.

Another element of this discussion deserves further elaboration here. While Qianlong has attracted the most scholarly attention regarding studies of identity in the Qing, Yongzheng has largely been neglected by Qing historians. Possibly due to his relatively short reign, very little research has been done on the way in which he represented his identity, leading most scholars to categorize him alongside his father Kangxi in being less “universal” than his son Qianlong<sup>4</sup>. However, as his unique private portraits and poetry suggest, it may be more appropriate to align Yongzheng with Qianlong when it comes to characterizing the imperial identity of Qing rulers. While much evidence still points to Qianlong as being revolutionary in terms of forging a multi-dimensional identity, it is becoming more evident that Qianlong may not have been the first to exhibit such behavior. As this study shows, Yongzheng’s artistic productions are similar in nature to those of Qianlong’s, meaning that it is fair to ask whether or not the universalization of the Qing court began with Yongzheng rather than Qianlong. While this study suggests that this is possible, much more research must be done to fully back such a claim. Hopefully, future histories of the Qing will shine a brighter light on Yongzheng and his role in transforming identity within the Qing. Regardless, this should not take away from the fact that both Yongzheng and Qianlong existed as individuals outside of their duties as rulers, which they illustrated using unprecedented artistic sources.

On one final note, the two major Qing emperors of the eighteenth century are representative of the way in which political rulers are subject to the influence of the various constituencies they govern. Interactions between rulers and subjects extend far beyond the realm of politics. In any empire, the culture of the governed possesses agency. While this agency is not nearly as visible as that of political rulers, and is subsequently overlooked by many, its consequences are far from invisible. Yongzheng and Qianlong may have relied on their ethnic sovereignty as Manchus to remain politically distinct, but this did not prevent them from integrating elements of the diverse traditions of their empire into their individual identities. They exerted power over their constituents, yet in return became reflections of them. The defining feature of the portraits of mid-Qing emperors



presented throughout this essay is paradoxically their lack of emperors. Outside of the context of governance, mid-Qing emperors came to possess many of the same traits as their subjects, as seen within the art they commissioned. Yongzheng and Qianlong do not command Buddhists, Daoists, Confucians, Mohists, scholars, peasants, Manchus, or Han Chinese in their private portraits, but transform into them. This study shows that although mid-Qing emperors politically kept their distance from those beneath them, personally, their identities resembled the multiplicity of their empire, serving as an example of how influence is negotiated between the powerful and powerless.

#### 4 EDITOR'S NOTES

This work was adapted from a senior thesis and has been condensed for publication. Contact DUURJ staff for the full publication. Chapter two explores in greater depth the purposes behind crafting “individual” imperial identities, while chapter three examines the peculiar case of artistic replication under the Qianlong court.

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(a)



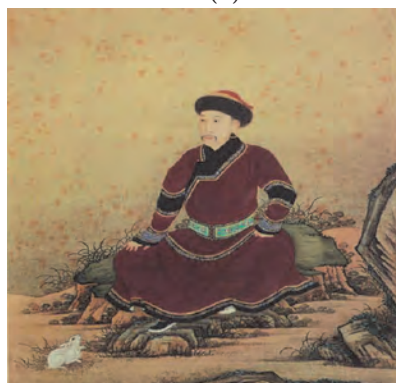
(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)



(i)



(j)



(k)



(l)

**Figure 1.** Yinzhen xingle tu ce 胤禛行乐图册 [Album of Yinzhen's Merry-Making Portraits]. Yongzheng period (1723-35). Album of leaves (ye 页), ink and color on silk, each leaf 34.9x31cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing. [www.dpm.org.cn](http://www.dpm.org.cn).



**Figure 2.** Yongzheng chaofu xiangzhou 雍正朝服像軸 [Portrait of Yongzheng in Courtly Attire]. Yongzheng period (1723-35). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 277x143cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing. [www.dpm.org.cn](http://www.dpm.org.cn).



**Figure 3.** Jean-Denis Attiret, Giuseppe Castiglione, Ignace Sickelpart, and Chinese artists. Wanshuyuan ciyan tu 萬樹園賜宴圖 (Ceremonial Banquet in the Garden of Ten Thousand Trees). 1755. Color on silk, 221.2x419.6cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing. [www.dpm.org.cn](http://www.dpm.org.cn).